

## Push Needed to Health Projects

The World Bank consortium aided new health and population sector programmes considered pivotal to a huge qualitative difference in the service delivery system are suffering from a slowdown in implementation. Exposing our own dearth of monitoring it has had to be a World Bank review revealing the sorry state of affairs in an area which, needless to say, is crucial to human resource development in the country. While apparently managing to quickly unlearn the lessons from 50 per cent project underperformance among 66 WB consortium aided projects undertaken during the past five years, we are now plodding it out with the fourth population and health project (FPHP).

The last-named multi-million dollar project has hit quite a few snags, but these can be conveniently put under a single rubric — lack of management strategy with a vision. The WB review mission in its assessment of individual projects highlighted fundamental policy and institutional defects that made management and implementation of projects extremely difficult. For instance, appointment of staff was delayed slowing down not merely implementation but also reducing the effectiveness of the project when it came to gestate. On top of the personnel placement delays, projects would remain unmanned with frequent transfers of key incumbents as replacements took their time to be in place. The ministry of health and population control cannot be blindfolded to the adverse impact such sudden departure of important officials from projects make on the pace of their implementation. Even in administration such frequent changes are regarded as unwelcome disruptions, let alone in project management and implementation where single-handed driving and piloting can make all the difference between success and failure.

This vital aspect of handling projects should be accorded the importance of an implementation policy rather than be treated as part of the so-called conventional personnel policy. If necessary, a capacity enhancement project ought to be specifically undertaken to have a new breed of dynamic project managers in place. In this context, the World Bank recommended personnel tracking system seems worthy of immediate introduction. Spot those who have returned from abroad with specialisation in the field and harness their new skill immediately. This could then form part of an extended strategy for the creation of a post of reservers going well into the future.

A minimum three-year engagement of key officials in a project coupled with delegation of powers to them can step up implementation by leaps.

## Biman's Plight

Bangladesh Biman, the national airlines, is not exactly a world beater when it comes to operational efficiency or service. The airline's management has been little short of atrocious. Even then, a recent audit report which catalogued instances of corruption and mismanagement in the airline, has come as a shock. There is one observation in the report which cannot but raise eyebrows. The report has found Biman's Dhaka-London and Dhaka-New York flights to be highly loss-making, termed them "prestige routes", and suggested that these flights be stopped. The auditor's suggestion is rather mind-boggling, but Biman's non-performance on these routes is what warrants explanation.

Given the high concentration of Bangladeshi expatriates in London and New York, one would expect Biman to earn a handsome operating profit on these routes, even if it struggles on others. More importantly, this solid base of potential customers should have enabled Biman to build more business, by appealing to a wider clientele. In other words, people would have been justified in wanting to see additional flights on these routes, and not a discontinuation of existing flights. The auditor's observation, therefore, compels the public to wonder how Biman has managed to turn these geese with the potential to lay golden eggs into virtual dead ducks.

It may be mentioned here that airlines such as Emirates, Singapore Airlines and more recently Gulf Air, have expanded their operations far and wide on the basis of efficiency and service both on the ground and in the air. They did not have to rely on "ethnic" passengers. Biman has this advantage in its Dhaka-London and Dhaka-New York flights. Yet, it is losing even Bangladeshi passengers to other airlines. The public have a right to demand an explanation from Biman, and the government has a duty to drastically reform the airline's management and cut costs through manpower reduction. Biman has no right to hand over these potentially lucrative routes to other airlines through its inefficiency and mismanagement.

## Habits Die Hard

Volunteering information can be dangerous at times. The Dhaka City Corporation engineering department should not have perhaps requested the Traffic department for the 'unhindered plying of the sludge carrying trucks' from Dhanmandi lake to Joar Sahara. Some in the Traffic department sniffed something as seems evident from their reply to the oblique allegation saying, 'accordingly, we have notified all our personnel on roads to give priority to the trucks working at Dhanmandi lake site'. The sludge carrying trucks were apparently stopped at different points on their route to the dumping ground at Joar Sahara asking for extra money.

The truckers, some thirty in number, have stopped work in protest. The truck drivers alleged that the police sergeants have asked for two types of payment — a regular fee of three hundred taka per day per truck as long as the vehicles are engaged in this work and spot payment for the retrieval of the impounded papers of the vehicles and their drivers in lieu of one thousand taka per case. And all approach roads to the dumping ground are so skillfully guarded that these roads have become turnpikes. Few trucks can pass certain points without being stopped by the traffic sergeant and the driver harassed. But they were quite lenient on the drivers as the police did not file any case against them but asked for only one thousand taka for the return of the papers. Perhaps this is not the first instance of such highhandedness by the keepers of law and order. There are honest officers to be sure, but they are an increasingly endangered species. The Daily Star report of Monday also says that police officials denied their knowledge of such wrongdoing by their staff though the DCC people informed police of the allegations. Habits die hard, don't they?

