

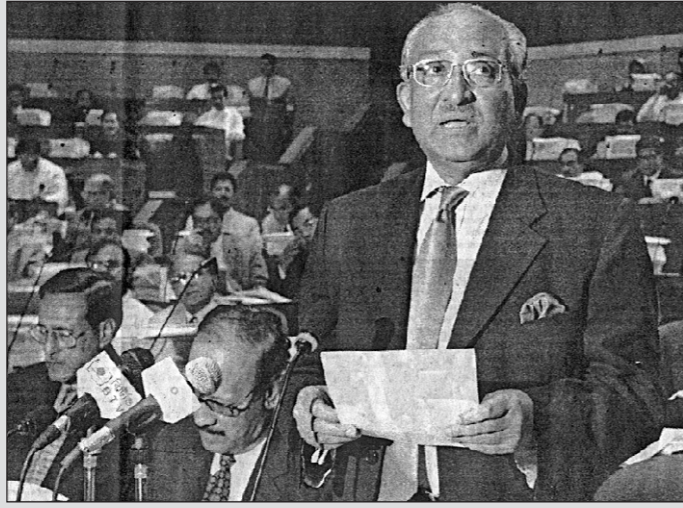
Proposed budget and some thoughts

On national aspects, I believe there have been many great things that we might reasonably boast about, whilst there were things, which one would wish that they were there. For example:

Myopia on matters of education, particularly SSC and HSC level education during the early years of our nationhood. Let us recall, in 1972, right after our Independence, we told ourselves something like this-- we lost too much time during the nine months of war and we needed to catch up with the lost time. Therefore, what we must do and we did so was to slash down the syllabus by half, experienced massive copying during the SSC and HSC examinations of 1972 and told ourselves that our boys did well at the examinations as more than 90 per cent of the examinees passed the exams. However, amongst the effects were, a general fall of standard of education even at university levels and session jam, which is still painfully there.

During this year's Budget our Finance Minister, a wise man known to have made wiser fiscal measures, has proposed the followings:

1. Imposition of duty on computers, an essential tool for the furtherance of all kinds of education. While the highest priority is very loudly given to education in the Budget, such a proposal is difficult to understand. What a contradiction! If anybody abuses the law of duty free imports of computers, please punish them. Don't let this failure to punish them effect those seeking quality education.
 2. Duty on writing papers-- what is being tried to achieve by increasing the cost of this universal tool of education and dissemination of knowledge? If anything, every effort should have been there to make paper available to all at a cheaper price. Whose interest is being served?
 3. Taxing of English medium schools. Aren't there any Bangla Medium Schools in the country that run on "Banijyik bhityi"? So why be discriminatory? Is any English Medium School forcing anybody to 'buy' their product (education)? Is this measure designed to 'collect revenue' or is it that the philosophy behind this measure is to ensure and protect in the interest of those who choose to seek education from English Medium Schools? If these schools were taxed then the taxation is very likely to be passed on to the students' tuition fees/charges, even a fool would understand that.
- What a pity, collection of revenue from education while the budget gives highest priority to education!



A budget of contradiction?

A Naser
Green Road, Dhaka

It seems that the Finance Minister is not aware of the fact that it is indeed the job of his government to stop the smuggling of goods including computer materials. And when the government miserably failed to stop smuggling, one of the reasons for which they were voted to power, Mr. Saifur Rahman imposed duty on the computer materials to 'prevent smuggling!' Doesn't the government understand that it will severely affect the common people and the growth of Information Communication Technology in the country?

Most of the people, especially a vast majority of the students, are yet to own a PC, though computer literacy is a must for present century, whereas the government has failed to equip every school in the country with even a single computer. And now they are taking the computer out of the reach of the common people! And also what about those who somehow managed to own a computer? We now shall have to pay extra money for the CDs, modems and, more horrifyingly, for the refills of our printers. So now when our teachers ask us to submit papers we shall have to think twice before we submit it in print. Still I consider myself lucky as I own a

computer, but feel sorry for my friends who are yet to buy one. The Finance Minister should know that computer is not a luxury item of the rich; it is an indispensable tool of modern education.

