

PM's directives

Poor ADP implementation
must be overcome

THE prime minister has addressed the perennial question of ADP implementation falling behind time and the resultant 'yearend outburst of work' that aims to make amends for the underutilisation of project funds throughout a fiscal year.

The PM's directives to the top officials have two important components. She has asked them to accelerate the pace of releasing funds and, in case of non-implementation of projects, to surrender the unutilised money.

The failure to implement the projects under the ADP in time has obvious drawbacks that the planners must take into consideration. When projects are implemented in hot haste at the fag end of a fiscal year, the normal procedures are ignored. It can spawn corruption and anomalies like violation of tender rules, poor procurement or delivery, leading to cost overrun that a poor country can ill afford. The quality of work also suffers when the project managers' main concern is to beat the clock. Finally, projects may remain incomplete despite the last-minute attempt to gear everything up, which is a failure that is seen as proof of our inefficiency by the development partners. It also adversely affects overall development planning.

The PM's directives have an extra bit of relevance in the present context because of the marked under-implementation of the ADP in the current fiscal.

However, the question is how things can be handled with the desired efficiency, and improved substantively, when we are already into the last month of the fiscal 2003-04.

The instructions of the PM have exposed the fact that the performance of the bureaucracy has been lacklustre, to say the least. But there is perhaps no way to allow things to remain where they are, if only because the donors and development partners are always stressing the need for increasing the efficiency of our project implementation mechanism. The government must not overlook that the burning issues of corruption and wastage of national resources have a lot to do with delayed and shoddy project implementation.

Tigers revelling in draw

An excellent display of team work, confidence and dexterity

THE Tigers have done it again. They have shown us that they are a formidable group of cricketers who against odds cannot only rise above mediocrity but also excel in performance. Let's remind ourselves of what our reporter in St Lucia, Rabeed Imam said -- 'If there is one emotion that can best describe Bangladesh's performance against West Indies, it's astonishing'. What a show of team spirit and determination to survive till the end of the game.

Captain Habibul Bashar's brilliant century showed sign of hopes, but the failure of middle order batsmen was enough to overshadow the bright spot. But not so soon. The ninth batsman Mohammad Rafique rescued the team in a spectacular way with his own century in the first innings. And lastly Khaled Mashud's fighting spirit on the last day of match gave the Tigers a rare opportunity to revel in a real draw.

But was it all so easy? Their choice to bat first was criticised since the opponents were armed with a good number of fast bowlers. But they survived. Though they bowled out the West Indies batting lineup without much trouble, they landed themselves in trouble in the second innings. Again the fighting spirit that Khaled Mashud is famous for resurfaced and saved the team from another probable embarrassment.

Overall, the Tigers deserve all the encouragement and appreciation. Quite naturally the team is elated. Their effort, their sincerity have been rewarded. If they continue to play with such elan and confidence, then it wouldn't be too much to expect them to win their first ever test match. We wish the whole team all the best for the next game. Though they didn't win in the last one, it wasn't any less than winning. Then again who knows what kind of surprise is in store for us in the future.

Japan, Koizumi and Bangladesh



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

AN editorial published on 22 March, 1897 in 'The Japan Times' noted that -- 'The bulk of the Japanese have as much difficulty to understand foreigners as the latter find it difficult to understand the former'. This holds true even today.

Most of us in the modern world are affected in some way or other by the ideas, culture and economy of Japan. Yet, this country remains for many an enigma, an unsolved riddle, Westernised, but different from any Western country. It is part of Asia, but clearly unlike any other Asian society. In this country tradition and modernity have become part of one continuum.

I was recently in Japan on the invitation of their government. For me, it was a revelation. Japan proved to be a stimulating fusion of the East and West.

The Japanese might have a practical, syncretic and polytheistic approach to religion, often perplexing to outsiders, but the modern Japanese society, which has developed from a feudal system is today astonishingly egalitarian. Despite modernity and industrialisation, Japan has been able to blend many aspects of its beliefs with its family values. Devotion to hard work has combined in this country with a submission to the consensus of the group rather than the individual. This factor has become a major binding element in Japanese society.

My discussions with senior Japanese officials as well as ordinary people on the street underlined two aspects -- how cautious the ordinary citizens generally are and how their experience over the last few years have added greater sobriety to their national character. Almost everybody recalled the fact that decades of uninterrupted growth had been affected and recession had emerged after the bursting of the bubble economy in the 1990s. This, they commented,

had led not only to hardships and unemployment but also in many cases into forced early retirement. There was also a consensus that these difficulties had prompted the Japanese government to move towards long overdue economic reform and a greater opening of its markets to international trade.

These steps appear to have paid off. Japan under the guidance of Prime Minister Koizumi is slowly re-emerging not only as an important and active player in the neighbouring Asian region but also in the wider arena of international affairs.

