

## ADP implementation picking up

*Why some important ministries lagging behind?*

ON January 5 this year in a meeting presided over by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman to review the status of ADP implementation, it was revealed that between July and October 15 percent of the ADP allocation had been utilised. This was six percent below the figure achieved in the corresponding period of the previous ADP.

In less than two weeks i.e. on January 18 finance minister held the second review meeting -- the frequency somewhat reflecting election fever -- which showed a slight improvement in the situation, 23 percent of the funds having been spent. And, in December alone, the figure is likely to have improved by 10 percent accounting for 33 percent rate of utilisation.

Even so, the ADP implementation rate in the first six months does fall way short of 50 percent which should have been attained past the halfway point of the current fiscal.

The appraisal is edifying, relate as it does, to 15 important ministries and departments handling Tk 18,736 crore of the total ADP fund of Tk 24,500 crore. While the latest burst of an upward trend in the implementation is welcome, we have to say that in spite of the thrust given by the government earlier on to accelerate the pace of ADP implementation in an election year, the juggernaut of the line ministries has been hard to roll on. Election or no election, there will always be the recital of legal complications, procurement bottlenecks, natural vagaries, donor conditionalities so on and so forth to palm off the stock exercises.

The Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) ministry has proved to be the most effective spender at 33 percent of the allocation. The other ministry besides the LGRD where there are many projects having 'an election orientation', namely, the communications ministry has, however, spent only 14 percent of its allocation. As a matter of fact, some of the major ministries like energy, home, health and family planning and water resources have been markedly slow in spending their allocations.

The question to ask is, if some ministries could succeed why must the others have failed their targets? Do we need special allocations or election time pressure to make things work? The truth seems to be that systemic flaws having to do with an incremental politicisation of development processes from government to government do override rational economic considerations of growth. Unless we carry out reforms in that area we can't develop at the desired pace.

## An avoidable hartal

*Why risk erosion of public sympathy?*

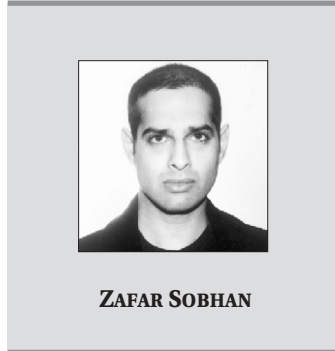
FOR quite sometime prior to the Eid-ul-Azha holidays, the opposition had been carrying out programmes of protest and agitation against the ruling coalition which included street marches, public meetings and intermittent but spaced out hartals. These protests by the opposition are aimed at ruling coalition's, what it calls, anti-people and anti-democratic measures. In the recent times, however, the agitation is focused primarily on the questionable functioning of the Election Commission. Of late, in particular, credibility of the EC as an independent organ of our Constitution has been in question not just by the opposition but also by public at large.

Protest marches and rallies are a right of any opposition in a functioning democracy. The current programme of agitation announced by the opposition is, therefore, within its rights minus, in our opinion, the hartal part. It is our conviction that the call for standstill has certainly outlived its purpose as an instrument of agitation in an economy-oriented world of today. More so, when the points that the opposition is trying to get across had already sunk in the public mind.

On an extremely relevant note, the hartal call is twice more undesirable since this could mean yet another closure round for all day-to-day public activities just when we were trying to shake off indolence of a 5-day festival-related vacation.

We therefore feel strongly that the hartal call for January 22 should be seriously reconsidered by the opposition in an overtone that must be hugely greeted by people. On a slightly different note, opposition think-tanks should realise that this legacy of hartals could very well be used against it if and when the party takes the reins of administration. It is also important to note that no other country of the world has this form of political protest in the manner and style as it exists here in Bangladesh creating so much of disruption in public life.

## More than just security



ZAFAR SOBHAN

ONE thing that we can be thankful for in Bangladesh is that, despite the horrors of the past year, in which we saw political assassinations, coordinated series of bomb blasts, and suicide bombings, we have not made security the be all and end all of our existence.

There is no doubt that people are concerned about the terrorist threat and that this concern is a high priority for us as we enter the election year. But we have fortunately not allowed security fears to dictate our lives, and if things remain reasonably stable in the coming year (a big if), the terrorist threat may not necessarily be as crucial an issue in the upcoming elections as once thought of.