Now let us take a look to another new field of taxation-- the English medium schools. Mr Finance Minister please clarify what could possibly be the reason behind such an action? Do you still think that English medium schools are only for the rich? My father enrolled me in a Bangla Medium school because he could not afford to pay the high tuition fees. But that was seventeen years ago. Today the scenario has changed. There are now more English medium schools and the expense has decreased significantly. More parents are now opting for the English medium schools for their children for the sake of better education. I said 'better' because I am not at all satisfied with the system of Bangla medium schools the syllabus is not up-to-date and there are less optional subjects. Ten years of school still fails to teach a student to write correct English. And the worst part is that a student has to wait for at least three months to get his S.S.C. or H.S.C. result. And because of such poor condition of the present Bangla Medium education system the capable parents are going for the English medium schools. But now, certainly the high tuition fees of those schools will go up even higher and far out of reach of even the higher-middle class people.

In the proposed budget for 2002-03, 15 per cent supplementary duty has been imposed on satellite channel distribution. So I presume Mr. Saifur Rahman wants us to watch only the national TV (BTV). Cable channels are the only sources of home entertainment for the middle class people like us. So please don't take that away from us, because once you have discovered a new field of tax collection you may only go on increasing the tax every financial year.

Finally, I would request the Finance Minister not to expand the existing tax net but to make it more efficient, transparent and more pro-people, because, as he certainly knows, there are huge system losses and corruption in government and private sectors that deprive the government of thousands of crores of taka in revenues every year. So he better look deep into those matters before he decides to impose any new tax. With an inefficient tax net the government will certainly fail to reach the desired target of revenue collection.

Yousuf Aziz
Dhaka Cantonment

The reasons given by the Finance Minister to ban reconditioned motor cars are not convincing. The reasons given and to counter the reason I have the following to submit:

- a. Custom officers not capable to identify the actual year of manufacture of old cars: This is the weakness of customs officials. There are definitely means to identify the year of manufacture as the car models change every year. The incompetence of custom official shouldn't be an excuse to ban the import.
- b. Fuel consumption of old cars are high: This is a very lame excuse as we see so many Nissan Patrols and Pajero V-6 on the Dhaka streets which are gas guzzlers and I guess the FM is running at least one of them if not two. If import of vehicles have to be banned, these gas-guzzlers should be banned first.
- c. Environmental damage: All cars manufactured in Japan conform to the international emission limit and much more environmental friendly than the new cars produced in many countries. It is unfounded that 5-year-old Japanese cars are danger to Bangladesh environment. I would request the FM to have a drive to Savar and see for himself the brick kilns. One brick kiln emits more dangerous carbon monoxide than ten thousand Japanese cars put together.
- d. High maintenance cost: The maintenance cost of the car increases after certain period. If the govt puts restriction on vehicles say 20-year-old, the overall cost of maintenance can be kept low i.e. the country will have to import less spare parts. But what we see practically that WW-II vintage Willy jeeps are being converted into mini trucks and happily plying in Dhaka roads without being stopped by any one.

Should we conclude that our FM is not in good terms with the middle-class who are the actual beneficiary of reconditioned cars or by Aladin lamp he wants to upgrade the middle class to Pajero Class. I hope the FM will re-consider his decision and allow import of 5-year-old Japanese cars, which are better than new cars manufactured in many countries.

Commodore AMA Alam (Retd.), New DOHS, Dhaka

Cessna crash

We actually got off quite lightly in the Cessna crash in Uttara. We will never know if the pilot intentionally targeted the empty playground to ensure there were no other casualties.

The real issue of concern is elsewhere. The Cessna had taken off from the old Tejgaon Airport. There are many tall buildings around that airport including the IDB Bhaban, imagine if the Cessna had hit one of those? Imagine a worse case scenario if you will, the Cessna's a very light two seater carrying small fuel loads. But the old Tejgaon Airport is used by Army Aviation to train pilots for C-130 Transports, Huey's and old Russian choppers.

Just think of the casualties had it been a C-130 Transport with its thousands of gallons of highly flammable fuel that had crashed in Uttara. Most accidents occur during take off and landing and that means any of the high rises in Mirpur or Begum Rokeya Sharani.

Tejgaon Airport should be closed to all air traffic immediately.

T Ali
Dhaka

Woo of the buyers

When the government is head over heels to attract foreign buyers in the garments sector to earn valuable foreign exchange the ill-informed immigration officials at the ZIA International Airport are putting stumbling block to discourage the regular garment buyers from coming to this country.

