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ADP implementation status

Previous lessons unlearned

ALMOST past the ninth month of the Annual Development Programme 2003-04, roughly 36 percent of the total allocation for the ADP stands utilised. How much of this fund utilisation, both local and foreign, corresponds to the meeting of physical development targets is something that has also to be borne in mind. But, in the main, the question that automatically pops up is: how are we going to achieve the remainder 64 percent of the ADP in the three months left to the fiscal 2003-04.

Obviously, this is an impossible task. And that's why the government is having to slash the original ADP of Tk 20,300 crore by Tk 2300 crore to hunker down to Tk 18,000 crore. Even this reduced target is notional like the original target was, and, therefore, it looks set to be unattainable. In hindsight, the ADP allocation for last year was originally set at Tk 19,200 crore. Down the line it was trimmed by TK 2100 crore to stand at Tk 17,100 crore. But the government ended up utilising Tk 15,000 crore! The question is: why such notional figures and targets were set in the first place when the ADP was announced? The explanation is given by an expert: although there was a pragmatic forecast of how much project aid would be available to the ADP 2003-04, the government high-ups asked to increase project aid by 59 percent. Thus the approved ADP had 'a weak base from the very beginning'.

The implementation of the locally funded projects has been 'satisfactory', but that of foreign aided funds remained at a low level, according to the finance minister. Thus, it has averaged out to a low ADP implementation overall, particularly given the fact that the expected foreign aid component was 59 percent of the whole programme.

Who is to blame for the situation? The oft-repeated drawbacks are: faulty project design, harsh donor conditions, delay in appointment of consultants, complications in tendering and directors' inefficiency. All of these are rightful concerns, but to our understanding, so long as a certain political approach that is willy-nilly taken to ADP is eschewed, implementation of ADPs in the forms they appear will remain a far cry. ADP targets are often unrealistically set to aim a political mileage over the opposition; and secondly, selection of projects on political expediency rather than on purely economic development considerations has proved problematic, too. These shortcomings need overcoming in the first place.

Farm loan default

Interest waived, but principal recoverable

THE government has done well to waive the accumulated interest on outstanding agriculture loans up to Tk 5,000 which is to benefit 15 lakh farmers. The amount being written off is Tk 490 crore which was set to further increase the indebtedness of the peasants in view of their proven inability to repay.

It is a step in the right direction and a benign move, too. To attribute any political motive would be wrong in that the elections are two and a half years away. We have to give the credit where it is due.

The increasing indebtedness was literally turning the farmers into fugitives in that the certificate cases were chasing them out of their homes. It caused hardship to their daily living much the same way that land cultivation was also being hindered at this peak boro-irri season.

The critics are likely to argue that such 'leniency' could prompt the farmers to flunk on the payment of principal upto the election year when the government might consider writing it all off. They have a point. Because, small farmers who, by and large, have been good loan repayers by reputation should not be lulled in the belief that complete waivers were possible. We cannot allow the fabric of financial discipline to be torn asunder under any circumstances.

The government, therefore, will have to make sure that the defaulting farmers pay back the principal amount in 12 instalments a year. The repayment schedule should be manageable to the farmers.

Malaysians voted for moderate Islam

HARUN UR RASHID

THE massive victory of Malaysian Prime Minister Datu Sri Abdullah bin Ahmad Badawi in the general election on 21st March sent a clear message to all that Malaysian voters have rejected conservative or orthodox version of Islam. In doing so they have given approval of progressive and moderate version of Islam propounded by Prime Minister Badwai. It was the strength of the victory of moderate Islam that caught many people by surprise. Hard-line Islamic party, Pan-Islam Se-Malaysia -- Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) took a good beating and lost substantial ground with the electorate.

The fundamentalist party PAS lost heavily in the election, even its leader could not get elected to the Parliament. Badawi's coalition, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), won more than 90 per cent of the seats in the national Parliament and managed to regain one of the conservative states (Terengganu) it lost to the PAS at the 1999 election.

Prime Minister Badawi, better known as "Pak Lah" (Father Abdullah) in the country, is an Islamic scholar and stands for tolerant version of Islam. He believes that Islam and modernity can go together. To him, Islam does not preach hatred towards people of other faiths and disapproves unreasonableness and fanaticism. He has been very critical of fundamentalist Islamic party (PAS) on the ground that they exploit innocent people for political power in the name of their orthodox interpretation of Islam.

