

Finance Bill Fallout

THE passage of the Finance Bill, 1999 through the parliament without a single amendment proposal from the opposition, having been adopted was a grossly one-sided affair. The opposition had tabled as many as 200 amendments, most of them aiming to secure an extensive withdrawal of taxes levied through the fiscal measures originally proposed by the Finance Minister. Evidently, the wholesale rejection of the opposition amendments stands in stark contrast to the sweeping adoption of all the 37 amendments the ruling party MPs had moved in parliament. We cannot quite see why the Treasury Bench had to be so surgical about the entire bunch of amendments proposed by the BNP and Jatiya Party MPs because the adoption of the ruling party's amendments has had the effect of tax exemptions which the opposition had clamoured for. True, the opposition had sought a wider range of exemptions than the ruling party did but the principle involved was the same: curtailment of the levies.

Intrinsically therefore, the government had an opportunity to be graciously accommodative to the opposition's fiscal demands. At least technically, the ruling party could make a statement on the floor of the House to the effect that, of their 37 amendments passed, there were no fewer than, say, 25 that actually replicated opposition proposals. The best thing, of course, would have been to reflect a clear-cut bipartisan spirit by straightway assimilating some of the opposition-proposed amendments into the Finance Act as is done in many a parliament overseas.

But no sense of accommodation has been shown by the government although there was room for it here. The opposition is likely to call a hault early next month demurring at the wholesale rejection of their amendment proposals. We have consistently urged the opposition to desist from hault or a confrontational course but we don't know how long we can do so when the ruling party still dourly refuses to show any sign of accommodation towards the opposition.

Killing at Court Compound

TAUR Rahman Azad had just come out of the Third Additional Sessions Judge's court after hearing of a case under Explosives Act filed against him when the assailants swooped on him. They shot the Bangladesh Chhatra League activist point-blank in the forehead, chest and abdomen in front of his younger brother and an uncle, and hundreds of others present at the court premises. The grisly incident simply does not sit in with the home minister's express determination to root out terrorism and much-hyped success of the policemen's country-wide combing operations. On the contrary, it goes to underline a frightening truth: the country's law and order situation has hit another low-point in its alarming slide downhill.

Tuesday's killing, shocking it may have been though, was not altogether a new phenomenon. In an identical incident Abu Morshed, a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activist and an accused in a murder case, was gunned down at the entrance of the Dhaka Bar Association office nearly four years back. There are more. Rape of a minor girl at the CMM's court, deaths of Seema, Yasmeen and Rubel in police custody and now this. Such a series of systemic failures strikes at the root of beliefs about security at and sacrosanctity of places like court premises. More importantly, they corrode confidence of the citizenry in the law enforcement mechanism.

Surely, the government has been successful to a certain extent in its crusade against crime, manifest in arrest of hundreds of criminals and terrorists, recovery of arms and ammunition, and submission of outlawed political activists. However, a killing such as this, that too near the court of law, points to the holes in the heart of its law enforcement system. The government's success will essentially rest on how it handles failures, not how it relishes its moments of glory.

Snapped Links with Chittagong

THE port city of Chittagong has been cut off from the rest of the country as train and road communications have been disrupted by agitating workers of three jute mills near Sitakund. The workers were demanding payment of arrear salaries from the mill owners. Such troubles are nothing new in this area but this time these have gone out of hand, so reported an influential Bangla daily on Wednesday. A large portion of railway track has been uprooted in two places and buses from Dhaka were forced to stop before road blocks set up by the workers. Hundreds of passengers had to suffer in an inclement weather and a long queue of buses covering about fifty kilometer jammed the Dhaka-Chittagong highway near Sitakund. The report says the situation may continue till such time as no solution is found to the workers' demands. A leader of the agitating workers claimed that they had no option but to continue with the road blocks even though thousands of people suffered for the same. Railwaymen said it would take them two days to put the tracks in place and resume train services.

This is one example which shows the highhandedness of the mill workers in taking the law into their own hands and the inability of the law enforcing agency to deal with such a chaotic situation. The police have exposed their glaring weakness in dealing with the unruly demonstrators in that area. Unless the mill-owners settle their differences with the workers the situation cannot be brought under control, that is what the police believe. What an absurd situation! If the police cannot bring the chaos under control why don't they ask for reinforcement or seek the help of BDR in this? And if the problem needs political redressal why doesn't the minister concerned make a move accordingly? Why should the people suffer every time there is an agitation in that particular area?

Democracy and Armed Forces

What worries one is the desperation of the armed forces in Pakistan. Realising that they have made the LoC sacrosanct, they may widen the conflict. This will be a tragedy.