It happened recently when one of our regular buyers from Spain who were visiting couple of times every year to place garment orders was held up for several hours. He has come to ZIA by British Airways with his wife and has been stopped by the immigration officials from entering the country. Incidentally, he had buying order worth of US\$1.13 million dollars with a reputed garment factory in this country.

The gentleman and his wife had to undergo a distressing waiting for six hours at the Airport. Not only he and his wife but a few other reputed garments importers including one representative of M/s Baby Tags, a famous importer of USA had to undergo such ordeal for several hours. One can imagine their state of condition of long waiting at the Airport. The plea of the immigration official is that they have no visa but these people are coming every year for last several years obtaining Airport entry visa.

Now, if the government changes the rules of entry visa then they should have been informed beforehand to their respective foreign ministry of the changes of rules of entry in Bangladesh so that the importers could be aware of the changes. In the interim period who have already arrived in the country should have been allowed to enter without further delay.

Such ordeal at the Airport cast a shadow of doubt of their intention of future imports and some of the regular buyers have expressed their dissatisfaction. Now can the country earn foreign exchange when the vested quarters are altering existing rules and regulations to debar the foreign importers? Why the immigration officials should not be lenient in cases of foreign importers who are helping to earn foreign exchange for the country? Such bureaucratic outlook instead of commercial outlook will lead us nowhere.

GMF Abdur Rob
Mohakhali, Dhaka

Right to know the facts

In your editorial "Remembering Zia" (May 30), it was mentioned that Ziaur Rahman declared our independence through a radio announcement on March 27, 1971. In the same issue of your paper, you published a special supplement on the 21st death anniversary Ziaur Rahman in which Prof. Yajuddin Ahmed and Prof. M Moniruzzaman Miah, in their respective articles, stated that Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh on March 26. Prof. Yajuddin also provided us with the specific time, date and place. He disclosed it was from Kalurghat Radio station of Chittagong on March 26, 1971, 2.15 am.

Now the problem is I know Major Zia declared the independence, but I am not aware of the exact time and date of his announcement. Needless to say, we have various statements concerning the issue. The test-books provide one while the historians another. The politicians have their own different versions too. As a citizen I have a right to know the fact. Is there any one to provide us with the facts?

Md Shahadat Hossain
DU

Regarding PM's treatment in USA
This is in regards to Zaman's and Mamun's letters (June 7) on the PM's knees.

I wholly agree with Mamun, when he says that nothings' changed since Bangabandhu had to go to London for a gall bladder operation. Imagine if the millions of dollars

spent on the PM's knee and her extended families trip had instead been used to fund a new OT in PG Hospital for such surgeries. Dare I dream that one day we will have a leader who rather than spending millions in hotel bills and shopping expenses for a huge entourage in NY would instead use that money in such a way that others may benefit too?

Just think how her personal popularity would have been boosted if she had done to operation in Dhaka, in a specially made operation theatre if necessary, but at least that would have left a legacy which would have benefited all those people in our country who can't afford to go abroad and whose treatment is not paid for by us the taxpayers.

Sadly she does not appear to be such a leader.

Tristram
Dhaka

Will joining JS solve the problem?

I read the editorial published on May 29, suggesting that Sheikh Hasina should join the Parliament.

But do you really think the atmosphere in the JS is suitable for parliamentary politics? And, if AL did join the parliament, would that really help? Is it only Sheikh Hasina's responsibility to protect democracy?

Rafiqe Bin Hai
Mymensingh

"Hasina is consoling a journalist!"

After a long time a letter has drawn my attention--"Hasina is consoling a journalist!" (June 7). What the writer said is absolutely true. AL, during their last 5-years of misrule and

mismanagement did everything--beating, torturing and killing the journalists when their pen went against them and their party's interest. It is the biggest and greatest irony on the part of this particular political party who to visit a tortured journalist.

We have read in almost all the newspapers including yours how Joyanal Hazari, Shameem Osman, Mufazzal Hossain Maya terrorised the people, tortured and killed many under the direct blessing of the AL leadership and now they are shedding crocodile tears for the miseries of the people! The AL leader has started a crusade against the democratically elected government with all its might and power instead of serving the people. Most importantly they are disclosing internal secrets and internal quarrel to foreign dignitaries and defaming the image of the country almost on a regular basis. We are also surprised how a responsible newspaper like yours is publishing these untrue, unfounded and highly irresponsible comments instead of condemning and denouncing these motivated and arrogant comments and statements.