The last terrorist attack was the December 8 suicide bombing in Netrokona, and it is remarkable to see how quickly the threat of terrorism seems to have faded from public memory and public discussion.

This is in part due to the fact that the authorities have made some high profile arrests and seizures in the past few months, and that the apparent respite in bombings has permitted the public to hope that

perhaps the government has a handle on the situation.

Perhaps the fact that terror has receded to the political backburner is also due to the fact that there is no consensus as to who would be better placed to combat the terrorists, the current 4-party alliance government or the opposition 14-party alliance, and that no one side seems to have been able to glean an obvious political advantage from the situation.

remains in power, the hands of the law enforcement authorities will remain tied, and the nation will remain at the mercy of the terrorists, has not really gained traction.

One counter argument put forth by supporters of the ruling alliance is that it is only the existence within the government of religious fundamentalist elements that keeps the terrorists in check, and that if the opposition were to come to power, then the extremists would step up their campaign of terror and things

attacks between now and election day, then the government might be given credit for cracking down on the extremists and keeping the nation safe. However, if there are more terrorist attacks or if the senior militant leadership remains at large, then public disenchantment with the current government could set in very quickly.

The government may try to deflect such criticism by continuing to blame the opposition for fomenting the terror. However,

or another in terms of public opinion as to the political parties.

If there are no more bombings, chances are on election day that most voters, with the exception of those in places that have been directly targeted by the bombers, will not put terrorism that high on their priority list when determining who to pull the lever for.

Is this living in a fool's paradise? Ought we to be more concerned with the terrorist threat and ought

waiting for more information before making a determination.

In my opinion, it seems beyond question that elements within the government do have links with the militants and have been sheltering and sponsoring them, and that this is one reason that the extremists have been able to be so effective and that their senior leadership remains at large.

Nevertheless, I am perfectly comfortable with the public taking its time to make a judicious, responsible, and informed judgement on the matter, or of its waiting to see how the government deals with those in its midst with such connections, before deciding how this will affect its political thinking.

I would also like to think that the public reaction is at least partly due to the fact that the electorate here is mature enough to understand that we cannot let security considerations rule our lives and crowd out all other concerns. The corrosive effect of terrorist attacks on the body politic and the mind-set of the public have been all too evident in some other countries (cough America cough) that we would do well not to emulate.

There are other crucial issues for the electorate to focus on this election year, such as the price of essentials, and education, and energy policy, and industrial policy, and foreign relations, and who has a more compelling vision for Bangladesh's future. These are the issues the election should be fought on. Security is important, but we cannot let it eclipse all of our other concerns.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

## STRAIGHT TALK

**The public reaction is at least partly due to the fact that the electorate here is mature enough to understand that we cannot let security considerations rule our lives and crowd out all other concerns. There are other crucial issues for the electorate to focus on this election year, such as the price of essentials, and education, and energy policy, and industrial policy, and foreign relations, and who has a more compelling vision for Bangladesh's future.**

On the face of it, this is surprising. One would have thought that the opposition would have been in a good position to mine the security threat for political gain.

The opposition has argued that the reason that the terrorists have been able to strike so freely and that the militant kingpins are still at large is because they have been sheltered by influential allies in the government.

This would seem to be a persuasive argument. The links between the JMB terrorists and elements of the ruling alliance have been well established and well documented, and it seems axiomatic that it is this link that has permitted the militants to grow so powerful and escape detection for so long.

But the opposition argument that as long as the 4-party alliance

would deteriorate much more quickly.

According to this argument, the best bet for stability, security, and an effective campaign to combat the terrorists would be for the 4-party alliance to remain in power.

Most people seem to have taken each of the above positions at face value and concluded that regardless of who is in power it will not make much difference on the issue of terror. The general consensus seems to be that both the 4-party alliance and the 14-party alliance are more or less equally competent (or incompetent as the case may be) to counter the terrorist threat, and that on this issue there is little to choose between the two sides.

Much of course depends on the events of the next twelve months. If there are no more terrorist

this line of argument has not caught on with the public either due to the lack of any supporting evidence, and in any event does not do much to redeem the government in the public eye.

