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Soaring prices of essentials

The talk of the day is the rising prices of essentials. Wherever one goes, whatever subject one talks about one hears the topic invariably almost everywhere, especially in tea stalls. You open a newspaper and you will find this as news, letters to the editors, articles highlighting plight of the middle class and lower middle class people and so on. The leading economists have varied and often diverse

opinions regarding the causes of the price hike. As a lay man, I think the price of a particular thing depends on (a) Production costs, (b) Carrying/Transportation costs and (c) Free marketing (syndication free). For agro-based items, production costs depend on a. Seeds b. Fertilisers. c. Irrigation and d. Pesticide (not encouraged). Easy and cheap availability of

these items will definitely reduce the costs of production, as costs of labour are too low. The government's input here is to ensure supply of good quality seeds, making available the required quantity of fertilisers and water for irrigation where/when required. Barendra project of North Bengal is a shining example. For long term benefits, research should be a continuous process.

Next is transportation. With the rise of fuel price the costs of transportation have also gone up. The costs of transportation by road from remote areas, say Dinajpur on the north to Dhaka city, will be very high. Compared to road, transport by rail and river is cheaper. So, if railway is provided with refrigerated containers it can bring fresh/perishable items to Dhaka at a very cheap rate. There is another price tag in overall transportation costs i.e. carrying goods in push-carts from the wholesale market to retail market. This keeps on varying with different factors which include fixed costs plus hartal costs plus extortion and systems loss on the way. To reduce all these transportation costs, Tongi Railway Junction should be the major wholesale market for goods carried by railway. Transportation by truck from places of shorter distances like Mymensingh, Comilla should continue. Goods carried on rooftop of the bus may be allowed, provided that is not unsafe. Full advantage of the local trains running between

Dhaka-Mymensingh, Dhaka-Comilla should be taken for carrying fresh vegetables from these areas. The next factor that I think influences the market is ease of marketing/selling. Unauthorised toll collection must be checked. Today Dhaka city has a population of over ten million, so, there should be minimum ten wholesale markets spread evenly all over Dhaka, depending on density of population. This will also bring the wholesale markets near to the retail shops, thus reducing extra costs of carrying by vans and push-carts. Dhaka is surrounded by a green belt. Small farmers should be able to sell their produce directly to the consumers. If these steps are taken it is hoped that the situation will ease to a great extent. Finally, we are to remember that we have little control over the import-dependent items, except that we may consume less of it. Commodore AMA Alam (Retd.) BN New DOHS, Dhaka



AUGUST 21

The month of August has been the cruelest one as we witnessed the most horrific incident of the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib on the 15th of August, 1975. There was yet another such ugly incident on August 21 three years back at a public meeting of then opposition party Awami League. The attempt to kill opposition leader Sheikh Hasina somehow didn't work; but many died on the spot; and many more were crippled/splintered. Unfortunately, the then government failed to do justice to these ghastly events --- they couldn't catch the criminals. On the contrary, the immediate past BNP led coalition government, that is alleged to be waging all this terrorist activities that include the rise of

the JMB and some other militant outfits, made some flimsy attempts to do justice, after being severely accused by the same forces here and abroad. There had been the visits of Interpol and the FBI personnel to investigate the matter, but they left without doing anything. Things remained obscure to the nation. "Justice" remained outside the corridors numbed and maimed. Terrorists remained active and safe lurking to strike at an opportune moment. With the present CTG in place to salvage the sinking nation, things have, however, taken a good turn --- corrupt politicians have been taken into custody and are being tried --- the nation is slowly but very steadily coming back on track. Now that the saviour is

there, and that they are making efforts to bring the murderers of the Father of the Nation to justice, we, the common people, strongly urge the government to bring before justice those responsible for the August 21 carnage. If, however, this act is not delivered the terrorism that has already made a heavy and frightening appearance in the independent Bangladesh will never be curbed --- it will only extend its ugly hands to undermine the spirit of our glorious liberation war and push us behind into the woods. It's however a sad truth that the masterminds behind all these incidents are yet to be arrested. Rafiqul Islam Rime Agrabad, Chittagong



Influence of history

Why should we study history and what is its practical application? Once I was really confused about these questions. Reading Md. Anwarul Kabir's article on the phenomena of history distortion after the brutal killing of Bangabandhu, I have now fully realised that the history has tremendous impact on the formation of mass psychology. Mr. Kabir has rightly analysed that the distorted history, as fabricated by the 'victors of 1975', enabled the collaborators of 1971 to erase the spirit of our liberation war from the mindset of the new generation. If we could be aware of the true history embedded with the spirit of liberation war, then the nation could move forward. This, in turn, could have transformed Bangladesh into a 'Sonar Bangla' as dreamt by our valiant freedom fighters. Unfortunately, we have become the victims of the distorted history. To escape from this, we must take some corrective measures.