Mr. Hiroshi Tsukamoto, the President of Japan External Trade

Organisation told me that exports are expected to post double-digit growth this year in Japan, mostly because of China. This spurt in economic activity is going to ensure a decline in unemployment and a possible end to deflation in Japan.

This sort of optimism in the air is also persuading consumers to start spending again and economists are forecasting a strong GDP growth into 2005.

POST BREAKFAST

Japan is going to enhance its economic inter-action with South Asia as part of Koizumi's new vision. This will include massive outlays of foreign direct investment in India. We need to be part of the extended process. We must not lose this opportunity of being part of a new awakening of Japan and its renewed involvement with the outside world. Japan has been an important partner for Bangladesh since early 1972...Japanese investment in Bangladesh ranks fourth among foreign investing countries, after the USA, the UK and Malaysia.

He has been able to steer Japan slowly but surely out of its difficulties.

Today's article will attempt to touch on some of the significant things that are currently happening within Japan under the stewardship of Junichiro Koizumi.

A non-believer in staid leadership, this photogenic gentleman has been in the news most recently with his risky gamble of going to Pyongyang to bring back five children of Japanese background. Their parents (rescued earlier by the Prime Minister in 2002), it may be recalled, had been abducted by North Korea in the 1970s. The high-risk venture was successful and has further enhanced his popularity.

He now stands head and shoulders above any real challenger in his country. This trip was well timed to divert attention from an irritating pension-funding scandal that had surfaced and forced not only his chief cabinet secretary to step down but also claimed two of his most prominent rivals. It is now generally agreed that the success of the Prime Minister in North Korea will improve the prospects of his party ahead of local elections this summer. In the meantime, Koizumi is mending factional divisions within his Liberal Democratic Party.

Japan, like Italy, has had its share to his allies within his party rather than on the usual bureaucratic machinery. For his most recent initiative with North Korea he chose his old LDP ally Taku Yamasaki to broker a deal with North Korean counterparts in China. Japan's engagement in the denuclearisation talks in China (pertaining to North Korea) has also seen him relying on informal access. It is this use of two track diplomacy that has left many conservative Japanese bureaucrats

all these elements are contributing to the Japanese Prime Minister attaining a 'can-do' image throughout the country. He, in fact, appears to be gaining a 'cult following' among the increased number of younger Japanese lawmakers who have been able to enter the national scene with his active support.

He has already been Prime Minister for more than 37 months, but shadowy rival factions within the LDP have been unable to create any serious pressure on him. On the other hand, the rival Democratic Party of Japan appears to be in a difficult spot. It won 40 seats in the Lower House elections last fall, but has failed to really flex its muscles in any meaningful way.

It is probably this assurance of latent, strong support that has enabled Koizumi to take such a bold but controversial policy with regard to Japanese involvement in the Middle East. Japan's decision to send SDF personnel to Iraq has been contrary to its usual cheque-book diplomacy. They have gone before to East Timor and also to Cambodia, but this was the first time that SDF was deployed in a combat zone since World War II.

Herein lies a danger for Koizumi. The Prime Minister's efforts to be seen as a world leader might backfire if some of the SDF members are

lost in action. In such a scenario, his popularity could plunge.

Things came to a head recently when a few Japanese NGO workers were kidnapped (later released unharmed). There was a lot of soul-searching. However, the current belief is that Japan's new posture in the Middle East is not inconsistent with its ambition to become a permanent member of the expanded Security Council.

Professor Masayuki Yamauchi of the University of Tokyo discussing the theme of the war in Iraq in

like institutional development for human security promotion and empowerment of communities at the grassroots level. Similarly, Ambassador Kazuo Kodama, a senior official in the Asian Department of the Japanese Foreign Office, indicated that this desire to help has also led Japan to declare a revised policy of GSP for LDCs that has expanded the scope of duty and quota free export of items from Bangladesh to that country. It may be recalled in this context that Japan has also recently accorded to Bangladesh a debt relief package of \$1.46 billion under a new debt relief scheme.

Japanese investment in Bangladesh ranks fourth among foreign investing countries, after the USA, the UK and Malaysia. Till now 120 projects with 100 per cent Japanese investment or as joint venture have been registered with the Board of Investment (BOI). It is claimed that the total investment outlay of the projects is expected to exceed US dollar one billion. It appears that Japanese firms have expressed special interest in sectors like fertilizer, chemicals, water supply and sanitary equipment, preservation of sea food, LPG bottling, knit fabrics, automobile parts, plastic and leather products.

These are all positive factors, but there can be success only if we approach the situation carefully and seriously. We have to offer Japanese investors in real terms, incentives, liberal packages and opportunities. We should also take effective measures to remove the downsides of corruption and other factors that are tarnishing our image abroad.

