

Tax Collection

What can be a more typical double-edged sword for the economy than the phenomenon of the income tax collection level dipping while the customs duty and import-based VAT accruals soaring during the first six months of the 1995-96 fiscal year? This rather dramatised perception, if you will, would appear justified if one were to take a close look at the implications.

Under the direct tax head collection missed the target by as much as Tk 49 crore for the first six months alone putting undue pressure on indirect taxes to be realised rather furiously to meet up the deficit in tax revenue. The VAT, for instance, was heavily milked and it yielded Tk 1793.10 crore up to December last exceeding the target by Tk 128 crore.

This illustrates a failure of the government's revenue policy which envisaged a shift from indirect tax to the direct tax for internal resource mobilisation.

Higher incidence of indirect taxes affects the purse of common consumers at the end of the day as the traders and industrialists tend to pass the brunt on to them through their pricing. So, a revenue policy worth the name attempts to be self-correcting by expanding the direct tax base. What in our case happens to be pragmatically important is obviously an efficient and unflinching collection of direct taxes.

The unnetted income tax not only means poor returns to the national exchequer it also has as the unsavoury knock-on effect of creating an unhealthy consumption boom, all the more so because of the open sesame import policy.

Such trends need to be viewed in terms of low savings, declining investments and fast contracting credit growth in the private sector. Even liberal estimates of credit growth put it at 12 per cent at the year-end, down by 10 per cent compared with last year's credit flow to the private sector. All this could perhaps be averted if consumption tax and income tax were increased in a situation where we had an obvious over-run of consumption goods.

Arms on Campus

Gunmen, a report says, are coming back to the Dhaka University residential halls. That they are returning there after a brief absence, when they had gone into hiding to evade the arms recovery drive on December 20, is corroborated by the open display of firearms on the campus. Pictures of such a display of arms were published in the national dailies and it seems there is none to challenge them. And look at the contradiction: the police raid university halls selectively and unleash their frenzy on the inmates but they turn a blind eye to the open display of firearms by some student cadres.

Does it not make a mockery of the arms recovery drive? Already the drive has come under scrutiny and questionable in some places. Arms haul or the absence of it in the DU campus can be a good enough indication of what the arms recovery drive has come to mean. Such a conclusion is inevitable but we still think that the performance by the arms recovering agencies in the remaining days of the run-up to the election will prove everyone wrong for thinking of such a conclusion.

We ask the authority concerned to thoroughly look into the smuggling of arms into the university halls. Failure to keep the campus free of arms constitutes a dangerous signal not only for the university but also for areas far beyond it. In fact, arms haul at the university campuses can be a test case. A half-way-house will prove potentially dangerous for the nation. So, we urge the authority to carry on a combing operation without any favour or partisan attitude. Let us not forget that Dhaka University sets the trend for the campuses in general. In a volatile situation like this, the lid in the Pandora's box must be tightened instead of opening it.

Help Fire Victims

Victims of Tuesday's fire at Kamalbagh remain traumatised as no one was there to provide them with emergency relief after such a tragic incident. Societies live by certain values for their sustenance. The people of Kamalbagh lost everything in the devastating fire but even after 24 hours of the tragedy they were not provided with food.

Bangabazar fire had triggered a virtual competition between different authorities and agencies to show how caring they were about the victims. But in case of Kamalbagh, nobody of any standing even felt the necessity for making a visit to the place. Why? As many as 700 huts and about 50 small factories perished in the fire. The loss cannot be assessed solely in monetary terms; for, the fire has consumed everything the poor people had only days before the Eid.

So, we urge the government and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to revive the spirit with which they had come in aid of the fire victims at Bangabazar. Now the authorities should not ignore the Kamalbagh victims. If they are helped through the initial set-back, they should be able to rebuild a modest future.

Official Lies on Arms Dropping

When Dhaka issued a stiff denial and when the Anand Marg threatened to take government to court, officials changed the line. They found it was not so easy to heap the blame for their failure on others.

It is no longer a news: it is an event. Numerous weapons have been air-dropped over the Purulia villages in West Bengal, without the state or the Centre being sure, even after 50 days, of the country which sent them and for whom. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, also defence minister, is irritatingly silent. Nor is there any statement or briefing by the defence ministry or the Home Affairs to explain.