The educationists, especially the historians, must come forward to initiate appropriate steps in writing the true history of the country, so that the new generation can lead the country with the spirit of the liberation war. Saima Akhter Department of English University of Dhaka

Coal exploration

Having made a blunder of Great Wall proportions with Phulbaria coal mining; opening salvos have been launched by interested ROK parties (Aug.22 report) for more misadventures. May be the South Koreans believe that once hooked; we will be addicted to more mining scams! Despite lack of background, expertise or know how of mining issues, the ROK business entity knows the type and style of doing real big business in Bangladesh. They know how to win friends and influence the authorities in Bangladesh! No wonder they prefer to come to Bangladesh, the land of 'milk and honey'. Both in Bangladesh and ROK proper and effective administrative tie up is what counts in big business; which gives them the confidence about it. For the ROK party; style of big business follows a similar pattern, both in Bangladesh and ROK; so no harm in trying! After all "birds of same feather flock together!". They must have done their homework and possibly are aware of the "modus operandi" of business even in a non political environment in Bangladesh! We can only wait and watch; how this new drama unfolds; this is possibly the first act of the drama! Drama watcher Dhaka

Moral crime and punishment

Moral crime goes unpunished. There is no legal framework to proceed against an offender of moral crime in Bangladesh. There is no real culture either to admit moral responsibility and offer any self-punishment. The prime minister of Bangladesh has no responsibility if his or her government is

said to be involved in generally perceived moral crime. The example is, the prime minister is not responsible for any corruption in the government unless he or she is directly charged with criminal acts including corruption. The most powerful Anti-Corruption Commission is not even able to proceed against any perceived moral corruption. This is what I see happening in Bangladesh. I find a very strong and neutral role of the civil society to give a clear definition of the moral crime and suggest an appropriate legal framework to proceed against moral crime. There is very little evidence to believe that the culture of self punishment would emerge in Bangladesh in the foreseeable future. Just to mention that the moral crime is more harmful for the nation than the financial crimes.

Another important aspect currently getting mixed opinion is "Democracy". I think, like the majority in Bangladesh, that democracy is democracy, there is no scope of any value judgment on it or make it a value added home product, because the people are the best judge and not the academicians or the politicians. The people of Bangladesh love and like democracy. Any thing short of it, will fail in due course. This is what our political history tells us. I can mention here that when women in some western democracy did not enjoy any voting rights, the poor, half-fed and illiterate women of Bangladesh enjoyed voting rights under the British Raj since 1935 under the self-government rule. I urge our academicians and experts: kindly respect the will of the people and do not try to define democracy going outside the popular perception of democracy in Bangladesh. Democracy is a faith and shall be nourished accordingly despite its ups and downs due to faulty practice. Kindly ensure that democracy is not punished for the fault of the users. Areader One-mail

Poor handling

The law enforcing agencies did not behave the way they should have. As a result, the DU campus became a battleground. The capital became a city of curfew like the five other divisional headquarters. Had the police on Monday acted in the right way, this situation would not have arisen. The government has failed in many sectors as well succeeded in a few. But the failure to manage a simple situation in Dhaka University is an indication of what may come up in the days ahead. A.A.M. Mostofa Saikh Chowdhury BBA programme, North South University

DU incident

It was shocking that some men in uniform assaulted a few DU students over an inconsequential matter. The students legitimately erupted into an outburst of protests and demonstrations against the assault. Students' persistent protests made the government accept their demands. Accordingly,

the army deployed on the DU campus has been pulled out and the CTG has said sorry for this unwarranted incident. In addition, a judicial probe committee has been formed to investigate the matter. In this situation, it is very reasonable to say that the students should return to their respective dorms (of course they were asked to vacate the same). It will be ill-advised to continue the agitation in the form of vandalising and damaging public as well as private property. After the actions taken by the CTG, no student should remain on the streets. AFM Mohiuddin Bangkok, Thailand