We should also try to take greater interest about what is happening in Japan, just as we do in the case of Europe. We are discussing here the second largest economy of the world. The language barrier is probably one reason for our reduced curiosity, but this can be overcome by more students learning Japanese. The existing level of cultural cooperation between Japan and Bangladesh could be further intensified for this purpose. Such a pro-active paradigm could also include exchange of ideas and publication of journals and books on folklore, theatre, art and music. We can build on these elements and create a structure of excellence that transcends geographical borders.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

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Modi. People will miss Vajpayee as a clever and resourceful orator. He was an adroit hand for compromises. That he too fell victim to the manœuvres of fanatics in the BJP is a tragedy. Parliament will miss his dictio in Hindi.

Vajpayee may have a grievance that people did not give him the due for all that he did. He should blame his party's stalwarts like Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi who were like a stone mill around his neck. Whatever he did they undid it because they had a closed mind. One used power to escape his linkage with the Babri Masjid demolition and the other exploited authority to rewrite history. People interpreted Vajpayee's silence as his concurrence for what the two did.

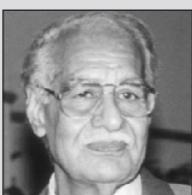
Whether such an approach pays the BJP dividends or not is yet to be seen. But the party has played false to thousands of Muslims who had begun moving nearer to it. Feeling personally betrayed must be for party if it does not realise that India can never be a Hindu rashtra. A couple of remarks that Vajpayee made to analyse the reasons for the BJP's debacle indicate that the party does not want to face the truth. It was neither "over confidence nor complacency," the cause attributed by Vajpayee, it was sheer saffronisation. People rejected the party's efforts to 'Hinduise' their pluralistic way of living. Vajpayee has still tried to save Narendra Modi, who the voters have seen as a symptom of

largely free of the poison it has injected. Results of the Lok Sabha election should have made the RSS wiser. The BJP may lose the ground still further and become a rump of a party if it does not realise that India can never be a Hindu rashtra. A couple of remarks that Vajpayee made to analyse the reasons for the BJP's debacle indicate that the party does not want to face the truth. It was neither "over confidence nor complacency," the cause attributed by Vajpayee, it was sheer saffronisation. People rejected the party's efforts to 'Hinduise' their pluralistic way of living. Vajpayee has still tried to save Narendra Modi, who the voters have seen as a symptom of

Agreed, he feels hurt over criticism. But Vajpayee is to blame for not taking action against communal or fanatic elements. He was too weak and vacillating. Maybe, his hands were bound because of the overall supervision by the RSS. But history is an unbiased reckoner. The verdict on him would have been different if he had only acted on instincts which were healthy and not allowed his diffidence to dictate him.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Vajpayee goes unwept, unsung

KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

STANGE, there was no effort, no persuasion by the BJP to keep Atal Behari Vajpayee in harness. Here was a person who gave the party a liberal face in the last 30 years and took the tally in the Lok Sabha to 182 from a mere five. Even the six-year rule of the party would not have been possible if he had not been the meeting point for the 24 parties in National Democratic Alliance.

Yet, none in the BJP shed tears when he stepped down in favour of L.K. Advani. There was no protest from even those who had basked under the glory of Vajpayee for years. The so-called loyalists were conspicuously by their silence. It was a fait accompli over which the BJP MPs went like an exercise.

Every leader offers to step down after a reverse because victory has many claimants, defeat none. Vajpayee's reaction was no different. It was up to his followers whom he led during many battles to say that they would not allow him to forsake the leadership. But they seemed a party to the macabre drama.

They could have torn a leaf out of the Congress book -- how they fiercely opposed Sonia Gandhi's decision not to become Prime

Minister. It was a moving scene, the leader declining office and the followers not accepting her 'no' for an answer.

The BJP meeting, in contrast, was too businesslike. No member rose to say that they would not allow Vajpayee to step down. None threatened to stage a dharna to keep him back. On the other hand, the party even went to the extent of changing the party's constitution to ensure that L.K. Advani would be the opposition leader and Vajpayee a mere glorified

Once the BJP's mentor, the RSS, decided that his utility was over, the rest was automatic. Pieces fell into places. In any case, the RSS had for some time been thinking of Advani as Vajpayee's replacement. The changeover confirms my worst fears that if the BJP had formed the government, Vajpayee would have been asked to resign in favour of Advani in due course of time.

Hardliner Advani is a trusted man of the RSS.

Although Vajpayee is never tired of saying that he is a swayan

By changing him, the RSS has come into the open to project the BJP as a party with the Hindutva face.

Nagpur, where the RSS has its headquarters, appears to have come to believe that the BJP should look Hindu every bit. When Advani said soon after elections that his party would plug the Hindutva line it was clear that the BJP would drop the pretension of being liberal. Vajpayee's image did not fit into that policy.

Muslim lines has given it electoral advantage. This was surely one of the central lessons it derived from the 1991 parliamentary polls in which the BJP was the beneficiary of the violence it had instigated over the Ram Janambhoomi movement the year before. The BJP was elected to power for the first time in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh.

What it tells is that the BJP has contaminated most of the Hindu middle class in India and abroad. The common man still remains

the disease of parochialism. The party cannot ride back to power on the back of Modi.

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