

## A big budget

Hoping for a better implementation record

THE 46th annual budget of Tk 4 trillion has been placed in the House by the finance minister and this is our preliminary reaction to it. This budget is the largest in history, which is 26 percent higher than the one in the preceding fiscal. It is also a budget with the biggest deficit. The total size of ADP has been set at Tk 1,64,085 crore and the revenue target has been set at Tk 2,87,991 crore leaving a deficit of Tk 1,12,275 crore.

We welcome the enhanced allocation in the major areas including education, the power sector and mega infrastructure projects. However, experiences shows that poor planning and lack of proper implementation have impeded the fulfilment of the projects. Allocation for education has gone up by 14 percent to Tk 45,163 crore with emphasis on heavy infrastructure investment with the aim to improve both capacity and quality. The emphasis on qualitative improvement in teaching methods is noticeable.

However, we have reservations on the new uniform VAT to be charged at 15 percent since that will adversely affect the consumers in general. The increase in excise duty on bank deposit holders who already pay advance income tax is another sticky issue.

Obviously, the budget has an eye on the elections of 2019. And hence, there may well be an emphasis on spending to complete projects ahead of it. Our question is whether the massive spending will result in qualitative spending that will benefit the electorate, or the spending is merely to elicit votes.

## Carnage in Kabul

Terrorism is escalating

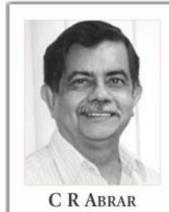
WE are sickened by yet another terrorist attack, this time in Kabul, with a bomb blast that ripped through the city's diplomatic quarter, killing at least 90 people – the death toll could go higher as more bodies are recovered – and wounding hundreds. Among the casualties, mostly Afghan civilians, were women and children. So far only the IS have claimed responsibility for the attack, with the Taliban denying it and Afghan intelligence agencies pointing fingers to other religious militant groups.

Whatever group is behind such horrible carnage the truth is that these attacks are cowardly and completely against Islam, the religion in the name of which it has been carried out. That the attacks should take place in the holy month of Ramadan, makes this abundantly clear. Already Kabul has faced a string of attacks in the first three months of this year, the Wednesday blast being one of the deadliest. The question is how will Afghanistan, already devastated by decades of conflict, fight the continuous and growing onslaught of terror from various quarters?

More than anything it shows how volatile and ungovernable the country has become and Nato-backed military is just not being able to gain any significant ground against terrorists.

While we vehemently condemn this despicable, cowardly, diabolical attack, the world must acknowledge that the fight against terror cannot be won through more arms, more violence and more interference by big powers in the governance and politics of other countries. Rather it has to be fought on an ideological level that will stop the brainwashing of misguided men and women who commit such cruel acts in the name of religion.

# Yogi's edict and BJP's bovine politics



C R ABRAR

YOGI Adityanath, the recently appointed BJP chief minister of the largest state of the Indian Union, has again become the subject of media attention. This time, for a weird reason. People belonging to a Scheduled Caste, the Mushahar Community in Uttar Pradesh, have alleged that they were given soap and shampoo by the local administration a day before the visit of the chief minister to their locality. They stated that they were asked to take a bath and clean up before attending a function at Kushinagar, where the chief minister was to inaugurate an immunisation programme. Some even claimed that they were asked to use perfume for the occasion. In videos widely shared in the social media, members of the community were seen displaying the soap bars and shampoo sachets. This experience of the Mushahar community with their chief minister only exposes the pervasiveness of the caste system in Premier Modi's modern day India.

Yogi Adityanath has been an ardent champion for protection of cows. Since 1998, as a member of parliament, he twice tabled bills banning cow slaughter throughout the republic, constitutionally a secular state. Before moving into the chief minister's residence, he ensured that the premises were purified with cow's milk and all leather furnishing were removed. Though Muslims constitute 20 percent of UP's 220 million population, not a single member of the community has been inducted in his 26 member strong Cabinet. Claims have been made that it is the first government in the state not to have a Muslim representation at that level. Government data informs that the state has the highest rate of interfaith conflict.