Observers believe that PAS's reckless promise of heaven for those who voted for it back fired with voters. Many Muslims were uncomfortable with PAS's unconventional style campaign, including a declaration that the place of hell would be reserved for those voting for the ruling UMNO. Furthermore, many Muslim women were also put off by the orthodox policy of PAS on women. Another outcome of the election resulted in virtual wipe out of PAS's partner, Parti Keadilan (Justice Party) of Anwar Ibrahim's wife, Dr. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.. Only she won the election from her party.

During the campaign, Badawi turned to the plight of Malay farmers in the Islamic heartland of the North-East of the country and it paid handsome political dividends.

He has been a strong and uncompromising fighter against corruption and nepotism. His words were followed by action.

Prior to election, the arrest of a corrupt Minister manifested his determination to wipe out corruption in the government. Badawi's swift action against a Minister and his promise of clean and moderate government lured many voters back. Furthermore, the election result shows that the deep divide in the Malaya community, caused by the September 1998 sacking and arrest of Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister, seems to have been healed.

It is a sweet election victory for Malaysian Prime Minister Badwai. Only last October he succeeded to the high position of Prime Minister when Dr. Mahathir stepped down after 22 years. Badawi has now obtained in his own right a decisive mandate from people to rule Malaysia. Although he has been a protégé of Dr. Mahathir, he slowly but steadily distanced himself from some of his predecessor's policies. He is a consensus man and does not approve confrontation in politics. He quietly made changes of government policies. For example, big infrastructure projects, previously awarded to corporate insiders, were cancelled and competitive bidding was introduced to eliminate corruption and nepotism.

Economists believe that graft in the country needs to be urgently addressed if Malaysia's economy is to sustain the high growth rates. It is reported that according to calculations by Morgan Stanley regional economist Daniel Lian, the extent of graft in the country cost Malaysia's economy as much as 5 percent of its gross domestic product. Once reforms take place, foreign investors will be willing to sink money into Malaysia.

People hope that the overwhelming election victory delivered Badawi a huge mandate to pursue attempts to break the nexus between politics and business. People expect him to go after the big corrupt businesses, not just the so-called small fish (ikan bilis in Malaysian language) he has prosecuted in the last five months.

Malaysia is a country of 22 million people. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual country. Malaya Muslims constitute about 57 per cent of the population, the Chinese 30 per cent, while the Indians about 9 percent. The racial harmony in Malaysia was maintained since the 1969 eruption of racial tension between Chinese and Malay communities.

Malaysia is one of the world's top 20 countries in economic development and is in 4th place for international trading competitiveness, behind only the US, Canada and Australia. 36 per cent of the work-force are engaged in industry, 48 per cent in services while only 16 per cent in agriculture. Malaysia's per capita income has risen to Asia's fifth highest, trailing only Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. Its stock exchange is one of the best performers in the world over the past five months.

The new Malaysian government under Badawi is overwhelmingly pragmatic in its attitude towards domestic and international issues. Tolerance and cooperation has been the hallmark of Badawi's coalition party, UMNO and the victorious Prime Minister has made his mark among his voters by preaching Islam's precepts of peace, open-mindedness and respect for other faiths. Badawi's victory is a positive development of moderate Islam, drawing a clear distinction from fundamentalist Islam.

The election has demonstrated that Malaysia is a pillar of stability and democracy has taken a firmer root in the country than some of other fragile democracies in South-East Asia and North Asia. In Seoul, politicians are immersed in the debate of bitter impeachment of their President and in Taiwan the national election is overshadowed by calls for invalidating the result of the election. Malaysia has none of the political uncertainty that may restrain longer-term investment in South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Many Islamic scholars believe although the moral and spiritual teachings of Islam have eternal value and validity, their social, economic, administrative and political ramifications are to be interpreted and adapted within the context of time and place. And that is what moderate voice of Islam stands for. The verdict given by Malaysian voters will be taken due notice of in many Islamic and non-Islamic countries. The moderate voice of Islam that has not kept pace in publicity with hard-line Islamists will hopefully receive a boost in other Islamic countries. Malaysia could be the role model for many Islamic countries.

BOTTOM LINE

Many Islamic scholars believe although the moral and spiritual teachings of Islam have eternal value and validity, their social, economic, administrative and political ramifications are to be interpreted and adapted within the context of time and place. And that is what moderate voice of Islam stands for. The verdict given by Malaysian voters will be taken due notice of in many Islamic and non-Islamic countries.

