

An ambitious budget Implementation a challenge

THE finance minister has presented the 45th annual budget of Tk3.4 trillion that is 29 per cent bigger than the last fiscal. These are our preliminary reactions based on the minister's speech and deeper insight will follow. The budget is targeted at creating more jobs, woo investment and speed up implementation of mega projects. The upcoming budget is targeting a GDP growth rate of 7.2 per cent and keep budget deficit at 5 percent of GDP.

A primary thrust is to speed up implementation of mega projects that will generate jobs. Implementation remains a major headache for the government given the dismal performance of current projects that have not only been delayed in commissioning but also missed completion deadlines and witnessed major cost escalations. Though it is envisaged that the economy will grow at beyond 7 per cent, economists have expressed concern that without major policy reforms attaining such high growth may hit a snag.

Meeting salaries and benefits of government employees will be a big challenge given the revised pay-scale that will cost the exchequer in excess of Tk45,100 crore, i.e. 54 percent higher than last fiscal. The good news is that subsidies have fallen thanks to a fall in international oil prices. Although the finance minister presents an upbeat picture on investments, experts worry that unless cost of doing business reduce, the picture will not get very rosy in this area. On the positive side, income tax ceiling remains the same.

The major concern remains revenue generation and meeting expenditures. The proposed VAT law has been shelved and with a 30 percent rise in budget from previous fiscal without having attained greater implementation capacity and better quality of spending, there is worry that the mega projects on whom so much emphasis is being laid will hinder development.

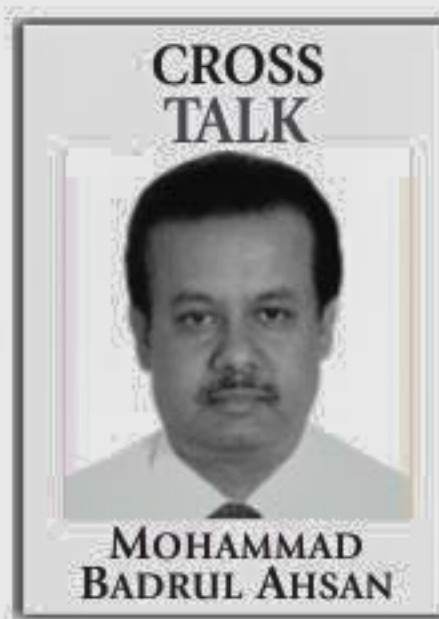
Protesting nurses under the cosh

Address their genuine grievances

WE are aghast by reports that at least 50 nurses were injured when the police charged batons and used water cannons on protestors who had attempted to lay siege on the health minister's residence in the capital. That the female protestors should be dispersed in such a violent manner, instead of having their grievances listened to, fills us with dismay, particularly as their demands could easily be addressed peacefully by the minister who had promised them a meeting with the PM, but has not been able to arrange that.

Worse still, following the altercation, cases were filed against 1400 unidentified nurses for "preventing the law enforcers to do their duties." Reportedly, the nurses threw brickbats at the police, which we deplore, when charged with water cannons, but why, we ask, was the situation allowed to reach such a state? Several hundred nurses have been demonstrating since early April following a Public Service Commission circular on March 28, regarding recruitment of nurses which stated that the applicants must be below 36 and have Bachelor of Science degree or diploma in nursing to be eligible for taking the recruitment test. The protestors are demanding that nurses should be recruited based on merit and seniority, and that the prerequisite for the exam discriminates against those who are older. We feel that with an acute shortage of well trained nurses in the country, the new criterion will make the situation worse.

The government should listen to the concerns of the protesting nurses, rather than attempt to silence them through violent means or intimidate them through filing of cases.



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

PERCY Bysshe Shelley wrote more than two hundred years ago that worse than a bloody hand is a hard heart, and the English poet had as if meant it to be an early indictment of

the Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh. The chief custodian of our electoral process has presided over the bloodiest elections in this country's history. More than a hundred people have died and many times more that number has been wounded in the Union Parishad elections. The keeper sat on his hands while the usurpers made a mockery of the most important pillar of democracy under his watch.

If he's still not convinced that he has failed to do his job, it's because you can't wake a person who is pretending to be asleep. If all those people have died in the villages of Bangladesh, then who has their blood in his hands? The driver is to blame if a bus runs over a pedestrian. The contractor is responsible if a worker dies during construction. The owner is responsible if a customer dies of food poisoning after eating in his restaurant.

How then can our CEC avoid responsibility for so many lives lost in the badly managed elections? He should have planned better, identified the risks, and arranged for adequate security to preempt

the eventualities. Last April, after a meeting with the top officials of security agencies, he said that the local government elections were always a "troublesome" matter. That's all the more reason why he should have taken more precautions since he already knew it was going to be tough.

But what precautions did he take other than putting together a self-fulfilling prophecy? There are many allegations

in elections has been concentrated in few hands while the voters didn't get a chance to bother much about who they should vote for.

