

Investment climate again

Steps needed to be taken to attract Japan

NOT that the point needed reiteration, having been made by so many both inside and outside the country, but once again we have confirmation that the unstable political situation and the uncertainty associated with government plans and policies are keeping otherwise enthusiastic investors away from Bangladesh.

This time the observation has come from the head of the Japan-Bangladesh Joint Committee for Commerce and Economic Cooperation, and contemplates specifically investment from Japan, but his larger point holds true for all those, both foreign and Bangladeshi, who wish to invest money in the country only to find the political and governance climate unfavourable.

In the Japanese context, due to tensions between Japan and China, Japanese investors are looking to diversify their investments to other Asian countries, and Bangladesh is seen as a prime candidate. In many ways, we are a potentially attractive destination for investors. The Japanese are enthused about our low labour costs, potential to benefit from quota-free access to the EU, and our two governments sharing good relations.

In addition, due to Japanese courting of Bangladeshi support for their bid for a permanent place on the UN Security Council, Japan is very interested in even better mutual relations.

However, there remain significant problems. Some of these have to do with the political instability. It is only natural that foreign investors would be discomfited by hartsals and the fact that contracts have been cancelled upon change of government. One such incident mentioned was the DAP-2 deal, signed during the AL tenure, and cancelled by the current administration.

The other main problem cited is corruption in the system, which takes the form of tender manipulation, and the government's lack of emphasis on developing infrastructure and setting out a complete and focused trade and investment policy. This is a reasonable point. Investors can see that there is no focus on how policies are pursued and money is spent by the government. This ad hoc approach to governance is no good. What is needed is a cohesive and coherent policy.

Now is a good opportunity for Bangladesh. Investors are starting to come in. But we need to stabilise politically, albeit along bipartisan lines, and the government needs to clean up the investment climate if we wish the trend to take hold. The most important need is a unified policy tied to a vision of where the country is heading. The lack of focus in our policy-making is a big part of what is holding us back.

It has touched a new low

Student as mugger!

THE incident in which reportedly two activists of the Dhaka College unit of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were arrested, after they had mugged a man has laid bare the abyss student criminality has hit. The degeneracy leaves us shell-shocked.

It goes to show that some elements in the student wing of the ruling party have turned truly delinquent and are now acting like criminals. This cannot be explained without a reference to their perceived sense of power. They must have felt that they were above the law, probably banking on some kind of "immunity" hoping to get away with their JCD label.

Fortunately, the law took its natural course in this particular instance. The police arrested the two muggers setting an example of acting professionally, and without fear. We want more of such action since crime cannot be contained if political clout gets the better of the power of the enforcement system.

The two arrested youths are very likely to be disowned by the organisation that they supposedly belonged to. But that will not solve the problem. Yes, they will have to be punished, but the only way to solve the problem enduringly -- if the BNP high-ups are really interested in blotting out criminality having a direct link to politics -- is to keep a tab on the activities of JCD adherents in different organisations and weed the criminals out.

Thugs are thugs; if they are not exorcised, they will act not only as image spoilers but will also cause incalculable damage to the ruling party. The party high command has to deal with them with an iron hand. They must not be oblivious of the pitfall associated with some of their supporters turning desperadoes. They might turn into a Frankenstein if the reports of JCD boys crossing the limits of lawful activities are not acted upon in the greater interest of BNP.

Power, politics and public purse



ABDUL BAYES

concerned.

