

ADP with an eye on election!

Prioritise economy over politics

ANNUAL Development Programme (ADP) is a useful tool in the hands of a government to endear itself to the electorate with some solid development work. It is basically an instrumentality whereby the party voted into power should seek to implement its economic plans, programmes and visions as embodied in its electoral manifesto on which it won. A government is obliged to deliver on the promises it had made to the people for balanced development of the whole country as distinguished from fragmentary, lopsided growth in constituencies they had emerged winners in.

Ideally, a government should like to break new grounds with the electorate beyond its own constituencies by placing economic interests of the country above partisan political considerations. But in reality, the government of the day tends to make compromises on what should have been an unalloyed holistic approach to development.

The just-announced ADP for fiscal 2005-2006 contains 516 new and unapproved projects among a total of 1440 development projects being taken up for implementation. The 'unapproved' segment of projects smacks of yielding to pressures of MPs and ministers for nurturing their constituencies keeping in view the next general election. Even assuming that all the remainder projects commend themselves on economic grounds, 516 projects are a big, undefined chunk anyway.

The new ADP is ambitious at Tk 24,500 crore, judging by the 20 percent increase in outlay over the last year's revised development budget. But outside the ADP, a portfolio of 68 projects is envisioned under the revenue budget claiming a total allocation of Tk 790 crore. The net development expenditure next year is, therefore, estimated at Tk 25,290 crore.

It is not just being ambitious, it's unrealistic as well. In the nine months up to March, the ADP for fiscal 2004-2005 had been implemented up to 46 percent, although a lot of acceleration is claimed to have been achieved since that point in time. The problem with speeding up implementation is poor quality work shot through by corruption.

With a bigger ADP, the government will have to closely monitor and evaluate the use of allocations, especially related to award of contracts.

The local currency component of the ADP is put at 52 percent. There has been a six percent shortfall in revenue earning. Finance Minister Saifur Rahman has assured that no new tax will be imposed to finance the ADP and that additional resources will be garnered through better revenue collection. Let's hope, he succeeds in the mission.

The other option the government might be tempted to use is to borrow from the banks which like the eminent economists we would advise against in the best interest of macro-economic stability. The rising inflationary trend dictates controlled borrowing and stemming of any expenditure drift.

Food jeopardy

Wake up consumers!

THE call for a social movement against adulterated, fake and substandard foods and commodities made at a discussion-meet organised by the Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB) on Wednesday has struck a responsive chord in us. Also, the suggestion that the media launch a campaign to build consumer awareness against food safety hazards that abound in the predominantly seller's market finds an instant endorsement from us. Our consumers are generally resigned to what is offered to them, to being short-changed, their level of consciousness of their rights is pretty much lower than what is observed among their counterparts in the neighbouring countries.

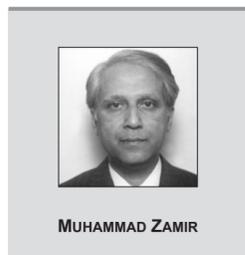
While the media, both print and electronic, have been generally prompt in bringing up the food adulteration and toxicity issues, and can certainly do more in that area, food safety concerns should engage the attention of the whole community. All bodies of public opinion need to be involved in the massive awareness building drive that is being talked about. National Professor Nurul Islam has suggested that apart from the print and electronic media, local government bodies and even mosques should have a role to play in sensitising people against health hazards posed by adulterated and rotten food items. To our mind, a greater NGO involvement would be necessitated.

Unfair trade practices are a much bigger challenge than is readily recognised in the country. Starting from inter-ministerial coordination through formation of a food safety council to bring all relevant departments under one umbrella to strengthening existing food safety laws we have a whole range of missing links to provide for.

We also need quick adjudication of cases relating to adulterated stuffs. Deterrent punishment should be meted out to those who play around with human lives instead of awarding kid glove penalties like small fines.

It's a pity we do not even have a composite legal framework for the protection of consumer rights.

Culpability has vanished in Bangladesh



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

IT seems bodies do not matter in Bangladesh as long as it is not one from your own family. Then comes the second part. It might be a member of your family but the corpse becomes an irrelevant statistic unless it happens to belong to a family, which at that point of time, is part of the ruling elite. Only then, it acquires a name and some significance. This situation might also lead to investigation and inquiry into the reasons for any untimely death. There is also a remote possibility of a follow-up action. Otherwise asking for your basic rights and accountability might be like asking for the moon.