Whoever is behind the bombings, the thinking among the public goes, it is the government's job to ensure law and order. The argument that the government's enemies are plotting to overthrow it only makes it look weak and ineffectual, and people are more interested in government finding a solution to the problem than pointing fingers.

But where we stand right now, bombings seem to have faded from people's consciousness, and to the extent that people do think about them, it seems that the bombings have not cut significantly one way

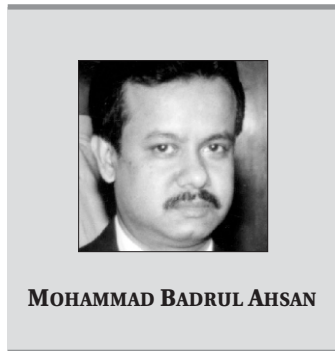
the upcoming election to be one determined on questions of national security?

I am not so sure. On the whole, I am encouraged by the fact that the general public has been slow to rush to judgement on one side or the other for the terrorist attacks.

The government has been roundly and rightly criticised due to the fact that it was unable to prevent the initial attacks and that appalling carnage has been committed by terrorists during its tenure. But by the same token, people seem to be giving the government due credit in light of the recent arrests and seizures.

Similarly, as to the question of whether some elements within the government have links to the militants, the public appears to be

## Greetings from the posters



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IT was good to see so many cordial people, who spent their own money to plaster Eid greetings on posters. Some of them gave their names and pictures along with greetings. Others carried additional message, which basically said that they wanted your support in the upcoming elections. I must say I was impressed to see such generous gestures. So what if this was a foot-in-the-door ploy for election campaign? Goodness, like water, has to come in the shape of its container.

Now these are real people I am talking about. They appeared in posters sticking on vans, buses and walls, their smiling faces, sometimes waving hands, oozing with confidence that they were ready to serve this nation. Many of them chose to be placed under the picture of their leaders, pictures spread out like umbrellas in clusters of two or three. They have got everything you would like to see in a candidate: loyalty for the leaders and posture for the people. They looked eager to enter the public life.

If you take out the political kabuki, then nothing is wrong with it. People belong to people,

and nothing is wrong when some of them can afford to draw the attention of others. If there is only one life to live, it can be increased by reaching out to touch more people like one flow in many streams, many drafts in one wind. Nothing is wrong if you seek a little publicity. After all familiarity is propaganda. When you try to know others, you want others to know you as well. Public life is nothing but a manifestation of private propensity to magnify

their trust and get what you want. In a way what a man does to get a woman, politicians do to get the voters. There is a kind of coquetry in both, a long-drawn lustful predilection between strong and weak, a consummate profligacy that turns purported relationships into a showdown of usurpation.

It is said that a country gets the leaders it deserves. What kind of leaders do we deserve? Do we deserve leaders, who greet us from the posters, who remember to wish

have length and breadth, but not depth. You can almost see through them, their intentions showing through their pretensions, their greetings bleating with political connotations that should make them suspects to us. But the biggest surprise is that it works. People see them, read their posters, and vote for them in the elections. It repeats again and again, like the unmistakable spell of an indefatigable sorcerer.

Let us change the scene for a

repeat their mistakes, it reminds of the useful idiot who walked up to a ruthless man and volunteered to get himself chopped. How are we as a people any different, because we fall for the same trick no matter how many times it is repeated? We walk into the same trap, vote for the same dishonest men and then spend four years resenting that mistake until we make the same mistake again.

These posters are perhaps the pillars of our pretentious politics.

these in the name of the people, the ultimate suckers who don't have a clue how they are taken for a ride.

It was a pleasant surprise to see those posters around this Eid like we saw them around previous Eids. But this time the posters were more numerous, if you know what I mean. This is an open season for courtship with the voters. One parliament member sacrificed more than hundred cows to feed the entire constituency. More to come. There will be free cigarettes, tea, snacks and handshakes from glad-handing candidates, who will come to your doors and ask for votes. If you are a voter, don't get spoiled. This good time is not going to last forever.

