

Disciplining ADP implementation

Ministries tasked, coordination demanded

AN ADP makes news four times a year: once, when it is announced; second time, when it has undergone a mid-term review, invariably accompanied by chest-beating lamentations over fund utilisation shortfalls; third time, when projects are dropped on a reality check followed by a downsizing of the development programme; and climactically, when even the revised ADP allocations have remained underutilised.

What eventually happens is that the last quarter of a financial year, coinciding with the rainy season, as though in a conspiracy of circumstances created by indolence, deliberate inefficiency and a huge appetite for corruption, is jammed with project implementation hyperactivity. Yearly allocations are sought to be utilised in a matter of few months only. Under-implementation and poor quality development work are the results.

Finding a scapegoat has been a necessary part of ADB evaluations. Sometimes the blame has been laid at the doorsteps of development partners for not disbursing funds in good time and on the finance ministry for not timely releasing funds and at other times the ministries themselves have been faulted for a gross under-utilisation of their allocations. In truth, the ministries have had little by way of an implementation machinery.

Presumably, at the end of a long road of experimentation with ADP implementation strategies we now have a set of measures enunciated by finance minister M Saifur Rahman for the ministries to utilise the project development funds within a given timeframe.

No fund for development projects will be released after the month of April beginning with the 2005-2006 fiscal. The ministries will have to place their respective requirements with the finance and planning ministry by that cut-off date. The finance minister has asserted that the ministries are provided with 75 percent of their allocations at the beginning of the year, so that they should be able to indicate the remainder of their requirement by April. One of the principal reasons for delay in the ADB implementation is ascribed to following the rules of procurement which, of course, cannot be compromised, so that efficient time management from the beginning of the year is crucial.

The most radical sounds to be the minister's warning that if any ministry should fail to spend its allocation on schedule, the unutilised funds will be reallocated to a better performing ministry. This is a potentially good disciplining approach which must be fully effective, though; otherwise, it risks distorting the order of development priorities straddling the ministries as originally envisaged in the ADB formulations. The decision to take action against officials not complying with suggestions of the monthly monitoring meetings of the ministries finds a responsive chord in us.

Needless to say, the new measures would be as good as their implementation.

Jamaluddin's fate

We hope the masterminds would be caught soon

THE reported discovery of a corpse, believed to be that of Jamaluddin, on Wednesday, from a remote forest in Fatikchhari, might end speculations about his fate ever since his abduction more than two years ago. Though his sons have initially identified the skeleton as their father's, only a DNA test can corroborate whether it is his or not. Our sympathies are with Jamaluddin's family who have spent many days and nights agonising over the uncertainty about his fate.

This has been one of the most high-profile abduction cases in recent times; mostly because of those allegedly involved in it. There have been numerous raids in and around the area where Jamaluddin was abducted and supposed to have been kept. There had been reshuffles in the local police administration; investigations had changed hands many times over; and the police top brass had claimed that his location was traced and that he would be rescued shortly -- but, all the same, he seemingly remained missing up until Wednesday. Seeing no progress in the investigation, his family had even sought the prime minister's help. From time to time, they appealed through the media for help in finding him out. But nothing worked.

Now, the Rapid Action Battalion has discovered a skeleton on the basis of a confession by Kala Mahbub, one of the arrested in the case. But one cannot help wonder why it took so long for the police to discover the corpse since the informer was arrested almost ten months ago. At the same time, we are also concerned to see that no action is being taken after the disclosure of names alleged to have been involved in the abduction by another arrested person Shahidul Islam.

We have been noticing that abductions and subsequent murders remain mysteries for too long a time to reflect any sign of efficient handling of such cases, especially when influential people are allegedly involved in these incidents. We hope this won't be the case regarding Jamaluddin's abduction and murder and that the real culprits will be brought to book.

NAZRUL ISLAM

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THE recent drive followed by newspaper reports against food adulteration generated a huge interest among the members of the public. Each and everybody want fresh, harmless and non-adulterated food for survival. If foods are poisonous, how could we sustain a sound physical and mental health?

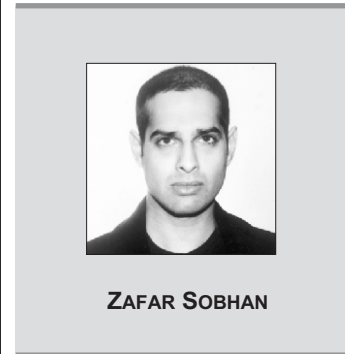
However, the ongoing hullabaloo is one side of the coin. Poisoning may occur at various stages of a food item -- production, preservation and processing. The current drive is centering preservation and processing stages. At these stages, foods are adulterated with mixing preservatives, colour or taste-enhancing materials consisting chemicals. These chemicals, mostly synthetic in nature, are surely harmful for not only human bodies but any living being.

But we generally overlook or we are not at all aware of dangerous poisoning of food items at the production stage. Our ultimate source of food is plants. But plants, especially crop plants, are heavily intoxicated with pesticide, herbicide and rodenticide. In the name of pest and weed control, thousands of tons of dangerous poisons are being applied in the crop fields and sometimes directly to the harvested crops while preserving in the stores.

