

NAM Summit spending on projects

Govt must explain non-budgeted expenses

DHAKA is scheduled to host the 13th NAM Summit next year. While we are not convinced about the usefulness to the nation of hosting the Summit, we are aghast that the government has been spending on a wide range of major infra-structural projects for this event, without as yet formulating a budget. Several projects, such as the construction of a purpose-built modern conference centre are nearing completion, while others, such as the construction of 'high quality' apartments for 4000 delegates, are in the pipeline. Yet, officials are still in the process of 'preparing' a budget.

We would like to know exactly how the government has obtained the funds for these projects? If they have been transferred from the national development budget, we must ask in the strongest terms, who empowered the government to take this decision? Very bluntly, on whose authority has the government justified this unbudgeted expenditure?

The government has not furnished any account of how much it has spent already nor how much it is planning to spend in the months ahead. Further infra-structural work, such as at Zia International Airport, would be needed. City roads need to be built and traffic management has to be greatly improved. All this will cost more money. How much will all that be, and where will it come from?

Given the arbitrary manner in which projects have been undertaken, we are concerned about the cost effectiveness and transparency of the various contracts. The authorities must make a full disclosure of the procedures followed so far, particularly with reference to competitive bidding rules and tender selection process. We stress the need for full transparency and accountability in all its work.

After the Summit, we will be left with brand new facilities. We would like to know exactly how the government plans to utilise these facilities? We caution it not to allow underhand or arbitrary arrangements, benefiting only a chosen few. A plan of utilisation must be drawn up and made public.

Pursuing a grandiose venture like the NAM summit for the sake of national prestige is all the more questionable when the entire process is mired in secrecy. The people have a right to know all the facts. The government is obliged to respond. If it accepts the principle of transparency, it will not hesitate to immediately throw light on its actions.

EC's recruitment dilemma

All is not well at the constitutional body

COME April 15, the Election Commission would be down to two election commissioners, Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed and Shafiqur Rahman. The vacuum the expiry of tenure of Abidur Rahman and Mushtaq Ahmed Chowdhury would create in the EC may linger on for quite some time, as there has so far been virtually no move to make appointments to these posts. In a recent statement, the CEC said that the country didn't require a huge commission with four commissioners. This paper does not subscribe to this particular view of his, as the current EC setup has proved efficient and effective so far. Besides, the emotive element in the CEC suggestion is much too apparent, come as it did after a row with the three election commissioners. However, we are against hasty appointments to these top two posts at the constitutional body. In the election year and with the incumbent government's tenure nearing completion, appointment of two new election commissioners at this point in time could spark off intense speculations as well as controversy. We would prefer the caretaker government to make the decision, once it takes over.

However, we see no reason why recruitment to some 1,400 grassroots positions should be on hold and why the government should continue to sit on the EC proposal for an independent recruitment rule. It's been nearly three years now since the draft proposal was first submitted to the establishment ministry for scrutiny and subsequent approval. Late last year the draft was resubmitted with some changes incorporated. In what seemed to be a positive development, a secretarial meeting presided over by the cabinet secretary decided on March 10 that the establishment ministry and the finance ministry would finalise the recruitment rules within a month. That, too, appears to have got lost in our now-famous bureaucratic tangle.

As the CEC has, we also urge the Prime Minister, as she holds the establishment portfolio, to facilitate passage of the EC's recruitment rule. Any more delay could well be misconstrued as intentional and a deliberate ploy of the incumbent government to short-circuit the EC's decentralisation plans.

Does Bangladesh have a foreign policy?

DR SYED ANWAR HUSAIN

THE foreign policy of every country, especially of a small one, deals first, with the preservation of its independence and security; and second, with the pursuit and protection of its economic objectives. The word 'policy' always carries overtones of prudence or wisdom and implies something about the objectives which influence actions. The foreign policy thus comprises what James Rosenance considers "the hierarchy of interests" which a government strives "to advance or defend, or which it will refuse to retreat from" in interacting with the outside world.