I know money was always there, and it gradually moved from fewer hands to many. In the early days, candidates bought off village headmen and elders, who guaranteed voting blocs. Average voters in their decision to vote were swayed by these influential people, while

had gone up to Tk. 500 for one vote.

That mass marketing of cash-for-vote incentive still had its limits. The money had to be given secretly because it was still deemed immoral and illegal. The vigilante teams of every candidate gave chase to opponents offering money and, if caught, beat the daylight out of them or handed them over to police. That etiquette has long ceased to exist.

In the UP elections this year, money has once again returned to the local oligarchy. The ordinary voters helplessly watched the last vestige of their involvement in government rudely taken away from them. Those who managed to enter some of the polling centres often had their ballots stamped already and neatly folded by the agents of the dominant candidates. The voters were then asked to carry the readied ballots to the booths and drop them into ballot boxes as if that was enough to do for the rightful exercise of their voting privilege.

The CEC has tried to blame everything on the political culture prevailing in the country, which sounded funny. It has only convinced the rest of us that he was blaming the dance floor to hide that he didn't know how to dance. This man is guilty on two counts. One is his failure to prevent the death of so many people. The other is his refusal to accept responsibility for that failure.

Someday he is going to have a conscience to know how hard-heartedly he has been defending his tainted hands.

The writer is the Editor of weekly First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

The CEC has tried to blame everything on the political culture prevailing in the country, which sounded funny. It has only convinced the rest of us that he was blaming the dance floor to hide that he didn't know how to dance.

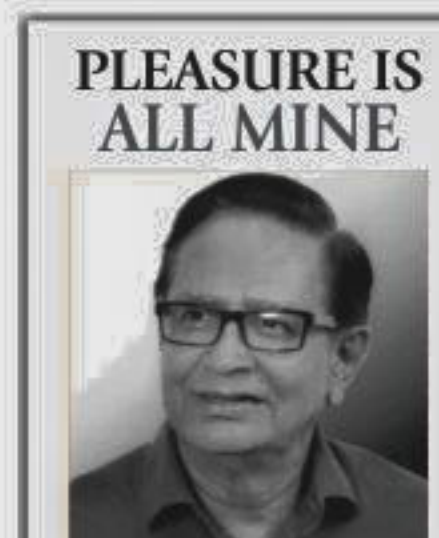
that the chairman-hopefuls took money from the member-hopefuls on the pledge of getting them elected. The chairman-hopefuls then allegedly ploughed back some of that money into bribing district and central leaders to buy the party nomination for themselves.

And here we're talking about big money that mostly lined the pockets of local party bosses. Interestingly, the voters have been deprived in more than one way. They have been deprived of their votes and many of them from selling those votes for money (not that I support it). You can say, this time flow of money

their share of fun lay in the prospects of having free treats to betel leaves, cigarettes, snacks, and tea on top of having cordial and close attention from the candidates.

Elections were the only time in this nation's life when the voters expected to get pampered by their politicians. The last time I had campaigned for a cousin of mine, the game had already changed. The voters were no longer shy and they stayed up at night waiting with betel leaf and tea for the candidates or their representatives to come and negotiate a price for their votes. I remember in my area, the bidding

Iron Lady in the neighbourhood!



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

BELYING speculation s at the anti Trinamool camp for a 'vote for change' like the West Bengalees accounted for in 2011, Mamata has swept to a second term with a

powerful mandate.

The news is a little old now but the inside stories are unfolding in captivating detail. The Left thought that the 'upright stance of the state police' was indicative of 'winds of change'. But they were unmindful of the 152 rural seats where Mamata government was riding on the beneficiaries of its welfare schemes - Kanyashree, Yuvashree, Sabuj Sathi (bicycle for students from poor families) and rice at Rs 2 a kilo for six crore people.

Going by a Times News Network item, within 48 hours before Mamata took oath, 'as many as 30 senior officers including 14 from the IAS and 16 from IPS, were moved out of their posts to make room for the trusted lot'.

A strong statement that: The bureaucracy no longer functioned under the Election Commission and that the new government was not obliged to carry out the poll panel's baggage.

Mamata also reinstated or gave new roles to ministers and party stalwarts who were defeated in the polls.

The democratic moral of the story is that while the Election Commission and the poll panel did their job in earnest; Mamata strengthened by the people's mandate promptly reasserted her position.

Next five years of Mamata would see priority on industrialisation, youth focus with job creation and land and land reform. Given the importance of land for industry, the CM has kept the portfolio in her own hands.

The ministerial council has 18 fresh faces, three women, seven belong to the Muslim community, while the Scheduled

Caste and tribe communities are also part of it.

It's worthwhile to note that having handled its "blue-collar" vote bank well enough, Trinamool now wants to focus on the "white-collar" sectors - higher education IT, industry and law. This in order to shore up its support base among the urban, educated upper and middle classes.

Bangladesh's expectation centres on Mamata's cooperation in resolving Teesta river water sharing issue and those of some common rivers. She knows all the ropes and we keep reposing trust in her as she had advised us to on a trip to Dhaka. Also, we flag the concern as a lower riparian state over the ongoing, off-going reportage on river linking projects in the upper reaches of India.

