

Public Accounts

We have so far been missing out on a prime exercise that parliamentary accounts committees in the democratic world routinely undertake to ensure financial accountability of various ministries of the government.

Nothing in the ultimate analysis can be a better watch-dog over governance than a parliamentary standing committee on finance; but its work will be of real efficacy if it relates to recent times rather than dipping toes in a hoary past.

The JS Public Accounts Committee burdened though by an avalanche of past audit observations, in its maiden report to the parliament concisely recorded their findings about six important ministries like those of works, telecommunications, energy, water resources, communications and cabinet division.

On the basis of their deductions, the PAC has recommended that each ministry has an audit cell to be headed by a joint secretary. Of the nine other suggestions made we would like to focus on two: the first one relates to piecing together all the different circulars issued from time to time by way of amending and reinterpreting the financial rules to suit different situations.

After fine-tuning the rules to the present requirement, the whole bunch ought to be published as an authentic guide-book for the ministries. Secondly, a law on misconduct should be framed to render current censures of past lapses materially deterrent.

Dealing with Fake Peers

Following a welcome police drive against fake spiritualists in the country, the frauds either went into temporary hiding or closed their shops. But now they are back in the business. A Bangla daily has cited specific cases of five such culprits who were earlier arrested by the police but have now returned to their deceitful profession by just changing tactics.

The fact of the matter is that no infertile woman could be treated by them to gain her reproductive capability. Now the fake spiritualists throw challenges that they will cure the infertility problem after being sure the female spouse is not infertile through a laboratory test.

Here again the arrested fake peers could not be put behind the bar because there were no specific charges against them. The problem is similar to that of cases against terrorists where the culprits most of the time are released for lack of material evidence or witnesses.

What's Happening?

A nine-year-old girl of Siddhirganj has reportedly been sexually abused by the father of her playmate. The victim is fighting for her life in a Narayanganj hospital. We do not know how to condemn this most loathsome carnal crime. A society that allows children's innocence to be violated so outrageously can hardly claim to be civilised.

The outbreak of this particular libidinous perversion, particularly at our level of underdevelopment, may prove highly costly if not checked now. It may be a proof of our traditional social and moral values giving in to a more aggressive temper.

Our society, however, need not be insular; rather it will have to be open and progressive to develop a rational approach to everything that is socially and culturally important for us. Are we ready to take up the challenge? We feel that the leaders in all areas must lead the nation by setting personal examples.

THERE are certain vibes off an economy, somewhat purring like a new car engine on ignition, in the event they are positive, of course, which speak volumes about the vigour and vitality of transactions in a society.

There are two pieces of bad news about the ordeals faced by the public through their daily bouts with changing higher denomination currency notes after shopping or commuting, and getting money's worth through the sale of goods, which seldom, if ever, excise our minds — thanks to the notorious refrains of highly sophisticated economists and government planners, some of them unwittingly perhaps captives of buzz words, which drown or crowd out the inarticulate demands of the economy.

The first visible sign of a vibrant economy is a retail network palming off different currency notes in a jiffy to round off small deals. But how irksome and time-wasting it is for the buyers presenting a Tk 500 or 100 note at a shop and being non-chalantly told by its keeper that he has to wait for the changes as a sales assistant is sent romping places to fetch these. Whether it is a grocery store, a medicine outlet, an au-

di shop, a meat, or a vegetable, or a flat corner and a bookshop, you will have the nail-biting photo-finish!

Most unsettling is the scouting for changes one strays in to on having reached a spot under tremendous time and traffic jam pressures by a three-wheeler or a pedal rickshaw ride as its driver looks philosophically askance. Their starting the day without cash in hand should be the transport owner's headache, but as it happens, this is a seller's market with hardly any competition, and besides, isn't lack of consideration for others a social past-time here?

Perhaps the wholesalers are now-a-days shuffling the notes with some of the consummate ease they had earlier gotten used to because of a slight improvement in the liquidity picture of the banks, but the central bank cannot shrug off its responsibility in respect of making notes of different lower denominations sufficiently available to the big retail market.