It is a question of values. We seem to have lost most of it over the past few decades. About forty years ago, there was a railway accident in one of the States of south India. Many died. Late Lal Bahadur Shastri, the former Prime Minister of India was then a member of the Indian Cabinet in charge of Communications and Transport. The Minister rose to the occasion. He not only expressed his condolence for the bereaved families but also resigned from his post. He took responsibility for the disaster. He did not have to, but that is democratic behaviour at its best. As Minister, he did not hide behind the blaming of officials or seek absolution by referring to scanty resources. He was man enough to stand up and be counted. Unfortunately, such precedent is totally lost on our Minister for Shipping. It is irrelevant for him if hundreds continue to die in launch

disasters every year. It is explained away to the vagaries of 'Kal Boishakhi', overcrowding and faulty construction.

In the last few months, we have witnessed once again several disasters. Sudden storms have led to sinking of trawlers and launches and death of hundreds of people. It was the same last year and this year does not look different.

I was listening to an interview on the TV with one of those responsible for salvaging the MV Raipura which

been unable to reach depths of twenty metres and blamed this on a strong under-tow. How can this happen?

Over the last three years, several disasters have starkly highlighted, time and again, the inadequacies in our ability to rescue passengers and retrieve corpses from rivers. This is difficult to understand given the fact that millions travel in deltaic Bangladesh, in vessels, on river routes, at any given time, on any day. It is also the backbone for our com-

ment. We have also not seen any move to compel launch operators to adequately compensate the families of the deceased. I believe that such compensation of at least Taka five lakh per victim should be made mandatory if the sunken vessel is found to have had design defects which led to its capsizing in the river. Similarly, other severe penalties, including imprisonment should be applied against owners of vessels and their Captains, if it is found after inquiry, that the vessel was carrying

quence of continuing callousness on the part of the responsible officials and the extraordinary greed of the owners of the vessels (who have no hesitation in permitting overloading and excess cargo during voyages). Added to this is the corruption during the monitoring stage, when such vessels are being constructed in Bangladesh. In many cases, technical fitness certificates are provided without sufficient care and examination.

Last year, concerned officials of

performance. Without further delay, the government should add and update the salvage and rescue fleet-not two as proposed but more. If resources are limited, then buy one aircraft less for Bangladesh Biman. These vessels also need to be powerful enough to be able to salvage launches of up to five hundred tonnes. South Korea is a leader in this field. Let us ask them or the European Union to assist us in this regard. We must make our river transport system secure as a strategic option.

Similarly, the Administration needs to update and streamline the existing technical aspects of the storm warning system. A recent report in this paper has already highlighted the serious difficulties that are being created because of this. It was also disappointing to find out that, despite technical advances, different systems are still being used to assess the severity of possible storms in seaports and river-ports. Such lack of coordination creates ambiguities and confusion. How can this continue in this day and age? Reform in this sector might require a lengthy technical scrutiny. It might take time. Nevertheless, let us start.

Efficiency and accountability need to be ensured within all the Agencies associated with the Ministry of Shipping. The Cabinet may also consider setting up a Special Sub-Committee to monitor developments in this sector headed by the Prime Minister. The first step could however be the handing over of this portfolio to another member of the Cabinet, or to a technocrat, who has been associated for a long time with this form of transport.

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POST BREAKFAST

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sank in the Jamuna River near Arichaghat in Manikganj with more than 200 passengers. It was very revealing. The specialist pointed out that the decades-old salvage vessel MV Rustam maintained by the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) was having difficulty in lifting the sunken vessel because of the gross weight of MV Raipura. The rescue wire had snapped more than once. Apparently, MV Raipura is too heavy for MV Rustam. The TV reporter also mentioned that inland vessels are now touching up to four to five hundred tonnes -- significantly above MV Rustam's capacity.

Another thing has also become clear during the latest salvage efforts and rescue operations. By now, our rescue teams should have been able to gain sufficient experience and expertise to carry out their operations like clock-work. Instead we have seen delay, confusion, lack of coordination and absence of suitable equipment. Divers have

Consequently, it was disturbing to find out that specialist salvage vessels with sufficient (moderate) capacity are still not available in our country. Paucity of such salvage vessels were also underlined in the failure of the concerned Authorities in being able to arrange rescue of those who had been affected by the sunken trawler which went down near Bholia in the Meghna River near Char Maheshkhali. Such a situation is entirely unacceptable.