It is no surprise that the recent Union Government order to ban cow slaughter has been implemented assiduously in the UP. After all, Yogi was the poster-boy of the 'ban cow slaughter campaign'. The food police had been mobilised to crack down not only on illegal sale of beef, but also on legal sale of buffalo meat. Curiously, the ban has also been extended on the transportation of buffaloes.

Like many other industries in India, the meat industry overlaps informality. The point not to be missed is that no other informal or semi-formal sector has been subjected to such sudden and punitive scrutiny as the meat industry. The government claims only illegal abattoirs have been affected by the ban. Muslims, on the other hand, view the prohibition as a ploy to make them jobless. All BJP-led states are experiencing stringent imposition of beef ban and associated penalties for violation.

In the UP, both big modern meat processing plants as well as small butcher outfits have been adversely affected. The perfunctory ritual of license renewal of the meat-processing entities has now become a matter of serious scrutiny for the municipal authorities, often resulting in inordinate delays and uncertainties, taking a toll on the livelihood of tens of thousands of Muslims.

The BJP spokesperson's claim that "milk products are



constantly going down because of illegal slaughterhouses" does not hold water. Official data informs that the number of both buffaloes and cows in the UP are on the rise: milk production has grown by 17 percent since 2012. The value of export of buffalo meat had expanded by as much as 27 percent, generating more than USD 4 billion in 2016. UP accounted for 43 percent of the total amount.

This targeted approach in law enforcement has been accompanied by steep rise in vigilantism in the UP and elsewhere. Yogi's former organisation the Hindu Yuva Vahini and other extreme right organisations have been in the forefront of the gau raksha (save cow) movement. The abominable Akhlaq case, lynching of a Muslim man over rumours that he had eaten beef which was later found to be goat meat, in 2015 in UP, is a stark reminder of such vigilantism. In another incident in April this year, Pehlu Khan was murdered by the vigilantes who accused Khan of committing the sin of taking his freshly purchased cow to the slaughterhouse. None of these gruesome acts of violence merited condemnation from the BJP leadership. It appears that bovines are more valuable than human lives to the champions of Hindutva.

The poor supply of buffaloes from UP and Bihar has sounded the death knell for the country's first fully automated abattoir in Tangra, West Bengal, that was set up only in 2012 at a cost of Rs. 25 crore. The beef ban has not augured well in the predominantly Christian population of northeast India. Observers note that the decision will take a severe toll on BJP's electoral prospect in that region. Apart from Muslims, the beef ban, shutting of abattoirs and the 'protection of cows' have also adversely impacted India's Dalit community who survive through buying and selling of animals and their carcasses. The prohibition is an assault on their livelihood as well.

Significant resistance to the Centre's decision is gaining traction across the India. In a recent judgment, the Allahabad High Court observed that food choice is a right to life and no one, whether the state or a vigilante group, has the right to take that away from someone. On May 30, the Madras High Court stayed the Union government's controversial notification on banning the sale of cattle in animal markets for slaughter on grounds that it violates the Parent Act. Only days ago, West Bengal Chief Minister termed the central government's decision to ban the sale of all kinds of cattle for slaughter across the country "unconstitutional", adding her state would not accept the decision. The beef ban has also triggered off public furor in the Left-ruled Kerala where beef accounts for 60 percent of total meat consumption. Its chief minister sent a protest letter to the PM, saying that the Centre couldn't draw up a menu and change the food habits of the people. The move was likely to hurt millions of poor farmers and squeeze supplies of the Rs. 1 lakh-crore meat industry.

About a week ago, India's solicitor general informed the Supreme Court that in order to prevent smuggling and ensure their protection, all cattle would soon be tagged with a tamper-proof identification number, similar to social security numbers that citizens are being delivered. It will include a range of data including the type of horn and tail! Press reports inform that production of cricket ball out of Portuguese cork and UP buffalo hide has dropped significantly in Meerut. "No one wants to carry leather ... to Meerut. There is fear of the road", notes a Hindu ball manufacturer. One waits to note if soon the powerful Indian cricket authorities would raise the demand for the introduction of cricket balls that are not made of leather.

