

ENIGMATTERS

A landmark change shall it be

Gender-sensitive budgeting

Gender concerns must be addressed at all levels

THE Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees women and men equal rights but this is yet to be reflected in the national budget. At a recent discussion on the upcoming budget and gender equality, experts agreed that in order to prepare a gender-sensitive budget, women's roles in macro economic activities and their contributions to, among others, the agricultural sector and household activities -- which often goes unaccounted for not only in our country but around the world -- must be recognised and measured.

While both women and men share the burden of poverty and underdevelopment, their experiences are different and these differences must be addressed when setting poverty reduction priorities and interventions. Sex disaggregated data is necessary, perhaps derived from the population census, to get a clearer picture of this. It is important to identify how government expenditures do or do not contribute to women's advancement.

For women's concerns to be adequately and effectively addressed, women themselves must be included in the mainstream decision making process. For years, women's rights activists have been demanding that a separate gender wing be established in every ministry and organisation to deal with the gender dimensions. This is yet to materialise, however.

In preparing a gender-responsive budget, it is important to have specific guidelines with gender and poverty formats as well as gender training of persons concerned. Consultations with women themselves, from the grassroots to rights activists are of the utmost importance in order to take into account actual experiences of women and to address their needs and concerns.

The government has a commitment to poverty reduction and development in general and advancement of women in particular. For these to be reality, however, they must be addressed in the national budget. We hope that the upcoming budget will reflect and address these gender concerns towards true betterment of the lives of women.

Providing education online

Let private sector complement official efforts

IN a world increasingly getting attuned to information technology, it certainly makes sense for Bangladesh to come level with other nations where easy, electronic means of a supply of information is concerned. The launch of the e-book by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday was, we believe, a good step forward in taking Bangladesh into modernity as it is meant to be. As we understand, the availability of 106 textbooks online is an encouraging beginning towards providing education to all in the country. The job now is for the authorities, especially in the education sector, to ensure that this online education, or e-book system, percolates down to our villages because that is where the future, academic as well as socio-economic, lies.

Let us not be lulled into the belief, though, that a mere introduction of the e-book in itself is a guarantee of a wider dissemination of education in the country. As a matter of fact, the hard part only now begins. That means that for online education or online textbooks to reach people in the rural regions, it is crucial that the technological infrastructure in the upazilas and districts be improved and upgraded. The tens of thousands of schools and colleges spread all across Bangladesh must first be equipped with computers (and, of course, an uninterrupted supply of power must be ensured) before the e-book can be made handy for the young. Which raises the all-important question of whether the government has the resources to equip all educational institutions with computers. Besides, there is a paramount need for trained computer personnel to educate the young on IT matters.

It is here that we agree with the prime minister on the need for the affluent to come forth in buttressing the government's efforts by contributing computers, laptops and other equipment so necessary in the promotion of online education. The past is often a tale of the great, selfless souls who contributed their resources toward promoting education not just in Bangladesh but in the entire subcontinent as well. It is a new generation of philanthropists we are in need of today in the necessary job of complementing government efforts. Let the private sector step forward and fulfill its social responsibilities. There can be no higher investment



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

PRINCE William and Kate Middleton are getting married at a time when the British government is planning to

modify rules of succession to the British throne. If the restructuring is carried out and approved by all the sixteen Commonwealth nations of which the British monarch is the head of state, would mean that the first born of the William and Kate couple could accede to the throne regardless of gender.

This is a fascinating development in British constitutional history. If carried out it would be a memorable transformation. It will be a significant departure from age old convention. The long chain of dynastic personalities that adorned the British throne shall now be joined by heirs who come first in the family, boy or girl. The present system allows only the first born son to be next in line to the throne, even if he had an older sister. This surely is being dispensed with.

Many will like to know, why has the present government taken up this adventure? Is it just to make history? Or there's something more to it? How far the Britons and the other Commonwealth citizens will grace the change?

British Prime Minister James Cameron and his deputy Nick Clegg are facing a tough job. They will have to embark on a hitherto untrammelled ground of monarchical landscape and work out an acceptable amendment formula regarding succession. "This is a complex and difficult matter that requires careful and thoughtful consideration," said a spokesman of Ten Downing Street. We don't know who proposed the change. However, this reform will be a landmark step, for sure.

