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Expectation from the upcoming budget

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The lower middle class and lower class people belong to our category of 'we'. They really constitutes the majority . But their voice is traditionally unheard.

Economic romanticism and unnecessary jugglery of statistics do mean nothing to them. They expect certain concrete things of life. What are those things? I believe this is a difficult question.

It is all the more difficult when I myself want to answer this question on their behalf. I wonder whether any government in this country has ever seriously thought about it.

Those of us familiar with welfare economics know for sure that it is a complex problem. People running the country are rather ignorant about it. This is also to their advantage. They do not realize that they do not know. Thus they can run the country because they do not recognize the needs and difficulties.

'We' want simple food, shelter, health, education and security from the state. It must be recognized that there are already some measures to fulfill these demands. However, these are far less than what are needed. In fact these are the basic challenges of our society.

In Bangladesh people generally ask: Have you eaten rice? The Bengali word 'bhath' is synonymous with food. The lower and lower middle class want reasonable amounts of basic food items like rice, vegetables, fish, meat, lentils, etc.

The question is how the society/state can ensure fulfilling of these basic requirements. Every year when the annual budget is presented in the parliament 'we' start believing that something is going to happen this time. Unfortunately the annual budget is only a traditional exercise in revenue and expenditure only and little else.

In the parliament debate takes place and sometime heated disputes can be observed among prominent members of both the sides. How can there be a meaningful debate on such technical issues like economic growth and inflation without minimum working knowledge of national income accounting?

What is the difference between nominal national income and real national income? How are price indexes constructed? Without a clear understanding of these statistical questions one would not really know what he or she is talking about.

In a similar way discussion on any fiscal and monetary matters would demand some working knowledge of fiscal and monetary economics. I myself feel very diffident when I am asked any question on these issues. In this fast moving world when every thing is getting knowledge based, it is so important for us to remember that we must educate ourselves on a continuous basis.

Ensuring simple food, shelter, health, education and security is a huge task. The entire political and economic philosophy of the state machinery must be oriented towards this national goal.

The agriculture sector must be able to ensure food security. While we know that this is something that cannot be achieved overnight, people belonging to the lower class always expect that something is going to happen this year.

These people neither do understand annual budget statistics nor do they bother about it. They, however, do understand whether they have enough food or not. This is something that one has to understand rather physically. For centuries they have been waiting that something to happen next year. Unfortunately that next year does not come in their life.

Economic and physical security is a dream of lower class people. They do not demonstrate on the roads of Dhaka city. The residents of Nadda area the other day demonstrated with 'kalshi'. However, ordinary people only dream of a more secure life in the next year. Many being

frustrated finally surrender and believe they will get this cherished economic and physical security in afterlife .

We all know that budget is an annual document. This is merely an exercise in economic statistics mostly unreliable. This is a weak statement. The correct statement would be it is practically a fictitious document. This is done as a routine work by the state machinery. The development story and the so called macroeconomic scenario portrayed in the annual budget every year is a mere exercise in statistics. These have virtually no implications for the life of ordinary people .

Many would wonder whether I am out of my head or have become psychologically abnormal? No I am not. Why? Suppose I am willing to implement a project worth say one lakh taka and also willing to give ten percent of the total budget as his or her compensation to someone whom I expect to implement the project faithfully.

In today's Bangladesh I believe such a person is a rare commodity. We know for sure that the total allocation is mainly spent on low quality work.

Even in a research/consulting project carried out for the declared purpose to collect primary data to implement a policy oriented project, we have observed with great consternation that the high ups in the government office as well as so called consulting firms are involved in grabbing the lion share of the allocation.

Hardly ten percent of the total fund goes to the professional people responsible for the implementation of the project. This has been the story of this country in the last several decades.

While on paper these studies are known as surveys, in practice these are money making businesses by the bureaucracy. In any case these reports of very low quality do not play any role in our decision making. The so called donor agencies know how to give some money to these corrupt people involved in the administration of the country.

The story of development projects of this country is a horror story. How unfortunate we are . The machinery of the government is seen involved in misappropriation of public money by generating sham paper works.

This has become a profit making business for both political persons and bureaucrats. Much of development works that we observe are of poor quality. The nation is bluffed by the political system and the civil service.

Thus traditional annual budget is not something that should be taken so seriously. The development is something that has to be felt. It is not something that has to be understood by so called macroeconomic indicators only. These are sometimes bluffs by some clever people.

We must be careful about western and western trained economists. We cannot solve our economic problems by using our class room notes taken from those western professors.

The oligarchy of politicians, bureaucracy and the so called professionals in this country is a company of dacoits. Ninety per cent of the allocated monies go to their pockets. This is also true about our annual budgets.

I am not surprised to see this. The politics, economics and sociology of the game must be understood in its proper perspective. The prevailing system must go through a process of major structural change. And in this the political values will play the most important role. Thus 'we' do not bother about the upcoming budget. Let the interest groups do their routine work.

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