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## Greed in the Islamic tradition



ADNAN M. S. FAKIR

Webster Dictionary defines "greed" as "a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed."

It is, of course, natural to seek pleasure and to pursue - actively - that which one perceives to be good and satisfying. Even those who give to the needy might do so, at least in part, because it gives them pleasure knowing they are helping others. But greed involves not just self-satisfaction, but selfishness. To quote Merriam-Webster again, to be selfish is to be "concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself ... without regard for others." Of course, the antithesis of this self-centeredness is that ever-familiar Golden Rule: "Want for others what you want for yourself."

Let us begin the commentary on a grim note. In the 103rd Sura of the Qur'an (al-'Asr), we read, "Truly humanity is in a state of loss." This stunning proclamation, however, is immediately followed by a critical qualification: "Except those who keep the faith, do good, encourage one another to stand for the truth, and encourage one another to be patient and perseverant." Notice the wording here: to "encourage one another" to stand for the truth and be patient. I cannot simply focus on myself. I must be cognisant of and concerned with others. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is quoted as saying, "None of you truly believes until [you wish] for [your] brother what [you] wish for [yourself]." And according to even the rather conservative medieval Muslim scholar, Imam al-Nawawi, this refers to all of humanity, and not just Muslims.

But let's return to that grim line, "Humanity is in a state of loss." Although Islamic scripture insists that each human is born free of sin, it also presents this world as a series of tests - a world where one must be active and swim upstream, as it were, in order to resist the downward pull of temptation. The earliest revelations of the Qur'an - the short revelations first revealed in the city of Mecca, and the ones typically taught to Muslim children - are replete with warnings of the harms of not material wealth necessarily, but material greed. Consider the following examples:

The 102nd Sura of the Qur'an, al-Takathur, opens with the proclamation, "Vying for increase distracts you, until you

visit the graves." In the 104th Sura (al-Humazah), we read, "Woe unto every slandering backbiter, who amasses wealth and tallies it, supposing that his wealth makes him immortal." And along these lines, the 107th Sura (al-Maa'uun) reads as follows: "Have you not seen the one who denies religion? That is the one who drives away the orphan, and does not urge feeding the poor. So woe to the worshippers who are heedless of their prayers, those who strive to be seen, yet

in secret, who is obscure among people, and who is not pointed out by people, and who is content with his provision." (Tirmidhi)

These notions of humility and contentment are of course not unique to Islam. So what do we make, then, of the modern ethos that "greed is good" because it drives individuals to compete aggressively in a free market, thereby benefiting society at large through the introduction of creative and useful ideas,

Indeed, one could seek wealth for the purpose of helping others.

In fact, in the context of Islam, there is at least one well-known prophetic report that indicates that it is better to work hard to attain wealth and give to those in need than to choose simply not to work. In this case, striving to attain wealth is not a distraction from the path of God, but rather an enhancement of faith.

What is unanimously regarded as a distraction is the selfish pursuit of wealth, at the expense of others, and ignoring those in need. This is the greed stated in Merriam-Webster. And even if this selfish form of greed benefits society in some way, directly or indirectly, one obvious lesson we glean from Islamic and other traditions is that the ends do not justify vile means.

And perhaps some of us moderns are overestimating the benefits of greed and downplaying its harms. Consider a recent study by, among other researchers, Michael Norton of Harvard Business School. According to Norton's study, when certain people act selfishly, they inspire others to act selfishly. What we're left with is a vicious, destructive cycle.

Earlier I referenced the 103rd Sura of the Qur'an. That Sura is called al-'Asr, which could be translated as "time." A major theme of the Qur'an is that, in time, all will be made right, people will no longer be deluded, they will, in the end, recognise the reality behind the material world, and the truth will be made manifest. This, of course, is a popular theme, as characterised by Shakespeare:

"Time's glory is to calm contending kings, To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light, To stamp the seal of time in aged things, To wake the morn and sentinel the night, To wrong the wronger till he render right, To ruinat proud buildings with thy hours, And to smear with dust their glittering golden towers."

