Dhaka, Thursday, November 2, 2000

Do MPs Pay Tax?

THE Parliamentary Standing Committee on Fi-I nance Ministry maintains a mysterious silence over a list of tax evading MPs the National Board of Revenue had sent to it four months back. That would be the most polite rephrasing of the news item published by Prothom Alo on Tuesday hot on the heels of BBC Bangla service's coverage the evening before. The more serious implication of that sitting on the list for such a long time is the unveiled attempt by a ruling party dominated standing committee to sweep it under the carpet. A few questions crop up in the public mind as a result of the procrastination over the issue, the most important one being whether ruling party MPs figure in a larger number on the list than those belonging to other political parties?

As it is, BNP MP Amir Khashru who represents his party on the parliamentary standing committee brought the matter up during last Monday's committee meeting alleging that the foot-dragging amounted to 'sweeping it under the carpet'. Are we to infer that there is a preponderance of ruling

party MPs among tax defaulters?

Nevertheless, what is more important than the comparative numerical representations on the NBR records is obviously the principle involved here. It speaks of moral bankruptcy of those MPs who did not pay their income tax and thereby forfeit their right to demand accountability and transparency from others. Failure to pay income tax by people who hold public or elective office should be regarded as an act of serious misfeasance warranting instant loss of positions.

It is not the first time that our MPs have made news for non-payment of dues. Not long ago, it was in the newspapers that several MPs' arrear telephone bills ran into a few crore taka despite the allowance they had regularly received to cover the

communications cost.

All this represents the height of financial irresponsibility on the part of public representatives who as legislators ought to set examples of abidance by law. Abuse of power is at its worst when an MP shows off an immunity to payments of routine nature that rest of the citizenry make as if it were their second nature.

We demand that the list of MPs who have not paid taxes be made public at once, even as a belated exercise in transparency.

Enhanced Ties with Kuwait

DRIME Minister's three-day visit to Kuwait has I vielded the four-year Technical Co-operation Agreement that paves the way for further export of skilled manpower to the Middle Eastern monarchy.

Manpower export has been a key aspect in bilateral relations between the two countries for nearly three decades now, having been extremely beneficial for both sides. While steady flow of remittance from the oil-rich country facilitated our economic growth. Kuwait has also benefited from the services of our skilled manpower in their much-needed infrastructure development sector. Unfortunately, manpower export to that country has not been incident-free, thanks to ruthlessly dishonest recruitment agencies straddling both ends. Iraq's brief but nonetheless destructive occupation of the tiny state and the subsequent Gulf War had also been a major impediment to manpower export. After ratification of the deal, the channel will be properly reopened. The nine-point covenant actually heralds a new vista on this front, as it has an in-built extension mechanism in place, which can only be brought to a termination by formal request from either of the two. A feature in the accord that will definitely play the safety-valve in recruitment is the provision that permits the employer to choose the employees himself or attend the selection process. Also, a detailed contract that specifies the nature of job, duration, wage and other financial perks, etc would eliminate the scope for unscrupulous brokers to sneak in.

Kuwait's nod to the prime minister's proposal for installing an oil refinery in Bangladesh is a crucial success with potentials for long-term economic and environmental benefits for us. Leaded oil is a major source of air pollution and we desperately need more refineries to eliminate lead content from fuel oil. Moreover, it would reduce our reliance on imported lead-free fuel. Also, the Kuwaiti government has promised to send a trade delegation some time this month to explore possibilities of further trade

and investment.

On the whole, the prime minister's visit has provided an impetus to Kuwait-Bangladesh relations. At our end, at this point in time, the primary responsibility should be to facilitate, through policy and administrative support, Kuwaiti investment.