There had always been reactions to the budget -- positive, negative or both. Some reactions are also rhetoric in the sense that critics want a wholesale solution for socio-economic ills from a particular budget. But the current budget seems to have invoked more criticisms than the earlier ones. I find that there are sufficient flesh in the arguments of the critics and, possibly, lesser substance in the points to counter them with. While the space

policies, such a "revolutionary" step is unlikely to be taken. Disconcertingly though, apparently the budget appeases the black money holders and goes to tax the relatively white money holders in terms of taxes and other facilities. Given that the next general election is almost in the vicinity, as critics would argue, black money holders would be appeased for the very dynamics of politics in the country. After all, money matters in election, no matter whether black or white. While the space

of the ADPs of the last government, the performance of the last fiscal of the present government looks pale. For example, while about 90 percent of the target was achieved during the last government, only three-fourths were achieved during the last four ADPs of the present government. A big ADP does never imply that there is going to be a leap forward unless the projects are economically devised, regularly monitored and quickly implemented. We are told

that is just not the rise in the prices of food items but also of non-food items. Due to import surge, the reserve situation is seemingly under pressure. On the heels of these events, the macroeconomic indicators might face turbulence with the implementation of the national pay scale, the money flows under the umbrella of ADP and revenue h e a d s .

Poverty and inequality

The revenue target in the last fiscal

resources. Bad governance would jeopardise the targets. There is no doubt that the country is faced with worst kind of governance now than ever before. Call it human rights, freedom of speech or rule of law, the society is gradually failing behind. The Judiciary could not be separated from the executive for the last four years. The opposition could not be provoked to join parliament. Public universities are on the brink of ruination due to hoodlums created by the political cadres of the ruling party. We expected that the FM would come out with a detailed account of the grievous governance issue and suggest the ways his government would face the problems.

Budget and bailouts

By and large, the budget appears to be a "political" budget where political considerations occupied the front seat in terms of resource allocation. It may seem that the budget might bail out the government till and through the polls. But given the soaring prices of commodities, rising unemployment and deteriorating law and order situation, it remains to be seen how far the budget would bail out the parties in power in the next general election. Apparently we see no vision in the budget but, of course, we witness a mission to go to power again by using public purse. Let economics lament till the next election.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

One could criticise that the FM had pressed home the political considerations of his party through the budget. More money would pour in rural areas no matter whether the projects are worthy of consideration, whether people would like them or not. But definitely that could help political aims to lure voters in

does not allow for detailed discussions on every aspect of the budget, allow me to finger at a few.

Black vs white

I remember, the FM once remarked that whitening of black money is not a practice usually in evidence in a civilized society. And, therefore, it was expected that he would have stood against such a step to allow black money holders go unchallenged. But to the utter dismay of the countrymen, this budget intends to back up black money holders and provide a green signal to them to go for the whitening exercise. Of course, personally I was not moved or convinced by the utterances of our FM. My pessimism rested on the simple ground that a country where politics is dominated by black money and where politics determine

the FM could be right in saying that economic realities have made him change his decisions, the countrymen need to know what these realities are and whether they would evaporate within just a year or so.

Big vs small

I also recollect, how the present FM vehemently criticised the earlier government for preparing an ADP, in his opinion, based on political considerations. He also dubbed the last budget of the last government as ambitious and unrealisable. But this year's budget aims for a bigger ADP than ever embracing ambitious projects. Most of the projects relate to roads and culverts. Well, there is no doubt that roads and culverts contribute to poverty reduction, but they also contribute to corruption. Besides, compared to the perfor-

that only 46 percent of the ADP targets of the last fiscal were achieved so far. The absorption capacity of the governmental machinery in implementing such a big budget seemingly was missed out.

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Inching inflation

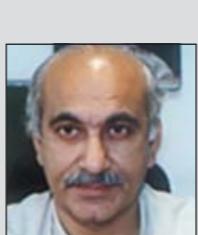
The economy is faced with twin troubles. On the one hand, inflation rate is inching up and trade deficit is being widened. The cause of infla-

tion is just not the rise in the prices of food items but also of non-food items. Due to import surge, the reserve situation is seemingly under pressure. On the heels of these events, the macroeconomic indicators might face turbulence with the implementation of the national pay scale, the money flows under the umbrella of ADP and revenue h e a d s .