We never tire of talking about purchasing power, effective demands, buoyant retail transactions, etc missing out on the obvious fact that these would not fully bloom, even though there might be potentialities for the same, if cash blockages prove to be off-putting on the finishing line.

It looks like a same-side folly when reportedly the employee at the bank counter demands that he be paid by depositing the exact amounts billed for, so as to spare them the 'hassle' of having to give changes. One suspects whether the banks have the smaller notes in sufficient demand.

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Small is Important for the Economy

"Small is beautiful" — is a slogan for promotion of cottage industry and self-employment projects under micro-credit programmes. Small is important, crucially important for us. Working on this bottom-line, let's also point out that small savings mean future for people, who can only start having one...

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Time and Tide Shah Husain Imam

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Maggie Thatcher's Revenge — William the Conqueror!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

PEOPLE in Southeast Asia should take a bow. Ever since Mrs. Bandernaike was elected Prime Minister of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all have had women as the head of governments.

Western men, on the other hand, seem to have a mental block against women politicians. After what happened to Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, can anyone seriously think of a woman President of the United States any time soon? When Margaret Thatcher was elected the leader of Britain's Conservative Party in 1975, most British men were slightly amused. "She will be allowed to lose only one election," prophesied Oxford dons. Clearly, the upper class was not happy that a grocer's daughter had made it to the upper echelon of their party!

Sometimes, it seems the Mayor is being dominated by his subordinates, particularly when we have to see the 'who cares' attitude of the cleaners of the DCC. Mr Mayor, we are really confused. Who is controlled by whom?

Shakil-Al-Mamun Department of Finance and Banking University of Dhaka

Game of vanity Sir, Whenever Indian and Pakistani cricket teams meet each other to play either on the Indian soil or anywhere else, it creates tremendous enthusiasm amongst the people of the sub-continent. Surely it creates a sense of togetherness, which is a good sign. But unfortunately due to the communal attitude of most of the Indian fans, including some leaders of purely communal parties of that country viz Shiv Sena and even BJP who have on several occasions been found arrogant. The manner in which the Pakistani team was treated in Bangalore on a recent occasion is still vivid in the memory of the whole world. Perhaps the Indians are suffering with a kind of serious inferiority complex.

The Pakistani cricket team and their lovers have also some responsibilities. It is equally deplorable that if Pakistan wins, they think as if they have hoisted Pakistani flag over the Red Fort and when the Indians win a game they celebrate their victory in a way as they have wiped of Pakistan from this globe. In the recent Pepsi Cup, we observed that both the teams played with their whole might. It was not bad. But the saddest part of it was that they were found playing neither in brotherly or friendly mood, but hatred and enmity were behind the spirit of 'do and die' policy. This is one of the causes that both teams are often defeated in final by less important teams. This actually has happened once again in the Pepsi Independence Cup-97.

I suggest the Indians and Pakistanis to keep the spirit of sportsmanship alive above all kinds of cynicisms.

K R Zaikhami Khulna

had stopped distribution of free milk to students, and earned the unenviable nickname, "Margaret Thatcher, Milk Snatcher!" Considering her somewhat of a lightweight, Prime Minister Harold Wilson tried to take advantage of her during question and answer sessions in the parliament. Instead of answering her questions, Wilson tried to ask her questions! Thatcher shot back: "As she would repeatedly do, to any man or woman who dared to cross her. This piece is not meant to be a discussion of the legacy of the 'Iron Lady', except to state that as the longest serving Prime Minister of this century, Thatcher realigned British politics, economy and society."

By 1977, Harold Wilson had resigned the Premiership in favour of an older man, James Callaghan. The Tories sensed blood. The Conservative Party annual conference that year was full of excitement and expectation. Although Michael Heseltine, in a shrill voice, gave his rendition of Labour's marching habits ("left, left", instead of "left, right") and tried to hijack the conference towards the Right, the real show-stealer was a young, mop-haired boy of sixteen, "William".

The son of a soft drink company owner in Yorkshire, in his spare time, William read parliamentary reports and memorized many of Winston Churchill's famous speeches. At the Conservative Party conference, he was allowed to speak as a Young Tory. He wowed the conference and the nationwide television audience with a brilliant speech in defense of Conservative principles.

