

US Economy: Strengths and Strains

What lesson do we derive from Uncle Sam's experience? First, to avoid large swings in business cycles, economic agents need to be coped with information via availability of the right information technology...

Whether big or small, the fundamentals seem to be the same in all economies.

In for Another Deluge?

It is too early for a bigger than usual annual flood to hit. But it has. In the northern zone alone some 100 thousand people have been rendered homeless.

This is all due to incessant rain for two days in the country as well as in the eastern hills. Is it a flash flood? When the Bay low dissipates tomorrow or at the most the day after and the sun is out for at least a few days at a stretch - will the current disaster profile change for normal?

This weather thing is still unpredictable beyond a day or two. Local weather conditions are determined by factors mostly non-local. If all the elements and developments in world weather could be taken into account, a state-of-the-art weather establishment could possibly forecast about the elements' performance in certain points on the earth's surface.

This may not be so. But we must prepare as if it is a certainty. What preparations do we need to meet such a challenge? The standard answer is food and clothes and medicine for the marooned and the shelterless. And, before that, drinking water.

People somehow survive the worst. But then they fall to the diseases that come in the wake. Are we fully prepared to stave off flood deaths due to cholera and diarrhoea? Here also reaching the distressed is the first point. Let us sort this out once and for all.

Tell-tale Signs

If there is will there is a way, this cliché of an adage is slowly making its presence felt in the activities of the law enforcing agency. And expectedly so.

This is a sure sign of improvement in the plummeting record of police efficiency and should go some way in restoring people's confidence in the guardians of law.

For, police performance in the recent times and not undervaluing, has come under fire as never before. Instances like these are fine professional ripostes to criticism which should imbue all and sundry of the profession with a sense of professional pride.

The untiring efforts of the law enforcers involved in the arrest of hardened and well-equipped criminals like Aslam, Bikash or for that matter in a different context though, the human concern shown by traffic police Uttam at Dhamrai the other day, enunciate that sincerity do help a lot in overcoming logistical inadequacy, a problem that our law enforcing agency is definitely plagued with.

Besides, the recent success stories of the police, irrespective of the elements of personal ability and commitment in them, do offer an appreciable commentary on the sincerity and commitment of the administration to fight crime. Although the situation is still far from being normal even for a developing third world country like ours, the newly felt bite in police activity should hearten our Home Minister whose much publicised crusade against crime, it seems, has finally begun to show results. We commend him on that.

But fighting crime is not only the responsibility of the law enforcing agency. Other members of the society have to engage themselves in soul searching and discharging their duties to find out the reasons behind the increasing proneness of the youth section to criminality. It is about time we asked ourselves the question why a talented science student like Bikash, who had stood second in the SSC examination had to slip into the dark world of criminality.

Why this Delay?

We are outraged at the procrastination over the trial of the murderers of Billal, a gas company employee whom terrorists had thrown down from the sixth floor of the office building after beating him in broad day light. Although it has been long time since the accused have been chargesheeted, the trial has not begun apparently due to the manipulation of a powerful quarter. These people who seem to hold considerable clout in the government ranks are reportedly exercising their influence on the relevant ministries to take the underpinnings of the case.

The fact that these elements have friends or at least sympathisers in the administration is quite obvious, otherwise they would have not been able to muster the courage of indulging in dharna to the ministries in the first place. This is nothing new but then are not we struggling to wake up from the nightmares of our history? We believe the two ministries would be guided by their ethical obligation sufficiently so that the cause of justice is not defeated but we also feel that things should not be allowed to the point where manipulative efforts can even be attempted. People indulging in this nefarious practice should be put through the hoop to rule out the possibilities of similar occurrences in future. It should be remembered that news of manipulation can only dent people's confidence in the government commitment to the rule of law.

We cannot afford to forget that rule of law is absolutely essential for democracy. And for that government has to make sure that seekers of justice do not roam in the wilderness as relatives of Billal are doing; and doing for quite some time now.

At the time of our visit to the US in May 1997, the economy appeared to be in 'good mood'. American economy experienced a steady ride on the growth path having stepped into sixth year of expansion during the 1990s.

Experiencing a robust growth rate for six years in a row is not at all a matter of pride and the unbelievable episode surprised some who are accustomed with the concept of booms and busts - business cycle - of an economy. Is the old bugaboo of capitalism tamed? Critics tend to argue that the 'honeymoon period' is going to be over soon and the old spectre of booms and busts might hit again albeit under a new veil.

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What actually contributed to this steady state? Information technology played the key role. Companies are avoiding past excesses using computers and improved communications to manage inventories better and to boost workers' productivity.

