

Finance Minister's Woes

The present Finance Minister, Mr. Saifur Rahman, may be right in his own way in saying that the Awami League government has left an empty coffer with an inflated budget for the year 2001-2002. His constant wailing in seminars and per-

the budget for 2001-2002 soon after coming to power. No body has taken away his rights to amend the inflated budget if that is the case. It is now almost six months that the new government is in power and nine months since the Awami League has relinquished power. Mr. Saifur Rahman will do well if he comes out with a realistic outlook of

Children in jail



Children of lesser gods

I was utterly appalled at reading that up to 197 'children' were indeed interred with common adult criminals. What is wrong with your judicial system, when it allows this to continue? The Judge should definitely be adhering to the Children's Act of 1974. Putting children into situations such as this leaves them wide open to both sexual and physical assaults.

This only adds to the thinking that your country is still living in the dark ages, not 2002.

L. Knowlton
Canada

sonal interviews that he cannot make the ends meet due to wrong planning of the AL government, may not be the whole truth.

AL government announced the last budget in June 2001 and handed over power to a caretaker government the following month. During the period of the caretaker government (July- Oct 2001) there may have been lapses in collection of revenues and as per news items, the caretaker government has overdrawn Taka 2500 crores to meet government expenses.

In addition there were huge expenses for the general election and work loss due to election fever in government offices. The three months that the caretaker government ran the show should also be assessed in terms of economic losses. During the same period occurred the September 11 incident like a bolt from the blue. The world stopped, business crumbled and the economy laid shattered worldwide. Unfortunately from the statements of Mr. Saifur Rahman it appears as if the September 11 incident has no bearing on Bangladesh economy and the recession we are facing is only due to misdeeds of the AL government.

Mr. Saifur Rahman may be a financial wizard but as a layman I am much concerned about the revival of the world economy. It is a fact that buoyancy of the US economy is the barometer of world economy. After the September 11 incident many multinational companies, airlines, service industries etc. have gone bankrupt in Europe and US.

September 11 has also brought disaster for Bangladesh. Country has lost large export orders in garment sector and other exportable items. Latest news is that K-Mart, one of the biggest garment buyer from Bangladesh, is closing its 300 retail outlets in US due to losses. This will also affect us. Traders and business houses in Bangladesh have become cautious due to recession in local market and are afraid to open letters of credit due to high war risk insurance premiums, port charges and bank interests.

There is another point to ponder. After the September 11 incident the US and EU has decided to divert more development funds and export privileges to African and Caribbean countries rather than to Muslim majority countries. The reason is quite obvious. Coming years will not be an easy sailing for Bangladesh.

It is a tradition in our politics to constantly blame the past government for all misdeeds and mishaps. Mr. Saifur Rahman had enough time to do his homework and amend

Bangladesh economy vis-a-vis world economy.

Ziauddin Ahmed
Gulshan, Dhaka - 1212

Star endorsement for mayoral elections?

The Mayoral Elections for Dhaka should be coming up relatively soon.

I am sure *The Daily Star* will be extensively covering the run up to the elections as well as the empty promises of the candidates.

My question is, why does *The Daily Star*, just prior to the elections, not give its endorsement to one candidate or the other?

The Economist magazine endorsed Bush for the presidency the week before the elections, after giving arguments as to why it would

Friday Picnic!

After reading Mr. Mujibul Haque's letter (March 7) "Friday picnic!" I needed to make the following comments.

How many times in the Quran there are warnings against bribery or paying interest (riba)? But we do it all year long (not only in the winter time) 6 days a week. The point I am trying to make is, our society never had the Islamic values installed in our way of life. Even now, if asked 99 per cent of Muslims would say they have missed one of the daily prayers, let alone be at the congregation (mosque).

Picnic may not be forbidden, though thing goes on in the picnic may be. The only answer I find on why we go to picnics on Fridays since it has been declared holiday is, we have lost our faith as a Muslim (the whole nation including me). To change this every one of us should start questioning our own faith and try to restore our faith.

Mijanul Akbar
Arkansas, USA

do so. Similarly the Washington Post and the New York Times, two of the greatest newspapers in the world, also endorse candidates, for national as well as local elections.

Why then not *The Daily Star*?

