

Paradox of poverty

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reserve stands at over \$2.5 billion, equivalent to Tk 15,000 crore.

Economists say there is no lack of fund in Bangladesh for taking programmes to develop infrastructure and pull people out of economic woes.

"Bangladesh is suffering from a lack of proper mechanism to spend the funds it gets," said Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, a leading economist and Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, an independent civil society think-tank.

He said a paralysis of the delivery mechanism in the public sector and absorptive capacity failure in the private sector, which is reflected in the over-subscription of initial public offerings in the share market, as the main reasons for huge amounts of money remaining unused.

The commercial banks are not finding proper way to invest excess liquidity for commercial activities and setting up mills and factories to contribute to the national economy, according to officials. As a result, no new employment opportunities are created, which would have reduced poverty.

The economists blamed deteriorating law and order situation in the country for poor investment in the private sector. Industrialists would be enthusiastic in investing their hard-earned money only if the law and order improves, they pointed out.

To make matters worse, foreign aid is not being released because of poor performance of the development projects as 96 percent of the aid has been committed against development projects.

The government takes hundreds of projects under the ADP every year but scores of these projects remain unimplemented leaving the money allocated for the projects unutilised. Though the government allocates a huge amount of money against these projects, the funds do not get released because of poor rate of implementation, the economists said.

For instance, the government allocated Tk 20,300 crore for the ADP for the current 2003-04 fiscal year but revised it down to Tk 19,000 crore due to poor project performance.

According to another estimate,

only 45 percent of the ADP was implemented in the first nine months of the current fiscal. The economists expressed doubt about whether more than Tk 17,000 crore would ultimately be spent by the end of the year.

Around 20 percent of the ADP in the previous fiscal also remained unimplemented. According to a survey conducted by the CPD, the rate of ADP implementation in the first nine months was only 54 percent in 2001 and 42 percent in 2002.

In the current fiscal, a number of ministries showed remarkable failure in implementing the ADP projects. For example, the allocation against the planning ministry was cut to only 7 percent to a mere Tk 33 crore from Tk 521.

The allocation against the establishment ministry was reduced to Tk 39 crore from Tk 57 crore because of poor performance in the middle of the ongoing fiscal year.

A recent CPD survey found four major causes for poor performance of the ADP and government's other schemes taken for providing economic safety net to the poor.

These are introduction of new public procurement policy limiting the scope for corruption in the implementation of foreign-aided projects; inability of the government officials to undertake anticipatory actions as agreed with the development partners; over-centralisation of the project planning and approval process and the state of uncertainty pervading the public administration in the backdrop of growing political confrontation.

It suggested massive reforms in the public administration and strengthening of local government for better use of government fund. A strong and elected local government authority would be in a better position to take people-oriented programme and development of infrastructure in the locality.

It also suggested an increase in the number of police forces and bringing professionalism among the cops for ensuring a better law and order situation, drawing more investment, both foreign and local. Huge employment generation would bring money to the general people and gradually reduce poverty, it maintained.

al-Qaeda deadline to kill US hostage in Saudi looms

REUTERS, Riyadh

Thousands of Saudi security officers backed by FBI agents scoured Riyadh for an American hostage held by al Qaeda, while the engineer's family pleaded for his life before a Friday deadline to kill him.

Osama bin Laden's network has said it will execute Paul Marshal Johnson, kidnapped last week, unless the Saudi government frees jailed militants. It has not said at what exact time the deadline Friday expires. Saudi officials insist the kingdom will not give in to the group's demands.

"Please release my father. He is an innocent man. He loves Muslims. Saudi Arabia was his home," Johnson's son Paul told Dubai-based Al Arabiya television from the United States.

Johnson's Thai wife Thanom urged U.S. authorities to save her husband. "When I see pictures of my husband, I hurt so much, I fall to the floor," she said in broken English. "He is sick man, he need medicine. He hasn't done anything wrong."

A senior Saudi official in Washington, who declined to be named, said a team of about 20 FBI agents specialized in hostage rescue and negotiations were working alongside the Saudis.

He said that for the past two days, more than 15,000 Saudi officers and security forces have been searching throughout Riyadh for Johnson, going door-to-door in some neighborhoods considered hotbeds for al Qaeda militants and sympathizers.

"More than 1,200 Saudi homes have been searched as of Thursday night. The searches continue," he added.

Prominent Saudi cleric Sheikh Saleh bin Abdullah al-Humaidi, in a sermon at Muslim Friday prayers in Mecca's Grand Mosque, denounced hostage-taking and murder as grave sins under Islam, the most senior Saudi cleric to do so.

"Killing a soul without justification is one of the gravest sins under Islam, it is as bad as polytheism," the state-appointed cleric said at Islam's holiest shrine.

"Whoever kills any person under our protection will not go to heaven. The blood of people under our protection is forbidden...they are on par with Muslims," he added.

