

ADP implementation bleak

A different flavour in an election year

TRUE to his commitment, finance and planning minister M Saifur Rahman has held a mid-term review meeting on the progress of implementation of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) for fiscal 2005-06. The appraisal actually covers a four-month period, between July and October of last year, and not the halfway point of the fiscal. The findings are rather bleak, having particular regard to the special measures the government had put in place for speeding up the implementation process.

This is a record big ADP with Tk 24,500 crore outlay, and predictably so, in an election year undaunted by under-performance of the last ADP, Tk 17,000 crore is in local currency, the foreign aid component being the remainder Tk 7500 crore. Overall, 15 percent of the total outlay was spent between July and October as compared with 21 percent in the corresponding period of FY2005. There is a better showing on utilisation of foreign aid: 17 percent as against 20 percent in the last fiscal. Only 15 percent money was utilised of the locally financed projects in July-October period, down by six percentage points compared with last year. The slow pace of implementation can be explained in conventional terms by attributing it to lack of inter-ministerial coordination and the bureaucratic red-tape that goes with it. Sometimes this is habitual, and at times it is wilful, the latter impression being difficult to shrug off as the pressure builds on the last quarter to spend money in hot haste and haphazardly as if to skirt accountability.

Significantly, 51 of the 333 foreign-funded projects out of a project portfolio of 859 in all, which had awaited approval have been mostly okayed by December last year. In other words, approval-related complications are out of the way so that the deceleration of implementation should stop now. The big reason, however, for the halting pace of ADP utilisation is that the first quarter was taken up by the motions and mechanics of getting the procurement processes under way. This is a hugely important and sensitive exercise given the controversies it had run into earlier on which basically led to plugging the holes of pre-existing procurement policies.

Bigger the size of an ADP, greater the chance of misuse of funds; and it's all the most so in an election year when there is a temptation of playing to the constituencies with project expenditure. The over-acceleration of the pace of implementation at the end of a financial year could mean larger borrowing from the banking system forcing the economy on a tumble which the government must do everything in its power and wisdom to avoid.

Whale sharks on our sea shore

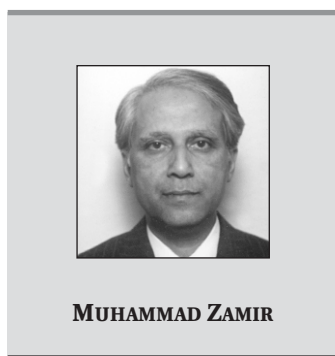
Rare aquatic mammals must be preserved

IN recent times at least four whale sharks have been trapped in the nets of our fishermen in the Cox's Bazar coastal area. All four of them were hauled up ashore dead or were subsequently killed. The other day we saw in one of the local dailies that some people were actually saddled on the poor dead animal. At a time when the entire sane world is fighting for conserving such rare species our actions can hardly be described as rational. It is also important to note that Bangladesh today has hardly any real window of excellence to be proud of. Under the circumstances we could actually enhance our image by being actively involved in preservation of such rare species. Needless to say, this will also go a long way to help maintain an ecological balance in our sea.

The ongoing scourge of violence and senseless killings has already taken a toll of the good and sensitive nature of the mind amongst a large section of our population. Putting a stop to catching or killing of such animals with a display of compassion to the living world in general is expected to have an impact on that debilitating mindset.

We strongly urge that the relevant authorities of the government rise to the occasion and help preserve this valuable species through enforcement of appropriate laws and undertaking an awareness-building programme amongst the fishermen of the locality and the public in general. Our Administration may also consider building a sanctuary for these rare whale sharks on the waters of our coastal belt ultimately turning it into yet another tourist attraction.

Erosion of individual liberty



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

has created chaos in our national psyche. Fundamental freedoms and human rights are facing serious challenges. Militancy, fundamentalism, corruption, criminal nexus between politicians and 'mastans', politicization of the judiciary, the executive and law and order agencies, extra-judicial killings, lack of accountability and partisanship characterize the state of our nation as we traverse the 35th year of our independence.