It is time that the government understood that the Ministry of Shipping, like many other government Departments, is in shambles. Repeatedly, they have proven their inefficiency and have shown very little in the discharge of their responsibilities. To each disaster there appears to be a ritualistic response. Investigation Committees are set up, but findings or suggestions of such Committees are never made public. Their reports are not even openly discussed within the Parli-

more passengers or cargo than it was permitted under licence. There should also be regular monitoring and checking of safety conditions on board these vessels, including the presence of a sufficient number of life jackets. Absence of stipulated facilities should immediately lead to suspension of the licence of the vessel in question.

Our Ministry of Shipping, like RAJUK, continues to shirk its responsibilities on the plea that they are under-staffed with regard to Inspectors, and that there is very little coordination between the relevant agencies and available river police and law and order agencies in different embarkation and disembarkation points on the river. This is not an acceptable excuse. It is an example of lack of proper governance.

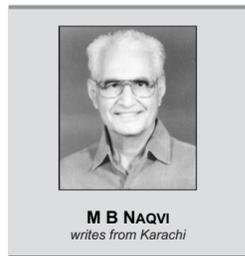
The general public today are dissatisfied with the way things are being run in this sector. Mere lip-service will not do. I consider that such tragedies occur as a conse-

quence of continuing callousness on the part of the responsible officials and the extraordinary greed of the owners of the vessels (who have no hesitation in permitting overloading and excess cargo during voyages). Added to this is the corruption during the monitoring stage, when such vessels are being constructed in Bangladesh. In many cases, technical fitness certificates are provided without sufficient care and examination.

I can understand the fact that it might be difficult to stop overcrowding. What I do not understand is why, if this cannot be stopped, authorities can not at least ensure adequate provision of life-saving devices for small children and elderly people when they board such crowded river-crafts. There should be no difficulty in that.

We have seen only inadequate and inappropriate response until now, from government agencies responsible for monitoring river traffic. It is time punishment, in terms of departmental action, is meted out. A few dismissals and suspensions might persuade others to be more conscientious in their

The successes and failures of Pakistan's nukes



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

FROM the start Pakistan's nuclear programme was military-oriented and India-specific. Initial proposition was that Pakistan was a weaker rival of India and had business to transact with India that could require application of military force. Ambivalent nature of India-Pakistan relations is known, with its three wars and three semi-wars. Pakistan was decisively defeated in 1971 and concluded thereafter that there is no future in conventional wars with India because it is richer and can always outspend Pakistan. Pakistan therefore decided to go nuclear to offset India's advantages.

When exactly Pakistan started its nuclear programme does not signify; it was sometime in 1970s. Pakistan succeeded in middle 1980s in enriching uranium. That key success led to other successes and soon Pakistan was able to fabricate nuclear weapons, admitting only its major components in 1990. But it was able in 1986 to threaten India with a nuclear riposte to the likely extension of India's exercise Brass Tacks into a thrust into Sindh, as was feared.

Once Pakistan became nuclear-capable, it decided to twist the Indian lion's tail in Kashmir, fearing no military response from it. It

chose an undercover semi-war with India in Kashmir. Events in India-administered Kashmir late in 1980s gave Pakistan an opportunity: it metamorphosed Kashmiris' nonviolent secular political protest agitation -- against India's manipulation of elections in Kashmir -- and captured the movement's leadership, converting it into an Islamic Jihad. It did so by infiltrating Pakistani-trained Jihadis, most of them veterans of Afghanistan's anti-Soviet war and many of whom had doubled as Taliban. This led to

Indian atrocities, if Jihad continues.

True, India might continue to inflict human rights violations even after Pakistan has stopped sending militants from outside. So long as there is an armed insurgency in Kashmir, the Kashmiri freedom fighters are offering India its chance: in a violent conflict, India would crush the puny violence of Kashmiris with its far greater violence-making machine. Adopting violent insurgency is a foolish game for Kashmiris.

They made as if they would invade. The threat was credible for both friend and foe. The rest of the world thought that thanks to balance of power, Pakistan would be obliged to use its nuclear option first. A nuclear war will result. The rest of the world was not prepared to accept it. Everyone advised the two to make up.

