

Mounting uncertainties

Tengratila nightmare continues

WE are concerned at Niko's helplessness, even more so when it appears to seek reprieve from the current predicament in some divine or cosmic intervention. That is the impression one forms from the report of our Sylhet correspondent. According to Niko officials, they have nothing to do under the current circumstances to tame the towering inferno that is raging at Tengratila and arrest the huge loss in burnt gas and the collateral damages, that were caused as a consequence of the blowout.

This speaks of the very shoddy level of preparedness of the company, and the lack of planning to tackle emergencies, that such operations normally entail. The only damage control mechanism lies in drilling another well for which a rig has to be brought in from Maulvi Bazaar. No one is certain how long that might take. In the meanwhile the fire will continue to rage, the environment and the surroundings and the people will continue to suffer.

Over 800 families have been affected by this blowout, not to speak of the over 600 or so affected in the Jan disaster, and their means of livelihood and of sustenance in the form of land and drinking water all but destroyed.

There are two immediate actions that the authorities must undertake without delay. One is to bring the fire under control and the other is to provide immediate relief to the affected people. While one notes the constitution of two separate bodies for investigating the causes of the accident and the extent of damages, one by the JS to evaluate the damage to the ecology, what is needed more than ever is to initiate action to contain the blaze. Probing the causes can come later. The sufferings that the two blowouts have caused to the local people are immense and actions to mitigate them must be taken without waiting for the outcome of the probes. Human sufferings cannot wait for probe reports and formalities of the like.

We also wonder whether the terms of reference of the probe committees include investigating the technical and administrative competence of the company. This must be done to ensure that it indeed has the all the wherewithal to complete their tasks.

Journalists at risk

Local administrations need to act

THIS is more than an occupational hazard Mufassil correspondents of national newspapers have got used to facing on their daily rounds of news gathering and reporting. Shafiqul Islam, the Bagmara correspondent in Rajshahi and general secretary of the local press club, fell victim on Tuesday evening to the venomous wrath of one Moshir Rahman Peter. The latter, allegedly a drug dealer and close associate of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), unleashed a group of five, armed with scythe and bamboo sticks, to pounce on Shafiqul, the journalist. Thank his stars, the correspondent screaming in pain from critical injuries was able to draw the attention of the local people who saved him.

What was his fault? Actually, he was helping three Jugantor reporters to meet with some JMJB leaders and local people in their quest for more information about the clandestine activities of the extremist group. That obviously earned the journalist the ire of Peter and his group, who like the proverbial wolf had quarrelled with the bike-riding team of reporters over 'honking' on their way out. Claiming a deputy minister as his relative, Peter threatened Shafiqul with dire consequences spitefully bragging, "What will happen if we kill a journalist like you?"

We are quoting from our report at some length only to carry the point with the government that the matter calls for a thorough investigation leading up to arraignment and punishment of the culprits.

Journalists have become an endangered species. This is for all to see, and which is earning a rap on the knuckle, even overseas. This should be easily avoided. For, free press in Bangladesh is one of our best faces forward; let's not overlook that fact. It is also immensely helping the government with a reliable source of objective information to tap for the purpose of good governance.

The more the journalists are trying to exercise their right to reporting by way of servicing the people's right to know, the more vulnerable they are becoming to the machinations of vested quarters and fanatical outlaws.

In a democracy, it's the government's natural responsibility to see that journalists are protected and helped in the discharge of their legitimate professional duties.

VISION FOR DYNAMISM

Beyond the National Budget 2005-06

RUSHIDAN ISLAM RAHMAN

PUBLIC expenditure policies and resource mobilisation strategies adopted through annual budget are expected to reflect Bangladesh's overall development goals. Economic and social development goals of the nation were, until recently, formulated within the framework of Five Year Plans. These plans provided details of the overall GDP growth targets, other development goals as well as the sectoral growth targets and resource requirements. With the advancement of private sector led growth, the details of sectoral investment, cannot be accurately planned. While this practical problem is accepted, it cannot be denied that there is a need for indicative planning for longer term goals of economic development.

At present the guiding document is the national PRSP which contains a Medium Term Macroeconomic Framework (MTMF). This lays out the targets and projections of macroeconomic indicators and spells out policy thrusts in fiscal and monetary areas. But this encompasses another three years (or effectively 2½ years) only.

A closer scrutiny shows that the allocations and policies in the budget 2005-06 has attempted to translate the strategies of PRSP into concrete actions; for example, agricultural growth and employment generation received due attention and safety nets have been expanded.