Dorji
Dhaka

RMG factory fires

Recently there have been several fires in RMG factories where export goods worth crores of taka have been burnt to ashes. Especially since no one can tell the difference from the ashes between burnt waste material and burnt export goods, I am just curious about what percentage of the insurance payment has to be paid to get a report

from the fire service in ones favour?

Bastiat
Dhaka

Resist acid attacks, punish the culprits

Nowhere in the world acid attack on women is found except for in Bangladesh. Every year on the occasion of International Women's Day we hear from the government, the opposition party as well as social activists to speak against this crime. They also stress on building up a social movement against acid attacks but unfortunately this heinous crime goes on unabated.

The criminals, who use this chemical, actually do not produce it, rather they buy it from somebody else. I do not understand why cannot the government declare this chemical as a controlled product like drugs?

Anyone who requires this product must attain permission from the local authority and whoever is using this product must legally be responsible to protect it from going to wrong hand.

Given the law and order situation of the country, we must take all possible measures to prevent this heinous crime

If we have a track record of who is buying and who is selling acid we can control acid throwing and it would also be easier to trace the acid thrower faster.

Mohiuddin Ahmed
Toronto, Canada

Biman's cost cutting measures

I read with interest your front-page news "Biman to cut one fourth of its overseas manpower" (February 27). Such steps are certainly welcome to the loss making state-owned airline. Similar measures should also be taken to reduce expenditure in every sphere of the airline operations, including the employment of foreign pilots over locals.

Biman has at least four domestic foreign captains and five DC-10 pilots all paid in hard currency ranging from 4,000 to 7500 \$ plus other expenses, such as five star accommodation and meals though there is no shortage of its own national pilots.

Internal feuding and politics in recent months has led to a serious slowdown in the training from newly



Cooking a picnic fight?

recruited cadet pilots to DC-10 captains. So much so, that the likelihood of releasing the foreign pilots, particularly from domestic, seem at the moment very remote. An erroneous training policy has also delayed the training of pilots on all the fleets and lead to the grounding of four trainee DC-10 captains for the last two months! It seems that cost cutting does not apply to flight operations.

L. Rabbany
Abu Dhabi, UAE

Taking life seriously

Recent incidents of mob beating and consequently, killing of many alleged extortionists raise concern amongst conscious people for

obvious reasons. Ruthlessness of this kind in public life necessarily reflects lawlessness of society. This also reveals people's changing perception towards governance system, which has failed miserably to live up to people's expectation.

Life is sacred, sacrosanct and inviolable in every religion, legal code and social norms. Every state thus takes life seriously by protecting it by legal system and administration of justice. It is also included in our Constitution as well. In Article 32, it declares "No person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with law."

There are many reasons for public's increasing negative attitude towards law enforcing agencies. These may be attributed to evils of four 'c' which are paralysing our state mechanism including law-enforcing agencies. Corruption, which has taken now institutional shape in governance system, is contributing people's negative attitude towards state apparatus. Caprice of public officials, which often exceeds their authority defined by law, negates the rule of law. Clientism amongst officials builds a unholy alliance between them and criminals. Collusion is also practised amongst the public servants for illegal financial benefits that people lead to defy law.

It is high time to investigate the causes for such ruthlessness in public life and restore law and order in society.

Abdullah Al Faruque
Chittagong University

A page on Islam

This refers to a letter regarding publishing a page on Islam in *The Daily Star*. My immediate reaction was that of a kind of discomfort and concern. I see no reason for a daily newspaper to embark on such a venture. There are several reasons why I am against the proposition:

1. Religion is best dealt with if kept within the jurisdiction of individual thinking without bringing it to public forum.

2. Besides *The Daily Star* being an English daily there is a large expatriate and non-Muslim readership and hence a quality in dissemination is a vital factor.

3. It is my understanding that there are a very limited scholars of Islamic studies who are able to effectively portray the essence of our religion in its right perspective particularly in English.

4. As I see it one of the objective of such a page will be also to reach a section of the non-Muslims including an audience who have wrong or preconceived notions and hence the writings will also be required to be highly interpretative and the contents capable of reaching such readership.

5. On the other hand it is my firm belief that we are reasonably practising moderate Muslims having a healthy image of ourselves in the entire free world.

6. Besides, although unfortunate the fact remains that already religion is slowly and surely clawing into our national politics, as a matter of fact the entire subcontinent. All you have to do is to look at our powerful neighbour and the most recent happenings. A page on Islam would therefore amount to opening doors to "ideas" which ultimately may even hurt your paper and the nation at large.