Briefly, a Russian-built transport plane, AN-26, took off from Karachi, overflew Indian territory and landed first at Varanasi and then at Calcutta, unchecked and unchallenged. It proceeded from there to Phuket in Thailand, returned to Madras and then flew to Purulia countryside over which it dropped weapons: AK-47 rifles, rocket launchers, anti-tank grenades, pistols and a large quantity of magazines and hand-grenades. Only on its last lap was it forced to land at Mumbai. (The British take the credit of tipping off India.)

Official sources initially said — the news appeared on December 20, three days after the occurrence — that the arms came from Bangladesh since they bore the name of a Bangladeshi ammunition depot. The party, which was to receive them, was named the Anand Marg. When Dhaka issued a stiff denial and when the Anand Marg threatened to take government to court, officials changed the line. They found it was not so easy to heap the blame for their failure on others.

The attention was then diverted to one Kim Davy, if

that is the real name of the arms smuggler. The crew, all from Central Asia, had no hesitation in admitting that they were professional gun-runners. They have named the country which sent them on an errand to deliver weapons. What are the compulsions weighing with New Delhi in not making the name public is not understandable, presuming it has not been able to pinpoint the party or organisation which was to receive the arms.

Failure to intercept a foreign plane intruding into India's airspace is bad enough; still worse is the government's culpability in suppressing the vital information. This is what Communist Party general secretary Indrajit Gupta has not liked. He has resigned in protest from the chairmanship of defence committee of parliament. Such a security lapse takes place and still the government does not feel obliged to place all facts before the nation. Gupta told me. Like many others, his faith in the defence machinery has been jolted.

"Every year we are making large budget allocations for defence, acquiring modern, and costly equipment to defend our borders, and being assured by ministers and other official spokesmen of their capacity to repulse any foreign aggressor. But the Purulia incident has rudely shaken the nation's confidence in the invulnerability of even our airspace." Gupta

has said this in his letter of resignation to Speaker Shivraj Patil who, in turn, has told him that the government is not obliged to give information to the defence committee of parliament.

This may be technically correct. Yet, the nation is entitled to know how the plane came in undetected. It is a sad commentary on our defence and intelligence set up. Everyone, by this time, knows that radars in the Purulia area were out of order. No head has rolled so far. If

in the lexicon of armed forces.

Defence in our country is a holy cow. It is seldom criticised or taken to task. The general feeling is that it is unpatriotic to do so. Even when the instances of human rights violations come to light, the majority of people flinch from holding the armed forces responsible on the ground that it may tell upon their morale. A public debate on the armed forces — their intrigues or failings, promotions or supersessions,

Pakistan is yet to be told. The defence ministry refuses to show papers (the field despatches, etc.) to outsiders. Official versions, however authentic, are official. Let some non-government hands go through the papers. They may point out certain deficiencies which may have escaped the notice of the defence people.

New Delhi can take a leaf out of Pakistan's book. Islamabad has declassified the documents relating to Rawalpindi conspiracy case in 1951. Involved were many top persons, including Maj Gen Akbar Khan, who allegedly hatched the plan, and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the eminent Urdu poet, who was then the editor of Pakistan Times.

The papers are revealing. Akbar says that Abdul Qayyum Khan, now prime minister of Azad Kashmir, came to him and told him that Kashmiri leaders were determined to launch a "war of liberation" before the snow melted. Akbar's conclusion was that the option of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan could start a war between Pakistan and India. "The alternative stand to take politically and declare openly would be to say that liberation war had started for the sake of bringing into existence an independent Kashmir." He said in this case Pakistan could give secret assistance to Kashmiris but the hurdle was that the government could not openly "commit itself to the idea." Akbar further says that

"another consideration was the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah." (The Sheikh was then the Wazir Azam of Jammu and Kashmir). The military plan, according to the papers, had to include "capture of Sheikh Abdullah" because if he was allowed to escape to India, "the Indians might form a puppet government under Abdullah with the danger that such government would find supporters arousing sympathies in the Valley."