THERE is never a good war. So said a JS President. Pakistan thinks otherwise. It does not realise the harm it has done to itself or to the peace process in the region. Some day it may. One only hopes it will not be too late by then.

Take the aspect of the harm Pakistan has done to itself. The Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir is what it has been seeking to alter through negotiations or wars. And that is where it has spoilt its case. The LoC has become the international border.

Islamabad's incursions into the Kargil area have shown the vehemence with which its violation has been opposed. The demand all over is that the intruders must go behind the LoC. No one in the world supports its violation.

Whether it is President Clinton or the Group of Eight nations, they have the inviolability of the LoC in view. They have demanded that it should be respected. And what they have condemned is its violation. America has even asked Pakistan by name to withdraw its men and restore the status quo ante.

In other words, the LoC is permanent. Pakistan has to respect the line if it does not want to be singled out as an aggressor. It may cloud the issue, as it has been trying to do through diplomatic manoeuvres. It may train and arm infiltrators and send its forces as it has done in the Kargil area. But it has to withdraw them because they are on the Indian side of the LoC, the border. The sanctity which the LoC has come to acquire after incursions is India's gain, which has not yet seeped into Pakistan.

New Delhi has been trying for years to make Islamabad accept the LoC as the international border. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Pakistan's Prime Minister, gave a solemn assurance to the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at Shimla in 1972 on the conversion of the LoC into the international border. But he could not sell the idea to his defeated armed forces and he went back on his word.

What could not be achieved then has been made possible through Islamabad's military adventure. Unwittingly, the Pakistan armed forces have themselves converted the LoC into the international border which they had opposed. Lt. Gen. (Rtd) Syed Rafaqat in Pakistan had something to do with the drawing of the LoC. He has said in Islamabad that the line was demarcated, not delineated, lest it should become an international boundary. But whatever the complexities, the Pakistani forces have done what India had failed to do.

True, it will take time for the Indian forces to clear the Kargil heights. They have done well to warn the nation that it would be a long haul. But the target they have set before themselves is the LoC. That is the border beyond which the Pakistani forces are sought to be pushed.

The Pakistani armed forces have not only firm up the LoC but also made talks on Kashmir difficult. Now that the LoC is the border, what is there to discuss except the opening of the Srinagar-Rawalpindi road for better contacts between the two sides of Kashmir and laying down the ground rules for the haulage of timber through the Jhelum? All the Kashmiris who have certain other ideas about the state will have to reckon with the reality of the LoC. The Pakistani forces have given de jure recognition to the de facto situation.

Still the worst thing that the Pakistani forces have done is to defeat peaceful options on Kashmir. New Delhi was prepared to sit across the table to discuss the problem. The two foreign secretaries had even begun talks solely on Kashmir as was the condition laid down by Pakistan for any dialogue. Now all that has been destroyed. The confidence which had got built after the Lahore Declaration has been rudely

shaken. Who will pick up the thread and from where?

Indeed, after the Lahore Declaration, a new chapter in India-Pakistan relations had opened. People all over India and Pakistan were beginning to look for a solution on Kashmir to normalise relations between the two countries. There was an atmosphere where there were serious efforts afoot to try and bury the hatchet. And it looked as if the 51-year-old gulf was beginning to be spanned. Trade, culture exchange, easy travel between the countries — all seemed a possibility. The meeting between Prime Ministers Atal Behari Vajpeyi and Nawaz Sharif at Lahore promised new vistas. Apparently, the Pakistani armed forces have a vested interest in war against India. They seem to have no faith in peace.

Still the situation is not all that grim. The prime ministers of the two countries pick up the phone and talk to each other. The bus, which Vajpeyi rode first, is plying between Delhi and Lahore. The Indian mission in Islamabad and Pakistan's in New Delhi are issuing visas and people are travelling back and forth. The Samjhauta Express steams out of Lahore and Delhi three times a week. Only recently did some 50 intellectuals and journalists from both sides issued a joint statement to appeal to the rulers not to escalate the situation. The armed forces in Pakistan may be fuming over all this. But the people of Pakistan want peace.

Even the Group of Eight nations has not named any country as an aggressor. It wants the two to sit across the table to sort out their differences. India is ready once the infiltrators withdraw from the Indian side of the LoC. Will they do so for the sake of peace? That is the question.

For more than four decades, there had been martial law in Pakistan. Even when the army returned to the barracks, it kept a close watch on political rulers. Now it has taken over without sitting in the chair. Democracy has receded further

into the background.