7. Finally for reasons known and unknown it is my belief that now is a wrong time to execute the proposal.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

Inferiority complex?

Why an independent and democratic country has to use certain words that were being introduced by our colonial masters? Words like His Excellency, The President, or Honourable Prime Minister, My Lord Ship, etc. are derogatory for a citizen of an independent nation.

These words are very demeaning for the common people because it creates superior beings who are nothing but servants of the people. Why should we cling to this mentality of inferiority complex instilled by the British to rule and subjugate the common masses?

Nafees K.
USA

"Celebrating

Making Arabic compulsory



Schools are for learning

It seems to me that there are two separate arguments being put forward to make Arabic compulsory at schools. Firstly, some have argued that knowing multiple languages can only benefit ones value in the real world. This merits consideration.

There are indeed many Bangladeshis who work in the Arab countries and this number is ever increasing. The ability to speak Arabic would certainly aid these Bangladeshis to get better jobs. For this however, there is no need to make Arabic compulsory and force it down everyone's throat. If the government can ensure that those who want to learn other languages are able to do so, it should suffice. The language laboratories that the present government has pledged might do the trick.

Now to the more controversial argument, that Arabic should be made compulsory so that Bangladeshis can understand the Quran better and be better Muslims. In my view, this argument is flawed on several counts. Firstly, the language of the Quran is not the same as spoken Arabic. As a matter of fact, it is much more difficult. When I was at boarding school, my roommate, who was half Egyptian and had lived in Saudi Arabia all his life, admitted to me that he barely understood the Quran although his Arabic was close to fluent. Isn't it therefore absurd that we should expect Bangladeshis to understand the Quran by providing them a few years of Arabic in schools? Secondly, the standard of English being taught at government schools is of extremely poor quality. Should we not expect the standard of Arabic that would be taught to be much the same? And given this, is it not even more absurd that these students would understand the Quran as a result?

I do support the view that true Islam should be taught and practised in our country. The so-called Muslim 'scholars' in our country do not preach the Islam of peace and tolerance, but the one of hate, intolerance and violence. But in order to do this, is learning Arabic necessary? Would we not achieve more by reading a credible translation of the Quran rather than learning a new language and trying to make sense of an extremely difficult scripture? Out of the more than one billion Muslims in the world, how many are actually Arabic speaking? And is there anything to say that those who are Arabic speaking are better Muslims than those who are not? It is actually to the contrary. As has been mentioned on this page, the Arabs look down upon all those who are not Arabs, they are highly condescending and hypocritical. Is that what they learnt by reading and understanding the Quran?

oroughly and on top of that we really need a massive thrust in promoting our scientific and technical education. I am in a US school and I know that our students can do a great job if they are given proper training. Moreover, we need an education system that provides a sound knowledge about social science so that our

Valentine's Day

This issue has attracted my attention, and I want to voice my reflections on it.

As Mr. Rahat has said, "Every-one is entitled to an opinion." I honour and value his individual opinion, but I would like to review some of his factual information.

I am not sure where it is said in the Qur'an that Muslims can take part in the festivals of other religions, but I did encounter countless examples where Muslims have been explicitly instructed not to do so.

The Messenger (pbuh) had said: "Whoever imitates the unbelievers is one of them." Also, Amr ibn al-As narrated that the Prophet (pbuh) had said: "He does not belong to us who imitates other people. Do not imitate the Jews or the Christians..." (quoted in Sahih Tirmidhi, #4649).

If we want to observe Valentine's Day, I do not think it is necessary to prove that it is not un-Islamic (it definitely is). Allow me to cite an example to illustrate my point: the Qur'an orders us to perform Sala'at in more than 163 different verses. Yet, we Muslims pray only once a week. We have every right to do what we wish. But it is important that we do not redefine Islam to suit our own opinions.

I would not label Mr. Barie as a religious zealot. He was simply stating plain facts. It is not relevant in this context whether Mr. Barie has ever fallen in love or not.

For a person who is in love, it is not at all necessary whether the Valentine's Day is observed or not. Love is subsistent without a mere occasion like the 14th of February.