Malaysian way of justice

A disturbing video posted on Internet shows that a prison official in Malaysia lashing a Rohingya refugee on charge of possessing drug. However, while the drug charge against the victim is very flimsy, the brutal lashing has exposed the way prisoners are

treated in Malaysia's crammed detention centres. Most of these detention centres house the 'illegal immigrant workers'. It is reported that whipping the immigrant workers is ubiquitous in Malaysian detention camps and it has become a standard procedure of punishing those who work in Malaysia without legal documents. Many of the prisoners in those detention camps are citizens of Bangladesh, who were lured into Malaysia for jobs in the plantation and construction sectors. These gullible workers are duped by the unscrupulous manpower agents to come to Malaysia and then leave them with no documents, only to be at the mercy of vindictive Malaysian prison officials. But often, the news goes unreported as the detention camps are inaccessible to media and human rights organisations.

While most of the countries in the world have done away with this brutal act of lashing as a form of punishment, the Malaysian government continues with this and the prison officials claim: "This is a

Malaysian style of justice for staying in the country without permit". Areader, one-mail

Same old idea

Indian Deputy Commerce Minister was ringing the old bell, "Give us transit the problem of your balance of payment would be solved." This time he has added another point: port facility. We are fed up for the last few years listening to Indian advice and demand in regard to providing access to our products to the Indian market. The idea is "If you accept Tata, they will industrialise you and you can export to the north-eastern states of India and the balance of payment position will improve." Is it really possible?

We are poor, but we are progressing steadily. Our development will be much speedier than India's if our politics remains in good shape. Under WTO and Safta agreements, our products can easily enter the Indian market.

Please wait, and don't get entangled in dubious deals.

DU incident

When the caretaker government of Bangladesh is holding out hope for a better future, it is being held back by the student unrest. Out of a minor incident between some army personnel and some DU students, the whole student community got agitated and resorted to violence. This is tarnishing the image of our youth because both the parties primarily involved were made up of young people. While the aftermaths can be suspected as

sabotage by the vested quarters, the general public feel frustrated at the severe lack of sense of responsibility shown by both the army personnel involved and the reacting students.

We all hope that this situation will not continue and the students will restrain themselves. I as a member of the Bangladeshi youth (now expatriate), believe that we should use our energy to build our country. Parvez Monon Ashraf Dallas, Texas, USA

Caretaker administration

Bangladeshis in Lebanon, perhaps several thousands, are almost entirely in favour of the steps taken by the CA, the caretaker administration and the military to restore sanity in the country after years of unabated corruption, mainly at the leadership level. AR Shams-ud-Doha Tripoli, Lebanon

Tax amnesty

In a seminar held at the National Press Club on 19 August 2007, NBR Chairman Mr. Badiur Rahman told (as reported by Prothom Alo of 20.8.07) that our GDP-Tax ratio was lower than that of Nepal. This year it has been fixed at 10.8% while Nepal's is fixed at 14%. He maintained that if we could raise this ratio, then we could dismantle ERD, only IRD would suffice and we could dispense with foreign aid. He further said that no self-respecting person would like to work in the ERD swallowing the insult and harsh conditions of donors. Therefore, there is no substitute of taxation. "We have a tax evasion culture. And the NBR couldn't adequately discharge the responsibilities of motivating the taxpayer," he said. He also acknowledged that there were yet some complaints of harassment of taxpayers, while they should be respected. Good results cannot be achieved by harassment; it has to be achieved by showing respect and love for them, he stated. Commenting on tax reforms, he opined, "Collecting tax by coercive means isn't reform. Reform means devising a system whereby people would pay tax being self-motivated."

Dr. Kazi Kholiquzaman said, "Our people become happy if they have to pay no tax. This attitude has to be changed." Professor Abul Barakat revealed that there were Tk two lakh crore of undeclared money and if this amount could be made legal, Tk 60,000 crore of tax could be collected. This amount is more than the country's total

revenue income and is enough to dispense with foreign aid, he said.