Many writers representing many cultures seem to be in agreement that material greed reflects not only self-centeredness but also delusion. So where do we go from here?

The desire for more and more of the good things in life is part of human nature. But in the Qur'an and other scriptures and sources, we are challenged: we are told not to self-indulge, but rather, to "hasten to do good." And here one is reminded of the words of the famous Sufi Rabiya Adawiyya: "Lord, if I worship you in fear of hell, burn me in it. And if I worship you in hope of paradise, keep me from it. But if I worship you for your own being, don't withhold from me your everlasting beauty."

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

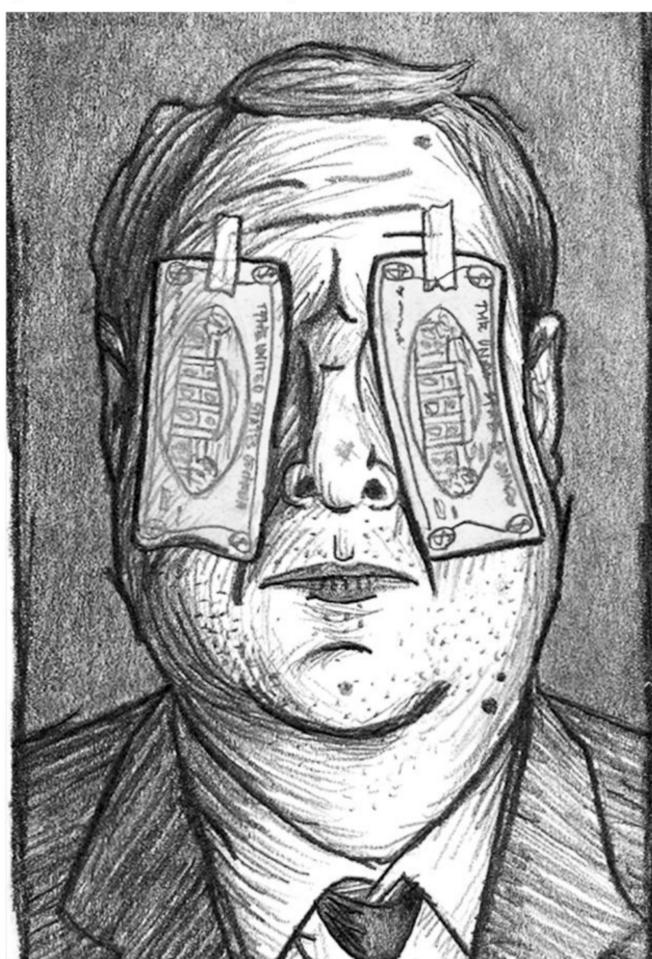
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### We condemn the decision of JU authority

Jahangirnagar University's order for students to vacate the accommodation halls has put students into unbearable sufferings. Many residential students have had to leave the campus forcefully. Many of them were studying for final exams, preparing for job interviews and completing their research for academic purposes. The students are shocked at this autocratic decision of bringing police into the campus to arrest students, who are currently facing cruel treatment by law enforcers.

We, the student community, stand against this arbitrary behaviour, and demand that the residential halls be reopened along with the withdrawal of the cases against the students as soon as possible.

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University of Dhaka



SOURCE: DEREK MICHAEL BRENNAN

refuse to supply even neighbourly needs."

In other words, material greed is an omnipresent temptation that terminates only at death. The antidote, according to a prophetic report, is to foster a sense of contentment. The Prophet (PBUH) says, "The most enviable of my friends is a believer with little property who finds pleasure in prayer, who performs the worship of his Lord well, who obeys Him

services, and institutions?"

Here we have to be very careful. We first have to ask, what exactly we mean by "greed." If we mean simply the active pursuit of wealth, that need not be selfish per se. As the 19th century English economist Alfred Marshall would have it, "love of money" encompasses "an infinite variety of motives," which "include many of the highest, the most refined, and the most unselfish elements of our nature."