

## SSC results out in time Stress on quality rather than quantity

THE ministry of education must be complimented for publishing the results of the SSC examination in less than two months. We also congratulate the successful candidates and high achievers. Although nearly 87 percent pass percentage is not a bad performance at all, when compared to the previous two years, this year's SSC results are slightly poorer. And much of it could be attributed to the political situation prevailing during the exams, and rescheduling of the dates must have been upsetting for the candidates. We would hope that in future students would not be subjected to such trauma by any political party.

However, given that the pass number is still high we would like to emphasise more on the schools, the system of teaching and the system of exam to ensure quality rather than only quantity. Regrettably, that does not seem to be the case. And we cannot but take cognizance of the education minister's rather rueful comments that in future the ministry would be doing away with announcing the list of top schools and colleges. Instead of creating a healthy competition, this has led some of the schools to resort to unfair means just to feature in that list. We are shocked to see names of reputed institutions in the list of errant schools. We would hope that punitive actions would be taken against those schools that have resorted to malpractices.

While quality is one aspect that the education ministry should attend to immediately, it should also address the huge urban-rural gap in the quality of education which continues alarmingly.

## Minister's resounding 'no' to reception Sycophancy spurned, good example set

OUR auditory nerves are often rattled by reports of sycophantic preparations made to receive an official dignitary on a routine visit to a place under his or her jurisdiction. Arches would be built, a colourful stage set up, school students lined up in sweltering heat for hours to greet a certain minister or a state minister on tour. All of these would have been arranged by closing schools for the day, maybe with a rest day following, and collecting subscription arbitrarily from schools to bear the cost of the august visit.

This is a throw-back to the feudal or colonial practices we thought we had discarded a long time ago in free and independent Bangladesh. But we are sadly mistaken by the surge in flattering adulations of people in high places even as we pride ourselves on our democratic credentials.

But one minister Bir Bahadur Ushwe, MP, in charge of primary education, would not have anything to do with such shamefully favour-seeking reception to be accorded to him entirely at others' expense. He refused to attend the programme in Bandarban saying that he strongly disapproved of the way this was arranged by 'closing so many schools' in the area. Each school had to contribute TK 1,000 to the programme. The teachers were required to sign up to their presence on the programme.

We hope and believe that the minister's example will not be lost on other dignitaries and that it will be replicated by them when faced with similar flattering designs at cost to their dignity and credibility.

## COMMENTS

### "Oil price cut likely in next budget" (May 26, 2015)

S M Iftekhar Ahmed

Can we trust that he would do so? Finance Minister has been saying for years that as part of the government's vision of a "Digital Bangladesh," the VAT on internet will be withdrawn. That promise has been made many times and yet nothing has been done.

Saleheen Azim Finally

A significant amount of time has already passed since the reduction of fuel price in the global market.

Aakash Usha

This is good news. If it reduces food prices, transport costs and electricity prices, it would be great.

### "Home ministry draws up safety plan for family members of Bangabandhu" (May 26, 2015)

Faruk Hossein

Where is our security, treatment or housing?

Aakash Usha

What have you done regarding people's security?

Chayan Chowdury

They will get all the things and we won't get anything.

### "2 IS men held in Dhaka" (May 26, 2015)

Chandra Puri Bahar Khan

Every citizen of Bangladesh must be careful about all types of terrorist organisations like IS, Ansarullah Bangla Team, Al-Qaeda, etc.

# On the eve of the budget

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

crucial for us - the citizens of the country, since revenue mobilisation efforts and expenditures undertaken by the government have implications for each one of us.

Despite such critical roles, the excitement over budget has probably tapered a bit among a large section of people over the years. There was a time when the budget was awaited eagerly by many. The recent lack of interest is not only due to extensive media coverage on budget much before it is announced formally, but also because people nowadays know that a new budget mostly means higher cost of living for them. Similarly, the sentiment on the street over budget proposals is also nearly non-existent due to weak political opposition and its lack of interest in the subject. Regrettably, they are also inactive in making alternative suggestions during the pre-budget period, except through late night talk shows on private TV channels.

Like past years, the budget for FY2015-16 will not be any surprise as some key numbers and many proposals are already in the air. In a nutshell, with an outlay of Tk 300,000 crore, the Annual Development Programme of Tk 97,000 crore and the budget deficit below five percent, the government intends to reinvigorate growth, raise tax-GDP ratio, boost investment and create employment, among other goals.

Veering away from numbers, we may ponder awhile over a few aspects of the budget

formulation process that often attract less attention as we become engrossed mostly in figures and measures.