Grievous governance

The success of a budget does not depend only on allocation of

Man of irony



M.J. AKBAR

for existence. The dialectic of conflict can take you only so far, and the BJP has reached that point. It must now seek a dialectic of inclusion. This fits in with a larger conviction that the only way forward for the subcontinent is within the secular space. He was also reminding Pakistan of the Jinnah that many Pakistanis prefer to forget, the Jinnah who wanted a democratic, secular Republic of Pakistan.

The irony lies not in the action,

Congress disease, was, in their lexicon, a synonym for hypocrisy, anti-Indian, and anti-Hindi behaviour. It was reassuring therefore to learn that Togadia and Kishore considered secularism a virtue, and did not want to extend the compliment to their favourite bogey, Jinnah.

Their compatriot in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Mahant Avichal dasji, has decided to launch a movement demanding the resignation of Advani from the Lok

barely managed to digest the liberalism of Atal Behari Vajpayee, and now they were being confronted with a recast Advani. Who can remain stable when the world totters at both the North Pole and the South Pole?

The poles shook similarly when Jinnah made his speech on August 11, 1947: after having created a nation for Muslims, he rejected the idea of a Muslim nation in the sense of a theocratic state. Pakistan, he said, would become a great nation

Bangladesh to cooperate as politically sovereign and economically inter-dependent nations. So far, the separatist urge has controlled our fortunes, literally: "fortune" is a word of economics.

It is a question that Advani has addressed to his own party much more than to others, and legitimately so. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh, predecessor of the BJP, belongs to the third phase of the Hindutva movement. The first phase was a search for renaissance and reform, and came to an end with the death of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. The second saw the institutionalisation of this search. In 1907, a year after the Muslim League was created, the United Bengal Hindu Movement and the Punjab Hindu Sabha were born. At the Lahore Congress session of 1909 the Hindu Sabha was formally recognised as a Congress forum. The RSS replaced the Sabha as the institutional force after its formation in 1926. The third phase began after the tears of partition, with the birth of the Jana Sangh in 1952. It was a mirror-image of the Pakistan demand, for it sought power for Hindus in India in the way that Muslims had established their base in Pakistan. Five decades later the president of the BJP is telling his party to move away from the 20th century and into the 21st.

It is a debate that will be welcomed by Indian Muslims, who have long been burdened by the "guilt" of partition. The Congress, paradoxically rather than ironically, has been as insistent upon demanding this price as the Hindutva parties, creating a tribe of "Congress Muslims" whose rise to power has often been in direct proportion to their ability to pour venom upon Jinnah. Once again, it is time to move on.

I have been wondering which is the greater irony: that both Jinnah and Gandhi were Gujaratis, or that both Jinnah and Advani were from Karachi. Whatever the answer, of this I am certain. The BJP's Man of Iron has become India's Man of Irony.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

BYLINE

The debate has a second hinge: is our future best protected by a secular, inclusive spirit, or by separatist urges? This question is relevant internally, for all nations of the subcontinent are divided by competing identities, as well as externally, for only a common commitment to a secular spirit will enable India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh to cooperate as politically sovereign and economically inter-dependent nations.

but in the reaction.

Let us examine the worst. Praveen Togadia, whose face boils over with hatred at less provocation, decided that Advani had become a "traitor." Acharya Giriraj Kishore, whose beard camouflages his feelings but whose eyes are a giveaway, was livid that Jinnah had been called secular.

Ours is a free country. We even allow the freedom to hate, though not the freedom to be violent. Such reactions from these eminences were predictable. What was interesting was how the term "secular" had become, almost surreptitiously, a positive word in their terminology. How? They hated the thought that Advani had praised Jinnah as secular; ergo, "secular" was a positive attribute which they wanted to deny Jinnah.

Correct me if I am wrong, but I thought that the one thing that the Togadia and Kishore hated was "secularism" -- that Gandhian concoction under which Muslims had been made free and equal citizens of a Hindu-majority India.

"Secularism," a sort of Leftist

Sabha because he has "deceived" the Hindus. He is also upset that Advani called the day of the destruction of the Babri Masjid the saddest day of his life, and claims that the voters do not want Advani anymore.

