

Reduction in Public Sector Outlay in the Fourth Plan Marks a Negative Approach

Crisis in Moscow

If Russia is determined to destroy itself, through its current power struggle developing into a bloody civil war, no one can save it, neither Boris Yeltsin nor the West. And most certainly not the communist-dominated conservative Congress whose sole interest now lies in stripping the elected president of all his power, blocking his reform process and, if possible, taking the republic back to some kind of a Stalinist rule, governed under a controlled economy.

At the time of writing, a slim hope for Russia lies in the declaration of a presidential rule imposed on the republic by Yeltsin, which is to continue until April 25 when a special referendum will decide who is to run the country, the president or the legislature. Since it is anything but a consensus decision, far from a compromise between the feuding head of state and the Congress, anything can happen within the next 24 hours. Leading figures in the Congress have already started talking of impeachment of Yeltsin, the court has ruled that the imposition of the presidential rule is unconstitutional and Yeltsin has vowed that he would not let another Bolshevik revolution of the type that changed Russia in 1917, take place again.

One of the most absurd features of the crisis in Moscow today stems from the inability — or unwillingness — of Yeltsin to change the constitution that has totally lost its relevance to the present-day Russia or, for that matter, to dissolve the Congress. Yeltsin is hanging on, precariously and clumsily, under a system that, as far as the Congress is concerned, does not want him any longer. In turning to his people for support through a referendum, the Russian leader is virtually catching at a straw. However, he remains as vulnerable as ever, if not more. The Congress will do everything in its power, perhaps with the help of the judiciary, to block the referendum. Again, can Yeltsin be certain that in a country facing all kinds of shortages, not to mention a severe winter, he has enough grassroots support to win the referendum, even if it is held?

For Russia, now faced with this unprecedented crisis, one that is pushing the country towards a civil war, the only answer lies in throwing the out-dated constitution to the four winds, in putting it where it really belongs, the garbage bin of history. One can even go further and suggest that this is one time in history when a military take-over of the republic by the elected president — Boris Yeltsin — would be fully justified. The problem here lies in the uncertainty that surrounds the republic's defence establishment. Another option, the intervention from outside in support of a democratically elected head of state, is ruled out for a variety of reasons. However, a strong signal of support from the West, especially the United States, could still help Yeltsin in proceeding with his planned referendum. We will see within next few days, perhaps hours, which way the chilly wind is blowing through the snow-bound Moscow.

We Won't Forget You, Helen

When Audrey Hepburn died recently, Liz Taylor compared her to an angel and we said Liz just gave word to what was in the mind of millions, including this paper. Now that Helen Hayes is gone at 92 after a life of pristine purity what shall we compare this doyenne of American actors and actresses to? The double Oscar winner shuttled between the stage and the film for over seventy years and put her mark on both without mixing up the media. She never grew beyond five feet and she was the perfect female counterpart of Peter Pan with a harmless sense of humor that easily took in its stride the impurities and other defects of the world. Hers was some sort of an elfin pressure in both Broadway and Hollywood and, without ever succumbing to the irresistible lure of glamour, she held to her childhood family values till her death last week.

Although she made more than a score of movies, the theatre was her real place. And when doctors barred her way to the proscenium saying the dust of the theatre hall was hurting her health she took her leave from where she started at 5 with the nostalgic words, "It's become a reflex, Parlov's actress, that me." She could say that for over six decades she took the curtain call always of an enraptured audience. While she reached the apex of her stage acting career in 'Victoria Regina' as Queen Victoria, on 969 stagings she happened to be a very fine Shakespearean actress indeed and the bard was very close to her heart.

She didn't want many things for herself. That makes what she wanted with the whole of her being very important indeed for all of us to note and care and take our cue. One of her lifelong dreams was to see, if not meet, only to see Mary Skłodowska, Madame Curie to the world. She had very obviously found her ideal in the double Nobel laureate scientist. She sailed all the way to Europe to take the journey back, this time as a co-passenger of her ideal. No one was allowed on deck when the Madame was taken out for her evening stroll by Eve, her daughter. Helen espied her from some hideout every evening of the journey.

A curious desire seized her on way to a visit of Greece. She wanted to be all by herself in the great Athenian amphitheatre — and take in the feel of how it could be when Aristophanes, Sophocles, Euripides and so on was performed in Periclean Athens. When she found herself all alone in the amphitheatre, something gripped her as never had so far and she burst out reciting from her dear Shakespeare. This was Helen then, the real Helen behind the filmic and theatrical masks. Her marrying a completely discordant character, playwright Charles MacArthur, wild and unpredictable, was doomed to totter and fail, though her admirers, no, it held, as very near to an ideal marriage, for 28 years when her Charlie died in 1956. She lived ever after with his memory alive.

