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Saifur Rahman's proposed budget has some striking features which raise questions about the rationale of some of his fiscal measures.

These relate to new fiscal proposals about SIM Cards, mobile phone sets, and imported furniture and poultry industry. One finds that SIM cards are used by three mobile operators and only one service provider uses a different technology which does not require use of the SIM cards. Is the new fiscal proposal relating to SIM cards purported to suit the interest of the particular mobile operator?

Has the duty on imported furniture been raised to promote the interest of a particular business house? And, is the new fiscal proposal concerning poultry industry aimed at serving the interest of some particular person?

Furthermore it is intriguing to observe the use of Sonar Bangla in the concluding paragraph of the Finance Minister's speech. We know Sonar Bangla is the political theme of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party. Has the Finance Minister embraced the philosophy of "Sonar Bangla"? **Khairul Masud, Eskaton, Dhaka**

Our finance minister, in his budget speech for the fiscal 2005-06, has proposed to extend the time limit for whitening the black money for another year. It is completely contrary to his earlier stand against black money. In various pre-budget

meetings, the finance minister announced, "we can't allow legalisation of haram (illegal) money every year." It might have been done only for the sake of revenue collection. But I think this can be done only for the specific period of time as it has been done in India. What amazes me is, the honest people are paying income tax at the rate of 10% while the owner of the ill-gotten money will have to pay tax only at 7.5%. This is quite ridiculous. It has been done for the last three years and only Tk. 1,800 crore (out of Tk. 70,000) has been 'whitened' so far. This proves that the black money holders are not willing to whiten their money in that fashion, because they are passing their time easily without showing their black money. So, why the black-marketer will pay extra amount! This kind of policy loses the trustworthiness, demoralises the honest taxpayer. This type of policy encourages the evildoers, makes the disparity and weakens the economy. Finally it can be said that, it is total injustice to the honest taxpayer. Hope our respected and learned Finance Minister will rethink about it.

Md. Shahed-ur-Rasul Narayanganj-1400

M. Saifur Rahman presented the national budget for FY 2005-06 in the House on June 9. As I am not a student of economics, most of the budgetary parlance is a little bit esoteric for me. But by reading the text of the budget I tried to understand the pros and cons

of the proposed budget. Typically a national budget is always debatable. The ruling party terms the budget as pro-people and the opposition as anti-people. But we, the general people of the country need to scrutinise the budget thoroughly. Mr Rahman doubled the farm subsidy to boost the



agricultural outputs and alleviate poverty. But the farmers, the lifeblood of the country should be benefited in real sense. He allocated Tk 24500 crore for ADP. It is not colossal for a huge population. But it should be materialised for the welfare of the mass, not to satisfy the political ranks and files or to woo the voters.

The revenue target of Tk 45722 crore may be ambitious but it is not highly impossible. It can be collected through good governance. For this NBR

should be rejuvenated to reach the optimum target. Tax ombudsman should be appointed shortly. Perpetuation of tax holiday for 18 sectors is essential for industrialisation and economic growth. But the provision to whiten the black money is really controversial. It will bolster corruption and

Awami League has boycotted the current budget session. So they have no right to lambaste the ruling party outside the parliament. I hope they will return to the parliament if they want to address the concern of the people.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen Dept of English, DU

The national budget of Bangladesh has just been presented in the Parliament with a lot of aplomb and rhetoric. Our finance minister has termed it a people friendly budget. Some quarters have also called it a budget for raising the party's number of votes. Be it as it may, I would only focus on one of the components of the budget, which affected me, and like me, a number of people, perhaps a very large number of people. I refer to the wanton imposition of an exorbitant tax on the SIM cards of the mobile phones. I come from a remote village of Bangladesh and work in Dhaka. Back home I have my old and widowed mother who lives alone. A maid looks after her. I some how managed to buy her a hand set which our acquaintances in the village get recharged for a paltry some of taka 300 as and when required. This phone was needed for me to enquire about her well being from time to time, or for her to get to me when she needed me. From now on it is going to be painfully impossible. I will not be able to replenish her hand set with a new card at the price that our finance minister has imposed

on us. After imposition of the 1200 taka tax it is not going to be possible for me to let my mother use a mobile phone at all. I would not easily know when she needs me or my help in case of illness or otherwise. This is painful to say the least.