General Parvez Musharraf, the chief of army staff, is reportedly wanting a national government in Pakistan. It means that even Sharif's days are numbered. Even if the military does not have a direct role, it has established its unquestioned supremacy by starting the hostilities. Musharraf is reported to have said, while talking to his troops in the forward areas, that they were engaged in jihad (religious war). He should know that the Indian troops include Muslims. A Muslim officer and some Muslim soldiers have died in the operation at Kargil. Whatever name he may give to their fighting, they have sacrificed their lives for their motherland.

The armed forces in Pakistan are living in a world of their own. In an Urdu journal which they run, they have argued that "unstable conditions in India" have weakened the control of rulers in Delhi. This is mere wishful thinking. In fact, the incursions of the Pakistani forces have created in India a sense of solidarity which was lacking before. Political parties have criticised the BJP-led coalition for not keeping them in the picture. But all of them stand behind the government in operations in the Kargil area to vacate the aggression. The armed forces in Pakistan do not know how strong the united will of a nation in a democracy is.

What worries one is the desperation of the armed forces in Pakistan. Realising that they have made the LoC sacrosanct, they may widen the conflict. This will be a tragedy. Dr Abdul Qadir Khan, the father of Pakistan's bomb, warned me during an interview in 1988, in which he disclosed that Pakistan had the bomb, that "if you ever drive us to the wall, we will use the bomb."

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

No Man's Land

With war fever staring in the faces of the military hierarchy, what a position to take! Our problem is that we go for personal preferences rather than depend upon sound professionals who have a habit of speaking their mind. What the nation desperately needs is people without myopic vision, people who do not suffer from an inferiority complex and people who are not impetuous.

WINNING or losing in a game should not matter, what matters is how you play the game. Nowadays winning is everything. Given the money numbers that go with success. One could be disappointed in not winning Cricket World Cup Final against Australia at Lord's, the way we went about losing it was both pathetic and disgusting. This loss is however not life threatening and will survive. Wars are unfortunately not like cricket, here winning is everything. Pakistan cannot afford to lose, our very existence in the new millennium depends upon winning. Moreover we cannot be content with at least achieving a stalemate 1965-style, which given India's numerical strength in conventional numbers, would be a victory of sorts. If war is unleashed by India, that is the only chance we will have of capturing Kashmir without losing any major part in the rest of the country. Pakistan has succeeded in internationalising the Kashmir situation but we have paid a credibility price for that. We have lost the propaganda war with India as evinced from G-8 countries calling, during their Cologne meeting, "We are deeply concerned about the continuing military confrontation in Kashmir following the infiltration of armed intruders which violated the Line of Control in the disputed border region. We regard any military action to change the status quo as irresponsible. We therefore call for the immediate end of these actions, restoration of the Line of Control and for the parties to work for an immediate cessation of fighting". The only silver lining other than bringing Kashmir out of deep freeze was that Pakistan was not indicted by name.

Caught up in our own romantic connotation about showing off, we failed to recognize that we had walked into a credibility trap of our own making. While the Mujahideen were operating in "no-man's land" in a virtually inaccessible area between the defended positions of the two countries, we accepted tacitly that Mujahideen had crossed the LoC. In fact both countries exercise intermittent control over this area during conducive weather, occasionally there have been patrol clashes over the past two decades. India upped the ante by bringing in aircraft to cover a major military blunder and inadvertently internationalised it by losing two MIGs and a Mi-17 combat helicopter, the wreckage of two of the fighter aircraft strewn several kilometers on our side of the border. Once the fight was in the open the Indians gave a "spin" to the event, a version that would appeal to the international community and follow it up by a media barrage. Pakistan's response was less than credible given that media professionals are in short supply in the government or in Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) anymore. Director ISPR is a good soldier who was extremely unfortunate not to be promoted on merit during the tenure of the previous COAS but his only claim to PR fame is a close association to the present COAS and that is hardly a qualification to handle the media.

In the media disaster that has engulfed Pakistan the official media machine has to shoulder the blame, that did not have the sense or vision to use the private sector, its expertise and its innovations. A severe bout of inferiority complex prevents those in government from effectively using media-personalities to make the case in various fora. Nobody has better announced our weaknesses in the area of PR than a former Director ISPR and previous owner/publisher of "Defence Journal", Brig (Rtd) A R Siddiqui in his book, "The Military in Pakistan, Image and Reality". Because we are parochial and prone to favouritism we prefer loyalty to the individual to that of loyalty to the State, we can even be comfortable with mediocrity in contrast to professionalism, mostly at a cost to the State.