Alternative Energy Agenda

EXPERTS at a seminar in Gazipur on Tuesday Lwere unanimous in their opinion about the efficacy of renewable energy sources against the backdrop of a rapid depletion of fossil fuels. The search for alternative energy sources goes on throughout the world, but in Bangladesh it is somewhat hurtling along in the absence of commitment to the agenda. The initial burst of enthusiasm has tapered off largely due to lack of policy support to the private sector without whose participation in the field no significant headway seems achievable there. People have been using renewable sources of energy like solar or wind power and biogas for quite some time now but to popularise and commercialise their use remains a challenge before many a developing country. Solar energy is utilised for drying cloth, fish, salt etc. Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems are gaining acceptance as a technology for electricity generation in remote areas. Biogas energy development has not achieved any significant penetration as yet. A number of improved stoves have been developed, but their distribution falls behind the target due to high costs. The wind energy potential of the coastal region of the country is vast. There can be its exclusive applications including power generation through hy-

brid systems. What is needed now is to popularise these among the masses and devise feasible methods of using them. Lack of confidence among rural people, lack of governmental initiative, absence of support to bridge the gap between buyers and sellers, and above all, absence of fiscal incentives to private companies need to be surmounted before

we can turn a corner.

ME Crisis

Is the Stage Set for Other Mediators to Move in?

Dilip Hiro writes from London

For nearly 10 years the UN has been sidelined from the Middle East peace process. Now Kofi Annan has shown the UN flag and the EU is making its presence felt. With the Clinton-brokered truce failing to take hold, the stage isset for other mediators to move.

money are crucial to victory.

It is in this situation that Annan stepped into the breach, followed by Solana, the EU's foreign policy representative. The prime mover behind the EU was France, its current president. Paris has a long history of interest in the Middle East, and more importantly of even-handedness in its dealings with Israelis and Palestinians.

By being personally involved in ably favourable to Israel. alleviating the inflamed relations between Israel and the Palestinians, Annan raised the profile of the UN, which has been missing since the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid nine years ago when the US grabbed the mantle of chief intermediary.

In 1991 Israel's hardline Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir had agreed to participate in the conference on two conditions. First, the UN must be excluded. And second, following the plenary eral between Israel and each of aware of the power imbalance Jerusalem (where the US owns a in May 1998 that 'The territory gence of Israel in 1948.

Resolution "with the centre man-

aging only the currency, defence

and foreign policy." (It may be

recalled here that the 1940

Lahore Resolution giving an

outline of Pakistan was moved at

the Lahore session of All India

Muslim League by no less a per-

sonality than Shere-Bangla A K

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tion was hurriedly amended

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replacing the present unitary

one), then India cannot afford to

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its door-step (and that also) in

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their finger on the nuclear but-

its three Arab neighbours, with Jordan's delegation to include Palestinians who were not members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

The reasoning was simple. In one-to-one dealings with an Arab country, Israel would come through as the dominant force, and that would enormously strengthen its diplomatic leverage, yielding an agreement invari-

This has been the case all along between the Israeli negotiators and their Palestinian counterparts, who represent a fledgling political-administrative entity called the Palestinian Authority.

It explains why Barak refused point blank to accept an international inquiry into the recent violence, and insisted on a bilateral investigation. His government was, at best, lukewarm about Annan's involvement and his subsequent arrival in Israel.

between them and the Israelis, welcomed Annan's intervention.

The domestic considerations weigh heavily on Prime Minister Ehud Barak. He can count on the support of only a third of the 120 MPs, and the device of a national unity administration can only briefly postpone the final reckoning a no-confidence vote backed by an alliance of religious parties and the Likud, led by Ariel Sharon.

It was Sharon who set off the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian violence, resulting in about 100 deaths, almost all of them Arab.

It was to bolster Barak's sagging political fortunes that, following the failure of the Camp David II talks on 26 July, Clinton went out of his way to praise him for making "concessions" on the

future status of Jerusalem. Two days later Clinton told an Israeli television interviewer, "I have always wanted to move our session, the talks must be bilat- By contrast, the Palestinians, embassy [from Tel Aviv] to West keen to live down her statement sectors, which led to the emer-

large plot of land]," and added that he would decide by the end of the year whether to do so or not.