Mobile phones are not a luxury for the vast multitude of people in Bangladesh. They have an inherent right to communicate. As Professor Yunus had said while launching Grameen phone, he had the vision of empowering the people, especially the women in the villages of Bangladesh. Please consider this vision in its correct and practical perspective. In the absence of a regular telephone network, mobile phones are a necessity. All we heard from the Minister, the other bosses in the finance department or the service providers is about mobile phone as a matter of business. Not as a matter of dire necessity, it is said that the service providers are making wrong kind of money and therefore they have to be brought to book. Honourable Minister, please do control them, by all means, if they are indulging in unruly business or are making undue profit. There are a number of ways to do that. Ask them to reduce call charges. Ask them to be transparent in their business if they are not. But please do not disempower the people of Bangladesh. Do not take our right to communicate away.

Khaleda Binte Azim On e-mail

American rhetoric and reality

The latest dope on Bin Laden and Mullah Omar: they are in clover in Afghanistan. Some days ago a teenage girl was arrested on suspicion of planning an attack in America. Seemingly, two events are in two different time space, not only carrying out of Laden is responsible to cause harassment in Muslim disappears in US but also concatenation of events taking place after 9/11 innocent people fall victim to more or less connected to the so called threat of al Qaeda that made US abrasively belligerent.

Subsequently, questions arise, why the cogs in CIA are coy about detailing the exact

place when Laden is dwelling in? Are they subtle enough to dodge the CIA's astute eyes evermore? Why US is gaga over hunting out them after bumping off thousands of people in Afghanistan. More the existence of the most wanted man become the much-vaunted.

Laden not only tacitly helping Bush make new strategies making pseudo-threat, only innocent people fall in between. In this sense US need laden to fill the vacuum of an opponent. In this uni-polar world US craves for vanquishing natural resourceful countries on the pretext of having connection to

al-Qaeda. The ideology behind bungled war on terror has turns turtle if not scuttled.

Much hyped WMD was not unearthed in Iraq, now US making alibi of "democratisation" to legalise the war and prodding puppets in power sharing while people are getting scared of suicide bomb attack. At the same time, America is adroitly fighting shy of applying the "democratisation theory" to Pakistan as Pervez Musharraf is with president Bush not against.

America shut out Yasir Arafat of peace dialogue. The outstanding leader died the

dream remains unfulfilled. Now they are not happy with Abbas apparent in inciting Israel writhing to complete sovereign Palestine state.

Have those people any right to preach human right who is guilty to culpable homicide.

Barbaric torture in Abu Gharib waves a shock across the world where prisoners are incarcerated in obnoxiously without justices.

Denigration towards Muslim is only contributing to resurrection of fundamentalism weaned on and nourished by US itself during cold war. Jewish magnetism and neo-

cons direction got ground in America doesn't practice that he preaches.

Deadly depredation of Iraq was complete. It hasn't become Vietnam. Now multinational companies are haggling about getting contracts to rebuild. Virgin oil field will be plundered; puppet will be euphemism for US's presence no matter if democracy works or not.

Exercising absolute power makes people corrupt and rampant corruption leads to collapse. Likely history repeats itself.

Roney, On e-mail



Tax on SIM cards

I cannot understand why people are opposing imposition of Tk. 1200 tax on SIM cards. Why it is seen as an extra burden on customers and how it will affect investment in the sector. My analysis reveals that this new taxation formula will benefit the customer in many ways.

A burden of tax amounting Tk. 1500 was already there. Now it will be collected in two stages. Tk 300 per handset at the time of import and Tk. 1200 when a new connection SIM card is sold. As a result, the price of handset will go down by more than Tk 1200. For example, the price of a handset procured at

Tk. 5000 could be fixed as [Tk. 5000 (CIF cost) + Tk.1000 (margin @ 20%) + Tk. 1500 (tax) + Tk 150 (margin on money paid as tax which will remain blocked for say 6 months, @ 10%)] to be sold at Tk 7,650. The price of the same handset will be [Tk. 5000 (CIF cost) + Tk.1000 (margin @ 20%) + Tk. 300 (tax) + Tk 30 (margin on money paid as tax which will remain blocked for say 6 months, @ 10%)] = Tk. 6,330 which is Tk. 1320 lower than the previous price.

The highest benefit, however, will go to the existing 5 milli on customers. On an average a mobile subscriber has to buy new handset every three year. They will get a relief of Tk. 1320 on each

purchase.

Someone may argue that most handsets were smuggled and so the price were not as high as it could be for a Tk. 1500 tax. But we must not support crying for losing benefits of support.