Nasir
On e-mail

"Cricket is for the rich"

I'm referring to the letter "Cricket is for the rich" by Md. Alauddin (June 5). Having read the letter, I was to believe that the writer had never played this wonderful game of cricket. Because if he had played the game then he would not have made a fool of himself by saying that "this game does not depend on techniques, training or physical fitness". People who have an iota of idea about cricket would know how much skill it takes to play a pool or hook shot to a genuine fast bowler for example.

Referring to his point that thousands of people are wasting their time on it, I want to remind him that this is the game that brought the whole country into unison when Bangladesh won the ICC trophy to qualify for the World Cup. Cricket is the only game that has established Bangladesh's name in the sports world.

My humble suggestion to Mr. Alauddin would be to refrain from making comments about something that he has little or no knowledge about. If he doesn't support cricket, that's fine. But making silly comments about it, not acceptable.

Khadem M. Iftekhar
Dhaka

Traffic control: time to take a look

Dhaka faces tremendous traffic problem everyday. There are two reasons behind such bottleneck. First, over population (thus over crowded traffic) and second, inadequate traffic control system.

Crowd can't be controlled overnight as it keeps increasing day by day. So the only way to resolve this problem is to introduce an efficient method to control the vehicles on the street. It is not clear why the government don't adopt traffic control system from the neighbouring developing countries.

Neighbouring countries like India, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines, Sri Lanka are good examples of a well-planned traffic system. Among these countries Vietnam is the

poorest and even poorer than Bangladesh. But you will be surprised to see their streets and their traffic discipline. They don't have too many big avenues and there are fewer traffic police in the street. But everybody follows the traffic rule without hesitation.

However, this wasn't done overnight. The government had to introduce the system first and then slowly persuaded the citizen to follow the rules. What Vietnam did for controlling the traffic, Bangladesh also can do it and that in a better way. What Vietnam did are:

1. They marked all the lanes in the

theless, I have seen public awareness created by detailed reports of your newspaper. And these in turn have prompted the government at different times to take measures to address such issues. I would request you to follow up on such government actions-- make sure that their responses were more than theatricals.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous courage that your journalists share as not to cower in light of political and different sorts of pressure from different quarters. I wish that some independent organisations could be set up in our coun-

Murder at BUET: A shame for the nation

A student was shot dead in broad day light inside the campus of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). Some criminals under the shelter of the ruling party in government were responsible for the murder. The shootout and the reign of terror associated with this was unleashed by the armed squads linked to and presumably, under the control of Mr. Nasiruddin Pintu, a leader of the student faction of the ruling party and currently a Member of Parliament of the ruling party BNP according to the news report.

1. In a civilised society and democracy, if not the Prime Minister herself at least the Home Minister would take the responsibility and would tender his resignation for failing to provide security to a student who was in an educational campus. This would be the honourable thing to do. But, then, only an honourable man is expected to do honourable things.

2. What was the Mayor of Dhaka Metropolitan Corporation doing there? What was the business of the Education Minister there? In what way was the tragic incident connected with their portfolio? The State Minister for Home Affairs should have led the police force in catching the culprits rather than wasting his time in the morgue? All these show nothing but a collapse of the administration and a drift towards anarchy.

3. The newspapers did an admirable job in giving a fairly detailed account of the background of the gunfight at BUET. The rival factions of the student wing of the ruling party were engaged in that shootout over a cut in a contract (tender).

4. Why does a democratically elected government want to maintain gun trotting "goon squads"? What does it say about the government's complicity, let alone sincerity in fighting crime?

5. In the newspaper reports, all the names of the fighters involved in the gun battle have been mentioned. The public should watch how many of them are arrested, tried and punished. Not all the members of public are resigned to living a life covered by the ruling party-led banditry and terror. It is time to take responsibility for our conducts as members of the public. In the end criminals are criminals and they should be dealt with as such.

The whole nation should pray for peace and deliverance from murders, rapes, and crimes no matter which political party is responsible. We must share the pain of the bereaved family as must take a share of the shame that is collective.