The growth pattern now witnessed by the US is unique in nature : low unemployment, low inflation and faster growth

are travelling hand in hand, thus negating many economists' perceptions. But even then complacency is ruled out by concerned quarters who appear to notice clouds still looming large on the horizon.

Inflation that will determine how long this expansion will last. Nor will auto sales, housing starts or any of the traditional cycle indicators give the first warnings of an impending recession as they did in 1979 and 1989.

much faster pace than the rest of the economy. This lopsided growth, according to this school of thought, helped extend expansion but, at the same breath, it rings a bell of caution.

By and large, the critics' forecast of a doom might not be in the scene for a pretty long time to come. The surge in high-

tech in 1995 and 1996 took place when autos and housing faced a sluggish trend. Recent projections point to a comeback of those knocked-down sectors thus giving Uncle Sam a big sigh of relief.

What lesson do we derive from Uncle Sam's experience? First, to avoid large swings in business cycles, economic agents need to be coped with information via availability of the right information technology.

Second, if we want to pursue a sustained non-inflationary growth, the only way we can accomplish the objective is through building up an information network through which consumers' changing preferences or changing aggregate demand could be timely transmitted to producers.

Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes

The most irritant caused by high-tech growth is in the realm of monetary policy. Interest rates do not seem to work on high-tech. When a company is going at, say, 30 per cent a year, interest rate at 7 or 9 per cent hardly counts.

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A Page from the Past

Death of Cabinet Mission Plan

The Muslim League accepted the Mission Plan since "the compulsory grouping of the six Muslim provinces" was considered "the basis and the foundation of Pakistan.."

Committee met on April 12, 1946 to discuss Azad's meeting with the Cabinet Mission. Members voiced their doubts and suspicions. Gandhi came to Azad's rescue and silenced critics by saying that only a federal solution could work in a country like India.

In its own mind, the mission was clear; it wanted one India, with something between the 1935 enacted federal structure and what Azad had suggested in terms of autonomy. When the Mission invited Jinnah for talks on April 16, it placed the alternatives before him.

The other alternative grouped together more or less the same areas but with a firmer Centre. There was provision for a Central Government, with an equal number of Hindu and Muslim Ministers, to administer Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications.

Jinnah first showed interest in the second alternative but later refused to commit himself. As always, he wanted to see what cards Congress had before he played his hand. The representatives of the Sikhs, according to the Mission's own records, "don't know what they want but are worried and alarmed."

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Singh favoured a Sikh State, or an autonomous province which Sardar Baldev Singh said should include the Ambala, Jullundur and Lahore Divisions of Punjab.

The Mission's first scheme was formation of an interim government which would set up an all-India commission, drawing members from the Centre and the Provincial Assemblies; first, to work constitutional guarantees for minorities and second, to consider whether India should be one or two units.

Jinnah and Nehru were consulted in that order. Both rejected the scheme which was then not made public. The Mission picked up the thread with

Gandhi, who wanted a united India, and with Azad, who saw in its efforts the last hope to keep India undivided, Azad sincerely believed that partition would divide and harm the Muslims more than the Hindus.

The schemes - known as the Cabinet Mission Plan - was published on May 16 and it did honour the wishes of Gandhi and Azad and kept India one. But it tried to please Jinnah as well by giving him "the Muslim zones".

It was a three-tier structure.

tonomous and frame its own Constitution for all subjects except Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications. However, after elections under the new Constitution, any province, if its legislature so decided, could come out of any group in which it had been placed.

The Mission rejected 'partition of Punjab and Bengal' on the grounds that it would be 'contrary to the wishes of a very large proportion of the inhabitants of the two provinces, and that it would of necessity divide the Sikhs.' Strangely, a few months later, Lord Mountbatten repudiated the thesis while partitioning the two provinces.

The Muslim League accepted on June 6 the Mission Plan since "the compulsory grouping of the six Muslim provinces was considered "the basis and the foundation of Pakistan". Khurshid, Jinnah's private secretary, told me subsequently that Jinnah sincerely accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan and he silenced his critics in the League by saying: "The die has been cast." Congress accepted the plan on June 25, interpreting the grouping of provinces to mean that they "shall make their choice whether or not to belong to the section in which they are placed."

This very reservation on the part of Congress sounded the

death knell for the plan. After its ratification by the All-India Congress Committee on June 6, 1946 Nehru, who had by then taken over the party's presidency from Azad, said that Congress had agreed to participate in the proposed Constituent Assembly, but nothing beyond. He made it quite clear that his party would be free to suggest modifications to the plan in the Constituent Assembly, hinting that both the grouping of provinces and the powers vested with the Centre could be changed.