Insecurity and threats have become harsh realities. We have watched with horror as the JMB has

been permitted within the Parliament at the time when the Opposition had tabled call-attention notices with regard to growing fundamentalism and deterioration in the law and order situation. They have also maintained that the recent nefarious acts of militancy are a direct consequence of the nature and composition of the present governing alliance.

We have seen numerous arrests of JMB activists and discovery of arms caches in the past few weeks. We have also read that these activists, when arrested, have always freely acknowledged their membership of the JMB -- an outlawed group. Some have also proudly claimed past association with the 'Shibir' (the student wing of the Jamat-e-Islami party). Ataur Rahman Sunny, brother of absconding JMB Chief Sheikh Abdur Rahman and Head of JMB's military wing has already revealed to the police about his past associa-

tion with Jamat-e-Islam politics ('News Today'-15 December, 2005). Such an admission has only strengthened the claims of the Opposition parties that the BNP should disassociate itself from its Islamic Alliance partners. Most of us believe that such a step would indicate seriousness on the part of the Prime Minister in tackling the militancy menace. It would also certify that the Government is willing to confront reality.

However, instead of taking such a step, the Government has been targeting the media and the right of

What they forgot was that curbing the access to information and controlling the media are useless steps in this age of electronic data sharing and cable TV.

We have been fortunate that till now, despite poverty and confrontational politics, our citizens have had the good fortune of savouring a free press. Attacking this therefore might not be the best idea. It could in fact exacerbate a bad situation and make it worse.

The month of December, which saw Bangladesh emerge as an

independent entity, has also seen the infamous promulgation of the Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Ordinance, 2005. This empowers the government and its security agencies to tap or intercept the telephone conversation of any person, ostensibly to ensure security of the State and protect public interest. Under the law, the government will be able to cancel or suspend license of any telecom operator if it fails to cooperate with the government security agencies.

The government has defended the decision on the ground that this step is necessary to contain acts of terrorism and flush out terrorists.

This, I feel, is contestable. I believe that such an Ordinance is unconstitutional and stands against the principles of fundamental rights of privacy and human dignity guaranteed by the Constitution in Articles 11, 32, 39(1) and 43(b).

What worries me is that such a repressive measure can easily be the source of abuse and misuse. It can and will be used to harass the Opposition and those activists associated in efforts to reduce flagrant violation of constitutional rights.

The Special Powers Act continues to be a controversial measure. It has been the cause for debate for many years. Now we have taken another contentious step in our national life. This will only worsen the brew within our political horizon. This will further erode our democratic rights.

I agree that there is a growing spectre of religious extremism in our society. Nevertheless, this is a bad law. I do not concur with the assumption that muzzling the media or bugging phones will cure the malaise. There does not appear to be any justification for such a sweeping law. If the government feels that it requires wiretapping any phone for the sake of ensuring security, then it should seek such authority for eavesdropping through the court of law.

It is this evolving situation in our contemporaneous affairs that has led me to seek out Tagore once again.

We must not forget the crucified history that has given us our liberty. Others must not control the windows of our mind. This country can only move forward if we continue to respect cherished values for which we fought and died. We must not build more walls round ourselves. We should instead try to ascertain the root causes that are leading a section of our people astray. We could then try to help them overcome these aberrations. Participation rather than control should be the order of the day.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador who can be reached at mazamir@dhaka.net

POST BREAKFAST

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targeted State institutions and even threatened to blow up memorials set up to commemorate our victory in 1971. They have also declared that it is inappropriate to celebrate Bijoy Dibosh.

It is no longer just the establishment of 'Allahar shashon'. It is the overthrow of the Constitution and negation of the constitutional process.