So far as the external actions of the government of a state are concerned the actions or the objectives are supposed to serve as usually summed up in the concept 'the national interests'. As observed over the years Bangladesh Foreign Policy (BFP) produces very little or no evidence to establish that it has been formulated and conducted following the requisite *modus operandi*. Of course, this is an arena of state function that is delicate as well as complex; and hence involves hard-headed thinking backed by the relevant philosophy and comprehensive organising ability on the part of ruling elite and establishment. Even in the case of the United States the making of foreign policy took a long time to mature. On 6 March 1953, President Eisenhower, for example, was found lambasting his cabinet colleagues: Ever since 1946, I know that all the so-called experts have been yapping about what would happen when Stalin dies and what we, as a nation,

should do about it. Well, he is dead. And you can turn the files of our government inside out in vain for any plans laid. We have no plan. We are not even sure what difference his death makes.

This scathing attack on the US foreign policy establishment was prompted by the very problem with which this section of the paper is concerned: the inadequacy of our foreign policy planning. The need for improved planning in foreign

and the generalisations therefrom the specific case of BFP when analysed, the exercise ends on a note of dissatisfaction. Much of what has been observed as BFP over the years is the outgrowth of highly personalised perceptions of the top-most state functionary effectuated by the relevant bureaucracy. The elements of "thinking ahead" and "policy planning" are hard to come by in such a foreign policy.

In the context of political under-

with Pakistan the fourth. The loud and clear message was that despite being a secular polity Bangladesh had a significant position in the comity of Muslim nations by the sheer size of its Muslim population. The foreign policy that gradually unfolded reflected all these fundamental principles, which, despite the turbulence through which the Bangladesh polity progressed over the years, remained largely unchanged.

ations." The parliament and parliamentary committee were required to provide necessary inputs for foreign policy planning, a well-meaning move, which was, however, hampered by the rubber-stamp nature of parliament. On the other hand, the president and foreign minister were in the habit of meeting an informal consultative group comprising members of the cabinet for thrashing out foreign policy issues.

any qualitative change, and followed in the footsteps of their respective predecessors. The BNP Government (1991-1996) followed a foreign policy that appealed to be an extension of Zia's; while the foreign policy of the Awami League Government (1996-2001) is of Bangabandhu's. Both the governments have, however, underscored the need for meeting the challenges of a changed world order following the ending of the Cold War and the transition to the twenty-first century. But one thing is clear: none of these regimes is free from the long and overarching shadow of its past charismatic mentor. Despite the parliamentary system being in place, parliament during both these regimes has remained a half-parliament the reason being that the opposition has stayed out of the parliamentary sessions most of the time. Whatever little discussion and/or debate that took place either in parliament or parliamentary committee has been marked by rhetoric, vacuous in content and fact. Consequently, parliamentary input to the making of foreign policy has been nil.

It appears that Bangladesh has so far failed to develop an adequately planned foreign policy and to democratise the process of making the same. Consequently, barring very limited instances foreign policy overtures are, in reality, ad hoc responses to pressing circumstances. If that be so it can be argued that Bangladesh is yet to sculpt a foreign policy and has so far only managed foreign relations.

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affairs, and in particular long range planning, has not been without recognition. In an article specifically concerned with planning in foreign affairs, George Allen Morgan said in 1961: Long-range planning is in great demand today. It is widely developed in certain aspects of military and industrial planning, and many feel there should be more in foreign affairs. To a considerable extent this is justified, and not as a passing mood but as a constant imperative.

"Planning is thinking ahead. Policy planning is the future of policy decision, i. e., the development of policies in the light of their implications for the future."

"Thinking ahead" and "policy planning" would appear to be basic functions in the foreign affairs community. In the context of the example from the state of US foreign policy planning in the early fifties

development and incomplete state-building in Bangladesh the impact of charismatic or strong personalities on policy formulation, foreign or otherwise, is inescapable. Because of his key-role in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state as well as of an over-powering charisma Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the central figure in policy making in the new state. He made some initial key-statements that foreshadowed the fundamentals of BFP. One such oft-quoted statement was about making the country "the Switzerland of South Asia", i. e., a recipe for a non-aligned foreign policy. As an extension of such a stance he is on record of having stated that Bangladesh would pursue friendship of all and malice towards none. In his home-coming address delivered on 10 January 1972, Bangabandhu emphasised that Bangladesh was the second largest Muslim country,