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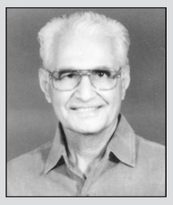
What is Sharon aiming at?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

WAS Ariel Sharon and his government acting on impulse, reacting to "Palestinian terror", in having Shaikh Ahmed Yassin assassinated? Did he have no well-thought-out strategy of his own? How can he not realise that premeditated assassination of such a notable Palestinian will provoke counter assassinations: more suicide bombings or variants of them? He well knows that such actions amount to state terrorism and radically undermine rule of law or undo what survives of international law. Anyway, a policy based on assassinations across borders is sure to undo what civilization has achieved so far.

It seems Sharon has had Shaikh Yassin killed only to make Palestinians mad with anger and to make them think only of revenge. Sharon, the calculating politician, despite his deep personal hatred of Palestinians, is pursuing a policy that he expects will achieve his ends: accompanied by hate-mongering, the supposedly tit-for-tat hits on Palestinian targets, dressed up as revenge against suicide bombings, can make him popular and retain PM's job. Let us find out what this policy of deliberately provoking Palestinians is calculated to achieveunless he is mentally unsound. This he is not. What is Sharon's policy is to be seen in the context of both short-term Israeli politics and of the longer-range Israeli aims. In the short-run, he, after having done his worst to render all peace formulas a dead letter, now proclaims a new peace march, beginning with unilaterally withdrawing from Gaza Strip, but after leaving no organised authority to assume power and responsibility. His actions seem calculated to create maximum anarchy. This is his way of peace-making.

Significantly, he has said nothing about the West Bank areas' future, also under Israeli occupation. Will this military occupation continue indefinitely, even after 37 years? What sense does it make for Israel to vacate Gaza Strip and go on sitting tight over so much Palestinian territory indefinitely? Which long-term future can one talk about? There must be something for West Bank areas in Sharon's mind. Why is he silent on that? Then, there is this new wall, deep inside the designated West Bank areas for Palestinians, supposedly to safeguard an Israel which refuses to share its ideas about the future of the area. It is clear that Israel is destroying the contiguity and economy of West Bank territories, perhaps for good. Malodour of bad faith is now overpowering, though it has not reached White House.

Who can forget that Israel has never lived within defined territories - from 1948 onward; it has not respected the borders given it by the UN resolution authorising its founding; it conquered more territories after defeating all the Arab armies, including Glubb Pasha's legendary Arab Legion. Then, in 1967 it suddenly attacked Egypt, Syria (UAR), Jordan and others, conquering all the West Bank, Golan Heights and Nagev Desert. Israel has never published an authentic map of itself, not wishing to define its borders definitively. Who can miss the significance of this? There are boatloads of Israeli hawkish politicians, parties and Rabbis who never tire of invoking Ertze Israel, the mythical greater Israel; they assert it is their destiny according to their religious texts.

Israeli hawks have recommended strange courses of radical action, involving a lot of ethnic cleansing - displacing Arab Palestinians and making the entire Judea and Samarra (West Bank areas) a part of Israel. How they do not say. How far east or south must they go to achieve their Ertze Israel is not common ground among the hawks? Some Ashk-e-Nazi secular Israelis do talk of peace with Palestinians based on vacation of undefined parts of West Bank areas. But Tel Aviv hawks have set up hundreds of Jewish settlements, connected by criss-crossing roads. Even according to secular Israelis not all settlements can be dismantled and Israeli IDF will continue to guard them and control the roads. So even the ideas of enlightened Israelis do not permit Palestinians to expect more than some isolated Bantustans, all of which will not be economically viable. The prospect is one of apartheid with the Israelis lording it over enslaved Arabs.

One wonders what has been the basis of Arab-Israeli negotiations so far. We can forget the negotiations before and immediately after 1973 War. They were mainly between the US and other Arab states, most of which eventually made their own peace with Israel and have stopped championing the Palestine cause; only Iraq, Syria, Libya and Iran continued to support Palestinian rights. Iraq has been destroyed; Iran and Syria are under heavy pressures; and Libya is undergoing a transmutation. Palestinians stand alone today; virtually no state speaks for them.