THE Fourth Five Year Plan (FFYP) has been scaled down from the original outlay of 68,930 crore taka to 62,000 crore taka. This represents a reduction of roughly 10 per cent in size.

This has been effected through a substantial cut in the share of the public sector in the total outlay from 41,930 crore taka to 34,700 crore Taka. This means a reduction of about 17 per cent in public sector outlay in FFYP (1990-95) and it also signals a decline in the proportionate share of public sector in the total Plan outlay from 61 per cent to 56 per cent.

This declining trend in public sector investment is difficult to understand. Significant augmentation of the government's capacity to generate higher funds for investment through greater internal resource mobilisation and tighter control on expenditure is an oft repeated success story. We are being told that the share of internal resources in the Annual Development Plan (ADP) was 25 per cent now and would rise to 42 per cent by the year 1995. Why is this then reduction in public sector investment in FFYP?

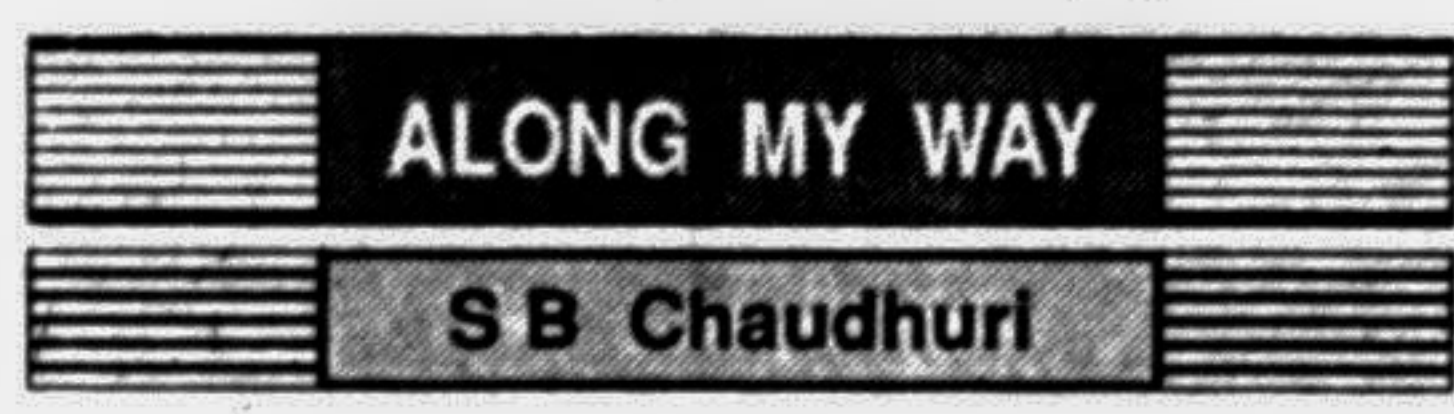
No less alarming is a report on poor implementation of ADP appearing in this newspaper. Quoting the

One crucial element contributing to poor ADP implementation is the bureaucratic weakness... It is reported that some of the ministries, divisions and public sector enterprises do not even hold monthly evaluation meetings. For some agencies, the performance record is totally blank.

Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Planning Ministry, the report depicts rather a dismal picture of ADP implementation during the first half of the current fiscal year. This performance, albeit some improvement compared to last year, still falls far short of the targets. Thus, only 27 per cent, i.e., 2,363 crore Taka, out of the total ADP allocation of 8650 crore taka for the whole year, has been spent during the first half of the year, i.e. during the July-December period. Against this achievement of 27 per cent in financial terms, the performance in physical terms is even worse at 22 per cent. The usual cliché that ADP utilisation normally goes slow in the first half of the year should not be considered adequate explanation for this performance failure.

It is true that shortfalls in ADP utilisation had been a regular feature in past years. Failure of the Government to generate adequate local resources to finance taka counter-part fund needs had been one of the major causes for the shortfall. However, this no

longer holds true. Delay in project approval had been another major factor slowing down ADP utilisation. This bottleneck has been cleared and the backlog of projects awaiting approval has been virtually eliminated. To rationalise the procurement process, guidelines in this respect



are said to have been revised. These and various other procedural bottlenecks, for instance the lengthy land acquisition process, that have plagued project implementation in the past, are said to have been removed. Training programmes are being provided to assist the sectoral ministries to improve the preparation of development projects. Project prioritization framework has been further rationalised. Intensive monitoring of nationally important projects are said to be under-

way. Project implementation is being kept under constant review at appropriate levels. Measures that have been taken to improve project implementation and ADP utilisation are indeed impressive and one could on and on, listing those.

And yet ADP implementation shows no improvement.