His comments, however, are unlikely to sway al Qaeda, which is fighting to topple the pro-U.S. monarchy and drive Westerners out of the world's largest oil exporter.

Several Iraqis killed in clashes south of Baquba

REUTERS, Baquba, Iraq

U.S. forces clashed with insurgents south of the town of Baquba on Friday in a second day of fighting in which several Iraqis have been killed, residents and the U.S. military said.

Families fled their homes to escape the violence north of Baghdad in a largely Sunni Muslim area where U.S. forces have frequently been attacked by insurgents, residents said.

The U.S. military said the latest clashes broke out on Thursday when a U.S. patrol returned fire after being attacked with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms south of Baquba, killing several of the attackers.

There were no reports of U.S. casualties.

Three U.S. soldiers were killed north of Baghdad this week when insurgents attacked their base with rockets.

African catfish

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eat out all other fish species," said Amin Nishat, country representative of the IUCN -- the World Conservation Union.

This particular catfish has been living in the sewerage line for years and some others may still remain there, he said.

Experts said people could cultivate catfish in tubs or artificial ponds. But they should not have cultivated it in open water bodies.

Shakhawat Hossain, a resident of Kathalbagan, told this correspondent that he saw two people landing a couple of catfish from the sewerage line of Asadgate last year.

Fisheries Secretary Iqbal Uddin Ahmed told the BBC radio service yesterday that they have stopped encouraging cultivation of such harmful species. However, the government does not have any plan to prohibit the African catfish cultivation, he added.

As many as 14 alien fish varieties are being cultivated in the country, the first of which was introduced in 1953.

Anthrax found

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Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Bandarban Mafuzul Karim Selim and Motia Chowdhury were present while Sherpur district AL President Atiur Rahman Atiq MP, Sherpur Bar President Narayan Chandra Hore, General Secretary Mukhlesur Rahman, Nalitabari Pourasabha Chairman Abdul Halim Ukil, Nokla Pourasabha Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman and Sherpur Sadar Pourasabha Chairman Golam Kibria Liton spoke.

3 of a family

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Awakened, Morshedha asked about their identity but the four raised their mosquito-net, threw acid on them and ran away.

The three were rushed to Gauripur Government Medical Hospital and shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at 6:00am. Hospital sources said Morshedha suffered burns all over her body, while Billal and Ramjan sustained 40 and 30 percent burns.

Morshedha told newscasters at the DMCH that she identified three of the criminals as Mangal, Kukul and Motaleb, all cousins to her husband.

She said her uncle-in-law had filed a case against them over land dispute one year ago. After the trial, they were sent to jail for one month.

About the motive for the killing, he said, "I need time to find it out as the murder was carried out very planned way."

WB provides \$91m

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participation of a wide variety of stakeholders, including the private sector and NGOs in piped water supply, the press release continued.

"This project will help the government increase coverage and quality of water supply, in particular to the poorer populations, which is essential to increased health and productivity in the country," said Karin Kemper, the World Bank's senior water resources management specialist.

Karin, also the task leader for the project, said the project will provide the rural population with a convenient as well as safe water supply procedure.

The total cost of the rural piped water supply project is US\$ 55 million. The World Bank's International Development Association, as a free grant will provide US\$40 million. The remainder will be provided through government, private sector and community contributions.

The other project, entitled

'Reaching Out-of-School Children', with the help of US\$51 million grant will work to increase access to schooling for thousands of disadvantaged children and improve the quality and efficiency of non-formal schools, called Learning Centers, said the press release.

It will enroll half a million out-of-school children in the Learning Centres to be managed by communities with support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Learning Centres usually provide three years of primary education, after which many students move on to government-approved primary schools. About 8-10 percent of students, or about 1.7 million, attend non-formal schools in Bangladesh.

About three million children from 6-10 years old are not in school, says the press release adding, the approved fund will help Bangladesh move closer to its goal of providing universal primary education for all children by 2015, said the press release.

Probes into sensational cases

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Kotwali area on June 5.

ATTACK ON AZAD

Humayun Azad and his family repeatedly pointed their fingers at the fundamentalists and some leaders of ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami including Delwar Hossain Saiedi for the February 27 machete attack on him near Bangla Academy. But investigators are reluctant to go along that line for reasons best known to them.

Police so far retrieved two machetes, arrested Dhaka University leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League Abu Abbas Bhuiyan, Tablig Jamaat activist Golam Mostafa alias Mostafa Mahbub and 'Tiger', a mugger of Suhravardhi Udayan.

Asked about Azad's allegation of fundamentalists and Jamaat-e-Islami's involvement in the arson, Inspector Saud said, "I will not disclose it at the moment."

The investigation is on and I will need more time to make any disclosure about motive or identity of the people behind it," he said.