The MoF starts the process of budget preparation as early as December, if not before, to finalise it by June. While doing the tedious number crunching, they also try to hear the views of stakeholders - professionals, business community, non-government sector and experts through consultation meetings. Stakeholders, at these meetings, inundate the Finance Minister (FM) with suggestions and expectations. I have high regard for the hard-working officials in the MoF who diligently take notes during these meetings. I also have empathy for the honourable minister who listens to the long wish lists of various individuals for a few hours and meticulously responds to each one of them. For the last few years, I have had the opportunity to attend these consultation meetings and have therefore seen for myself the sincerity of the MoF to give a patient hearing to the comments and of the participants to express their ideas.

But we all know by now how much of those suggestions are reflected in the budget. Without being frustrated, the right spirit should be to look at these meetings strictly as platforms for exchanging ideas. If thought otherwise, then it shows that we probably haven't understood the mechanism of budget preparation in a political setting which is guided by the philosophy of the party in power. So be it. A democratically elected government gains the moral right to reflect its philosophy through economic policies. But how much awareness exists on budgetary issues among the political leaders themselves is a point to be raised in this connection. How many members of the parliament are willing to go through budget proposals and challenge the FM on allocations, expenditures, priorities and implementation? They are elected by voters of their respective constituencies on the basis of their commitments that they would flag peoples' concerns and bring money from

the government to solve their problems.

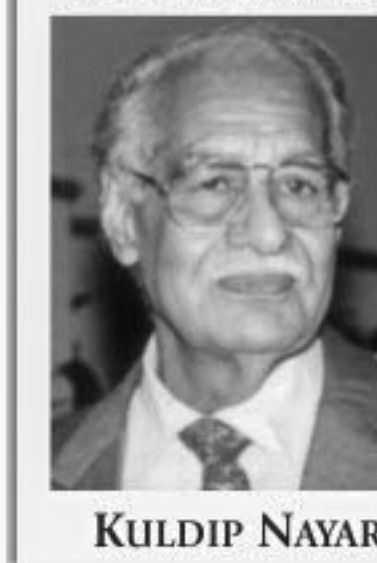
To their credit, many MPs do work toward fulfilling their commitments. After all, they have to ask for votes during elections and showcase their achievements. So they would submit their requirements to the MoF and try hard to get it disbursed. But budget has a greater role to play than merely building local roads, culverts, schools and hospitals. Besides, the national budget is also supposed to go beyond one year and should have a vision on how the economy should perform in the medium term. What strategies are needed for higher growth and more jobs, how inflation can be contained, what type of investment is needed, how resources would be mobilised, and many more such issues have to be addressed through budgetary measures. Unfortunately, it is not only the lack of interest, but also the capacity of political leaders to carry out constructive debates on these issues within and outside the parliament.

Coming back to the consultation process, despite good intentions of the MoF, these are utterly underrepresented. The voice of people at the grassroots level is totally absent in this exercise. Understandably, the MoF alone cannot organise that many consultations across the country. This is an area where lawmakers can come forward. The government has floated the idea of a district budget, without much success though. To make this initiative effective, suggestions have to come from the local level, not from the centre. The plan for revenue generation, expenditures and allocation has to be originated from those for whom the budget is prepared. Let the burden of expectations of people on the budget also befall on the shoulders of each and every public representative. Let the local leaders also be responsible for improving the accountability of budget implementation.

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## Modi's non-rule

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

relations exercise is nothing new because all his predecessors have done so.

India's icon, Jawaharlal Nehru, did not have to do so. Still, when India was licked at the hands of China in 1962, Nehru met editors to explain the debacle. Lal Bahadur Shastri had so much goodwill that he did not have to placate them in any way. However, after the 1965 war with Pakistan—both countries claimed victory—Shastri took editors into confidence before going to Tashkent. His humility stood him in good stead because before leaving he told them that his fate was in their hands and whatever they wrote would guide public opinion.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi was riding a high horse until the crops failed and had to import wheat from America, which gave it against rupee payment. She too informally talked to editors and gave an insight on India's deteriorating economic conditions.

Her son Rajiv Gandhi, who was hit hard because of the Bofors scandal, never threw his weight around. One, he was conscious that the dynastic ties had parachuted him from being a pilot to the *gaddi* of prime ministership and, two, he was aware of his limitations in the political field. He suffered from the complex that his brother, Sanjay Gandhi, was more suitable for the job - something that his mother had instilled in him. He too went out of the way to cultivate editors. His successors, lesser in stature, expanded the PMO to have information advisers.

Modi is his own PRO. He has not appointed anyone as information adviser. Maybe, he has felt the necessity and that explains Jaitley's invitation to editors to meet the prime minister. But will this exercise help? Modi may not be guilty of any misrule, yet his regime is that of non-rule. There is nothing spectacular that stands out in his first year's rule.