Azad differed with Nehru's interpretation. He said: "It was not correct to say that Congress was free to modify the plan as it pleased." The grouping of provinces and the Central subjects, according to him, "could not be changed unilaterally by Congress without the consent of the other parties to the agreement."

When the matter was referred to the Mission's members, Lawrence said that the terms could not go outside the terms in the Constituent Assembly. The British Government suggested that the matter could be referred to the Federal Court to advise on the Congress interpretation that a province need not join a group from the beginning. But Congress did not agree to it. Jinnah reacted sharply and blamed Nehru for repudiating the grouping of provinces and the limited Centre which were the very 'basic form' on which the scheme rested. He made the All-India Council of the Muslim League reverse (on July 27) its earlier resolution accepting the plan. And he himself accused the Mission of 'bad faith' and the Congress of taking a 'pettifogging and haggling attitude'. This pronounced not only the death of Cabinet Mission plan but also of a united India.

To the Editor...

The political haze

Sir, That the political relationship between Bangladesh and India is basically pivoted on communal feeling is not true today, as stressed in the commentary (DS, May 28), although a section of local political leadership may be fanning anti-India baiting in its political campaign against the other major political party.

Feeling insecure about the possible stance of the 'big brother' is based on the economic and military might. Today's subjugation is based on economic control, not physical occupation, as in the 'Empire' days centuries ago.

Today the New Delhi administration is not strong, with coalition of about a dozen parties. This type of instability occurs after a foundation is shaken after 50 years (in this case, the degeneration or eclipse of the Congress). Cycles in politics is as natural as in the other spheres, cosmically speaking.

The issue is the age or decade of change in all nations, countries, societies. The dynamic changing scenario has to be monitored carefully, regularly, at close intervals. The inputs have to be upto-date, and the outputs objective. The analyses should not be confined to political analysis as number one priority. What is the role of WTO? Of course, it is operating with global politics in the background, but the visible effects are first economic, in trade and commerce. Indirect control is the style of the decade.

The problem the citizens feel is that the politicians have to change and modernise the style of politics, otherwise frustrated external forces (not physical) outside politics will try to create circumstances to compel the political leaderships to change the tune of leading or misleading the public.

In the same issue of the DS, on the same page, a visiting Bangladeshi resident abroad offered a novel clarification about the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: Bangabandhu was not the target, and Bangabandhu is alive, but President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the target. There is some substance in the state-

ment about two different missions of one person. So it may be useful for Awami League, and the political parties, to clarify the political stand on this sensitive issue.

Bangabandhu should be above politics and political parties. Hence one single party cannot own him - he belongs to the people and to the nation.

We talk and advertise a lot about atmospheric and environmental and physical pollution. Let the nation talk freely for sometime on political haze, garbage, and pollution. The country has to come out of it, for the sake of historical transparency for the future generations. As they say, politics is too sensitive a subject to be left in the hands of the politicians alone.

A Zabr Dhaka

National Hockey Stadium

Sir, We thank the authority concerned for naming Dhanomdi Mahila Sports Complex after the name of Sultana Kamal as "Dhanomdi Sultana Kamal Mahila Sports Complex." It may be recalled here that Sultana was a golden girl of our country in track and field events and married to Sheikh Kamal. But she died a premature death on the horrible night of 15th August, 1975. Now since a sports complex has been named after her name we are proud of remembering and respecting her as a sports personality.

But unfortunately nothing like this happened to the fate of Sheikh Kamal though he did a lot for development and promotion of sports and games of our country during his short-lived life. We all know about the pioneering role of Sheikh Kamal in establishing Abahani Krira Chakra. But as an ex-national hockey player I would like recall here his outstanding contribution to the development of hockey in our country.

One day, most probably in 1974, he the hockey player, raised a demand to Sheikh Kamal to arrange a permanent

hockey field at outer stadium. He went to the Chairman of National Sports Council (NSC) and requested him to allocate a field at outer stadium exclusively for hockey. General Ershad was then the chairman of NSC. He immediately allocated a field for hockey and as a result a hockey field of our own was created at north-eastern corner of outer stadium.

But we deeply regret to say that we have never evaluated the valuable contribution of Sheikh Kamal. But it is now high time to recognise his contributions.

In the light of the above fact we suggest to name our astro-turf national hockey stadium after Sheikh Kamal.

Abdul Majed 13, Rajani Bose Lane, Dhaka

Grow more trees

Sir, While we have been making a huge hue and cry for years against deforestation, indiscriminate felling of large number of trees and pollution problem, these days we feel happy and thrilled to see hundreds of young people planting trees.