There is so much misinformation on defence that it is difficult to separate rice from chaff. All border incidents, according to New Delhi, are the doing of militants or those in Pakistan. I have not come across a single happening during the 45-year-old border tension where we might have even inadvertently committed a mistake. The recent rocket firing, which has provoked Pakistan President to say that they would retaliate, has been vehemently denied by India. Let the two governments give permission to a joint team of human rights activists from both sides to ascertain the truth.

Coming back to the air-drop of weapons, it is difficult to imagine that the truth will never come out because Rao's government does not believe in transparency. It goes out of the way to confuse or cover up things. The hapya scandal has seen the light of day because it is the Supreme Court that has forced the government to speak. One would hate to involve the Supreme Court in the weapon-dropping case. But then how does one make the government tell the truth? One is sick of hearing lies and alibis.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

The plane was allowed to come in, who gave it the permission and who authorised its landing in Varanasi, Calcutta and Madras? Both the Indian Air Force and the air traffic control authorities claim to have intercepted it. But that was when the plane was on its return journey.

From whichever point the incident is viewed, it is an instance of defence failure. Apparently, no action has been taken against any one so far because one has not heard of court-martial proceedings or of persons who have been found guilty. Probably, accountability is not the word

triumphs or defeats — is a taboo.

Till today the Henderson-Brooks report on the 1962 India-China war remains a top secret. Our debacle was primarily due to the fault of the top brass. But their view is that the responsibility lies, on the shoulders of the then prime minister and defence minister, Jawaharlal Nehru and V K Krishna Menon, respectively. What is the truth? The limit of 35 years placed on the release of official documents is over. The nation must know the facts.

Again, the true story of the 1948 war between India and

Thoughts on Constitution of Bangladesh-II

Political Party, Citizen Registration and National Security Council

by Mustafizur Rahman

FOR disciplined and fair politics, the political parties themselves are required to be given some constitutional duty and freedom. So it is proposed that the following provisions be included in the constitution in the form of articles or schedule:

"A political party, for the purpose of interpretation here, shall be a registered association of a number, more than a certain minimum determined by law, of citizens with rights to vote in national election, with the sole aim of representing the political will of their members according to a constitution of theirs and through a declared manifesto; provided that the members shall not be those who are in the service of the state, or who failed to declare their allegiance to this Constitution.

No organization shall be permitted to operate as a political party unless it is registered according to law and has a declared manifesto, has a party constitution not including anything inconsistent with this Constitution, a verifiable list of members registered and paying subscription, has a fixed head office, and maintains proper accounts of all its receipts and expenditures therefore. All political parties shall submit their annual accounts.

along with relevant information to concerned tax offices, and shall abide by all laws. The scope of activities, conditions of qualifications, limitations, method of registration and all other matters related to political party, shall be determined by Act of Parliament or until so determined, by order made by the President.

Subject to the provisions of law, any political party shall secure its fund only through voluntary payment of regular subscription and/or donations by its registered members.

No political party or its members shall be permitted to seek or accept any donation, gift or contribution from any foreign organization, individual or government for any purpose.

No citizen shall be taken as a member in more than one political party at a time. The intending member shall certify the fact of his eligibility before registration as a member. A member of any political party shall have the right to withdraw his registration by stopping payment of membership fee and giving the party a notice to that effect in writing.

A political party shall not be permitted to carry out any commercial activity or to seek from or force any indi-

vidual or organisation to make any contribution in any form.

(In the event there is enacted any law barring political parties from securing funds through even donations, and there is established a system of proportional representation in any of the houses, either fully or partly, in case of bicameral system, there may be introduced a system of proportional payment to the political parties out of public fund).

Introduction of Citizen Registration System: The Parliament shall provide for registration of all citizens with such information that does not impinge into the rights of privacy.

This shall be implemented within not more than five years of amendment of this constitution, incorporating this provision.

National Security Council: It is proposed that the constitution provides for establishment of National Security Council through following provisions:

"The Parliament may provide for establishment of a ten-member National Security Council headed by the President, composed of the President as the head, the Prime Minister, the chairman of Election Commission, the Ombudsman, three

members selected each by every one-third of the total number of parliament members and three representatives of the Armed Forces chiefs. The National Security Council shall review the national security matters, political and economic stability and matters related to dissolution of parliament and any urgency developed from international crisis, calling on foreign loan, declaration of emergency and other matters determined by law."