Tel Aviv is the internationally recognised capital of Israel, Jerusalem is Israel's self-declared capital.

It is the standing policy of the 21-member Arab League to sever relations with any country setting up its embassy in Jerusalem. This is currently the case with Costa Rica, Honduras and the Dominican Republic, which have their embassies in Jerusalem.

To refresh Clinton's memory the Arab League reiterated its

long-standing policy. On the other hand Hillary

Clinton lost no time in declaring that 'I'd like to see that move [to Jerusalem] made before the end of the year." The Clintons were clearly out to woo the crucial Jewish vote and money in New York state.

Hillary Clinton is particularly

that the Palestinians currently inhabit, and whatever additional territory they will obtain through peace negotiations, should be considered, and will evolve, into a functioning modern state."

While Bill Clinton's statement impacted positively on his wife's election campaign, it forfeited his claim to be an honest broker between Israelis and Palestinians. It came on top of his thinly disguised criticism of Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as obdurate, and somehow responsible for the failure of

Camp David II. Given the severity of the crisis that enveloped the region, it is incumbent upon the UN Security Council and its Secretary-General to play a leading role in dousing the flames, and return the parties to the negotiating

After all, the Palestine problem is the only one that the UN shares with its predecessor, the League of Nations, established after the First World War. And it was the UN General Assembly which in 1947 proposed partitioning Palestine into Arab and Jewish

OPINION

HE United States and its

closest ally in the Middle

cally miles apart, but one

East, Israel, are geographi-

factor binds them. The current

domestic politics of both coun-

tries have begun to impinge on

the Middle East conflict to such

an extent that new players have

Secretary-General Kofi Annan

and the European Union's Javier

Solana to the violence-racked

region seemed to reflect the

diminishing role of the US a

country that has dominated the

peace process for almost a

The entanglement of Israeli-

Palestinian violence with the

domestic politics of both Israel

and the US has further compli-

cated an already complex equa-

tion. Anxious to remain in office,

Ehud Barak has been trying

frantically to cobble together an

emergency national unity govern-

And then there is President Bill

Clinton a lame duck chief execu-

tive with only a few months left in

office. He is also hobbled by the

fact that his wife, Hillary, is con-

testing a senate seat in New York

state where Jewish votes and

That the nationalist

desh, had realised within a cou-

ple of years of the creation of

Pakistan in 1947, the 'Muhajir'

(refugees) leaders of Pakistan

took long five decades to wake up

and find themselves in. That is

why the most unexpected and

unusual sound of 'music' is now

coming from those quarters who

once considered themselves more

loyal than the king! They now feel

so cornered and helpless at home

that had to announce, and that

also standing on the soil of India,

that they want to establish their

rights as envisaged in the 1940

Lahore Resolution on Pakistan.

Had such announcements been

made by any Bangladeshi leaders

prior to achieving independence

in 1971, they would have been

dubbed as 'un-patriotic', 'anti-

Pakistan' and even 'anti-Islamic'

perhaps by these very quarters

more than others. What a change

has come over there with the

passage of time! Sometimes

history is too harsh and cruel to

teach you a lesson. At last we are

to hear all these from the 'horse's

A three-member delegation of

the Muttahida Qaumi Movement

(MQM) of Pakistan, which

recently visited Delhi, (perhaps

first of such visits by a Muhajir

delegation), to attend a seminar

on the invitation from an Indian

think-tank called Strategic and

Political Risk Analysis, had made

some observations and allega-

tions against Pakistan govern-

ment, in an interview published

in the leading Indian daily. The

Times of India, knocking at the

very basis of Pakistan. Let us now

take a close look at what they had

Bitter Taste

First, they had pleaded for

mouth'.

leaders of former East

Pakistan, now Bangla-

ment for just one month.

decade.