Ziaur Rahman, having been pressed by the exigencies of circumstances, was compelled to concern himself with the foreign policy issues. Despite having been a parvenu in the realm of civil administration he proved himself a fast learner with the ingenuity to apply common sense. He was aided in this task by the very able and erudite foreign minister Professor Muhammad Shamsul Huq. The extent of Zia's impact in the foreign policy formulation is corroborated in the words of his foreign minister, "The President right from the beginning showed an active and keen interest in foreign policy planning and seemed to perceive its special importance in the objective conditions of Bangladesh. He took time out of his busy schedule for discussions not only on problems of interstate relations that warranted immediate attention, but also on the whole gamut of international rela-

In 1979, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) was established as a think-tank to support foreign policy planning. Zia used to take briefings from the members of the staff of this institute on critical international issues, especially before undertaking any foreign trip. The role-potential of the institute has, however, not developed over the years because of certain structural limitations or because of different valuations of the institute by the regimes in power. It appears that despite the personality input remaining unperished there were attempts during this regime to develop the necessary framework for foreign policy formulation.

During the Ershad regime policy making was highly personalised with necessary bureaucratic back-up. The two democratically elected regimes since 1991 have not made

Do the Taliban really understand what they are doing?

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

PROBABLY not. To the Taliban (they are not a rock band, as President George W Bush once thought) the Buddhas of Bamiyan represented stone statues or idols that needed to be demolished, although the statues predate, and have nothing to do, with Islam. The Taliban seem to lack the sophistication necessary to understand that they were making an assault not only on culture itself, but also on the historic religious tolerance preached by the religion, Islam, they profess to promote.

The Bamiyan episode has also accentuated the dichotomy that exists between those (Muslims and non-Muslims) who believe in the primacy of culture over religion, and those who embrace both religion and culture. To the former, it is a golden opportunity for Islam-bashing, which they have not been bashful in exploiting. The episode forces the latter to look more closely at the phenomenon called the Taliban.

Barbara Crossette, a correspondent of *The New York Times*, whom the writer respects enormously, wrote on March 18: "Rough-cut and wild-eyed, vandals called the Taliban blasted away last week at works of priceless art, the giant standing Buddhas of Bamiyan. The world, including the world of Islamic scholarship, was outraged and could barely find words for what had happened. An assault on history? On culture itself? Certainly it evoked the religious triumphalism that plagues a broad swath of the world, from China to the Balkans the destruction of the centuries-old mosques by

Hindus at Ayodhya or Serbs in Bosnia, or the assaults on heritage that defy peace itself in Jerusalem."

Culture is defined in the dictionary as "enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training." Crossette poses: "The question is: in the deepest, broadest sense, did the Taliban really have any idea what they were doing? The movement's leaders are mostly young sons of illiterate peasants, raised on mine-strewn battlefields and stark refugee camps, and educated in rote sectar-

taught their national history."

"Paula R. Newberg, an author and a former advisor on Afghanistan to the United Nations, says neither of the two main groups in conflict in the region the Taliban, who are from the Pushtun ethnic group and are Sunni Muslims, and the Hazaras, who are Shiite Muslims have a long historical link with Bamiyan. She sees the destruction as, "all of a piece of war that has been going on for over 20 years."

"In conversations, these experts and others, who have watched in

of war. A fractious alliance of Islamic fighters bankrolled and armed by Washington, had driven out the Soviet Army and then turned on each other and on the Afghan population. Their government was ineffectual and very violent. Under Ahmad Shah Massoud, it still fights the Taliban in the north aided, bizarrely, by Russian arms. Under it, too, archaeological sites were ransacked, as was Kabul museum."

"Ms. Newberg, who has visited Afghanistan frequently under the Taliban rule, says, "The Taliban as a

export of terrorism, the closing of trade routes and narcotics, he said, and American policy reinforces the Taliban's isolation. They cannot now hold a United Nations seat and are, unlike their enemies, under an arms embargo. When they slashed opium cultivation last year, there were no rewards, only more isolation, because they would not turn over Osama bin Laden."