Even so, where are the Oslo Agreements? Where are the two Nobel Peace Laureates? Who sabotaged those agreements? Then, what happened to the hard work by the Quartet that finally took the shape of American Road Map to ME Peace? Where has this roadmap led to? End result will be what Sharon may be about to do to Palestinians. His 'achievements' to date are an indicator. Has anyone asked: what can the Palestinians look forward to? It is doubtful that the US, the hyper power busy reshaping ME, has ever taken into account the disaster awaiting Palestinians; the latter's human rights have not been the worry of the US or most major powers. It is only recently, after the Iraq fiasco, that the socalled "old Europe" has begun to notice the pitiable Palestinians on their radar screens; they sometime mention the Palestinians' future. Would no one ask the simple question: why are the Palestinians so mad as to resort to suicide attacks on Israelis? Why select the Israelis? Palestinians see them as heavily-armed robbers who have snatched most of their historic homeland, thanks to America's support and acquiescence of major powers like Russia, UK and France. This support first led to the rubber-stamping by the newly-created UNO of what the US and UK wanted - with all Arab states opposing. Zionists had imposed themselves on Palestine with the active British help after WWI. Later Israel usurped territories in the war of 1948. It conquered much of remaining Palestine in 1967. It is still militarily occupying West Bank areas and Gaza - 37 years after the war. For thirty-seven years of living under the Israeli Martial Law, Palestinians have had no civil rights. No wonder, they are desperate and angry. As they see it, Israelis have successfully sabotaged all peace-making efforts. Arabs have gone from one humiliation to another. Doubtless, they are paying for their disunity, backwardness and weakness; the strong has vanquished the weak. Fine. But each action has its apposite reaction. If the defeated and brutally oppressed (weak) are adopting the only weapon left to them, terror, no one should be surprised. Regrettable as loss of human life is, history's ineluctable imperatives were behind 9/11 and March 11 outrage in Madrid; worse should be feared.

The US and its Iraqi Coalition friends have to understand this stern logic:

Israel does what it does because it works in close mesh with America and it is the latter which underwrites the state of Israel politically and financially. For Arabs everywhere Israeli actions vis-à-vis Palestinians or other Arabs are really American actions at one short remove. What can avail but terror against the hyper power or its satellite? Hence the threat of more terrorist attacks is serious.

The US and friends of Israel thus qualify, in Arab eyes, as legitimate targets. This seems to be the genesis of 9/11 and 3/11 (Madrid) attacks. It is easy to condemn terrorist attacks because the innocents suffer - and not the main policy-makers who actually enrage the attackers. The latter just go on. That makes terror basically futile. One regards individual terrorists' attacks anywhere to be useless, misplaced and mostly counterproductive. Modern states are too powerful. But it is vital to understand what motivates these terrorists and why. To be able to stand in their shoes is necessary to realise that terrorists are looking for ways to make their opinions heard. It is enlightened self interest of the high and mighty to provide a credible platform or tribune to the dispossessed and the oppressed Palestinians from which they can proclaim their love of freedom.

Mr. Bush, the US Presidential candidate, talks much about freedom. Has he heard of the Palestinians? Don't they deserve freedom? Can monstrous historic wrongs not be corrected? Is 84 years so long ago that no one can discover the origins of Palestinian troubles - when the League of Nations handed over Palestine to Britain. What was its demographic character at the time the Mandate was given? Did the League hand over a Jewish-peopled Palestine to the British care? Let us ask how honestly did Britain achieve the objectives that the League must have specified? What precisely was League's Mandate and what did the British accomplish. Isn't Israel an instance of Albion's perfidy?

The time has come to employ a wholly fresh and radical approach to the Palestine question. After all the lives of a whole people have been destroyed because the supposedly liberal opinion in Europe had a bad conscience, having massively oppressed the Jews. Those who grieve for 3000 American lives in 9/11 and 200 in Madrid's 3/11 should reserve a few tears for the many thousands of Palestinians brutally killed by IDF just as many Israeli civilians have been needlessly killed. Shouldn't Europe and others wake up to what the latter day Nazis - on the rebound - are about to do? Discovering a method in the apparent madness of power-drunk Israeli politicians is a priority.

PLAIN WORDS

The time has come to employ a wholly fresh and radical approach to the Palestine question. After all the lives of a whole people have been destroyed... Those who grieve for 3000 American lives in 9/11 and 200 in Madrid's 3/11 should reserve a few tears for the many thousands of Palestinians brutally killed by IDF just as many Israeli civilians have been needlessly killed.

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Let us not ruin ourselves

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

AS was expected the present law and order situation in the country and the most alarming hike in the prices of essential commodities would engage the parliament members of the government in serious consideration. The meeting of the BNP parliamentary party, which was due to be held two months earlier, was at last held on March 21, 2004. It was reported by the print and the electronic media that almost all the MPs expressed their anxieties over the afore-stated two terribly burning issues.