This is neither an outcome of a day or two nor it is a singular achievement of any individual or any political party. Rather this is the result of a great mass awakening, will, determination and endeavour of every citizen of the country to revitalize and restore our motherland with evergreen trees. Our heartfelt congratulations to those.

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, but fortunately our country is the most fertile land in the world. Everything grows in our small but panoramic Bangladesh. The more we plough our land the more we grow food and the more we become happy and prosperous and live in peace.

We would request our authorities concerned that side by side with afforestation on both sides of roads and highways we may also plant trees on both sides of railway tracks, embankment and river banks. This would not only protect us

from floods, tidal surges, river erosions, disruption of road and railway communications and pollution in the air but would also make Bangladesh more beautiful.

The more we grow trees the more we overcome our difficulties.

O H Kabir 6, Hare Street, War, Dhaka-1203

Information cell

Sir, It is heartening to learn that the government is contemplating to form a "central information cell." This was recently disclosed by the State Minister for Information Prof. Abu Sayeed at a gathering of the Information Officers working in different ministries and departments.

It may be mentioned here that a few days back, through these columns I had suggested to set up an information cell. So I sincerely welcome the declaration of formation of a central information cell and I believe that this cell will establish a transparent information flow system in the country and will strengthen communication between the government and the members of the public.

M Zahidul Haque BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.

Passports

Sir, The other day I had an occasion to go the Passport Office, Dhaka to get a passport book as the pages of the existing one have been utilised. I had to go through a mighty hassle (I will discuss it later on an appropriate occasion) before receiving my booklet. After receiving the booklet I had a weird feeling.

Right from our green days in 1972 there used to be quite a few calligraphers on the pay-roll of the Directorate of Immigration & Passport, Govt of Bangladesh whose duties were to write passports neatly, correctly without any mistake. In countries outside our own, passport is used for identification of its holder

and hence is considered to be a very important document from that point of view. What could be the image of that authority which issues a clumsy, slovenly written passport and also of the holders of such passports?

My Bangladesh International Passport was written so badly and the handwriting was no better than that of a student of Class III. With take-it-or-leave-it attitude of the officers, I could not even lodge a protest. What a pity! Out of about thousand employees of the Regional Office, there is not a single calligrapher or a person who can write a good legible hand. It is food for thought of the Home Ministry.

Abu M Fais 45, Azimpur, Dhaka-1205

Dhaka City Corporation

Sir, It is heartening to learn from the press statement made by the government during the last week of April '97, that it took the following decision in a meeting of the executive officials of many departments and Dhaka City Corporation:

- 1) To clean the city of the garbage and other refuse from the city by 15th May. 2) To reduce the traffic jam. 3) Removing water-logging from the city.

It has also been decided to raise the level of Shantinagar main road. I am, a hydraulic engineer, and of the opinion that such action may improve road traffic, but surely, aggravate the flood problem of the surrounding area. Because, water-logging is a recent problem due to obstruction of the drainage channels which should be removed instead of raising road level.

The following, a few suggestions, are also made for favour of consideration of the officials of the Dhaka City Corporation:

- a) The present population of Dhaka city is nearly 10 million including the floating ones and nearly 5 per cent of them are disabled. As such, the male members of the society, for want of

public toilets, openly use the park areas, garbage dumps, foot paths along the main streets, such as, west of the Kawran Bazar mosque, south of Outer Stadium and east of Gulistan cinema hall. So adequate number of public toilets, for men and women, with commode-type WCs and squatting pans may kindly be constructed through out the city, both commercial and residential areas. Fifty paisas may be charged for using commode-type WCs, kept under lock and key. Full-time male or female attendants must be employed for keeping the toilets clean and dry. For this purpose, contractors may be engaged through competitive bids.

b) Old, destitutes and disabled persons and teenage mothers with new-born baby, victims of unsocial activities of the society crowd the traffic signals and markets of the city for begging. Those unfortunates may kindly be gathered and guided to the destitute homes to provide free meals and beds as social service to the society. Zakat fund collected through banks and government contribution may be used for the purpose. Steps may also be taken to impart training to those who are capable of picking up trade for the purpose of rehabilitation.

c) To make the city beautiful, the ugly writings on the walls, and hand bills and posters must be cleared and made such misuse unlawful.

d) Cattles are slaughtered in front of the meat and fish markets of Gulshan. Similar is the case with the other markets. After taking out the saleable part of the cattle the refuse is left behind to rot and give out obnoxious smell. The drains under the floor are already blocked with refuse. So DCC may kindly take necessary steps to keep the area and drains clean and agreeable for a decent society which we want to demonstrate with pride.

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