This meltdown has already created instability and affected our future potential in terms of foreign direct investment. It has also led some to suggest that Bangladesh is on the verge of becoming a 'failed state'. Lack of effective and good governance has encouraged criminals and terrorists to feel that they are above the law. On more than one occasion apprehended wrongdoers have been released from custody due to socio-metric overlay and informal intervention by politicians.

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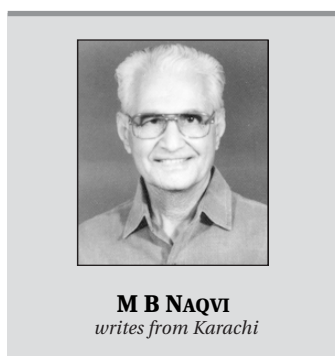
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No Mr. President -- you shouldn't have said these things



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

HERE are four unfortunate observations that President Pervez Musharraf has made. These are: (a) no government in Islamabad can survive if it seriously displeases Punjab; (b) if National Security Council is disbanded, another Martial Law will become unavoidable; (c) there is a foreign hand behind Balochistan's troubles; (d) Sindh is committing suicide by opposing Kala Bagh Dam. These statements should never have been made. They will play havoc by resonating in Pakistan politics for a long time to come.

The President's first proposition is purely political and in one sense plainly true: Punjab houses some 63 per cent of Pakistan population and if Punjab is settled in NWFP, Balochistan and Sindh are added to the tally, Punjab will constitute something like 70 per cent or more of Pakistan population. Foolish will be the government that ignores Punjab's opinions or demands.

The categorical nature of President's remark however goes well beyond normal political prudence. He has emphasised Punjab's position in a more profound and radically different category than mere numbers. What is so extraordinary about Punjab? What one meets in civilian life is a plethora of opinions among Punjabis; there is

a rich plural intellectual life insofar as they concern themselves with public affairs. Why then did he hold up Punjab as the key to Islamabad's decision-making?

Is Punjab some kind of a check on others over and above their numerical strength that is ordinarily decisive in day-to-day affairs? Are other provinces being told to go to Punjab first and win them over before you can decide on anything big in their areas? Well one recognises nothing special about Punjabis other than their numbers. Indeed, there are few

scrutiny is the fact that ruling establishment, not counting him, is dominated by Punjabis; don't we all know that the Army is 70 per cent from Punjab and civil bureaucracy too is mainly Punjabi?

In short, he is in awe of the Punjab's share in the ruling establishment. His public articulation of this otherwise known fact means that other provinces should not insist on propositions that are unacceptable to the establishment. Does the President realise that this is setting Punjab against the other three provinces? It can

complaints against Punjabis qua Punjabis. They are so warm-hearted and friendly, normally well-intentioned. The only complaint one has long entertained against Punjabis is that they are politically so docile and most politically aware Punjabis one knows have concurred in the view.

Why then is President so over-awed by Punjab and Punjabis? Didn't Punjabis in general accept his rule in October 1999 without any trouble even after he had overthrown a Punjabi Prime Minister with a genuine base in Punjab? The President should know what he is talking. In which case one must look for reasons for his extraordinary deference to Punjab. The only reason that can hold up in

cost Pakistan's national unity in a radical way: Punjab as a permanent check on all significant issues will not be acceptable to any Pushtoon, Sindh or Baloch; that will be destructive of Pakistan's integrity.

As for Presidential obiter dicta on NSC much the aforesaid applies. He is warning all future generation of Pakistanis that should they try to disband, or rather degrade, the forces' participation level -- it is inconceivable that a civilian government will not want to know what the three forces' Chiefs think -- all hell will break loose and the Army Chief of the day will overthrow the Constitution and govern through Martial Law. This is incendiary stuff. What Mr.

involved is what happens when the civilian government refuses to buy the hardware and other stuff according to the wish list of the generals. Here, the generals want to sit in on all decisions being made and not only about matters military. Their demands (or wishes) go well beyond mere autonomy in making decisions about what is to happen inside the Army, Air Force or Navy, including what equipment to buy. They now want a share in power as such -- perhaps a decisive share.