Pakistanis too saw that the Indians meant business. Pakistan made U-turn in the Kashmir policies by promising no more infiltration from this side. That firm prom-

text was the 2002 war crisis. India was ready to attack if Pakistan had not made those promises about Kashmir. That is to say, India was taking the risk of a war despite the presence of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent, probably not less effective than India's own. One calls for taking purposeful note of the mere fact that Indians made a credible move to attack Pakistan, ignoring the presence of the Pakistani nuclear deterrent. That simply shows that this Nuclear Deterrent did not deter India threatening war.

through the proxy war; and (b) these nukes could not defend Pakistan against India's threatened attack without Pakistan making vital political concessions.

Let's note that no outsider loves Pakistan because of these nukes. No outsider appears to dread Pakistan's nukes, not even India. No outsider is prepared to do as Pakistan wishes him to do because it has nukes. It is true the same is true of India. But India is out of context here.

There is another negative aspect of the nukes: there is Dr. AQ Khan's underground Bazar of nuclear contraband. The story has not ended. The rest of the world is still interested. They all think that Pakistan is vulnerable to various threats from inside. There are anti-Musharraf and anti-Pakistan elements inside who can get hold of these weapons. Extremist forces can, in conceivable eventualities, get control of these weapons. Pakistan is more vulnerable because of these nukes. Conceivable threats of external intervention exist.

Pakistanis have paid through their nose for these nukes. Pakistan's economy has been put under a pressure that it cannot really bear. The kind of inflationary pressures and the growth of poverty that has taken place is due to Islamabad not being able to invest enough in the social sectors. The economic price of the nukes is lost opportunities.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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many consequences.

India chose to suppress Jihad by inflicting horrible human rights violations on Kashmiris. The Indians need to be blamed for these gross human rights violations. But Pakistan also shares some responsibility. Why? because its did not think its options through. It should have foreseen what the Indian reaction would be. And whether the pressure Pakistan was putting on it was enough to make India cry 'uncle'. In the event, Indians fought on, i.e. to kill as many Kashmiris as offered themselves to them. The result is that Kashmiris have lost something like 80 to 85 thousand lives and many more limbs. Loss of property is astronomical in purely Kashmiri terms. Despite these sacrifices the Kashmiris are not an inch nearer their Azadi. The outlook is more

Remember Pakistan's military thinkers, who controlled the nuclear programme throughout, wove strange strategic doctrines in the hubris created by nuclear weapons. On the one hand, they dreamed dreams of federating Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to confront India with this strategic depth. How unrealistic this foolish project was should be clear. On the other hand, a theory was evolved that keeping Indians engaged in a proxy war in the Kashmir Valley would free Pakistan from the worry of an Indian attack. So long as India was kept on the hop, Pakistan was safe. In retrospect, this can be seen as foolish ratiocination.

In 2002, the Indians called Pakistan's bluff. They brought forward their troops on the Pakistan border in staggering numbers.

Dispassionate assessment of the true utility of Pakistani nukes is urgent. There are two clear negative entries in the national ledger. One, nukes were of no use to Pakistan vis-à-vis Kashmir and it had to promise it will send Jihadis no more. The promise was repeated several times to Indians and Americans. The second con-

Why does one make such a sweeping claim? Because Pakistani nuclear devices were sold as giving Pakistan an impregnable defence against India; it was argued that given the nukes presence, no one will dare attack. The fact that India dared makes those nukes less credible than they were thought to be. It is being argued that India did not finally attack because of those nukes. But that is non sequiter takes us nowhere. The decisive moment was when the Pakistan President made the premise of virtually ending the Jihad in Kashmir. Obviously nukes were no help to Musharraf; if the notional benefit of the nukes had to be sacrificed to keep peace, the nukes' value gets heavily diluted. The nukes are no longer vital for Pakistan's security because (a) Pakistan cannot win Kashmir

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Widening Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has decided to widen the strip of road from Sonargaon Hotel (Pantha Kunja) intersection to National Transmission Centre at Shahbagh of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. The District Commissioner has already declared to acquire land for the purpose.

Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue is an important road for the north-south traffic movement in the city. And we have noticed frequent traffic congestion at Banglamotor and Sonargaon intersections. This traffic congestion is primarily due to cross traffic flow at Sonargaon and Banglamotor intersections through link roads. Widening of the road between these two sections will have no effect unless free traffic flow is ensured in the main road. Experts believe that free traffic flow in the main road can be ensured through "grade-separation" at the intersections (Daily Star 23

February 2005). Under the grade-separation, the link roads would run beneath the main road elevation while the existing level of the major roads would remain the same at the intersection. Elevated expressway connecting all major intersections of the city can improve the situation too. It is therefore suggested that to improve the situation in Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue through "grade-separation" and expressway be considered instead of widening the road.