AHSANULLAH KILLING

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police has failed to make any notable progress in its investigation into Ahsanullah Master murder after arresting three accused Mahbub, Monir and Dulal and Kabir Hossain, the North Badda landlord who sheltered them, on May 14.

CID sources said they might soon submit charge sheet in the case. The AL lawmaker was assassinated a few yards off his house in Tongi's Naogaon in a burst of gunfire that also left a schoolboy killed and five injured.

Asked when he would submit the charge sheet, he said, "It is uncertain. I just cannot rush into submitting the charge sheet in such a sensitive case."

JS body

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probe report. Now I will prepare a report in consultation with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority for submission to the prime minister," Manjur told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The prime minister directed us (standing committee chairman) to inform her of the irregularities or corruption in the activities of ministries, if we find any, in the interest of fighting graft."

The standing committee formed the sub-committee on January 7 for the probe after criticising Communications Minister Nazmul Huda for the allegations of corruption. Huda denied the charge outright.

Members of the standing committee alleged at the temper-high meeting that a CNG autorickshaw was sold at up to Tk 3.67 lakh, up from the actual price of Tk 1.67 lakh as a result of monopoly by Uttara Motors.

The sub-committee was asked to submit its probe report by next 30 days, but it failed the deadline and promised to come up with the report on May 30.

The committee also failed the new deadline and the convener of the committee, Nadeem Mostafa, is now abroad.

Following the suggestion, the government decided to introduce the system and the Department of Shipping called tender in August last year.

A total of eight local companies participated in the bid. A selection committee headed by the director general of shipping scrutinised the bid and selected four companies suitable for the job.

But the aggrieved companies complained to the minister and secretary of the shipping ministry that they had been deprived from the job without any valid reason.

They alleged that the four companies were selected on the basis of marks that was not mentioned in the tender. The advertisement only asked for application without mentioning clearly what sorts of documents to be attached with the application, they said.

Following the allegation, the shipping minister cancelled the selection of the committee and decided to appoint all the eight participating companies for working as classification society.

But now, after eight months, the government is going to cancel the whole tender process and start again from scratch, sources said.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain when contacted said the previous tender was cancelled because a section of the shipping department officials participated in the bid forming companies with their close relatives. It was a gross violation of terms and conditions of the service, he observed.

Sources said cancellation of the previous tender has delayed the process of setting up local classification system at least for six months.

Akbar Hossain, earlier, admitted that a vested interest group in the Department of Shipping had been hindering the introduction of the system. He also committed himself to introduce the system within two months.

Representatives from all countries attending the conference lauded our efforts to ensure that for the first time the OIC secretary general was elected, rather than selected under the influence of pressure groups behind the scenes," he added.

Morshedha said, "We have lost the election for the post but there's a victory in the loss as it showed the OIC is a democratic and a more transparent body than even the UN."

"We have also to remember we fought against Malaysia which currently holds the OIC chairmanship, and Turkey, the host country," he added.

He however noted there is no Jewish lobby within the OIC but it was state interests that dictated the election.

Chowdhury said although Bangladesh received only 12 votes, the countries with the biggest Muslim population voted for it.

Morshedha told newscasters at the DMCH that he identified three of the criminals as Mangal, Kukul and Motaleb, all cousins to her husband.

Officials of the Department of Forest said elephants frequently take a route between India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The elephants are coming to the locality due to deforestation, they noted.

When reminded he was confident and hopeful about winning the election as he left for the ICFM, Morshedha said, "No-one contests any election, it be international, national or municipal, without hope. If you do not nurture any hope to win, why would you take part in an election?"

SQ Chowdhury described his

Journalist Syed Quahhar dead

BSS, Dhaka

A senior journalist, veteran unionist and assistant editor of the now defunct Dainik Bangla Syed Abdul Quahhar died at his Mirpur residence yesterday morning. He was 65.

Syed Quahhar, former acting president of the National Press Club, general secretary of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) and founding secretary of Dhaka Journalists Housing Cooperative Society, was suffering from diabetes.

He left behind his wife, three sons and a daughter, a host of relatives, friends and admirers.

The first namaj-e-janaza for Quahhar was held at Dhaka Journalists Housing Society Mosque at Mirpur after Jumma prayers. After second janaza on the National Press Club premises, the body was taken to Nabinagar in Brahmanbaria for burial.

President of National Press Club Reazuddin Ahmed and General Secretary Shaukat Mahmood, presidents of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) Gias Kamal Chowdhury and Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, secretaries general of BFUJ Ruhul Amin Gazi and Manzurul Ahsan Bulbul, presidents of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) Elahi Newaz Khan and Altaf Mahmud, general secretaries of DUJ Abdus Sahid and Shah Alamgir in separate messages condoled the death.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed her deep shock at the death of Syed Quahhar. She prayed for the peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathy to the bereaved family.