The nation, if it values human freedoms of its people, cannot subordinate itself to generals. At this rate, senior police officers will claim a share in provincial decision-making. Which will result in CMs becoming subordinates to

Musharraf is saying is that no major decision should be made without the concurrence of top generals -- or else!

Well, democracy is all about civilian (citizens') supremacy and rule in which armed forces are meant to obey orders of the government. An Army's perpetual threat of imposing Martial Law makes it an unwanted Army. No government can take a major decision in national security matters without knowing the professional assessments and wishes of the three or four Chiefs of Staff. All that is

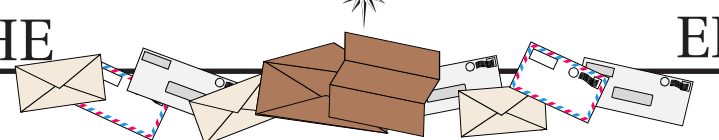
after two years of low-level insurgency? Why did they not know earlier and prosecute those found to be in league with the 'foreign hand'? Funds are a necessary part of such rent-an-insurgency techniques which can be traced. The government ought to bring cases to courts. The least it can do is to take the people into confidence and expose the foreigners' designs. If there is one or more foreign powers causing the insurgency-like actions, why not name them?

What the public knows is that nationally inclined Baloch people are protesting, in the only manner of protest they know, against Musharraf government's mega projects. They want a share in decision-making and more autonomy in their execution. They do not want to be outnumbered in their province. They want more autonomy for their provincial government. They seek more benefits for themselves from the exploitation of their mineral wealth, especially oil and gas. Most of these demands are just. Why should foreigners be needed to incite them to protest; they have enough reasons to protest.

As for Kalabagh Dam and Sindh opposition to it, the President and his army of Ministers should sit down and explain. Why should it be supposed that Sindh is out of their mind and are unable to see the benefits that will flow to Sindh from this Kalabagh Dam? Why are Sindh not convinced of what the President is so sure: i.e. the new benefits that they are foregoing by not building this dam. It does look as if the establishment has actually decided to build the Dam and Sindh are being browbeaten into accepting another fait accompli.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Changing civilisation?

Economic disparity between the super-rich westernised (materialistic) countries and the poor nations in the Third World have forced millions (of the four billion poor in the world) into reflective patterns of thinking on how to improve their economic standing through ruthless exploitation, based on distorted economic and political value systems.

The first phase was socialism, as practiced in the former USSR. Godless governance sank after a few decades; and the rich nations are now after China to control its emergence (through indirect means).

Now there is another headache: the emergence of religious fanaticism, symbolised by the 9/11 suicide bombing of the WTO buildings in New York. The parameters are different. The message is clear: modern politics has failed to deliver (to the majority of the six billion souls).

Violence is apparently a side

issue, as the philosophy of approach is the turning point in the new struggle for equality. How suicide bombers are motivated? To decide to become a human bomber takes years of reflections and motivation. Modern westernised, materialistic propaganda techniques have failed to re-motivate the suicide squads, (now Bangladesh is a victim).

It is a tricky issue, and it cannot be dismissed with sure finality (like instant food). Military actions and subjugation are not the solutions. Violence returns to its source, later than sooner. What is missing? The human touch.

Westernised, imposed models of "democracy" are not working in Asia, Africa and South America. The western controlled mass media devote the majority of the time to details of military exercises to curb the intimations from immortality (reminds us of Wordsworth?).

Back to the changing sign wave against the time graph. The repeti-

tions are well documented in the pages of collected histories of human civilization. Nature does not move in a straight line. Life is governed by cycles (macro and micro).

Planning by the aggressors for self-survival is not enough. Note the relocation of factories and services (our RMG industry is one example); and the expected failure of the WTO talks (Hong Kong). The exploitation continues.