What worries me is just that. People will be misled once again to vote for the charmers, candidates who will look good on the posters and give fiery speeches in public meetings. They will use their leaders, party and money to win elections. Then they will turn into Draculas once the sun goes down on the election year and the winning candidates return to the descending darkness of their narrower interests.

Perhaps we should ban those posters, for the sake of decency, cleanliness and honesty. I bet you won't find so many posters in another country. We need to start cleaning up, because there is a connection between clean conscience, clean city and clean country. May be that is the message we should print on posters, and stick them on walls, cars, vans, trucks and buses, and wherever else we find a space.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

**It was a pleasant surprise to see those posters around this Eid like we saw them around previous Eids. But this time the posters were more numerous, if you know what I mean. This is an open season for courtship with the voters. If you are a voter, don't get spoiled. This good time is not going to last forever. People will be misled once again to vote for the charmers, candidates who will look good on the posters and give fiery speeches in public meetings.**

one's own existence. In power one feels multiplied the same way reflections in the mirror grow numerous when another mirror is held in front of it.

Strange though if you think of it, that people we never met looked at us from the posters and offered their greetings. All those pairs of eyes, smiling faces and raised hands were trying to catch our attention, often slinking away in the back or side of speeding cars like apparitions vanishing into the thin air. We never saw them before, and we might not see them after, but their greetings remain etched in our memories like the afterglow of an extinguished fire.

But all said and done, what we see is an emerging pattern. Talk to strangers, get close to them, woo

us well right before the election time with the flippancy of a man who is trying to seduce a woman? And it works. That is why posters are so prolific in our lives, our walls, fences, cars. Wherever there is empty space, it is covered by faces of people who want to get introduced to us.

Some of them we know, others we don't, yet we deserve them to occupy our political offices, meddle with our lives, disturb our peace and deprive our rights. These poster boys of politics are like hocus-pocus, because they bully us, and they bluff us, coming from the posters and going back to posters, just like cartoon characters which become animated from still pictures.

It's funny that they are also flimsy like their posters, that they

minute and turn to Germany where a grisly murder is creating great waves. The court has ordered retrial in a case of manslaughter where a cannibal killed another man and ate 20kg of his flesh. This German cannibal found his victim on the Internet who travelled all the way from Belgium to grant his killer his long cherished fantasy. This man took lots of pain killers and drank schnapps while the other man tied him up on a table and then slowly dismembered him piece by piece. Only when the victim fell unconscious from loss of blood that his killer decided to slit the throat of the dying man and put an end to his misery.

When you read the posters, and think of the people who are being primed up by unscrupulous men to

This is where it starts and this is where it ends, people forever exploiting people through gabs or guiles or both, this endless cycle of dog-eat-dog scramble in the name of liberty and freedom. It is all so flaky, all so unreal, all so deeply rooted in the mystery of nature where species entice species in the endless art of deception.

That is why we see pictures piling up on pictures, leaders in layers of generations, being used as baits for the people. People almost wear their leaders as badges, using their names and images equally for elections and extortions, the line between them blurred at times. We use our leaders as ladders, our parties as pastiches, ideologies as incantations to get what we want. Democracy is when we do all of

## OPINION

# Telephone bugging: Strangulation of civil rights

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

ANOTHER intriguingly tumultuous year is out. Till the middle of 2005 the national scenario was more or less static. None appeared to have anticipated yet another crisis that was in the powers of fermentation. In fact, the period turned out eventually to be a period of respite and a God-sent opportunity for the JMB to consolidate its anarchical offensives across the country. On August 17, 2005 63 all district HQs except one were jolted by a symphony bombing. The message for a state run by Allah's laws alone was thus passed out to the government. Till the end of the year many people including at least two judges, 8/10 lawyers lost their lives due to suicide bombing. Threats of the JMB suicide bombers were being received by opposition political leaders, lawyers, judges, university teachers and elites.

It is true that the government is currently in a desperate bid to haul

up the JMB extremists but it is also true that the main two leaders Bangla Bhai and Shayekh Abdur Rahman are yet to be captured. On them many weird speculations are in circulation including the ones that these two are in safe custody and shelter of some powerful men of the 4-party alliance. Some men in the 2nd and 3rd line of command have been arrested and are being interrogated but until and unless the main two leaders are intercepted lives of the people shall continue to be in total jeopardy. And curiously enough the mainstream opposition Awami League is being held responsible for JMB atrocities to debase the image of the government (!)