Belated though the meeting provided an opportunity to the members to make an introspective look at the overall scenario obtaining now in the country. The younger section of the MPs was reported to have been very critical about some of the ministers/senior members of the party. They demanded to size down the cabinet to 30 with persons known for their high moral integrity and honesty. More specifically, they pleaded with the leader of the party and Prime Minister so as not to include any businessman in the ministry. They said that those persons in the cabinet were more after their respective business interest. It was due to their machination that the government was not able to enforce any control over the prices of essential commodities. This younger group foresaw that the 'popularity' of the 'alliance' would be swept away to the waters of the seas if the price hike and acts of terrorism were not effectively contained right now.

The open discussion that followed even touched on the legitimacy of opposing the propagators of the alternative stream led by Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury. By going into action against the trend the youthful members of parliament thought would mean attaching importance to it which it didn't deserve. Such a realisation on the part of the law makers belonging to the party in power would be a genuine expectation of any one, particularly the saner ones of either side. In fact, the police action on the street blocking passage to political opponents, was in itself utterly provocative. Such interception on grounds of protecting public life and property is readily understandable. But the "Bikalpa Dhara" activists didn't do anything that could call for such action and that too, so ruthlessly where unidentified hoodlums joined hand in a ghastly sportive fashion.

The slur or the slander so freely dispensed allegedly at the instance of 'higher-ups' could be the mis-deed of some over enthusiastic police men pampered to such acts by lower level of people in the political party in power. It is inconceivable that the head of the government could have any share in such "orders". At least I do not believe it since the Chief Executive of the government in her political overtures is very much used to say in public meetings that she would meet any challenge of the opposition politically. And such a stance, if meticulously and honestly adhered to, must be a sensible one and hence should be ever vindicated. Otherwise, the strength of the government or the political party in power depletes fast to reinforce and reinvigorate opposition strongholds. The part of the population which has no political linkage or affiliation, in such events, will register their support to the opposition granting it numerical strength more than ever before. It's a very simple arithmetic, historically proved and must therefore be intelligently taken care of.

Away to the chain of events over the past couple of weeks it is observed that notwithstanding the ideological differences of the political parties, big or small or the past unpalatable experience with some of the leaders of those parties, the opposition is gaining faster grounds. All are, as it appears, bent upon waging a war against the party in power. If there is ultimately a united movement things may turn very uncertain. It is therefore of no use to be complacent with the two-thirds majority in the parliament and to use provocative words benefiting opposition consolidation.

Still then the new movement of the alternative trend is yet to take a concrete shape to be reckoned with. For instance, we can take a look at Dr Kamal Hossain's Oikya Prochesta and its recent convention at the Paltan. It was indeed amusing to know that invitation was extended to all the political parties including BNP. The agenda included, among others, rousing of public opinion against the ever-compounding acts of terrorism, corruption and rule of the musclemen with direct patronage of the party in power. In the first place therefore the invitation to the 'alliance' government members appeared to be funny and ridiculous.

It was true that after being forced to run for safety down the railway tracks at Tejgaon Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury could manage to attend Dr Kamal Hossain's convention and even was able to address the huge audience. But the pledged unity of all the political parties, the left-leaning 11-party conglomerate and even the mainstream opposition party Awami League presented some breach somewhere. Political observers have been of the opinion that the ground for securing Awami League's support to the 'Oikya Prochesta' was lost to Dr Hossain due to his own lack of enthusiasm to respond to AL's call for hartal on Dr Humayun Azad's case.

The much desired element of reciprocity was surprisingly absent. It was also reported that he didn't even consider to repeat his personal persuasive endeavours with the smaller parties in case of Awami League or for that matter, its chief Sheikh Hasina. That's how the absence of AL representation in the convention shall have been explained.

The imaginary clash of personality did perhaps the inevitable twisting of the whole episode.

However, it is premature to make any conclusive remark on the issue of the planned movement against the present government. Meantime, there has been some very dirty scenes witnessed by the whole nation. Vicious acts of terrorism have been perpetrated on the industrial holdings of Maj Mannan, said to have been at the instance of some extremists in the party in power. Such acts of gansterism and massive destruction of property have been something which Begum Khaleda Zia, as the Prime Minister, has been condemning in all her public meetings. But the men behind the dastardly acts continue to show utter disrespect to the commands of their leader and thus slandering her public image.

Against such a grim and atrocious situation the firm words and conviction of the younger group of MPs of the government party are sure to lit the candle of hope in the dark alleys. It is high time that urgent repairs are done to the damage done by the own party men, before it is too late.

We await and see the action that the government takes in all such cases. Let prudence rule the judgement of everyone in the government and in the opposition. Let us not ruin ourselves in any case by being vindictive.

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