Islam has its own concrete cultural and ideological structure-- a system described as the 'complete code' that dictates every aspect of life. Valentine's Day is not a part of Islam, nor is it a part of our Bangladeshi culture. It is a tool of the cultural invasion, and is being exploited to promote indecency and immorality.

Finally, I would like to shed some light on the history of Valentine's Day: In the 4th century BC, the Romans used to observe an annual festival in honour of *Lupercus*, the god of fertility.

On this day, they would use a lottery to select and distribute young women to the men for pleasure and entertainment (!)

Followers of Christianity had subsequently tried to stop such pagan practices but failed. All they were able to do was to change the name of the occasion from *Lupercalia* to *Saint Valentine's Day* (This official renaming was done by Pope Gelasius in 496 AD).

In the medieval ages, such practices as were carried out on the 14th of February, particularly the lottery, began to cause much trouble, and so the rulers of most European countries banned its celebra-

tion.

However, King Charles II revived it in 1660.

And from England, the concept was shipped to the New World, where "enterprising Yankees found a great means of making money". In the 1840s, Esther A. Howland was one of the first to create American Valentine's Day cards, and had earned \$5000 in the very first year.

The Enron story



Enron caught stealing?

Thanks to Mr. Sohail Kasem for the all-inclusive synopsis of the "Enron matter".

As the irregularity of the accounting practice by Andersen began to surface, we are observing that our lawmakers are getting interested towards enforcement of tougher laws in the practice of accounting. We will probably end up having another government agency to watch over the accounting practice of firms managing large corporations. Ironically this will not solve the basic problem rather will lead to more tax burden and bigger government, contrary to the Republican campaign agenda.

The fundamental problem lies in the profound relationship of political entities and corporate America. The unfortunate financial dependence of our political apparatus upon the "soft money" channelled from the big corporations' lead to the detrimental picture where the ultimate victim is the taxpayer-- the citizen. It is very difficult to comprehend that accounting flaw of these magnitude leads a utility trader of this enormity spiral down to demise where there were so many affiliate political bystanders could have been watching over it!

After the funeral of steel industries, while watching the suffocating managed health care, here we see the corporate sting on the utilities. The "Enron debacle" is bound to repeat itself, as we are not ready yet to revolutionise the political finances. The recent "campaign finance reform" is just the tip of the iceberg.

Until we see the Washington lobbyist thrown out of business and the "legalised bribery" channel to the lawmakers and their parties eliminated, it remains a far cry to see the true reform in favour of the people.

Asad Zaman, MD
Chicago, USA

(In those days, \$5000 was a lot of money). "The valentine industry has been booming ever since." (source: Dr. Khalid Baig in Impact International, London, March 2001)

Apparently, the roots of this festival lie in superstitious polytheistic-culture.

Arafat A. Razaque
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

students can be more aware of the social issues and channel their expertise to the progress of the country.

If anyone is interested in learning more (i.e. learning Arabic, Spanish etc) should have the opportunity to do so. But making any such thing compulsory will only hold back our work force from becoming efficient and competitive. We don't want our country to be another Afghanistan (no education, no conscience and no progress).

The argument that learning Arabic will make us more prepared to get a job in the Middle Eastern countries and hence bringing more foreign currency is absolutely illogical. The economy of the most of the Middle Eastern countries is on the verge of a collapse and I cannot foresee a lot of our work force to go there. In addition, knowing Arabic won't help you getting a better job in any Arab countries (actually Arabs look down upon us anyway, whether we know Arabic or not).

Please don't suggest any steps that will force to move our country even more backward. My experience with all these religious fanatics who propose to make Arabic compulsory is as follows: They want their own relatives to learn English better and live in an western country. But when it comes to the education of the common people, they want to promote Arabic. We should be cautious of this element of our society and not allow these kind of self-destructive suggestions to be accepted.

AN
USA

I read with avid interest all the letters in your full-page letters column. Being of eclectic nature, this page is a colourful and interesting part of *The Daily Star*. What amazes me is the participation by the overseas Bangladeshis and they write with no hold barred. Through its website, *The Daily Star* reaches to all part of the world and the reader can respond quickly on any subject through the Internet.

Recently there is a debate going on regarding making Arabic compulsory in school. In my opinion whatever Arabic our students might learn up to secondary level will be too little to understand the Holy Quran revealed in classical Arabic. Our madrasa students learn Arabic for years but very few of them really understand the Quran, they concentrate more on memorising it. For real understanding of the Quran, one has to study Arabic in depth, which is possible in higher level of education. For others, it will be prudent to study the translations of the Holy Quran by world-renowned Islamic scholars.