Women football team and our expectation

Some days before the Bangladesh women football team participated in the AFC cup in South Korea. It was the feigning of a milestone in the history of country's women football. Allegedly some of our political leaders were against it. Somehow, women football has

started and we hope it will go on. Women again proved that they are capable of doing anything like the opposite sex if proper opportunities and privileges are given. They can even do better in every field and represent the country before the world. In this age of liberalisation we must look into the matter of gender discrimination more seriously. The government should take adequate attempts for their welfare and provide opportunity assuring special care. We hope women of our country will have the chance to contribute more in every sphere of country's development and prosperity.

Higher education

Cantara Wali Ruhi quite rightly said in her letter (27 April 05) published in The Daily Star, that "higher education is not for everyone". I entirely agree with her views and examples mentioned in the letter. As we see today quite a lot of students are so determined to go for higher education though they

are not efficient. It is better, in my opinion, to look for a good job, rather than continuing one's studies. It requires a lot of hardship and intelligence to earn good qualification.

Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait

The incident that occurred at the Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait the other day is not only very regrettable but is an eye-opener too. Nobody with little bit of common sense can support rowdiness at any place and at any stage. However, it is time to ponder why it happened at all. I am residing in Kuwait for more than 10 years. With pains I have noticed that Bangladesh Embassy staffs have done nothing or very little for Bangladeshi community. Unfortunately, I share the same feelings with many others. The honourable Ambassador of Bangladesh cannot and should not evade his responsibility by saying

that nobody informed him about the non-payment of the wages of those poor workers. Does not he or ministry of manpower know how much a labour has to spend to come to Middle East even for a miniature work? What is the average salary here for a Bangladeshi worker? And if they don't know, should I tell them that not only me but everybody knows here that an unskilled worker from Bangladesh has to spend Taka 100,000 to Taka 150,000 to come here.

It is hard to believe, but it is true and even a clerk in the Embassy knows that the average monthly pay of a Bangladeshi labour is equivalent to only Taka 3500 to Taka 4000 only, which means that even if he gets his pay regularly and saves everything he earns, he needs two to three years to recover all the spending he incurred to come over here. Unfortunately, this equation is not true as for his survival he needs to spend some. And above everything the irony of the fate is that in lot many cases he is not paid regularly.

Very sadly and knowing fully all these simple details, the staff in the Embassy have no time to ponder on this. A Bangladeshi worker is the least paid worker amongst those of all other nationalities. No serious attempt was ever made to negotiate for a minimum salary for him. But he has to survive also. Back home he has a family to support. He has to pay back the loans to friends and relatives he took from to come over here.

Only way out for him is to do some part time job like car washing, domestic help etc. etc. Part time work is not legal here but to me it is still acceptable. But to earn more money in shortest possible time, he may get involved in immoral activities. There appears report almost daily in the local newspapers that some Bangladeshi men and women caught red handed indulged in immoral activities. Of course they are not the good name for the country. Still there are some unfortunate who could not find a part time job. You may find any of them standing at the

road intersections and traffic signals begging. He has to survive too. What a name we are earning for our nation. Honourable Minister for Manpower is happy that he managed to export so much of manpower. Honourable Finance Minister is happy that remittance has increased and foreign exchange is bulging. But at what cost?

Shafiq Ahmad Engineer, Kuwait National Petroleum Co

Pre-budget comment

The current budget session of the parliament has to analyse the negative effects of black money, corrupt practices, and nepotism in the national economy, as pointed out by CPD, an NGO think-tank (DS May 15). The development indices as publicised officially have invisible walls and barriers, not ordinarily visible to the outsiders. Poor governance encourages such negative infiltration

into the economic flux, and awareness programmes are not initiated properly by the elected MPs, ministers, and the cabinet. The people have sympathy for the unpleasant tasks and responsibilities of the harassed Finance Minister (the homework applies to all developing countries).

Materialistic temptations are a universal human weakness in the evolution of civilisation. Discipline starts from the top and enforcement of the same also starts from the top. There is no point in pointing fingers at the lower levels of the society, who do not lead the nation. If the approach is right, the later details take care of it. Why cry "wolf" in urban jungles?

A Husnain, Dhaka