I still remember some of the things William said. A true right-winger, he ridiculed the Labour Party for being soft on competition. "They would like some kid who finished second in a race to get the first prize, so as not to hurt his feelings!", he satirized to thunderous applause. He even knew black humour. "I care what happens to this country thirty years from now. I know... Margaret Thatcher led the applause for William when he finished his speech. Displaying a rare motherly instinct in public, Thatcher also asked William to call his mother to let her know that he is all right! William was the toast of the town. He appeared on talk shows with Shadow cabinet ministers. "William the Conqueror" newspapers screamed! His fifteen minutes in the limelight, everyone else thought.

In the intervening years, as Margaret Thatcher went about changing the face of Britain, William went to Oxford to complete his education. In 1990, Michael Heseltine ousted Margaret Thatcher as the Leader of the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister. Another person who worked for Thatcher's ouster was Kenneth Clarke.

Without commoners! Sir, The second show of the Prime Minister's TV programme was telecast on 23.6.97. Whether it was better than the first one may be a question. To me, it was a bit better than the first show. This time questions were more direct. But can this programme rightly be called 'Deshbashi' Mukhomukhi? The people saw her on the TV screen only, but questions were hardly of their own. TV authorities arranged this programme, as it appeared, for three classes of people namely journalists, educationists and economists, who were on the panel.

No questions on country's productions, marketing and transporting of mangoes, exporting of mangoes, and paddy and jute, prices, price of fertiliser and deplorable primary education in rural areas.

The people from the countryside were absent in the programme!

Heistline forgot that it does not pay to cross the Iron Lady. The person elected new leader of the Conservative Party and the new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to replace Margaret Thatcher was not the Oxford-educated Heseltine, but a Thatcher protégé, John Major, who did not attend college.

In the aftermath of the Conservative Party's landslide defeat in the British General elections and John Major's resignation last month, the Tories held another leadership contest last week. After days of bitter bickering, two candidates emerged for the final run-off — fifty-six year old Kenneth Clarke, former Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a younger candidate, Baroness Thatcher remembers Mr. Clarke well; that did not bode well for Mr. Clarke.

Mrs. Thatcher also remembers the younger candidate fondly, and threw her weight behind him. He won! The name of the younger candidate, the new leader of the Conservative Party, the Leader of the Opposition, and most probably the next Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is, 36-year old William Hague!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh, who currently lives in Princeton, New Jersey, USA

OPINION

The Age of Satellite TVs

Saruwat Chowdhury

Television is probably the most powerful medium of mass education in both the developing and developed countries. I remember the days not so long ago when BTV used to broadcast programmes only in the evenings, and for a few hours on the weekly holidays. Those days, I used to crave for whatever cartoon features was allotted for each day and the "deshi" programmes for children shown in early part in the evening.

Returning home after several years, I am amazed to find that those golden or miserable (depending on your point of view) days are long gone. VCRs, satellite TVs etc., today seem to have brought "the whole world" within our reach. School children and their parents today do not have to eagerly wait for programmes BTV has to offer. Instead, they have a myriad of choices ranging from the Cartoon Network, Zee TV, Zee Cinema, DD Channel V, ATN Star Plus etc. It seems that millions of children and teenagers around the world are listening to the same music and watching the same films and videos. Therefore, one may claim that the marvels of entertainment technology help us experience a feeling of inter connectedness to the cultural waves across the world. But, do these programmes help create a global identification with the "welfare" of the whole human species and the "planet" itself? I don't think so.

Children and teenagers around the globe are gradually becoming hooked to the "magic box" in their living room. Parents often wonder whether the pop artists and mega-stars are the newly-emergent global figures? A school-going Bangladeshi child may never have heard the name of the latest UN Secretary-General, but he/she is most likely familiar with the music of Michael Jackson. Even in the remote villages, people gather around TV set and stare at it, mesmerised. Traditional village life (the one we read about in Bangla essay books) included lots of Jari, Shari songs, where people of all ages joined in. Every Bangladeshi village probably had their own singer or story teller who entertained the villagers. Such live pastimes