New bases in South Asia have been planned. The sites of the natural energy resources have been noted, for perpetual control and exploitation. The invasion of Iraq was for energy and not Saddam, and Iran would have escaped notice had there been no oil there. OIC is a sleeping giant, but why this deliberate laziness by the rich members in moving into action? Where the wealth is kept, and how is it used?

The communication gap amongst the OIC members is huge (and unbelievable). The former

Commonwealth settlers are now controlling a sizable portion of UK economy.

The sunset era has to be recognised, and accepted. Where are the modalities of approach, regardless of political, religious and ethnic borders? Man's inhumanity to man is a taboo topic for debate, formally or informally. The time has come to face issues squarely, looking into the eyes of the opponents. The tide is changing; for some it is ebb tide, and for others, flow tide.

We are witnessing outer "operation clean". Inner cleanliness comes first.

Deadly habits or deadly treatment?

While I was going through the cover story article of 'Star Week-end Magazine' of 25th November, 2005 I was shocked like anything reading the story of a farmer family of Rupsha Upazila. If the case be so

then I will have no other view but blaming our health care system. Some illiterate, derailed people are only being blamed for spreading diseases like HIV, AIDS, and HCV etc. But again referring to the starting tragic story of the whole family being affected by HIV through blood transmission I like to blame our national health system for its irresponsibility. I can't understand why a strict discipline is not being maintained all through before pushing blood through intravenous injection. Both blood and syringe can only be checked and guaranteed by the authority. How can we expect discipline or caution from the indigenous, unconscious section of people until the authority is sincere. I think only the authority has the whole thing to do at least in case of transmitting blood. We are unnecessarily beating about the bush. I don't know why the famous satirical poem 'JUTA ABISKAR' of Rabindranath Tagore bubbles up in my mind.

Highspeed Group
Motijheel CIA, Dhaka

"Unprecedented icy wave hits Bangladesh"

I was startled and took some time to find, if it was an ad of cold drink or a weather forecast. Those who are following the weather chart published by the DS might have noted that daily high and low temperature at Dhaka on 27th and 28th December were higher than the corresponding average values of about 40 years. The daily lowest temperature since 17th Dec/05 was 13.2 on 28th, which is also higher than normal of the day by 1/2 a degree centigrade and higher by several degrees from the recorded lowest of the day for the last half a century.

If we look at the average daily temperature at Dhaka we still find that daily temperature is higher than the long-term average by over 20C. If we scan through the data for the other six stations for which the

DS monitors temperature we would find that also not very different and it is difficult for us to conceive the situation to be an 'unprecedented icy wave hitting Bangladesh'.

But Bangladesh is a small country and experts say that the country does not have a weather of its own. Global and greater global phenomenon affect weather of Bangladesh and this might have been bringing the cold wave and if it comes true it will be another fit of BMD in utilising modern technology in the forecast of Bangladesh weather. This is very important for a country so prone to natural weather calamities.

M.A. Matin
Dhaka

Satellite TV and our young generation

Today TV is the most popular media of entertainment to all generations of people. In the towns and cities, there is hardly any

house where there is not a TV set. Even in villages, we see that most persons have a TV set. But the young generation is badly addicted to it, which sets us thinking. Though, all programmes are not harmful, we have to think what it is giving and taking away from our young generation. Young people most often watch the exciting films on violence and crime. They also see obscene films. All these things leave a damaging effect in their soft minds. They will try to commit crimes and violence in a sophisticated way and it needs no telling that much of our young generation is going astray day-by-day. They are becoming addicted to narcotics. They don't like any kind of educative programmes. So, the guardians should be more cautious in the matter of TV. They should allow their boys and girls to see only those programmes from which they can derive much benefit and make the right use of it to build up their career and future.

Md. Khaled Saif Ullah Masum
IUC