# Bangs Don't Help, Performance Does

*The best course for the BJP is to quit government and sit in the opposition. Not because it has lost in all four states, but because it will send the message that the party respects even the semblance of people's anger to its governance. Its stock is bound to go up.*

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

VEN after the defeat in its stronghold, the three Hindi-speaking states in the North — Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan — the Bhartiya Janata Party is not facing the facts. The price rise or lapses in the administration are important factors. They have aggravated the situation. But they do not constitute the situation.

The truth is that the party has lost its sheen — and appeal to the voters. The image it has tried to project has been on the basis of two points. One, given a chance, it would do better because it is the party with a difference. Two, *Hindutva* is India's ethos and the party will push the country towards that. Whatever its rhetoric, the BJP's image has received a battering on both counts.

The point of the *Hindutva* ethos has hurt the BJP in two ways. Liberals have distanced themselves from the party more markedly. On the other hand, the staunch Hindus have got alienated because they have found the party compromising on its agenda for the sake of power. It took no time to set aside the three objectives — the demolition of mosques at Mathura and Varanasi, the building of Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri masjid and the deletion of Article 370 to confer special status on Jammu and Kashmir when the party found that some constituents were willing to support the BJP coalition.

The party has two options before it. One, it can become more stringent and more fanatic. But this may cost it the support of some of the 13 constituents, which sustain the shaky coalition. Moreover, if any lesson is to be drawn from the results, it is that the tide of communalism is receding. Delhi and Rajasthan, where the BJP has been routed, have a preponderant majority of Hindus. The committed RSS cadre is active. Rajasthan does not have many Muslims. So is the case of Madhya Pradesh. In Delhi, the Muslim population is confined to a handful of constituencies. It is really the Hindu community, which has turned its back on the BJP. Will becoming more Hindu help BJP?

The other option before the party is to eschew communalism.

were only an interlude.) Finding that the BJP is no different than others, they have turned back to Congress in the hope that it has improved in the wilderness. The near return of the backward and the Dalits, once the Congress vote bank, has been crucial.

The best course for the BJP is to quit government and sit in the opposition. Not because it has lost in all four states, but because it will send the message that the party respects even the semblance of people's anger to its governance. Its stock is bound to go up. In fact, the BJP should not have formed government in the first instance. It should have asked the nation to return it with a clear majority. After having tried all political parties, the voters would have had no option to but come to it. Even in the last Lok Sabha election, one slogan that helped the BJP was: "Give us a chance."

The party has lost the opportunity because it has been found out. The explanation that it was given only seven to eight months does not wash. It is the ineptness of the government that has annoyed the voters the most. How to charter its new policy will be the biggest task before the BJP.

However, the dilemma of Congress is a different one. Sonia Gandhi wants the Vajpayee government to go but hesitates to let her party step in. Somehow, she has come to believe that Congress has only to wait and power will automatically fall on its lap. Statistically, Congress has done well. In the 1993 assembly elections, Congress won 281 seats in the four states against the 261 of the BJP. In the 1998 Lok Sabha election, the assembly segments reduced Congress to 241 and

enhanced BJP to 330. But in the current elections, Congress is way ahead with 368 against the BJP's 162.

The reason why Sonia Gandhi is against Congress heading a coalition is the expectation to have a majority on its own. But how is it possible for the party to secure 273 seats in the 545-member Lok Sabha? Congress does not exist in Bihar and UP, having 139 members in the Lok Sabha. The four by-elections in Bihar have made it clear that Laloo Prasad Yadav still sways the voters because he has won all the four. Congress cannot oust the communists from the 60 odd seats, which they win in every election. Although Congress has bagged a by-election seat in Punjab, it does not mean that the Akalis, despite their infighting, can be ousted from more than six out of 13 seats in the state. Tamil Nadu, with 39 seats, is still a toss up among AIADMK, DMK and the Tamil Manila Congress of GK Moopanar.

Stretching it to the maximum length, Congress does not seem winning more than 220. This means adding 80 seats to the present strength of 140. Still it has to have some 50 more to have a simple majority. Congress will have to look for partners to reach the magic figure of 273. In the Lok Sabha elections, Congress will have to reckon with regional parties. If the party is going to seek their support in the next election, why not now? Whatever Sonia Gandhi's wishes, India is bound to have a coalition at least for one more election.

Even if the state elections, especially when they were held only four states, do not reflect the nation's mood, the way they were fought with state elections are no criterion to determine popularity at the national level. But it cannot deny the writing on the wall? It reads clearly and categorically. The BJP cannot win as it is constituted today. It must realise that it has lost even its bastions. Strange, the party got no advantage even after playing its trump card, the Bangs. Bangs do not impress people, the performance does.