Notwithstanding anything contained elsewhere in the constitution, the President shall dissolve parliament or declare the state of emergency only on the recommendation of the Parliament and approval of the Security Council with consent of two-thirds of the members."

Any person in the service of the Republic shall provide service to the National Security Council, as and when asked for.

(Some detailed provisions may be worked out for balanced power and responsibility. This can act as the interim non-party and impartial caretaker government to conduct election and supervise smooth transfer of power.)

Tomorrow: Democracy and Human Rights

To the Editor

Private schools

Sir, The long letter of "A Concerned Citizen" on the English-medium schools may mislead a percentage of readers on the sweeping assumptions on which the commentary is based.

Children's education cannot be left to the market forces. This is not done anywhere. Secondly, there must be regulations in education; and these must be enforced in public interest. It is naive to equate the situation with simplistic demand-and-supply economic theories. Thirdly, it is harmful to employ untrained teachers for children.

The Education Ministry has to work faster with a larger taskforce. The enforcement has to keep pace with the opening of new schools, whether in the private or public sector. The public sector is overdue for modernisation and review. And lastly, the political opposition should indulge in less politics, and prick the government on such issues as education and exports.

A Husnain Dhaka

Large-scale dairy-farming

Sir, Mr Shaikh Siraj, the comper of BTV's *Maiti-O-Manush*, through his programme on a number of occasions has highlighted the existing problems in the country's dairy farms which include: i) lack of proper milk marketing facilities, ii) scarcity of animal feeds, iii) non-availability of livestock medicines, and iv) tax burden of dairy farm-land. I would strongly call upon

the authority concerned to take urgent measures for solving the above problems in order to protect our rapidly growing dairy business. Small as well as large-scale dairy-farming is essential not only for solving our nutritional problem but also for generating employment opportunities for our unemployed youths and others.

M Zahidul Haque Asstt Prof, BAI, Dhaka

Ensuing election or impending danger?

Sir, All attempts and efforts of negotiation between the ruling party and the opposition over the question of holding general election under a "neutral caretaker government" have failed and we are now moving towards an election on the 15th February without the participation of the major political parties like Awami League, Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami who did have the representation of 69 per cent voters in the last fifth parliament. As the election is drawing near, there is growing a concern among the conscious citizens of the country as to what happens to the fate of our unfortunate nation centering this one-party poll of the ruling BNP.

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) has also showed an inflexible attitude to hold the election within the ambit of our constitution in spite of the continuous appeals and agitations from the opposition to cancel it. This intransigent stand of both the CEC and the ruling BNP to constitutional obligation is, of course, praiseworthy. But the question arises whether

it will reflect the opinions of our electorate.

Democracy, as we know, is a form of government which entails honouring of the public opinion. Then why such an election is being arranged? Is it not contrary to the spirit of democracy? Neither our CEC nor the BNP seem concerned about it. Do not they know such endeavour to hold the election is supposed to lead the nation to a permanent state of conflict and confrontation, jeopardising the social and economic stability of the country. I would like to request the CEC and the Prime Minister to refrain from taking the risk of holding such useless election in the larger interest of the nation and democracy.

M A Hamid Lecturer in English Habigonj Mahila College

What is the strategy of Opposition?

Sir, The current actions of the opposition political parties are very unwise and contradictory to what they are professing.

They are constantly saying that people of Bangladesh are with them in their fight for a caretaker government, they also want fall of this 'autocratic' government, and will not vote to polling centres to cast votes in a farcical election, in which major opposition parties are not participating.

My question is, if it is the case, why they are calling hartals on the election day? Why this warning that anyone who will go to cast vote will do it with the risk of life? Could not they just lie back and enjoy with relish the embarrassment of the ruling

party in getting only a handful of votes? They should not repulse but invite foreign vigilant teams to see how unpopular BNP is.