Mobile operators are least concerned about their old customers. It seems that they would have been happy with the previous taxation policy which offer them more flexibility in fixing higher price of SIM. Our experience of buying SIM cards at taka 4 to 5 thousand is not older than 6 months.

M. Sharif Uddin On e-mail

JU teacher as PSC member

It is well known that the Public Service Commission is an autonomous body. Some qualified professors or BCS Cadres having 10 years working experience are taken as members of PSC. If a university teacher becomes its member, his students get encouragement to appear in the BCS examination. So, it is a demand of the students of Jahangirnagar University to appoint a qualified and renowned teacher as a member of PSC. I do hope that the concerned authority will appoint a qualified teacher a member of PSC.

MA Hossain Jahngirnagar University, Savar

Muktadhara's publicity stunt: 'Shrestha Banglaees'

I was really shocked by reading Mr. Humayun Admed name is the list of the greatest Bangali (still alive). Oh! Come on. How can he be great. That's ridiculous. What have he done for the society? He only knows how to make stories. That's it, there are many Bengalis out there we can do the same that does not make him great. He has created bad example for the society by marrying a girl half of his age.

Tasmeen Hossain On e-mail

I am simply awe-stricken. 'Shrestha Banglaees'. Sounds so noble and inspiring.

Muktadhara, New York, a leading organisation (or a group/company), recently launched their landmark effort to honour the living outstanding (shrestha) Banglaees on the basis of public voting. I am sure this effort was triggered by the BBC Radio (Bengali section) effort to find out the best Banglaees ever. They were clever and didn't want to bother making award arrangements for the recipients, since it was all posthumous. BBC had previously launched another campaign to find out the best Brit ever. The recent effort of Muktadhara, I believe, is a resonant effort of the same. But, living (alive in their words)?

I am not even sure of the total population of Banglaees. But, I would presume it to be around twenty five to thirty crores (including both Banglas). We are quite lot of people. And this is one reason, Bangla as a language has climbed up the ladder to become one of the

top five most spoken languages. The desire Muktadhara, New York had, I believe, was not totally commercial. They had an honest pursuit. But, the length they have gone and are planning to go, raise the very question of its authenticity and credibility. As far as I am aware through an email (since they are so reluctant in publishing the details on their website), they had received a total vote of around forty thousand or less (approx. 0.016% of the total population). Close to six thousand via postal mail and the rest through internet. I leave the judgement to the reader as to how representative it is.

I have no intention of disparaging or belittling the elected outstanding personalities. They sure are outstanding in their respective fields, and some have reached beyond their self and contributed to the Banglaees as a whole. I don't want to mention any individual as I am not capable of doing that and cannot dare, to be frank. They all deserve to be the most popular names amongst the living Banglaees. Is most popular a synonym for best in Bangla? If this is true, then I don't have a point.

People might have the feeling that I am trying to be utterly pessimistic about it. And some would also think that Muktadhara, New York has at least begun a process that would finally someday enshrine the names of Banglaees worldwide. In this age of vibrant information tech and bottle neck competition for being the superior, this totally unprofessional and flawed process of selecting the 'Best Alive Banglaees' looks so naive that I cannot but help calling this whole effort a blasphemy and profanation of the honourable awarddees. This has again proved how far we are lacking intellectually that we even care to respond to such a meaningless effort.

minimal effort?

I believe there will be some intelligent and sensible people who will protest the guile and chicanery that they have undertaken in a haste move to make Muktadhara, New York a popular name.

Khurshid Meher Japan

Dr Yunus and his wish list

Dr Yunus's wish list is not a new thing. However, a wish list and the implementation under present socio-economic conditions are like the banks of a river that can never meet. I know of a case where an

editor was always criticising the bureaucrats for their ill-doings, corruption and inefficiency. He made as if he had the panacea for all the evils, forgetting the various complications and negative forces present in the society. He was made the chairman of the Disinvestment commission, perhaps as a test case. What happened! Within a few weeks he had to change his tune but by habit this time he was blaming his colleagues, the politicians, industrialists, bureaucrats and other sectors of society for his failure. It is very easy to criticise than to do something good.

It would have been better had Prof. Yunus not highlighted his own

personality but given specific solutions for the incumbent chairman of the Anti-corruption Commission for removal of the negative forces by joint efforts of the government and the public.

Poet Allama Iqbal had clearly defined between "Guffar" (talks) and "Kirdar" (practice). I would, therefore, request the government to replace Justice Sultan with Dr Yunus for a few days to see his magic.