The visits by United Nations

emerged as probable mediators.

MQM Shows Red Signal to Islamabad?

by A M M Shahabuddin

their finger on the nuclear but- available in any part of Pakistan. making Pakistan a Federal State as envisaged in the 1940 Lahore ton.

> Secondly, they said, that they had come to India "to inform and educate" the Indians, particularly the Indian Muslims, about "the dangers of Talibanisation", 'a

> creation of ISI'. Thirdly, they narrated how the Muhajir community, as a whole and particularly MQM activists, are being maltreated by the administration. They said: "Fifteen thousand Muhajirs, including our workers, have been executed, 53 awarded death sentence, 28 are missing after arrest, 2000 are illegally detained. beaten, tortured and held in chains". In this connection, they also disclosed that of the 98 police stations in Karachi, 92 had police chiefs from Punjab, who were under ISI control. "The picture given by the Muhajir leaders undoubtedly forebodes and foretells of coming events that may unfold gradually.

Sad History

It is true that the Muhajirs. who are mainly concentrated in the port city of Karachi, former capital of Pakistan, Hyderabad and some other parts of Sindh, have now realised to their utter dismay that they are gradually losing ground of whatever privileges, authority and position they had enjoyed earlier. It is a sad

history for the Muhajirs. With the partition of India, when the Muhajirs from East Punjab (India) migrated to Pakistan part (west) of Punjab there was no problem for them in intermingling with the locals as their language and customs were the same. But with the Urduspeaking Muhajirs who migrated from UP, CP, Bihar and other parts of northern India, it was a big problem as there was no Urdu-speaking bastion already

So ultimately they settled down in Karachi, then capital of Pakistan, with their own identity. As they formed a majority in Karachi they had a good going. There was an added advantage for them as Mr M A Jinnah, the former and the first Governor-General of Pakistan as well as Pakistan's first Prime Minister Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, both were Urdu-speaking Indian Muhajirs. So for the Muhajirs, it appeared

to be a great boon.

But the dominance of the Muhajirs on state affairs became an eye-sore for the ever-dashing Punjabis. A clash of interest became inevitable. And the deck became cleared for the vested interests with the sudden death of Mr Jinnah at a health resort at Ziarat in the northern region and then the mysterious assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, who was shot while addressing a public meeting at Rawalpindi Park in Punjab, later known as Liaquat Bagh (Liaquat Garden). That death mystery was never solved. Rather it was further deepened because the assassin was shot dead on the spot and later the investigating officer died in a mysterious plane crash on a domestic flight. Then the wheels started moving perhaps in favour of those waiting in the aisle. And shifting of capital from Karachi to Islamabad in Punjab under army rule of Field Marshall Ayub Khan was the last "nail" for the Muhajirs. The rest is a history full of conspiracies and intrigues, power-politics punctuated with army rule.

Bengalis Raised Voice in 1948

What the MQM leaders are saying today may be something new for them, but not to the Ben-

their voice as far back as 1948 when Mr Jinnah announced that "Urdu, and Urdu alone, will be the tion leader and former Prime State Language of Pakistan." They could foresee the shape of things to come in due course. The dark shadows were already cast. imposition of Federal rule on The most striking features of the statements made by the MQM leaders to Indian media is that leaders have said in Delhi bears they had indirectly tried to get India involved in solving their problems, if Pakistan government does not agree to their suggestion for a federal government and that also was made standing on Indian soil. The Bengalis carried on their struggle against the ruthless oppression perpetrated by Pakistan army, but they had never gone to India to narrate their woes to draw India's sympathy and action. It is true that thousands of refugees had to flee to India to save themselves from the massacre committed by the Pakistan army and many freedom fighters with their leaders had to cross the border but that was done during the ruthless army operation and not before that.

It is, however, at least good to know that the MQM leaders have come to their senses after having a bitter taste of the 'Punjabi clique', as they themselves had cited the example that out of 98 police stations in Karachi, 92 are manned by the Punjabis, as if no officers are available from three other provinces, including Sindh.