It is almost a no-go situation. A substantial increase at the level and efficiency of public investment are essential to support higher economic growth in the coming years. Usually, it is lack of funds which hamper efforts in this direction; whereas in our case, money is really not the problem, atleast for now. Adequate taka funding for project implementing agencies has been assured while the project pipeline grows bigger each successive year.

One crucial element contributing to poor implementation of ADP in the past is very much in evidence even now, namely, the bureaucratic weakness. This is the offshoot of an inherently cumbersome administrative system, a legacy of our colonial past. A drastic overhauling of the administrative framework for the execution of development projects is unavoidable.

To go back to the IMED report of ADP utilisation, the report underlines the apathetic attitude of different ministries, divisions, departments and key public enterprises responsible for implementing various development projects. Some of them, it is said, would not even comply with the simple directive to hold monthly evaluation meetings. For some agencies, the performance record is totally blank. Even in the case of nationally important priority projects brought under intensive monitoring, performance in a fairly large number of projects have lagged behind.

It is worth noting that at its meeting held last week, the National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reforms (NICAR) authorised

Formation of Development Coordination Committees at the thana level. Chairpersons of concerned union parishads will serve as presidents of the Committee by rotation. The local member of the parliament will act as the adviser of the Committee.

Presumably, NICAR took this decision to ensure smooth implementation of rural uplift programmes coming under the allocation in the ADP for infrastructural development work in thanas and districts. One wonders if some such arrangements could not be made for field level supervision of implementation of all ADP projects.

The importance of undertaking a successful public investment programme for the economic uplift of the country is perhaps escaping the attention of all concerned. There are questions asked. For one thing, can the Government count on the dedication and commitment of the bureaucracy? Should the democratically installed government associate the elected representatives of the people more closely with development projects? After all, commitment may very well be the missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle.

The writer, now a guest columnist of this paper, is a former governor of the Bangladesh Bank

OPINION

Foreign Policy : Constraints Overshadow Many Gains

Mir Abdus Satter

THERE are many critics, including myself, who feel that the performance by the present Government shows a poor sense of priorities and that, generally speaking, it falls below — maybe far below — our expectations. However, if one takes a balanced view, we cannot talk about "non-performance", the term used by your contributor, A M Mominul Haq in his attack on the administration published last Thursday.

The article reminded me of a piece by your esteemed guest columnist, Shah A M S Kibria, published a few weeks ago, that referred to "stagnation" on the economic scene.

Such terms, "stagnation" and "non-performance" are simplistic, which obscure several positive gains in many areas, by highlighting the failures. Some say, this is part of the modern journalistic skill which, speaking for myself, does not add to the credibility of serious discussion on contemporary problems.

Contributor Haq has offered a set of facts — all negative ones — to focus on the failure of the administration on the economic front. In this respect, he has done better than other critics. The question is, has he looked at macro-economic reforms undertaken by the Finance Ministry, which have been endorsed by many donor agencies, or at the introduction of fiscal discipline? Has he looked at the reduction of the inflation rate? Is there a rise in our export earnings?

In the same negative vein, Haq has gone after the Foreign Ministry, blaming it for what he has called "hibernation".

Instead of being carried away by emotions, we should try to understand a number of constraints in the foreign relations of developing country like Bangladesh. In my view, within these constraints, our performance has been anything but dismal. It certainly does not call for sarcastic condemnation, like that of Haq. It calls for understanding, careful evaluation.

There are a number of factors which have hindered the repatriation of Rohingya, like the return of stranded Pakistanis to the country of their choice. However, we must admit that on both these issues, some movement has taken place in past two years. It would have been faster if Myanmar and Pakistan had tackled their internal problems better. Dhaka is hardly in a position to push these countries harder.

The third constraint facing us stems from weaknesses of organisations of developing countries we belong to, ranging from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to OIC. This means that in dealing with problems which affect our bilateral relations with, say, India, Myanmar and Pakistan, we are obliged to act virtually on our own, using our devices and skill as best as we can. In this sense, we are in the same situation as many developing countries in Asia and Africa, the Middle East and the Arab bloc? Which of these countries, has taken the kind of initiative that has dazzled contributors to The Daily Star?

We may find fault with the performance of the Foreign Ministry. But let us offer it an alternative agenda, if your contributor can think of one.

The last constraint we must take note of lies in our economic scene. Bangladesh is just too dependent on donor nations to pursue new initiatives in its foreign relations. Just to give one example: Can Dhaka take too firm a line against Myanmar without causing offence to China, Japan and Thailand which want to take cautious line against Yangon? If we are economically strong, say, like Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, we can demonstrate our initiatives in every field, including foreign relations.

Contributors to The Daily Star are welcome to identify the failures of the present administration. At the same time, they must focus on our inherent weaknesses which cannot be wished away by the Foreign Minister, A S M Mostafizur Rahman.