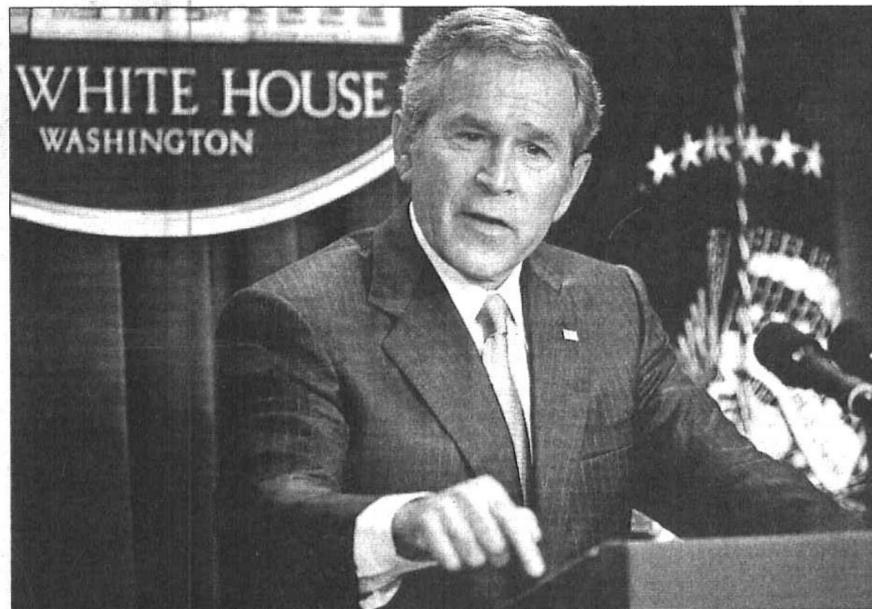
Previously, by saying that only death and income tax payment were inescapable, Adviser for Finance and Commerce Mirza Azizul Islam put so much emphasis on tax payment that no other Adviser/Minister ever did. Given this commitment and endeavour of the present government, revenue collection would definitely improve, but something unusual must be done to dramatically augment income tax payment by individuals who are mostly very modest earners, devoid of any capacity to save for rainy days. Had there been an adequate social security system in place and prudent govt. spending, people wouldn't have been so tax averse as we see today. It is not proper to say that our people enjoy tax evasion. All and sundry (including the poorest of the poor) regularly pay taxes in different shapes without any grudge. It is easy to pay. But income tax is neither easy to calculate, nor easy to defend.

Therefore, the oft-repeated harassment is a reality in Bangladesh.

The present drive is wrought with this evil. Hence the number of taxpayers is destined not to rise appreciably. Apart from traditional reasons, the present situation is also responsible for this. Presently, the legally earned income which wasn't declared is called black money and this may be made white within 30 September 2007 by declaring it and paying usual taxes plus 5% fine on it. But the calculation of the money remaining undeclared for years is neither easy nor, in most cases, encouraging to pay tax on it. The fast rising inflation (the maddening rise in cost of living) is a definite deterrent for modest income earners to pay even a few thousand taka of tax now. So it would be futile at the moment to ask for taxes on undeclared income of those who cannot make a decent living these days.

It would therefore be wise to bring all or as many eligible taxpayers as possible into the tax net by declaring tax amnesty for all who would submit tax returns by a given date, say 30 Sept. 2007. Only then the talk of Tk 60,000 crore of tax collection, harassment free tax payment environment, dispensing with foreign aid and the ERD, getting rid of the insulting conditions of donors, etc. would be meaningful. It is always better to avoid being penny wise, pound foolish. Awlad Hossain Dhaka

Bush at crossroads



Of course, the Bush administration that began a global terror war to track the so-called "terrorists" across the globe following Sept 11, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq, had not expected that their "democratic" drive would be fruitless and disastrous and that they would end up at the crossroads with their eyes looking pathetically at passers-by for help.

Armed with terrible strategies killing the innocent Muslims globally on the advice offered by his Neo-cons, President G.W. Bush has already not only burnt his both hands (not just the fingers), he has also been left almost

alone at the crossroads, looking around for customers not only for US weapon systems but also with fresh offers of nuclear deals if only the buyers could rescue him through some face-saving device, help his Republican Party regain its lost image and also win the upcoming presidential elections in 2008 as well.

His efforts to divert the world attention from the disasters and failures in Afghanistan and Iraq yielded no fruits. Now that he has got no extra hands to burn in Iran and elsewhere, the Iran venture seems to be put on hold. Bush seems to be very seriously

considering the options for survival and image building. The very thought of leaving White House in disgrace obviously makes him and his Neo-cons all the more depressed and confused. It seems, the only option before him now is to conduct joint military maneuvers in different regions and some how confuse the nations across the globe and try to alter the world mindset as far as possible. Will Bush succeed?

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal Freelancer, India