A Dismayed Citizen
By e-mail

How many lives would it cost to restore law and order in the country? What does the government has to say regarding this incident, for which their student wing is responsible?

been embraced so warmly.

I have decided that parliamentary democracy and cricket have a great deal in common and, indeed wonder whether a working knowledge of cricket should not be made compulsory, especially for those desiring to be leaders of political parties. The appalling carry-on between the two lady leaders of the two main parties would surely never have been possible if they had had a good grounding in cricket.

Good politics and good cricket require similar qualities of character-- traditionally linked with the concept of 'an English gentleman'.

Angela MV Robinson (Rev Mrs)
St Andrew's High School, Haluaghat

Banning culture

The film "Matir Moina" by Tareque Masud has won the critics' award at Cannes. The award has brought great pride for the nation. But Bangladesh Censor Board banned the movie on the ground that it may hurt our religious feelings. This is outrageous. The citizens of a democratic country must not be denied their rights this way.

If we notice certain activities of



Victim of cadre politics

Is there any place in the country where people can feel and secure? I see none-- not even the father's lap or the campus of BUET, one of the highest seats of education.

Gopal Sengupta
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

An innocent student of BUET was shot in crossfire between two known groups of tender-terrorists on June 8. The day was the submission date of a tender.

BUET campus was previously terrorised by those "tenderbaz". Still the BUET authority did not give proper attention to this issue. The office for tender submission could have been shifted from the campus but no body paid heed to it. The result of this callousness is the sad death of a talented student.

Why didn't the BUET authority ask for more police force on the campus knowing that day was the tender submission day? If they did such tragic incident might not have occurred on our campus-- the supposedly safe place for us.

Hasibul Hoque
On e-mail

streets and the drivers had to follow it.

2. No unnecessary horn while driving (I heard less than 7 horn during my weeklong stay in Hanoi).
3. There are no rejected automobiles, emitting dirty smoke.
4. Overtaking is very unusual.
5. All the roads contain these elements: lane mark, footpath, drain (no half done road at all).

Is it very difficult for Bangladesh to implement these regulations to our metropolitans? Shouldn't we get rid of this concept that "poor means dirtiness, poor means pollution, poor means no discipline"?

Haroon Rashid
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Journalism-- beacon of hope for us

Thanks for the detailed investigative reports you write on different events of the day. We know that good governance and accountability will not be achieved overnight. Never-

try to recognise such merit. It should be done not simply for acknowledging such professionalism but also to provide some beacons of hope to our younger generation that truth and justice can still guide our society and ambitions for those who want to do the right thing.

Maybe, we can contribute in some way to make this happen. Please let us know how.

Ishfaqur Raza
Washington, USA

Rear parliamentary democracy

Having made a great effort to follow the news - and understand it - while living in Bangladesh - I cannot help but wonder why the tender plant of parliamentary democracy seems so difficult to rear outside the nursery where it developed-- England. It is particularly strange when another great institution that also emerged from there, namely cricket, has

Being a 'gentleman' should have nothing to do with birth but much to do with character and attitudes, particularly the politeness with which you deal with others, of all classes, and the restraint you exercise upon self-interest.

Good politics and good cricket simply do not work unless they are played by 'gentlemen' with a respect for 'the game' that transcends personal ambition. 'Playing the game' involves a great deal more than just obeying the rules - which, these days, sometimes means studying them in order to get round them! It involves understanding those rules as an aspect of the overall love for 'the game' and making sure they are always interpreted in its interests.

Playing games is not only for children - it is far more serious than that - for it is linked with the acquisition of maturity. As Tagore put it ('Games' in Sonar Toree). 'How can you grow up if you don't want to play!'

the last two months we can see a series of events: (i) Restriction on to movie "Lal Shaloo" (ii) Ban on some cable channels (iii) Banning the film "Matir Moina". It seems that some invisible hands are acting against our culture and freedom.

Foyez Ahmed, Sylhet

What's next?

It was quite surprising to know that our government is more concerned about cultural and social values than our lives. The decision of banning cable channels was ridiculous and pathetic. It's good that they withdrew the ban.

It is a disgrace for the government for not being able to improve law and order situation. Or does the government think that crimes do not affect religious values and culture?

Bothered, Dhaka