"Mr. Starr also says that America should stop their 'endless dancing on the subject of Islam'. The destruction at Bamiyan "once more

drawal of the Soviets at American behest in 1989, America washed its hand off Afghanistan, leaving the fully armed mujahideen to turn on each other. Because Osama bin Laden has not been turned over, America has helped enact harsh sanctions against Afghanistan, and the US government has shown scant sympathy for the devastating famine that is ravaging Afghan civilians, although ordinary Americans have. Normally, America is a generous victor; Germany and Japan after World War II are cases in point. In Afghanistan and Iraq, because of American dislike of the Afghan and Iraqi governments, America has turned a blind eye to the enormous suffering of the civilians.

It is ironic that even in matters such as the conduct of the Taliban, Muslims have to defer to the more balanced views of the Westerners, Jewish and Christians alike. Muslims have a legitimate grievance in that whenever non-Muslims attack institutions that are holy in Islam, such as the reported desecration of mosques and the burning of the holy Quran by Hindu militants in Amritsar, or by Christians in the Balkans, their religions are not blamed. On the other hand, it is as though Islam and Muslims all over the world are responsible for any act of terrorism by any "Muslim" or for the cultural vandalism by the Taliban. Nevertheless, as the Barbara Crossette article illustrates, sometimes a practicing Muslim in the West finds that he can carry on a much more enlightened discourse with a fair-minded Western Jew or a Christian than he can with an ignorant Taliban inside Afghanistan, or a self-hating "Muslim" outside.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Afghans may justifiably feel that the Americans have used them. American arms, agents and dollars flooded Afghanistan as long as the Soviets were occupying Afghanistan, between 1979 and 1989. As soon as the Afghan fighters forced the withdrawal of the Soviets at American behest in 1989, America washed its hand off Afghanistan, leaving the fully armed mujahideen to turn on each other.

ian blinders. Do they understand that this act more than anything else, will be how the world remembers them?"

"Even if they know how the world feels, said Fredrick Starr, chairman of the Central Asia Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (at Baltimore), "we have revealed an astonishing superficiality in our knowledge of who these people are." At New York University, Barnett Rubin, director of studies at the Center on International Cooperation, said: "I would dare say they have no idea what Buddhas are or what Buddhism is. We say they're destroying their national history. None of the Taliban went to schools where they were

horror as the country has consumed itself, show frustration over global, especially American, reaction to the Bamiyan debacle. All are sharp critics of the Taliban for its total failure to govern, its treatment of women, its tolerance of the opium and heroine trade (at least until last year). But all also know how Afghanistan was like before the Taliban, and that its immersion in war set the mould for the Taliban's own brutality, and the isolation for its thinking. "The one thing I've never been able to convey to people is what it is like to be a human being in an environment like that," Mr. Rubin said.

"The victorious Taliban were welcomed in city after city in the 1995 and 1996 after a brutal period

whole are a phenomenon of war, and I think even their attitude toward women is a phenomenon of war rather than a phenomenon of Islam." While such scholars, as well as a range of United Nations officials, are in considerable agreement on what went wrong, they are divided over what to do. Some actually propose pouring more arms into the northern alliance (and igniting more war), while others urge carefully rewarding the Taliban if they move to conform with international norms."

"Mr. Starr believes the United States should use this moment to rethink its policies in all Central and South Asia. Afghanistan's collapse is poisoning a wide region through the

reveals the multiple and sharp cleavages within Islam," he said, citing the appearance, albeit late of Egyptian and Pakistani Muslims trying to dissuade the Taliban from their attacks on Bamiyan. "We take it personally," he said. "We think the Taliban is directed against us. It is not. It's directed against other Muslims who don't get it."

Barbara Crossette's article fails to fully address American responsibility for the Afghan misery. The Afghans may justifiably feel that the Americans have used them. American arms, agents and dollars flooded Afghanistan as long as the Soviets were occupying Afghanistan, between 1979 and 1989. As soon as the Afghan fighters forced the with-

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Attack on Tipu Sultan

"Shame on us for doing almost nothing". This was the subheading of your editorial on April 5 regarding the attack on UNB journalist Tipu Sultan who was mercilessly beaten by the hooligans of the ruling party MP Joyanal Hazari at Feni. Perhaps, the word 'shame' carries no meaning to us these days. Otherwise, how can we ignore such a brutal act? The Prime Minister often shouts about the so-called freedom of press and freedom of speech. What does she mean by it? Does freedom mean getting beaten up by her party people and becoming paralysed for life?