In our school days during the Pakistan ear, Arabic was an optional subject. In matriculation exam one could fetch 'letter' just by memorising a few pages. Similarly, Urdu was compulsory subject up to 1953. All we were interested in was to get high marks; in exams one could answer the entire paper either in English or Bangla and no Urdu was required!

Therefore, it will not be fair to burden our school students with compulsory Arabic learning. We are already paying the price of neglecting English in our educational institutes. We should not burden our students with an extra language like Arabic rather concentrate on learning better English and other practical subjects.

Sakhawat Hossain
Gulshan-2, Dhaka

Restore law and order in society

What in the name of God is going on in Bangladesh? Since the 4-party alliance came to power 6 months ago, the nation has degenerated into a cycle of lawlessness.

Seems like the alliance's cadres are running wild and creating anarchy and lawlessness throughout the

tion in the law and order situation in the country. Is she that delusional or does she think that the people are that gullible?

She should stop announcing grand 100-day plans that go nowhere and should come with simple steps that she would implement at once to arrest the anarchy created by her party.

She was elected to improve the law and order situation in the country.

Are we asking too much from the BNP?

Moushumi
USA

Opposition leader - some observations

I have certain observations of the honourable Leader of the Opposition in the current Bangladesh Jatiyo Sangsod that I am interested to share with my fellow readers of *The Daily Star*.

Interestingly, I have come to notice how Sheikh Hasina from time to time gets caught in certain vicious cycle of repeat mode.

Take for instance the time she would call hartal. She would just go on and on at it until t he Bangali people was saturated with this lethal measure like never before.

While in the government, she would repeatedly call on the then opposition with phrases like people will not tolerate this and the people will not tolerate that.

Ironically, the people did not tolerate her government and the Awami League became the largest opposition party in the current Sangsod.

Lately, our beloved opposition leader seems to have got in to yet another vicious cycle-- boycotting the Jatiyo Sangsod.

I suppose one would obviously find it hard to find any spare time when involved in full time Bangladesh bashing instead. Taking petty complaints to important world leaders and the global body at large is disgraceful.

I fail to understand what good will it do to Sheikh Hasina or the Awami League, should Bangladesh be branded a Taliban state (God forbid!).

Frankly, much nagging and no real action is undesirable. Repeated cries of conspiracy (implicitly against her party alone) is useless without concrete evidence. Dear opposition leader, how much longer do you plan to continue your petty street ranting by boycotting the pristine Jatiyo Sangsod? In case you have not yet understood the Bangladeshi people, they are once again fed up with your droning speeches and street politics.

You have been voted to govern the country as the opposition leader, please act like one and do your job right.

AA
California, USA

Israeli incursion

The Israelis keep on killing Palestinians in the name of security while the world watches mutely. Even the Arab world, especially Egypt now bought out by the US are, silent or mouth peace proposals without the resolve to follow through.

I would like to refresh the memory of the readers of the period during the Palestinian Mandate under the British.

During 1945-48, in an effort to bring stability in Palestine, 338 British men and women were killed by the Irgun and the Stern gangs through bombings, kidnappings and assassinations. Out of this 223 were officers and serving men.

The outrages included the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel where 91 people died, including Jews. The attack was claimed by Irgun, then under the leadership of Menachem Begin, the late Israeli PM.

Just one incident should contrast the relative brutality of the Arab attacks on the Jews as opposed to the Israelis against the British peacekeepers.

Irgun kidnapped two British NCO's, murdered them, hung them from a tree, mined the area around the bodies and booby-trapped the bodies themselves.

In 1953, under the command of Ariel Sharon, 75 Arab men women and children were massacred in a village near Jerusalem.

In 1982, Sharon, then Defence Minister and architect of the invasion of Lebanon, sued Time Magazine for libel when they revealed his complicity in the massacres of refugees in the Sabra and Shatila camps in Lebanon.

Islamic Terrorists? Jihad?

"Neither Jewish ethics nor Jewish tradition can disqualify terrorism as a means of combat." Yitzhak Shamir, the Stern Gang.

And I am to believe that the Palestinians are terrorists?

MA
Dhaka



Prisoners of violence