# The Never-ending Crisis

*After the beating that Saddam is receiving it would seem that he would have no stomach to build weapons of any kind. In any case the whipping of Saddam cannot be lost on her Arab neighbours.*

In Teheran we were received the only time by the spiritual leader Khomeini, who poured cold water on our peace proposal. In Baghdad we were received warmly, and President Saddam Hussein was more than eager to reach a settlement.

Side by side with long protracted war and unending effort at mediation, the two adversaries got totally bogged down. After eight years of murderous war a peace deal was signed through the good offices of the UN. The deal was of a kind that Khomeini exclaimed, "I have drunk poison".

Not long after the misadventure in Iran Saddam Hussein fell into a trap in Kuwait, the fall out of which continues to this day. It was a wake up for Saddam to capture tiny Kuwait, enormously rich in oil. In fact at the bottom of all this lies the politics of oil of the oil cartels.

The US, the sole superpower, will not allow any interference with her oil politics. Therefore Saddam had to be taught a lesson, which would not be lost on the oil rich Arab neighbours.

A gigantic coalition was built that included the US, Britain, many Arab States. War drums were beating in a

## The Horizon This Week

Arshad-u-Zaman

crescendo as the gigantic army backed by powerful air force literally beat Iraq into pulp when she was crying for mercy. Once again the misadventure in Kuwait ended in a total fiasco for Saddam. Whereas in the Iran-Iraq war it was basically a fight between two neighbours, in the case of Kuwait, Saddam had literally put his hand in the cookey jar.

The UN Security Council has voted stringent measures to put Saddam on the mat. Saddam has to be totally stripped in public. His wailings appear to be falling on deaf ears as nobody is prepared to come to his aid. Thus we see Richard Butler visiting Iraq regularly in order to verify Saddam's programme of building weapons of mass destruction. After the beating that Saddam is receiving it would seem that he would have no stomach to build weapons of any kind. In any case the whipping of Saddam cannot be lost on her Arab neighbours.

The confers then moved to the cool hills of Taif, north of Makkah al Mukarramah, where a marble city had been built for the Conference. The Conference promptly decided to send Habib Chatti, the Secretary General of the OIC to Tehran to persuade the Iranian authorities not to boycott the Summit. The effort ended in failure as the Foreign Ministers level meeting commenced and I held fort in place of Chatti. The Summit decided to set up an eight member Heads of State Committee including President Ziaur Rahman from Bangladesh.

In record time we prepared papers, had all the vast resources of Saudi Arabia, including a palace, a private jet, for our mediation mission. The next morning we flew to Teheran and then to Baghdad.

## OPINION

### Carrying a Bag of Potatoes

Abu Shahab-ud-Din

Why there is a lack of energy, creativity, and originality in our life today? Why is the cultural scene so lacklustre in Bangladesh now? The answer lies in our confused, and unsettled national question itself. We are now going through the most critical period of our state's basic dilemma. Our national identity is not well-defined yet in order to ignite the general enthusiasm and spirit that presages the birth of a proud new member in the comity of world nations. Usually the intelligentsia (the theoretically-oriented, professional, creative class) of any nation defines, and lays the foundation to a national culture. Here, in our case, one half of the intelligentsia still thinks that Bangladeshi national culture need not be any different from the ever-beautiful, and original Bengali culture, the foundation of which was already well-defined, and laid down by the stalwarts like Bankim, Modhusudan, and Tagore a hundred years ago. Therefore, it is imperative on our part to faithfully continue that unique trend. If the task before us is nothing more than replicating some well-established forms and traditions, there naturally cannot be much original spirit and creativity demanded of us in carrying it on. This has thus become a smooth, mechanical job for us — no more difficult than carrying a bag of potatoes to a preset destination. So we carry that potent bag, and doze off once in a while on the road.

The other half of the intelligentsia, who think that the Bangladeshis are a fresh breed of up and coming Bengalees, who were culturally so uninitiated a hundred years ago that, virtually, they must rediscover in themselves a newly born bunch, whose mother tongue, although, happened to be Bangla all along, their real conscious existence has just started recently. Therefore, this bornish group, because of the time lapse, and cultural lag of a century, be better called "Bangladeshis" in order to be differentiated from their more literate and enlightened fore-runners.

If we are not proud to be different, not mature enough to detect our difference, still taking time in attaining the required maturity, then that is the root of our current stagnancy, backwardness, and a listless existence. But once the chain reaction of enlightenment starts, their will be fireworks here too, in this godforsaken corner of the world.