A changing dynamic in a couple of potential equations in relations between the centre and West Bengal, or for that matter, some other states could have a positive impact on some of our outstanding problems with India - courtesy of good humoured interstate relations.

"Mamata Banerjee" wrote Meghdeep Bhattacharyya from Kolkata on May 27, "kept the 'federal front' pot simmering today by drawing to her swearing-in heavy weight regional leaders but she did not take an overtly anti-BJP stand with the Lok Sabha polls still three years away." The title of the report Tea and sympathy, served with prudence, captured the mood aptly.

The Chief Minister needed the centre's support to run the government in Bengal. Arun Jaitley, the Union finance minister from BJP, scoffed earlier on at the hint of a front: 'It is a tried, tested and failed idea'. He, however, spoke of Modi's constructive federalism. Perhaps sounding somewhat utopian, he emphasised that whilst parties are opposed to each other, the governments needn't be.

The second tipping point lies in West Bengal having an issue of debt relief with



the centre, a legacy said to be of 34-year old Left rule. Jaitley granted that it would be a big challenge to revive the state's economy in that context and that 'the centre is ready to support, irrespective of the political character of the government.'

Then we may have to contend with BJP making debut in NE through Sonowal assuming charge in Assam. The new CM vows to rid the state of immigrants. Optimists tend to see it as a pre-election rhetoric which may outlive its original intensity after the polls. But the RSS

hasn't pulled its punches in reacting to the victory being a verdict against an appeasement policy.

In the end, it is of no less importance that we cite a little-churned statistic that will help us to a perspective. US \$446 crore remitted from expatriate Indians in Bangladesh as against US \$ 11 crore 40 lakh from India to Bangladesh (Source: Bilateral Remittance Data 2015, World Bank).

The writer is a contributor of The Daily Star. Email: shahhusainimam@gmail.com

COMMENTS

"SC upholds BGMEA building demolition order"

Shamsul Alam

It's a sad plight. But the final judgment of SC has to be upheld. BGMEA must not lose heart. I am sure you will be able to construct even a bigger and taller landmark building at the right place. Govt. should come forward awarding BGMEA with an appropriate land plot.

Mortuza Rento

It's great news for the environment friendly people that SC upholds the HC's verdict to demolish the BGMEA's building in Hatirjheel area of the capital city. BGMEA always talks about compliance of others but now it should demolish its building in compliance with the SC's rule without delay in a bid to fully implement of Hatirjheel's project. So long this was not possible due to this illegal building.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

T20 not the yardstick

During our time there was a saying in the game of cricket "andha kandha bhai, amar dosh nai", which means "I will hit blindly, do not blame me". Modern T20 is nothing but rugby cricket—just hit and run, does not matter how the ball is. Particularly in the death overs, when you have no alternative other than to hit and run. For the batsman, although he has the opportunity to play 20 overs, due to the need to accelerate the run rate or to chase the total, he becomes rash.

In T20, one can claim to be a very good bowler who at least has an average of 2 wickets per match. Quality bowlers can only be judged primarily through test matches and even one day internation-

als, where a bowler is allowed to bowl 10 overs. The same goes for the batsman.

Warner, due to his batting and fielding, and above all his unique leadership, made all the difference. Only Adam Jumpa has an average of 2 wickets per match with a T20 record of 6 for 11. Fizz has only one wicket on average with 17 wickets in 16 matches.

One may have a low run economy per over but with few wickets (like Babu Nadkarni during our school and college days)—he is not termed as an excellent bowler. On the other hand someone who has a good number of wickets with a reasonable runs per wicket is a good bowler. We need to look at every aspect to

determine who really is a quality bowler.

But both the print and electronic media are reporting Fizz's 3 for 16 runs in a match as the best over in the tournament, when there were 6 for 11, 4 for 7, 4 for 11 and more like this. I hope The Daily Star will publish my letter showing bowling figures of the top bowlers in IPL 2016. The news that was attached showing bowling figures of the top 5 bowlers only mentions in the descriptive text the names of B Kumar, Chahal and Watson, but has not mentioned the name of other bowlers in the list like Kulkarni, Fizz, Maccalaghan and Bravo. Luthfe Ali

We should not overreact

The news analysis "No fuss with FIZZ, please", written by Syed Ashfaqul Haque, published on The Daily Star on June 1, 2016 is true to the point. It is a well thought piece of writing. Yes, we are proud of Mustafizur Rahman—he performed brilliantly in the IPL. We bless him and wish that he will always be successful. But we should not go overboard and act like fools. At one place the writer wrote that, "The sports ministry must not go overboard. A reception or awarding of a flat to Mustafizur will only make the government a laughing stock internationally. And this unnecessary pampering may greatly hamper the youngster's progress to a greater level." We hope the government will heed this observation and act wisely so that so that no one will be able to look down on us. Nur Jahan, Chittagong