Our economic situation in a possible pre-war scenario is horrendous despite the fact we got temporary respite from the IMF that allowed our survival till now. Most of our continuing economic factors have negative trends with hardly any hope of reversing the situation in the present environment and by the current crop of economic managers. We cannot leave poor Ishaq Dar to fight the economic battle on his own. The Finance Minister must be helped by the man whose basic constituency of business and industrialists in forefront are resisting the reforms necessary to increase the revenues. The PM must get into the act and speak directly to the whole spectrum of commerce in different centers so that they register themselves for (and pay) General Sales Tax (GST). The PM is prone to a lot of symbolic acts, why doesn't he take a trip to the

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

manipulations in Sindh. While people are dying in Kargil, the nation was more focused on cricket. Kashmir and the scenario likely to develop should occupy our minds in exception to everything else. We would be at war today but it does not suit India to attack in this weather. But who knows the devious nature of the Indian mind, just because we think so, they might still go ahead and attack us in strength, not only across the LoC but along the entire length of the international border. Because they presently hold the credibility factor in the world media they may use this advantage to paint us as the villains of the piece. While the weather for the next 60 days is not really conducive for all-out war, that may be the ultimate reason for trying to catch us off guard.

One of the reasons we usually fail is because our "sacred cow" syndrome. In the face of possible war scenario, it was suggested all uniformed personnel be withdrawn from WAPDA to go back to their professional duties, one day it was reported that "all ranks upto Major have been sent back to the Army and only officers of the rank of Colonel and Brigadier remain". The next day it was reported this was only a rumour and untrue, planted by those who have a vested interest in having the Army withdrawn from WAPDA.

With war fever staring in the faces of the military hierarchy, what a position to take! Our problem is that we go for personal preferences rather than depend upon sound professionals who have a habit of speaking their mind. What the nation desperately needs is people without myopic vision, people who do not suffer from an inferiority complex and people who are not impetuous. We need people who really believe in God, not those who give the Holy Koran lip-service in public while raising rose-tinted glasses to their lips behind closed doors. We need people who should have the strength of character to portray what they really are in private as they do in public, not having dual (and even triple) personalities. We need planners who will implement what they conceive in the national interest, not those who would send the flower of our youth to their deaths to serve their own narrow selfish vision of glory and ambition. Make no mistake, India will force war on us, sooner or later, if we want to exist in the new millennium let us get the character of our leadership structure right, sooner rather than later.

To the Editor...

Suu Kyi

Sir, Quoting an AP report from Bangkok, a news item appeared in some English dailies on 20 June 1999 that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi asked Myanmar women to fight for democracy.

In the whole country of the Union of Myanmar, where Myanmar language is spoken by the majority, the married women are called "Shin Ma". This is a term used by a husband when calling his better-half, especially in rural areas. Even in urban areas and in big cities as well, most of the husbands address their wives "Shin Ma". This word is a short from of "Ein Shin Ma", which means a woman in a position of authority or control in a household.

The exact translation in English would be "the female head of the house-hold".

There were times that we the husbands used to joke among ourselves by addressing our loved once as "Home Minister".

Since Myanmar women are the heads of the households, what kind of war they are supposed to fight for?

The Myanmar military government is committed to building a democratic system according to the conditions, traditions and values of the society. It is committed to bringing a better life for the people, including women.

The Myanmar people understand how sincere the government is in building the nation. Only Daw Aung San Suu Kyi does not appreciate what the present government is doing.

Mya Tun Information Officer, Myanmar Embassy, Dhaka.

No free lunch

Sir, The Privatisation Board invited about 200 teachers of Dhaka University, including those of the Arts and Science faculties, to what it called a dialogue at Sheraton Hotel on June 9, 1999, followed by lunch. The Vice-Chancellor, a phar-

Again, another exam which was scheduled to be held on 21.6.99, has been shifted to 23.6.99 after a few students appealed as the final match of the World Cup cricket had been scheduled on the previous day. As the students appealed, the controller office shifted the date. This was like a blow to the students. The controller office could have easily scheduled the exam earlier considering the final match.

We hope that, the DU authority will handle these matters seriously in future.

Godowns and workshops

Sir, Following disintegration and transfer of central bus terminal from old railway station Fulbari to three different places Saidabad, Mohakhali and Gabtoli the road traffic management in old Dhaka instead of showing any mark of improvement, accuracy and rectification has gone to dogs and turned worst. Now not only the old railway station but all the areas spread from Fulbari to Bangabandhu Avenue to Captain Bazar-Jaikali Mandir road to Forder Street, Wari to Saidabad to Jatrabari have been turned into godowns and workshops of buses. The public throughfares are blocked and barricaded with innumerable buses and the members of public fail to make movement from one place to another without undergoing great hardship and difficulties and wasting their valuable time, energy and money.

It appears that the road traffic in Dhaka has been paralysed but the authorities concerned, the DCC and DMP are not at all interested to solve this erratic and important problem and to mitigate the untold sufferings of the city dwellers.

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