Although these are the commendable features of this year's budget proposal, one must go beyond the arithmetic of mere correspondence between PRSP strategies and budgetary allocations. One must ask: what type of vision of economic growth and structural change of the economy is incorporated into the allocations and/or sectoral priorities?

When we look at the budget from this angle, we find that its emphasis is more on short term response to

previous one or two years' growth performance of the economy rather than on a longer term vision of poverty reduction through pro-poor growth and structural change of the economy. Many people have termed this focus on short term priorities as 'election year budget'. But the preoccupation with the short term programmes is also due to the absence of any longer term policy document on the goals of economic and social change, say for the next five to ten years. PRSP provides a reasonable set of guidelines for focus on poverty reduction in the

next fiscal year has been set as 'Given favourable external and domestic environment, ... economic growth may exceed 6 per cent in the next fiscal year' (quoted from budget speech). It is good to be cautious and to keep in mind resource and other constraints faced by the country. But one must be able to distinguish between unforeseen events and the normal risk parameters. MFA withdrawal has not been an unforeseen event. Bangladesh must prepare for the associated changes. Natural disaster of a usual scale is also something that we

cannot escape the sacrifices when the nation has already committed itself to specific poverty reduction goals. If the targeted (and

period. Moreover, a firm determination with concrete targets is lacking. 'Given the projects under consideration are implemented, it would be possible to generate additional 2910 MW electricity in the next 3-5 years' (quoted from budget speech). 3000 MW of power generation in 3 or in 5 years gives widely different growth rates and related implications about meeting the growing demand.

The last question relates to employment generation. This has implications for GDP growth as well as for structural change of the economy.

It should be emphasised that a single year's budget cannot provide a long term vision of the economy and society. Lack of long term vision in the proposed budget of 2005-06 is a reflection of lack of a national consensus on such a vision about the economy. Bangladesh must set the goals of socio-economic changes for the next 5 to 10 years and formulate the strategies for reaching those goals.

short run. But its strategies do not look beyond three years and therefore this cannot be the sole guiding document for economic policies of a country.

A few key priorities and provisions of budget 2005-06 may be examined to highlight the lack of long term vision in the budget. During the last few weeks numerous analyses of budget and its specific provisions have been made. These analyses are of two major types: (a) reactions against specific measure of tax proposal and (b) detailed analysis of various aspects of the budget. Both approaches can be useful but these approaches look at the trees while the forest may be lost sight of. Therefore this writeup focuses on a few general points. Four questions will be addressed here: i) whether the target of GDP growth reflects the aspirations of the nation, ii) whether there is a vision of long term structural change of the economy, iii) whether the employment generation policies can help in GDP growth and poverty reduction targets and iv) how 'caring' are the proposed 'safety net' provisions.

Target of GDP growth during the

must live with and adequate preparedness to face it may reduce the impact on GDP growth. With adequate attention to the risks, GDP growth target must strike a balance between caution and optimism.

The target of 6 per cent GDP growth rate is commensurate with the PRSP's MTMF. It has been recognised by PRSP that this target is conservative and an alternative growth scenario has been presented in the document, which gives GDP growth target of 6.2 per cent for the next fiscal year. Moreover, the GDP growth rate of 2003-04 now stands at higher than 6 per cent. Current year's GDP growth has been lower and with a lower base a much higher GDP growth would be easier to achieve next year. Is it a greater success if a higher growth target is set and the achievement is slightly short of that or if one is cautious and sets an unambitious GDP growth target at the level already achieved and exceeds that target? This question cannot be answered by only economists or by a single ministry in charge of budget preparation. Achievement of a higher GDP growth target requires higher invest-

realised) GDP growth rate is low, achievement of the poverty reduction goals will require more effort on the front of asset and income redistribution, which can be even more difficult to achieve than reaching a higher rate of GDP growth. The choice is a difficult one, but this is the right time to make the choice if one is serious about the PRSP process and attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The next question is about a structural change of the economy. To enter a path of sustained GDP growth and to achieve the poverty reduction targets, higher growth rates of the industrial sectors and the technology based service sectors are required. Power sector and other infrastructure must be developed to support industrial growth. How serious are the budgetary targets in these areas? There are isolated programmes, but all these together do not give an integrated effort towards desired structural changes. To give an example, for a serious matter like adequate power generation, a target has been mentioned in the budget, which will be achieved in next 3 to 5 year