Interestingly, the women's lib activist will take pride in that if the reform is effected it will allow the

elder lady in line to be the queen of England. Here, the women's right stands ensured! This reform will be a great leap forward in this traditional but democratic society.

The change appears to be minor. But the idea is likely to have a mixed reaction in Britain and along the shores of the Commonwealth nations as also in other modern king-



It will be interesting to see if there's other demands coming up, like slashing of royal expenditures and doing away with monarchy altogether in modern democracies.

doms of Europe.

Regarding succession rules there has been hush-hush in Windsor and Buckingham Palaces for some time now; there were gossip and whispers but it's been there in the air alright. Britons these days show less interest in the royal family. Especially the death of Princess Diana had seriously impacted on their psyche.

How far will the people of Britain accept the change? In fact, the rule is not to do away with the kingship; it is to change the rules of succession. This might not create any misgivings in people's mind. It won't spark an uprising against the constitutional move, one hopes. Whoever sits on the throne is the sovereign, be it a lady or a man. Things will not change for them. But there could be chain reaction around the royal families elsewhere.

The recent uprising in the Arab world against the long serving despots could be a case in point. The uprisings that started in Egypt

spread fast and inflicted others and now there's full fledged revolution for a change all over the Arab world.

People, in all ages, preferred change with the time. Long serving rulers or traditional systems become redundant at a certain point. There might now be a desire to see changes in monarchical rules or royal prerogatives in these countries. The wind of change is also likely to blow across the castles round the world. This might spur constitutional and political crises with undecided outcomes. Uneasy shall be the heads with crowns.

And then there's the Church of England. The state of relation between queen and the Church will also make an interesting picture. The state and religion issue has always been a stinging point in European history. The Church in England will have important points to make, if it cares to say any thing at all regarding the upcoming reform.

Tales of thrones and crowns

have never been soothing. From time immemorial there have been conspiracies, internecine struggles and secret murders for the throne and the empire. The priests, representing the church, always played an important part in shaping of events, most of the time as rivals of the royal members. History is replete with such unsavoury incidents.

That also makes history more affluent. For it is with the kingdoms and emperors that the attractive tales of wealth and treasures are attached. The beauty of the enchanting princess and the valour of the handsome prince make these periods of history the most magnificent. If there were conspiracies and fights to take control of the throne there were also instances of abdicating the alluring seat for the beloved.

In 1936, the Prince of Wales, Edward VIII, the first monarch to be a qualified pilot, chose to abdicate rather than give up Mrs. Simpson, an American socialite, who was seeking divorce from her second husband after divorcing her first. He was never crowned.

Reaction of the people, politicians and civil societies in the sixteen Commonwealth countries is expected to make things interesting, if not complex. There ought to be difference of opinion in all tiers of the socio-political circuit with likely high-voltage debates and impatient utterings.

There were voices of dissent in Australia and New Zealand last year against the authority of the queen. They questioned the necessity of having the British monarch as the head of their state. Why should an individual be the head of state of sixteen countries?

It will be interesting to see if there's other demands coming up, like slashing of royal expenditures and doing away with monarchy altogether in modern democracies.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star. Email: md.sattar@thedailystar.net

Loan or re-placement of returnees?

M. MIZANUR RAHMAN

POLITICAL, economic and natural turmoil around the world has posed a great threat to Bangladesh. In this integrated world economy, a problem in one country instantly creates problems in another country. Our economy is highly dependent on remittance, which is the highest net foreign exchange earning sector in our country. According to the World Bank (WB), remittance inflow alone has helped Bangladesh reduce poverty by 6%. Bangladesh is the fifth highest remittance-earning country in the world, but now this sector is encountering a tremendous problem due to various reasons.

In 2009, it was predicted that the number of workers going abroad would be significantly lower with UAE, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Singapore already struggling with slow economic growth and declining demand for construction and other services (CPD and ILO, 2009). The prediction proved true, and has been intensified with the political chaos in the Middle East.

More than 71, 60,000 documented Bangladeshi migrant workers are now working outside the country, and this year there was a target to send 5, 77,000 to work abroad, according to the finance ministry. Though the labour market has shrunk in Malaysia, in the first eight months of this financial year, 80,924 workers migrated to different countries, which really instilled some hope.