The writer is former lecturer of Russian Language at the University of Dhaka

## An Uneasy Anniversary

*As December 6 comes back with the grim reminder of the incident, the question that strikes one's mind is that what is the communal situation in India now and what impact the "Babri mosque" demolition has had on the country's politics?*



including the Congress and the United Front. As December 6 comes back with the grim reminder of the incident, the question that strikes one's mind is that what is the communal situation in India now and what impact the "Babri mosque" demolition has had on the country's politics?

Muslims make up more than 12 per cent of the population in India and play a crucial role in constituencies where there are tough tussles. They generally vote for the Congress on the left and centrist parties who form the United Front (UF). When the Babri Mosque was demolished, P. V. Narasimha Rao's Congress was in power at the centre. Many Muslims believe that the Rao government did nothing to protect it although the Congress is traditionally known as secular and close to the minorities.

By the time Rao condemned the incident and vowed to take actions against the offenders, it was too late and the Muslims had already started distancing themselves from Congress. In the last two general elections when they were largely with the UF or to some extent even with the BJP.

Sonia Gandhi and the present Congress leadership realised this and moved to assuage the feelings of the Muslims and offered apologies for the Babri Mosque destruction. Earlier, the Congress had expressed regrets over its government's role during the demolition of the mosque but the Muslims were not satisfied. Sonia Gandhi and other leaders even sought to win back the support of minority Sikhs who has also alienated from Congress to a large extent following the Operation Blue Star at the Golden Temple and anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination. Their approach of late has succeeded in winning back many Muslims and Sikhs to the Congress fold and it was a factor for an easy Congress win in the recent assembly elections.

In recent years the BJP despite being seen in many quarters as "communal" succeeded in winning over many Muslim votes, and that too, at the cost of the Congress which has traditionally been close to the Muslims. Why did the Muslims distance themselves from the

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has said that there has been no communal riots in India since the BJP-led coalition took over early this year. He is right and many Muslims and secular forces have confidence in liberal leaders like him. But there is another set of BJP leaders and governments who are really hard-liners like those seeking to impose some religious programmes like "Saraswati Vandana" in schools in Uttar Pradesh. Many Muslim guardians in the state has decided to take back their children from those schools. The left and centrist parties have bitterly criticised such programmes.

However, because of the liberal section of the BJP leadership the communal parties like the Shiv Sena, VHP and the Bajrang Dal can not take a strict stand on many matters and as a result the relations of these parties with that section of the BJP leadership is not good as reflected in the uneasy ties in the Shiv Sena-BJP coalition government in Maharashtra recently.

The communal situation in India is always under close scrutiny of major political parties. The minority factor also played a role in the recent state assembly elections although other issues like onion price and poor governance featured prominently. The demolition of the Babri Mosque has been a black spot particularly when the courts are involved in the issue. While efforts by some religious organisations -- both Hindu and Muslim -- to whip up tensions over the issue once again is undesirable, it is necessary that such organisations are effectively tackled by the governments in the states and the centre. Even Mamata Banerjee of "Trinamul Congress" in India, a party in the BJP-led coalition, says the December 6 is a black day. The close ambience in South Asia and the SAARC spirit largely depend on the communal harmony in the largest country of the region.

point out the following facts for consideration by the city authorities:

We have seen a letter published in the DS on 26.10.98 titled "Six-day fix" and there were some points to think about traffic jams.

There are overbridges and underground train systems in Delhi and Calcutta which we may emulate. Besides, rickshaws also are now under control in Delhi and Calcutta.

Rickshaws should ply only on lanes and bylanes.

The writer has dwelt on Dhanmondi only. Moghbazar, Mouchak, Gulistan, Baitul Mukarram and other areas should also be taken under consideration.

Our city authority officials are requested to visit the city on foot to understand what really is the situation of the traffic in Dhaka.

M. Ali Dhaka

## Road to democracy

Sir, India has announced that a law for "freedom of information" will be tabled in the parliament for adoption.

All western democracies have this, and especially in the US this law helps in developing true democracy. That's why they are now ruling the world.

Can we not enact similar law?

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## Stock market or casino?

Sir, The country's stock market today has turned into a virtual nationwide on-line casino, where real and fictitious share certificates are used more as gambling chips rather than investment product.

Whilst regulatory bodies are busy plugging leaks in the floodgates of market manipulation, big cracks are appearing

on the walls of fragile capital market regulations. The daily netting system in both the bourses has become a devil's gift for the wild speculators. The need for having shares and money is dispensed with where trades are squared off before the daily closing.

The operation of screen-based on-line trading without the supportive central depository system has only resulted in a thriving short sale deals. Of late, the erratic price behaviour of two low-profile shares in both the exchanges have again raised doubts about the efficacy of the regulatory bodies in monitoring market mechanism.

Khurram Malik<br