A mention of few particular points on employment generation strategy and related allocations in budget 2005-06 may be pertinent. Strategies of PRSP begin with employment generation and pro-poor growth. So does the budget speech. The specific provisions for employment in the budget focuses on i) safety net type employment in specific regions, and to deal with seasonal underemployment and ii) credit or in particular microcredit for self-employment. Such self-employment and seasonal employment are smart routes to safety net provision in a resource poor country like Bangladesh where people are eager to work for small returns. Some of the sectoral investment programmes, especially in agriculture will also result in employment growth: However, in the budget one cannot find appropriate policies or programmes which can result in better quality jobs. But employment creation as a strategy for pro-poor growth and for sustained and sufficient pace of economic growth requires a dynamic view about employment in addition to what

have been proposed. The practical aspects of such dynamic view consist of (a) regular jobs, (b) improved terms of employment and rising real wage and (c) better quality of labour force.

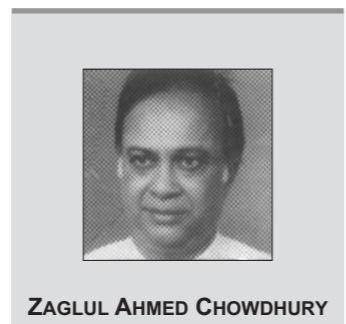
The current year's budget is expected to provide 'care' implying that it has extended the safety net provisions. New programmes have been introduced, per person grant in the older programmes have been raised. The recipients (as well as their observers) view this as a dole given by the government. It is not viewed as money from other tax payers or money which has other uses (some of which may be more pro-poor). There have also been proposals from others to raise the amount further.

Such programme should not be introduced in an ad-hoc manner. An integrated framework for safety net should be planned and except for very old or completely disabled, payment should be linked to productive work. Choice of programmes should be based on an evaluation of all available forms of safety net provision (including health service, free medicine etc.).

It should be emphasised that a single year's budget cannot provide a long term vision of the economy and society. Lack of long term vision in the proposed budget of 2005-06 is a reflection of lack of a national consensus on such a vision about the economy. Bangladesh must set the goals of socio-economic changes for the next 5 to 10 years and formulate the strategies for reaching those goals. The next ten-year period is critical for the path of Bangladesh's development and her position in comparison with the neighbouring countries. At this moment the nation cannot afford a lack of commitment to adopt a long-term vision of development for accelerated economic growth and a dynamic all-round development.

Dr. Rushidan Islam Rahman, an economist, is Research Director, BIDS.

Good governance can make SAARC collectively stronger



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

GOVERNANCE is an issue that may not be directly linked with the SAARC as such, but it is obvious that much of the progress and development of a nation is contingent upon the internal conditions of the country. It is in the light of the domestic development a country makes that also impacts on and contributes to the collective progress of a region. In South Asia, national situation and progress are important for the all round development of the SAARC region and hence good governance is a matter that is attracting greater attention of different quarters. Whenever discussions and debates take place in the regional context as regards socio-economic problems and development of South Asia, some issues invariably come to the fore and good governance definitely gets priority among them. It is only logical to assume that the conduct and management of the affairs of a country have tremendous bearing on its progress, particularly the socio-economic progress of its people.

So good governance that brings welfare to the people is now a much-talked about issue and this is

especially relevant in South Asia where most people are mired in poverty and are struggling to improve their miserable condition of life. For the SAARC, this is a matter that warrants considerable attention both nationally and in the context of regional approach so that collective efforts for progress of the region is made possible. Every sovereign nation has the right to govern its own affairs without outside interference, and as such the issue of good governance when talked about in no way means meddling in the affairs of

is acquiring larger usage and significance in recent times, but it is, by no means, a new phenomenon. A good rule that essentially signifies the welfare and betterment of a state and its populace, is broadly characterised as good governance. It is no surprise that the expression is generally associated with democracies, whatever be its form presidential or Westminster.

When, the last century, in democracy flourished, governance and accountability emerged as an unavoidable and indispensable

ered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people or institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest", according to "Our global neighbourhood" a report on global governance.

The subject "good governance and accountability" is a much talked about issue in the developing countries, particularly where the democratic system of rule is practiced. It is because the expectations from a representative authority is much higher than any other from of

Nevertheless, they agree that so far no other system has evolved which is better than the democratic one and as such a government chosen by the people by exercising their right of free will and precious choice unquestionably remains the best available pattern of governance till today. When such an authority takes over, all its activities as regards performance, mainly how the country is governed, come under strict observation and scrutiny of the people as a logical corollary of the character of

some negative impression about the system itself in some countries. But what is admirable is that this situation notwithstanding, these democracies, in most cases, are sparing no efforts to strengthen and consolidate pattern of people's authority. Good governance remains a critically important issue for a nation on one hand and collectively on a regional scale on the other. And this applies to South Asia.