Before the Middle East crisis began, the number of workers going abroad had decreased and Bangladesh experienced the effect of the global financial crisis. Statistics show that about 3.9 lakh Bangladeshis were on overseas jobs in 2010 compared with 4.75

lakh in 2009, while the number was 8.75 lakh in 2008 and 8.32 lakh in 2007.

It is now a big concern that Bangladesh's economic growth target of 6.7% in this fiscal year may be under threat as thousands of workers have come home with empty pockets from Libya and other countries hit by political upheaval. Migrants in rich countries are unwilling to return

It would help these returnees and also the country if the government could ensure all the necessary arrangements for re-sending them to some suitable countries and pay the expenses.

because they know that the situation at home is not good either and it will be difficult for them to survive. Many of them are under pressure for loan repayment, family expectation and societal desire. Only for these things, they tolerate lower wage, inhuman treatment, unhealthy work environment and so forth.

Our government has taken the issue into consideration and is thinking of offering soft loans to the returnees for their rehabilitation, which is really a good initiative. But I do not know to what extent it will be beneficial to them and what better support the government could offer.

These loans have two aims, one is helping the returnees start businesses and the other is helping them go abroad sometime later. Almost 24,000 people have returned, 6,000 are on the way back, and 50,000 may return if the problem continues. The government is going to launch the programme with Tk.100 crore, which

is too meagre to serve either of the two purposes. If we take only those 30,000 people, among whom 20,000 may get the loan, they will get Tk.50,000 each, but it costs almost Tk.2.5 lakh on average to go abroad. So, if they want to migrate again, this Tk.50,000 taka will be of little help.

Again, these days, this amount of money will not be enough for doing business. So, there is a great chance

The most important thing for the government is to find out new markets for our labour force. Doing a proper need assessment of the labour receiving countries and resettling the returnees in those countries should be the first priority now. For this reason, the government needs to go for more and more bi-lateral negotiations with those countries.

It would help these returnees and also to the country if the government could ensure all the necessary arrangements for resending these people to some suitable countries and pay the expenses under the condition that after a certain period the migrant workers will repay the money to the government.

A country's poverty reduction strategy can be sustainable if it is consistent with a well-articulated employment strategy that creates productive and decent employment opportunities so that workers of every level of skill, education, and training can get remunerative employment. And when it is not possible in the home country, migration to some suitable one should get priority.

Bangladesh, a country of high inflation, poor investment and growing concerns on a number of political and economic issues, is greatly dependent on remittances from its 7.2 million overseas workers. Moreover, 7.2 million workers means 7.2 million families, 7.2 million stories -- stories of anxiety, stories of separation for a long time, stories of sadness -- stories that should be heard. So, for the sake of the country and for these dejected people, searching for new markets is necessary and a demand of the situation.

The writer is a Development Researcher and an Assistant Director at D.Net. Email: mithunmds07@gmail.com

The writer is a Development Researcher and an Assistant Director at D.Net. Email: mithunmds07@gmail.com

The writer is a Development Researcher and an Assistant Director at D.Net. Email: mithunmds07@gmail.com

The writer is a Development Researcher and an Assistant Director at D.Net. Email: mithunmds07@gmail.com

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 26

1802 Napoleon Bonaparte signs a general amnesty to allow all but about one thousand of the most notorious émigrés of the French Revolution to return to France, as part of a reconciliatory gesture with the factions of the Ancien Regime and to eventually consolidate his own rule.

1933 The Gestapo, the official secret police force of Nazi Germany, is established.

1945 World War II: Battle of Bautzen last successful German tank-offensive of the war and last noteworthy victory of the Wehrmacht.

1964 Tanganyika and Zanzibar merge to form Tanzania.

1984 Reagan arrives in China. US President Ronald Reagan lands in China at the start of a six-day state visit, the first by an American president since 1972.

1986 A nuclear reactor accident occurs at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Soviet Union (now Ukraine), creating the world's worst nuclear disaster.

2005 Under international pressure, Syria withdraws the last of its 14,000 troop military garrison in Lebanon, ending its 29-year military domination of that country.