Media's silence about Tipu Sultan raises serious doubt about its neutrality. No civil body raised a question on the issue also. It is a shame on the media as well as on civil society. Is this a democratic country? It really doesn't seem so. Tipu Sultan's case is a glaring example of where we stand as we claim ourselves to be a democratic nation. It puts a black curtain on the conscience of the nation. When a government fails to safeguard journalists from the atrocities done by its MP, there can be no credibility of the government to stay in power.

A Young Citizen
Dhaka

Corrupt politics

The nefarious politics in Dhaka is getting on the nerves of citizens, namely voters. The political system is simply not delivering. This is

mainly due to the poor standard of national leadership. This leadership is quite different from party leadership, but it seems that this difference is being ignored deliberately by those who are more or less recognised as national leaders.

The reasons are not far to seek. It is the havenot mentality which cannot resist temptation; specially in two areas: misuse of power and influence. Even the genuine workers who are keen to provide public service find it difficult to work in a corrupt environment. The top leaders have to make sacrifices and suffer for their principles. But how many are willing to do so?

Corruption is more visible in the Third World than in the developed countries, because the difference is both in degree and in kind. Not only is there absence of internal elections, but there is lack of transparency in the public sector activities. First self and party, then come the others. This lop-sided priority is keeping Bangladesh from taking off in the field of development. Politicians should harangue less and be more forthcoming with statistics. The exposure on the Internet in the case of a neighbouring country's government is a stark reminder to Dhaka that the electronic mass media can do a lot of political and personal damage, and it cannot be muzzled.

AMA
Dhaka

PHOTORIAL

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A client can get any type of key copied in Dhaka. Stalls like this operate unregulated all over the city. These 'key makers' will copy anything, no questions asked. This makes the task of the criminal so much easier. Burglaries and car theft are on the increase. It is about time the authorities brought this business under control.

Hats off to the Prime Minister

With reference to the numerous articles on the recent stand off between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, all seem to have missed an important point: we should congratulate the Prime Minister for setting a trap for Khaleda Zia and then manipulating her to step right into it. The trap was laid with the Prime Minister's offer to resign on April 17. As expected Khaleda Zia rejected the offer and demanded that the government resign by March 30, thereby walking right into the trap. Subsequently, the Prime Minister withdrew her offer for early elections citing Khaleda Zia's ultimatum, proclaiming that her government would resign as per schedule as provided in the Constitution. Predictably, Khaleda Zia had to opt for a program of agitation and hartal to bring the country to its knees and force the government to resign. In the process the ordinary citizens will suffer, but that is not a serious concern to Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina.

The trap is, indeed brilliant! We all know that no matter how many hartals are called, BNP's four-party alliance will not succeed in bringing down the government. Instead, BNP will become more and more unpopular with its four-party alliance already falling apart and its issuesless hartal causing more aggravation. In the process, the voters will forget about the prevailing law and order situation, forget about the outrage perpetuated by ruling party MPs, and/or their offspring. So hats off to the Prime Minister for a brilliantly

played technique. Let me be the first to congratulate her on her second term in office. And the rest of us should prepare for another five years of hartals.

Omar Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

Save our soul

Challenge and counter-challenge of our two major political parties have rendered the political scenario extremely dreadful. We are waiting for the result of their war of hate and rivalry with a growing sense of anxiety. The political parties, in the name of democracy, get involved in devastating activities causing unlimited harm to us. The demand of the Opposition Leader as well as the narrow-minded pre-conditions of the Prime Minister have not only surprised us but also grieved us. Both of them have failed to follow the path of democracy. We like neither hartal nor terrorism in the name of anti-hartal procession. Hartal is about to become an every-week occurrence in our country during every government.

We have been suffering from the curse of hartal for a long time but are yet to see any positive result of hartals. Then what is the purpose of such political unrest? We have seen every hartal taking a toll on human life and leaving thousands of people injured. When will this ego-driven politics stop? Can't we bring sanity back to our political process?

Saifullah
BUET, Dhaka