It is important to note that South Asia is on the verge of remarkable economic take off and this is now widely assumed that this region along with China will play the dominant role in the global economic field in the next one or two decades. South Asian nations, India and also to an extent Pakistan, are making significant progress towards this end. Bangladesh and other smaller countries are also showing prospects and these are encouraging signs as their rate is largely commendable. Internal strike is affecting Sri Lanka and Nepal. Sound policies and good governance can help transition to effective progress and development. There is no room for slacking and all efforts must be made towards economic progress which will hopefully result in the better socio-economic conditions for the South Asian people as a whole. The SAARC in different events like the summits is putting special emphasis on progress both at national and regional level for the simple reason that this will meaningfully help collective welfare. This is of paramount importance for regional progress.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

Sound policies and good governance can help transition to effective progress and development. There is no room for slacking and all efforts must be made towards economic progress which will hopefully result in the better socio-economic conditions for the South Asian people as a whole. The SAARC in different events like the summits is putting special emphasis on progress both at national and regional level for the simple reason that this will meaningfully help collective welfare.

a country unless there is reason to feel it interference in internal affairs. It is a matter of common knowledge that any country can come for discussion in both positive and negative manner in relation to its internal affairs. And in this broad parameter, such discussions in a constructive spirit leave good impact for a country. For the South Asian region, good management of the affairs of a member nation is receiving wider attention and it is imperative that good governance characterise the region for the sake of the all round development of individual countries and in turn of the SAARC as a whole.

Governance is a terminology that

ingredient of a state run by a representative authority. Different personalities-cum-politicians as John Locke, Edmund Burke, John Stuart Mill and Michael Foot have touched the matter in many ways. There can be varying interpretations about governance, but there is hardly any doubt that its positive aspects have encouraged the kind of rule which is desirable. "Governance is the sum of many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting and diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative actions taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empow-

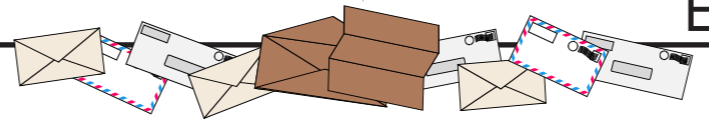
authority for the simple reason that people pin great hopes on the government which they choose themselves to govern them. In other forms of government like autocracy, monarchy, military dictatorship, one-party system scant opportunities exist for reflection of people's will in running a nation. By stark contrast, democracy pledges a "government by the people, of the people and for the people" and the enormity of expectations of the electorate from such a government is well understood.

True, democratic governments too have many pitfalls and many political scientists opine that these are not also fully ideal form of rule.

a people's government. Consequently, a government in a democratic environment come under immense obligation in meeting the hopes and aspirations of the voters and cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this aspect.

Democracy is practiced in developed, developing and least developed countries (LDC's). The effective functioning of a representative government is inseparably linked with strong foundation of democratic institutions which have found firm roots in the developed world. Many developing and LDC nations are struggling to provide a sound shape to the system but at times failures unfortunately create

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



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.

(Un) smart security of the PM

The lady was screaming at the peak of her voice. She was also trying to negotiate the man-high concrete road divider on the airport road near Nikunjo. Hundreds of vehicles were rushing by, just a couple of inches from her. Hundreds of people were standing by helplessly, hear her screaming. It was simply crazy and suicidal for her to attempt to cross the double-lane highway that is divided by high concrete dividers. And normally she would not be able to cross it. Just few meters from her were a pedestrian over-bridges.

Why then did she take such a fool-hardy action that brought her only a few seconds from death? She was forced to undertake the extremely hazardous procedure of crossing the road that way instead of using the over-bridge, by those employed to oversee the PM's security. Although she bore an ID card of a leading national English daily, the security force didn't care. She was

forced to place herself in the death trap because the PM was to come by alongside the footpath. It was an excellent idea that she would distribute Khichuri (or Biriani) among the poor and the poor would pray to Allah for the peace of the soul of our late president Ziaur Rahman. But was it really impossible for the PM's security to keep her the over-bridge, which is the only way within miles to move between Nikunjo and Khilkhet, for the pedestrians? Why the PM's security is not smart enough to make a comprehensive security plan?