Mohammed Alauddin Dhaka

Blow out prevention

I am distressed as you all are over yet another blow out in Tengratilla gas field. In world wide oilfield operations, blow-outs have become a rarity nowadays; but having two blow-outs in only six months by the same (multinational) company is certainly unique. Standard techniques for well control and blow out prevention do exist throughout the oil and gas industry, and failure to meet those standard operating procedures, and repeatedly, by companies working internationally, cannot be justified and acceptable. From a second-year basic undergraduate drilling engineering course taken nine years ago, I had learnt how to make drilling plans in abnormally high pressured zones and what measures to take if situation starts getting out of control. And those were not just textbook words; those were standard industry practices at that time. So preventing blow out is no rocket-science, it never was. In fact, while drilling, contractors normally have BOPs (Blowout Preventers) at the site. BOPs are heavy equipment that can completely close a well on the verge of a blow out, thus preventing any major accident or leakage of gas at the well. From a very reliable source I came to know that during the previous blowouts, the drillers/operators did not have any BOPs at the site! To drill in a gas zone and not have a BOP handy is something that defies any worldly logic it seems only possible if either the drillers are insane, or the drillers are sane but they are drilling in no other country than Bangladesh! Regardless of whether they had BOP this time or not, the fact that the same company blows our gas for the second time is very disturbing and alarming. This means that they have not learnt from their past mistakes, nor they have dealt with our gas resource with the seriousness that it deserves. This outrageous disregard for our extremely valuable national resources and the unacceptably substandard way of conducting business in Bangladesh should not be tolerated anymore. I urge the Government of Bangladesh to take ultimate and exemplary action against it so that - 1) We send a strong message to the world that Bangladesh is not a playground for outsiders to do whatever they wish, and 2) such technical negligence by any oil & gas company is not repeated in our country and in other geopolitical "weak and humble" countries.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has shown strong conviction in the past, and I hope she will again set an example by getting tough on those who were responsible for this blow out. We really have to be alert in safeguarding our assets and rights, and the Prime Minister should lead us from the front.

Will she? Can she?

Sudipta Sarkar, Boston, USA

We are extremely sorry at the past activities of our Niko, Unicol and our Minister is concerned, it is not far that there was heavy loss of lives and properties during the explosion of Tengratilla gas field, which was left uncared by Niko and they were busy in caring and managing the minister, leaving the unending loss unpaid and unsettled. Niko was very reluctant to that major failure as they are reported to have no such technical know how, for which Tengratilla has again been seriously exploded.

We should ask our newly appointed Adviser Mr. Rahman, to kindly expedite ascertaining the actual loss due to negligence of Niko, they should make good of the total loss of the Tengratilla and Magurchora explosions and no new contract should be made with that Company. We hope, during the active and sagacious role of Mr. Mahmudur Rahman, all the past loopholes be detected and our Petro Bangla and Bupex be able to unearth the huge and unending resource at our own. Niko may be asked to compensate the total loss.

Peerzada Syed Rofiqul Hussain Hiala Shaheb Bari, Habigonj



PHOTO: AFP

BREAKING THE LAW OF SMOKING

Smokers suck on cigarette puffing on lung likely in search for exhilaration but it remains unattained like water on mirage on desert. The precarious habit doesn't leave even making smoker susceptible to ulcer, cancer, the risk of brain stroke.

With the people of developed countries saying no to smoke multinational companies focusing on developing countries with new strategies. Few days ago govt. passed law-banning smoking in open place. But law alone isn't enough to discourage.

If smoking make you feel tedious then the exigency tour tenacious desire to get rid off.

My strong appeal to young generation in particular please come and says no to smoking.

Roney, On e-mail

Let's bring peace

Every thing was very smoothly going on in DU. The campus was calm and quiet. All classes were being taken regularly. We were happy. But just before the summer vacation a terrible accident took place. And later the student politicians and the police made the varsity a battlefield. We really don't know whether classes will start from July or not. Remember what happened last year and the past few years. Last year some

goons attacked Prof. Humayun Azad. And before that Shamsunnahar Hall incident took place. And if you analyse carefully you will see, every year an accident happens and the varsity suffers from a long session jam for this.

We need to realise that the general students suffer because of session jam. At first a congenial educational environment should be built. Why do we forget that students

are the builders of the nation? The government and the DU authority should take measures to bring peace and stability in the campus, and efforts should be made to deactivate all those issues and causes that create anarchy in the campus.

DU students should be more helpful and constructive.

Cantara Wali Ruhi DU