Take for instance, his visit to China. It was neither productive nor an unmitigated disaster. However, the fact that it was not successful is not the criterion to judge its merit. He undertook the trip and reportedly conveyed India's unhappiness over China's occupation of the

territory beyond my comprehension. On a lesser provocation, New Delhi cancelled its foreign secretary's meeting with his counterpart in Islamabad. The Pakistan High Commissioner in New Delhi had met the Hurriyat leaders before the foreign secretaries' meeting. There is apparently no such yardstick for relations with China. Instead, India is offering it access to the country's large market.

Granted India cannot take on China but this does not mean that New Delhi has to be overawed by Beijing. To give a befitting reply, New Delhi should have introduced the stapled visa system to the people visiting from Tibet.

demands reason, not rustic force.

Modi's worst performance is in the economic sector. Many were taken in by his promise of *achche din aagaye* (good days have come). The reality is entirely different. The common man has never suffered so much before as he suffers today.

Nevertheless, Modi's regime has been democratic of sorts. Knowing his credentials, I expected him to train his guns of parochialism from day one. But that he did not do so is a reprieve. Yet, there is no mistaking of his policies. He has left the dirty work of dividing the society on religious lines to his party's mavericks, the members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Modi and his home minister Rajnath Singh's public assurances that they want all communities, including the Muslims, to enjoy equal rights are positive. But they have hardly helped keep the atmosphere free from the pollution of parochialism. Yet, it looks odd that the exponents of Hindu rashtriya make provocative speeches that do not incite the people to indulge in communal riots. This is a big relief. It would, however, be better if they were not to pollute the atmosphere. Probably, they are conscious of the harm it would do to the society, which is 80 percent Hindu.

It seems that Modi has drawn a red line which the RSS and its ilk do not cross. This has helped create a healthy secular ambiance, however tenuous. One expects communal amity to prevail in the remaining four years of Modi's regime. Maybe, he and his party seem to have realised that communalism is neither conducive to peace nor to the democratic ethos we cherish. He and his party must ensure that mistrust between Hindus and Muslims does not appear in any shape.

There are complaints that Muslim youths are picked up and detained without trials. And it is harrowing to know that hundreds of them are languishing in jails for years without trial. That it happened even during the Congress regime does not make the crime less felonious.



PHOTO: AFP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Indian Territory is good enough. Authentic reports, now available, indicate that he even took up the matter of China's stapling of a visa on the passport if the person is from Arunachal Pradesh, which the Chinese claim is part of their territory.

I personally think that Modi should have cancelled the visit when one day before his arrival at Beijing, the ruling Communist Party paper ran a vituperative piece against India and carried a map without showing Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir as part of the country.

Why New Delhi was keen on the visit

We would be fooling ourselves if we believe that the border issue is spoiling our relations with China. Nehru put it correctly when he said that the clash was that of two giants preaching different ideologies. Only posterity will judge whether or not democracy wins the race against totalitarian communism.

As of now, totalitarianism has won. Most South Asian countries are under the influence of Beijing, although they follow their own way of governance. Nehru had expected that a democratic polity would have preference. But he had not reckoned with the might of communist ideology. Ballot box has a moral appeal which

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Child labour in DU cafeteria

The highest educational institution in Bangladesh, the Oxford of the East, Dhaka University stands upright for its academic excellence. It has greatly contributed to our educational field as well as our political, socio-economic and cultural sectors. Members of its faculty are considered to be some of the most meritorious, intellectual figures in the country. Having said that, almost in all cafeterias and shops in DU, children are found to be employed for labour.



Aren't authorities in the public university concerned about this issue, especially since they always talk about the dangers of child labour elsewhere in Bangladesh and other countries in the world?

M.Sbariful Islam  
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### Palestinians' bid to suspend Israel from FIFA

It would be the first time since apartheid South Africa that a country was asked to leave FIFA because of its practices. Israel is already relenting on what has been a blockade preventing players in Gaza from travelling freely to the West Bank. And that's what the Palestinian Football Association is charging Israel with. They're saying that Israel is choking their ability to develop football because of the impediments to the free movement of players and coaches.

The most damning accusation towards the Israeli Football Association is that they

have created and formed five or six (depending on reports) clubs in the Occupied Territories in the settlements of the West Bank. It's the Israeli Football Association using football as a way to take land that should rightfully be part of a possible Palestinian state. And they're saying that the Israeli Football Association should be removed from FIFA unless they agree to cease these practices.

In fact, the Israelis are repossessing parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip that they had pulled out of, occupying it again to "destroy terrorism." What they're actually doing is destroying everything the Palestinians have painstakingly built for the last ten years--their roads, water system, houses, schools, lands, refugee camps, police force, government and all its services.

The plan for revenue generation, expenditures and allocation has to be originated from those for whom the budget is prepared. Let the burden of expectations of people on the budget also befall on the shoulders of each and every public representative.