Zakir Shahin
Khilkhet, Namapara, Dhaka

Mobile service

The quality of service that is being provided by a leading mobile company is as dreadful as it can get. I have been facing problems for the last few days after the evenings. First I thought that my mobile set was faulty but after getting the same complaint from two of my family members I understood it was the

company that was at fault. With the mobile telecom industry expanding day by day there is no room for such poor service. The CDMA Company is launching many new offers to increase its market but its major responsibility should be to fix the common ever-present problems. I hope we will see better service from the Company soon.

Iftazar Sayeed
On e-mail

Biased recruitment at DU

A report in The Daily Star about DU recruitment has drawn my attention. The recent hide and seek and the unwarranted delay in the selection process of DU has proved that most things are politically oriented. Being a student of this highest seat of learning it becomes difficult for me to understand when totally unqualified students are securing first position topping the good students. It is not happening in one but in most of the

departments. What I have seen is that one of my friends who secured excellent CGPA in BBA was not able to answer a single question in the class even for a single day. How has he obtained such good result?

No VC is fair as they get the appointment through their political affiliation rather than their quality. If the most qualified persons in research and administration are appointed to positions of responsibility, then we will get the benefits. Today, DU has become a den of corruption, nasty politics, hub of many nefarious activities. We all should voice our demand to the DU to come out of the impasse as our brothers, sons, and daughters or near and dear ones are studying and will continue to do so in this institution. My request to the concerned authority is that please don't vitiate the environment of the university again and again through political recruitment.

Bazlur Rahman
Dhaka University
Ahmadiyya bombing

People of all the communities have been living peacefully in Brahmanbaria since the British days. Why are the Ahmadiyyas being targeted now? Who are these so-called 'zealots' who commit crimes in the name of Islam? Anyway, if the Ahmadiyyas want to call themselves Muslims then who are we to question that? The concerned authorities must address this issue before it gets out of hand.

Rahat Nilofar
On e-mail

What are you eating?

Recently I've read in the newspaper that most of the restaurants and fast-food shops in our country serve sub standard food. Most of the shop owners have a deal with the wholesalers of Karwan Bazaar that they would supply the restaurants dead chickens. The fast foods and birianis are prepared with these. It is also shocking to know that cakes, breads, ice creams that we eat for breakfast or as snacks, are made in such a way that one would really feel

disgusted if one saw the preparation process. It is really a bad news for us!

Once I thought at least the well-known fast food shops produced and delivered decent (?) food to us! I suppose no one can be trusted anymore!

Cantara Wali Ruhu
Dhaka University

Reduce the mobile call rate

I am sure that those who are contemplating taking a cell phone are now regretting that they had not done so sooner. Price of SIM has gone up and the main sufferers are the common people. Mr. Saifur Rahman thinks that by doing this, it will help reduce the mobile call rate. But I think that it will not be so effective unless the government forces the mobile company to reduce the call rate. The four mobile companies have a monopoly business in our country and the victims are the common people as the call rate is

higher than in any other country of the world. The mobile companies must reduce the call rate.

Syed Ashek Ahmed
On e-mail

Response to Tania Hossain Firoz's letter- 'Is this fair?'

This is in response to Tania Hossain Firoz's letter published in the Daily Star dated 26th of June 2005. Labaid Cardiac Hospital fully appreciates her concern about the status of women in our society and expresses its full solidarity with her viewpoint that women of our country have been very successful not only in the field of medicine but in all spheres of our national life. Our Prime Minister is a woman. The Leader of the Opposition is also a woman. None of these two ranks has feminine gender. Similarly there is no feminine gender for doctors

and engineers. The word 'Chelera' used in the advertisement is more symbolic than literal. It was never intended to mean only the men folk of the country nor was it used to propagate or promote any discriminatory concept of slighting the women community of the country. This terminology, it may not be out of place to mention, has been in use in our spoken vocabulary for ages and the advertisement only picked up the commonly used phrase "Sonar Chelera" to mean both men and women. It is worthwhile to mention here that Labaid Cardiac Hospital is an equal opportunity provider and is staffed with competent and successful female employees and doctors. Nevertheless, we thank and appreciate Ms. Tania Hossain Firoz for raising the point.

Brig Gen (Dr.) Manzoor A. Mollah (Retd)
Advisor, Admin
Labaid Cardiac Hospital, Dhaka