Insurgency in Karachi? During the regime of the now-

deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the imposition of direct Federal rule on Sindh, dismissing the elected provincial government there on the plea of the provincial government's failure to stop lawlessness and murders by MQM supporters, and subse-

galis of former East Pakistan, quent massive crack-down on now Bangladesh. They raised MQM workers had a tremendous 'boomerang' effect on over-all political situation. Then opposi-Minister Benazir Bhutto, in her reaction, said that she feared an insurgency in Karachi due to the Sindh and crack-down on the MQM workers. What the MQM testimony to that apprehension expressed by Benazir Bhutto.

MQM Signal

There is still time for the Pakistani leaders, particularly Punjabi leaders, to save Pakistar from further political 'erosion'. 'rumblings' and 'landslides', by rectifying their policy of dominat ing other provinces. They will have to accept the truth and the whole truth, because, half the truth is often whole lie'. Today the 'ground reality' is the hard truth. Each of the four provinces, namely Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and Frontier (NWFP), big or small, has its own share of contributions to the growth of Pakistan. Punjab alone is not Pakistan.

And the Muhajirs had made large contributions in making and building up Pakistan. The Muslim minorities in Indian provinces, for some reason or other, were in the fore-front for demanding Pakistan, while the Muslims of Bengal made the largest contribution towards making Pakistan. And they were the first to be shaken. So the Muhajirs shouldn't be put in the category of 'enemies' of Pakistan. That would be another blunder for Pakistani leadership. They should remember that 'a chain is no stronger than its weakest link'. The MQM signal should be enough for the wise.

The writer is a retired UN official

to the Editor ...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Whither Coastguard?

Sir, I would like to congratulate The Daily Star for the excellent report (29 October) "Piracy and ship movements threaten Shell's operation, gas pipeline" 29/10/00. It was indeed an alarming report where the DS veritably highlighted especially vis-à-vis the recent inauguration of our Coastguards with boastful fanfare. End result like the dog squads are pretty pathetic as, almost non in the maritime circle in Chittagong are even aware of their very existence. When will this rent seeking empty rhetoric of naked loot and plunder of the public exchequer ever cease?

Are these all deliberate, cool and calculated moves to foil the emergence of a viable and potential private sector? In the melee lets hope the Godfathers of Chittagong will not launch a preemptive strike, to cause havoc by their wild schemes, encompassing the entire Sandwhip Island.

It is high time the government take note and become alert to the frequent wake-up calls received, pertaining to both; the port of Chittagong and one of the most vital sectors of our economy-- gas sector. Undoubtedly, the greatest

achievements of Bangladesh today is the projection of our gas. oil and rich sea resources to the outside world.

Hence, how can we allow any one to destroy such potential and vital projects with impunity and that too in-spite of the existence of a massive naval forces and the Coastguards? It is alleged that, our naval forces took two hours to reach the spot, is it not ridicu-

Lets hope this dismal and disgraceful show will never be repeated and those responsible will be rendered exemplary punishment. It is also hoped that the port and MMD authorities will also pull up their socks and render all assistance especially by dispensing with red flags nearabout the gas pipeline entirely, so that, disasters read in the news media of gas pipeline explosions involving valuable and innocent

lives are not put into jeopardy. The writing on the wall is crystal clear as the evil minds are working overtime to sabotage the good work of the government. Will the relevant authorities pay heed?

Salahuddin Khan Agrabad, Chittagong

A Mawaz Dhaka

Land for more roads

Sir, It is good news that the government is giving up some land of the jail compound in the old Dhaka city for making a road to ease the traffic. Another suggestion is for the BCSIR to give up some land at the corner of New Elephant Road and the Mirpur Road crossing, to widen the road at the intersection, which is heavily congested all the time. This area has to be redesigned for a straight link between Dhanmondi Road 2 and Elephant Road. Dhanmondi Road I may become a one-way road to link with Jhikatala via Philkhana Gate, where a huge shopping complex is being built.