The opposition political parties are also calling hartals and agitation programmes on days selected by the ruling party for election campaign. As they are sure that people are on their side, the opposition political parties should allow the ruling party candidates to campaign to their hearts' content, as it will only waste their time and money.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

TV: News and World Cup cricket

Sir, Nowadays man cannot live alone. As a part of the living universe he must be well acquainted with the national as well as international affairs and news. And TV plays a vital role in making a person conscious of the current affairs. But it does not mean that all the time TV news will be welcome especially when an interesting event is live telecast on TV simultaneously.

We are hoping that the ensuing World Cup Cricket, world's one of the most interesting current events, will be telecast by the BTB. During the live telecast of the matches no news or other interruptions will be welcome by the viewers. Therefore we also hope that good sense will prevail the BTB authorities and TV news will be scheduled accordingly during the matches.

Md Mokhlesur Rahman 37/A, East Nayatola Moghbazar

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Speech Waiter

I'VE decided to become a political speech writer. The money is good, and I will be sharing a seat with the person who wields power.

The expert on political speech writing is Tom Paines, who has written for many prominent figures, including sitting presidents as well as indicted congressmen.

Torn charges \$350 an hour, but assured me that by the time our session was over I would be another Bill Clinton — or Bob Dole.

He said, "When you're writing for a major politician, it is essential that you answer all the questions that the electorate is asking. Let's start with, 'My fellow Americans, who doesn't have all the answers?'"

I said, "Rush Limbaugh?"

No," he replied in disgust. "Big government doesn't have all the answers. Now what does this country have to balance in the next seven years?"

I knew that one. "The salaries of its professional baseball players."

Torn gritted his teeth. "The nation's budget, which means deficit spending has to end. What does this country have to strengthen more than anything else?"

"The border with Canada," I suggested.

"The American family. It must be protected from terrible TV programming that our children watch."

You must propose an X chip which will blow up the family's TV set whenever an R-rated movie is shown."

Torn asked me, "Who is destroying America?"

Gang leaders and drug dealers.

"You forgot violent criminals and men who don't pay alimony."

"I was coming to them."

Torn was starting to lose his patience. "Now what do you want your candidate to do in his speech?"

"Touch the people?"

"No, you want him to win but he cannot do it alone. He can only do it with the support of the wonderful people he is addressing."

"I wish I had thought of that," I admitted.

Ever since I took the tutoring, I have received dozens of writing offers from politicians running for office. I guess word got around how creative I was when I inserted this phrase into a recent fund-raiser speech for senator Hercules: "And I end by saying, 'God bless you and God bless America.'"

After a standing ovation, Hercules called me and said, "Thank God you didn't write, 'Have a nice day.'"

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB

OPINION

Hello Darkness

Seemingly, the following are the options ahead for BNP —

1. Scrap elections; refer the caretaker issue to the Supreme Court.

Or

2. Go-ahead with the February 15 elections.

It is now fairly obvious that the first option is now a remote possibility and that BNP will continue on its suicidal mission to hang on to constitutionality, at any cost. Let us examine the possible outcomes or alternative scenarios ahead, along with the probability of each outcome actually taking place.

A. Elections are held successfully; the BNP forms the next government, consolidates its position, and in time (say two to three years) announces interim elections under a caretaker formula. This is the best possible scenario for BNP. Unfortunately, the probability of this actually happening is remote.

B. The BNP somehow muddles through, and in the face of stiff resistance is forced to hold interim elections soon after forming the next government, and with its credibility and

prestige at an all time low, will fare badly in these polls. Since this outcome will favour the opposition, BNP will resist this tooth and nail. This explains why they have not yet made a clear public commitment to interim elections under a caretaker government after February 15. Thus, the probability of this event occurring is low.

C. Elections cancelled, a state of emergency declared and all political activities banned; large-scale arrests initiated, and the media is silenced. (Probability is increasing at an alarming rate — I would judge this to be a very likely outcome).

D. Elections disrupted, generalized anarchy, the Army takes over and martial law proclaimed. (Probability very significant, increasing daily, but less than C.)

In my opinion, C or D are the only choices left. The opposition, it would seem, can now choose between the devil and the deep blue sea. It is also clear that we should now get ready to kiss democracy goodbye. Back to square one once again! Thank you Begum Khaleida Zia. Thank you Sheikh Hasina Wajed. Congratulations to Golem Azam and Hussain Muhammad Ershad and HELLO DARKNESS!