S Asia Spends US \$ 18b for Arms Each Year

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

DR Mahbub ul Haq is deeply concerned about South Asia.

The development guru, who is adviser to the administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and author of the agency's annual human development reports, thinks the region seems out of step with the rest of the world.

Dr ul Haq notes that faced with a choice between investing in air-conditioned jeeps for generals and classrooms for children; South Asia, unlike the rest of the world, is still inclined to choose the jeeps.

"I am worried about South Asia. This region seems isolated from the changes visible in Europe and Russia, where the people's initiative alone

have a population of about two million, with the former's income being three times the latter's. But Oman has one-third the literacy rate of Costa Rica. And life expectancy in this Arab country is ten years less. Social indicators of Oman are a fraction of those of Costa Rica. Again, the United States' income is number six in the world; but it is 44th in the world list of child mortality," he says.

UNDP's fourth development report being prepared now confirms Dr ul Haq's assertion that income does not necessarily translate into impressive social indicators. The report examines the human profile of the US in all its aspects, according to Dr ul Haq who revealed, The human

index for blacks in the US is lower than that in many African countries. Similarly, the human index for Hispanics is lower than in many Latin American countries. This, to a large extent, explains the riots in Los Angeles."

India's defence establishment rejects Dr ul Haq's view that military budgets can be safely reduced. "If Pakistan (India's neighbour with whom it has had conflicts in the past) goes on spending for more money than is necessary, can India remain far behind? There is always an arms race between the two countries. They are looking at each other across the national boundaries and shopping desperately for arms. Only a political understanding between the two Prime Ministers can reduce this urge to spend more money on the military," according to defence observers.

Observers note that both countries' Prime Ministers are not engaging in any negotiations which could curb arms spending. Winds of a cold war and near-confrontation continue to blow on the sub continent making any major changes in arms spending unlikely.

But Dr ul Haq is optimistic

A freeze on annual defence spending can make available in the next 10 years at least US \$50 billion for meeting basic needs

has changed their political alignments. This has become possible after years of investment in people, which is the best investment for a very fast rate of growth," Dr ul Haq says.

— Dephneus Asia

To the Editor...

"Window on Asia"

Sir, "Window on Asia" by Shahed Latif published on 06 March 1993 is an excellent in-depth study of the social ills, and subsequent health problems, prevailing in our country, or Asia for that matter. I have always enjoyed reading his windows, but this one cuts where it hurts, and is indeed thought provoking. However, he has failed to observe that in a male dominated society, the women really have very little to say or do about "not using it" and thereby losing it", and here I am not talking about the 00.0001 per cent of the female population who are gutsy enough to want to look charming thru' the years and who also pitch in their bit towards the GDP, but of the many many others who are so bound by the male dominance and whose lives are so poverty stricken, living for them is just a passing of days, bearing children year after year and trying to make ends meet, that they grow old

beyond their years very soon. I would like to relate an observation which is in contrast to Shahed Latif's 72-year-old cheerful lady.

Early in the morning, I have watched from my verandah, a couple of times, a young couple walking to work. The man is always looking grim and walking fast, holding their child. The woman, barely in her late teens is skipping along to keep up with her husband, but she looks cheerful and that itself gives a glow to her face, which makes her look quite beautiful in spite of her poor attire. It set me wondering about the fate of the woman in a few years time, when she will perhaps have a couple more kids and will have lost some her stamina. I doubt I will even recognise her then. It makes me sad to think about it.

Bilateral relations

Sir, I must thank Mr S. M. Ali for his article on a new agenda to tackle Dhaka-Delhi bilateral relations, published in your paper on March 16.

nobody thought they would be eating vegetables with gusto, but now the health conscious people do eat vegetables, and this change has come about thanks to Government and media efforts. So also a change in outlook and lifestyle of our people can be achieved if this issue is made a national one.

Mr Ali deserves special thanks for coming out with bold suggestions for easing relationship between Dhaka and Delhi. I fully agree with him when he says "If we cannot raise the level of credibility which involves trust and mutual confidence we will be in serious trouble". His concern

may not be shared by many in both the countries but I am happy that at least one person has been as bold to state the fact as it is — concerned as he is of the possible danger of further estrangement of relations.

Chowkbazar

Sir, Chowkbazar is the most important business spot in the city. But it is very regretful to say that it is always packed with rickshaw vans and trucks. The same is with the adjoining areas like Begumbazar, Najmuddin Road, Nawabbari

and Swarighat. If you need to go from Chowkbazar to Nawabbari, it will take more than two hours due to the hopeless traffic system.

"1958 not '54"

Sir, No sooner had Mr P Haque in his letter "1958 not '54", published in your daily on