Advani was elected from Gandhinagar, capital of Gujarat. What greater irony could there be than the fact that a city named after Gandhi, a Gujarati, should seek to reject Advani because he spoke a language that Gandhi would have understood? Gandhinagar has become a measure of Gujarat's betrayal of Gandhi. The parallel irony of course is that Advani helped create such a voter, and now is being asked to pay the price of his own past.

Which, neatly, brings us to the next irony: Advani, who sparked the revival of the BJP in the second half of the 1980s with the Ram Mandir movement, had become to Pakistanis what Jinnah was to Indians, the object of a hate-cult. The role reversal has a particular piquancy. One can sense the depth of shock within the BJP. They had

only if every citizen had "equal rights, privileges, and obligations." He continued: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state. We are all citizens and equal citizens of one state."

But of course the debate that Advani has started over Jinnah, is not a debate about Pakistan but a debate about India, which takes irony to unprecedented heights. It is a debate with many contours around a central question: was Jinnah solely responsible for the partition of India? Who destroyed the Cabinet Mission plan of 1946, often called the last chance for Indian unity? How much did newly elected Congress president Jawaharlal Nehru's press conference in Mumbai on July 10, 1946, where he withdrew from the Congress commitment, affect the unity of India? (Azad was deeply

involved in the psychological uplift of his people.)

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we cannot escape: how did a man who never believed in communal politics deliver a nation for a community? Did he change? Was he driven into that corner? Such questions will never be answered satisfactorily as long as the politics of bias shapes our "facts."

A politician with an inclusive attitude often rejects certain facts for the larger good. Dr BR Ambedkar has become an icon to Dalits. Will any leader of an Indian political party, with any sense, seek to hurt the Dalits by picking on some elements of Ambedkar's politics, like cooperation with the British, or will he woo Dalit sentiment by recalling the extraordinary contribution Ambedkar made to the psychological uplift of his people?

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On the other hand, weak monitoring and audit system has provided opportunities to plunder the scarce resources of the country. The government's system of awarding scholarship to female secondary and higher secondary level students supported by payment of 90% of teacher's salaries and offering grants for development of infrastructure of educational institutions have led to establishment of more schools and madrasahs, and colleges at private level, only to extract funds from the government without caring about quality of education.

It was also learnt that ninety percent of the newly established school, madrasah and college authorities resorted to withdrawing government funds by showing dummy teachers in collaboration with the officials of funding authorities. The governing body of those

institutions have guardian's representative to comply with government rules but they have no role in assessing quality of education and teachers' involvement in daily routine classes. Most of the students are dependent on private coaching.

So there is no performance criteria for the teachers who do not have any accountability. Almost all teachers are members of associations formed on the basis of political party lines. Their appointment, promotion and other facilities are all determined on their participation in political activities. The Rajshahi University situation that came into print media recently was no exception, rather it was a part of the whole education scenario.

Rezaul Huq
Lalmatia, Dhaka

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Attention: Doctors

There are large numbers of medicine manufacturing establishments in Bangladesh which are marketing medicines of same chemical formula in different trade names. It is not possible for a doctor to remember all these trade names. It is not also possible for the medicine-manufacturing establishments to make the information of their medicines available to each and every doctor. The prescriber's guides that are available in the market are also incomplete.

Under the circumstances, when a patient comes to a second doctor with a prescription made by an earlier doctor, the second doctor may find it difficult to prescribe when the trade name of the medicines previously prescribed are not known to him.

Furthermore, if the second doctor shows his ignorance about the name of the previously prescribed medicines, the patient thinks that the knowledge of the second doctor

is very poor. It is a matter of shame and disgrace to the second doctor.

It is therefore requested (for the interest and benefit of both the doctors and patients) that all doctors mention generic names within bracket against the trade names of the medicines.

Musharrif Hussain
Mymensingh

Best friend

Trees are not only the