Parking along the main roads have to be strictly controlled, specially near the schools and shopping areas. Prefabricated parking lots may be assembled at selected sites to provide parking space (as seen abroad); and no public investment is required, as the private sector can handle this lucrative business, if they are provided with the plots.

There are no authorised taxicab stands where necessary. The authorities should take a firm decision to reduce unlicensed vehicles and drivers in several phases-- misplaced kindness is not good governance (specially before the elections). There are traffic congestion in other sectors, e.g. smuggling-- there are too many unauthorised containers containing illegal goods.

Transport service

and Mirpur Sir, People often say that Mirpur has got a very good network of transport service. This is perhaps somewhat true. But there is no existing service whereby the people can board a transport in a decent and orderly manner, standing in a queue, specially from the intermediate places. When a bus starts for Gulistan or Motijheel route from Mirpur section 12, people at section 11, 10, Kazipara, Shaorapara, Agargaon, Farmgate cannot get a seat in it in an orderly manner since the bus is already packed up at the starting

Two to three years back, Premier Bus Service started operation from Mirpur, charging an exorbitant rate of Tk 20 per person (for Mirpur to Motijheel). Whereas, the fare should have been not more than Tk 15, considering the distance covered for Uttara to Motifheel with a same fare. Obviously, people were less interested to avail the service due to high rate. Hence, on the plea of loss they have discontinued the service causing immense suffering for the people of the area.

Maxi service was also introduced with much fanfare, but its services has now become worse than a tempo service. Initially one Maxi was supposed to carry 12 passengers but now it carries not less than 14 passengers and sometimes few even carries 16 persons as nobody is there to check this malpractice.

Now, several area of the city are connected by BRTC's orderly City Service, in which, the people could board from intermediate places in a decent and orderly manner. But this service has not been extended to Mirpur area. As such we strongly appeal to the authorities concerned to introduce such city service to and from Mirpur area with immediate effect to redress the suffering of the people. One service may ply in Motijheel to Mirpur Section 12

(a) via Kamalapur (or Fakirapul/Kakrail), Malibagh, Bangla Motors, Farmgate, Agargaon, Shaorapara, Kazipara, and the other one

(b) via Sec. 1. Shyamoli, Asadgate, Dhanmondi Rd. 32 (either through Pantha Path, or Elephant Rd), Shahbagh and Gulistan. At present there is no direct bus service operating in these two routes.

Lutfur Rahman 6/C. 5/12, Mirpur, Dhaka

Special police drive

Sir, Often our police department announces programmes to nab criminals. These drives are called Chirooni Obhijan, Sharashi Obhijan, Operation Tiger, Non Stop Special Drive etc. It seems that the police department loves variegation in the names of the drives.

But it is a matter of great disappointment that these drives fail to bring fruitful results. Crimes of Nur Jahan all sorts are still going on

unabated. From different newspaper reports we come to know that during these police drives often criminals are altered beforehand. Then what is the point in carrying on such drives when criminals who are worth capturing roam around freely and the police turning a blind eye to

The home minister had declared that criminals will be hunted down at any cost even if it means to dig them up from the ground. May be the policemen are busy looking for the criminals under the ground while miscreants are committing all sorts of horrible crimes over-head.

In a recent television interview Motiour Rahman, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner of Dhaka said that law-and-order is under control, reports of frightening incidents which appear in newspapers are far from true, it is being done to increase the circulation of the newspapers. What a misleading statement!

On October 21, a procession had been brought in support of Sumon, the murderer of Mohsin and Sayem, by Sumon's brother Sujon at sutrapur in which armed cadres took part!

It is not an isolated incident. It has become the very norm of the country. And if the government don't acknowledge this fact and take necessary steps, the day is not far away when the whole nation will be doomed.

Chittagong