Parallel to the bomb blasts across the country the present government has been caught off-foot by Transparency International imputing Bangladesh with the thorny crown of the most corrupt country in the world for the fifth time in succession. Yet the terrible obsession that has very palpably laid an awful seize on the present govern-

**The telephone bugging ordinance is considered to have been a sinister attempt at strangulating liberties of the civilians since there is no honest assurance from any quarter of the government on its one hundred per cent appropriate use without prejudice. In Bangladesh the movement in favour of civil rights and personal freedom is yet to gain the desired momentum to pressurise the government.**

ment is all due to the informal bombing operations of JMB. Though at the present moment, there has been a partial lull in the frequency of the bomb blasts, attributed to a number of arrests of the lower ranks, the overall organisational strength continues to be simply bugging. News are pouring in on the financial support JMB has been receiving from some Middle Eastern countries and a few other unknown sources. Here, the ominous aspect of money laundering invariably takes the upper hand. Yet the mischievous transactions taking place surreptitiously towards JMB funding remain unearthed. Hence, among the numerous interventional options the gov-

ernment has already obtained legal sanctions for telephone bugging obviously to spot out the major partners in and out of the country. An ordinance in this regard is already in place.

The ordinance for legalising telephone bugging has provoked adverse reaction among different sections of the civil society and political parties in the opposition besides eminent personalities in legal profession, intellectuals etc. It is said to have been promulgated to contain unfettered activities of extremist militants and to prevent suicide bombers. Almost all the elite citizens have expressed their fear and apprehension about wrongful application of the ordinance. And in the context and

experience of Bangladesh such apprehensions may not prove to be unfounded eventually. The celebrities have also described the provisions in the ordinance as an attempt at infringing upon the fundamental rights of the people, opposed to freedom of expression and direct intervention or meddling in private life of the citizens. In their considered opinion the ordinance shall have afforded the government enough power to transgress into lives of individual citizens.

As a matter of fact, the whole process of going for legal provisions in support of telephone bugging was done all in haste. The 'Tele Communication Act-2001' was amended hurriedly by the cabinet

to proclaim the ordinance through the president. It was done in such a manner as the Parliament was not in session. In support of such an abrupt action the aspect of terrorist activities (of JMB) was taken for a pretext. It was contended that the militants had been pursuing terrorist activities using mobile telephones freely. In the amended law (as per ordinance) the Home Ministry has been empowered to bug telephone of any one at any time. Similar provisions, claimed to have been in vogue in many other countries, have been alluded to, for affording justification to GOB proceedings in this case.

Yet such a flack empowerment of the Home Ministry continues to be unacceptable with the people at

large. From past experience there persists a genuine fear that the amended law may be misused in cases of the leaders of the opposition political parties, chiefly Awami League. Such bugging, on the one hand will interfere with the normal process of communication between opposition leaders and, on the other hand, it will afford the present government a surreptitious opportunity to pre-empt opposition political strategies to their own advantage. In the Bangladesh context there is no safe ground to reassure any one against the inappropriate use of the amended law.

In another statement on January 04, 2006 in a discussion meet the law minister Moudud Ahmed reaffirmed introduction of yet another law providing more stem measures against militant activities in the country. We are yet to see how much appropriately such a new law is used in practice.

Till now the telephone bugging ordinance is considered to have been a sinister attempt at strangu-

lating liberties of the civilians since there is no honest assurance from any quarter of the government on its one hundred per cent appropriate use without prejudice. In this connection we may refer to similar provisions in US laws but those have some positive and redeeming features. They are not to be freely applied in any case without prior approval of the court. A recent news tells about infringement of the provision of court's approval by President Bush himself. Such violation has provoked tremendous protest and row across the United States of America. In Bangladesh, on the country, the movement in favour of civil rights and personal freedom is yet to gain the desired momentum to pressurise the government. Still then, it shall be entirely the responsibility of the government to ensure that the provisions of the new ordinance are not abused in any case under any circumstance.

Kazi Alauddin Ahmed is a management consultant.