For agriculture purpose around 80 active ingredients represented by over 250 products (trade names) are registered in Bangladesh. In addition, around 25 active ingredients represented by 60 non-agriculture products are registered. There are many unrecognised companies producing numerous pesticide products, which are notorious for being adulterated and many do not have any labels. What is most alarming is that pesticide use is very indiscriminate in Bangladesh. There are areas where pesticides are used in excessive quantities.

To kill insects and pests, we are

The blame game



ZAFAR SOBHAN

IN the aftermath of the August 17 bomb blasts the chattering classes in Dhaka seem to have come to two consensus conclusions.

The first is that, contrary to the government's repeated statements that the threat of extremism is all a creation of the media and the opposition and our external enemies to discredit the administration, it is now evident that religious extremists are a serious threat to the country.

The serial bomb blasts have demonstrated that the extremists exist, and are better trained and organised, and have a more extensive and disciplined network, than anyone could have imagined.

The second consensus seems to be that the time has come for the government and the opposition to stop playing the blame game and pointing fingers at one another, and to unite to confront the threat.

There has been much tut-tutting in editorial pages and drawing rooms about the irresponsibility of the two sides hurling accusations and counter-accusations at each other, and how the need of the hour is to present a united front against the terrorists.

This is all well and good, so far as it goes. There is no doubt that right now it is important for the moderates on both sides of the aisle to unite to

face down the extremist threat.

But it should be noted for the record that there is a contradiction between these two positions that is hard to reconcile.

If it is true that there really are extremists operating freely throughout the country and that they pose a mortal threat to democracy, and it is also true that the government has time and again denied their very existence and put little or no effort into bringing them to book, then any moral equivalence drawn between

response to extremism is not one of them.

Let me count the ways in which the government is more culpable than the opposition when it comes to the rise of religious extremism.

The first point is that the recent terrorist attack happened on this government's watch.

Apologists for the government argue that similar things have happened during previous governments. Nice try. If it were merely a question of the occasional bomb

has never tried to argue that there are no extremists in the country.

Then let us look at the investigations into the August 21 attack and the supposed crack-down on the JMB on February 23 this year.

Is it too much to suggest that had correct action been taken by the authorities in the aftermath of August 21 and had the crack-down on the JMB in February been genuine, that the extremists might not have been able to pull off last week's blasts.

accurately if we are to really come to grips with how we have got to where we are, and are to put together a workable strategy to move forward and deal with the extremists.

The extremists have apparently spent decades patiently setting the ground work and preparing for their revolution, and all the while our capacity to even comprehend what has been going on, let alone to strike back, has remained minimal.

This is a formidable enemy that we are facing, and we still seem to

The fault line in Bangladeshi politics should be between the extremists on one side and the anti-extremists on the other, but many of the people who should have joined hands against the extremists long ago did not do so, and the main reason for this is that they could not bring themselves to join hands with the opposition.

The real problem in this country and the reason that the extremists have been allowed so much leeway to ply their trade is that too many people are too invested in their anti-opposition mind-set to comprehend where the true threat lies.

The need of the hour is for the moderates to band together and take a stand against the extremists. There are many more of us than there are of them and if we stand together then we can defeat them.

But the problem in doing so is that some people will have to admit that the opposition has been right all along and the government has been wrong -- and too many government supporters would rather sew their lips shut than admit this.

This is the moment of truth for the government and its supporters. It is still unclear whether they are ready to admit that the extremists are more of a danger to the country than the opposition.

The ruling alliance has been playing a dangerous game with the extremists for a long time, under the theory that the enemy of their enemy is their friend. Now the danger of what they have been doing all these years has become apparent to everyone, the question is whether they would rather continue running the risk of turning the country into a Taliban state than admit their error and correct their course.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

STRAIGHT TALK

The real problem in this country and the reason that the extremists have been allowed so much leeway to ply their trade is that too many people are too invested in their anti-opposition mind-set to comprehend where the true threat lies. This is the moment of truth for the government and its supporters. It is still unclear whether they are ready to admit that the extremists are more of a danger to the country than the opposition.

the government and the opposition on this issue is not really tenable.

If one party has been screaming blue murder about the existence of extremists, and the other has been covering its ears and accusing its political opponents of telling malicious lies, it should be pretty clear which party is more culpable when extremists are found to actually exist.

The fashionable thing is to say that we should not point fingers and to blame both the government and the opposition equally for the polarisation in the body politic and the divide between the two sides.

But the uncomfortable truth is that when it comes to turning a blind eye to the rise of extremism there is no question that the ruling alliance is more at fault than the opposition.

There may be precious little to choose between the two sides on any number of issues, but their

blast here and there, then it is true that such things occurred during previous administrations too.

But there has been an unprecedented escalation of terrorist attacks during the tenure of the current government -- from the attack on the AL rally last year that killed 22, to the assassination of two opposition MPs, to the blasts of August 17 -- none of which have any analog in the recent history of the country.

So it is simply factually incorrect to argue that what we are seeing now is no different than what we saw when the opposition was in power.

Second, a big part of the current problem is that the government has for a long time contemptuously and mendaciously dismissed accounts of extremism in the country as fabrications by the media and the opposition.

The opposition -- for all its faults --

The government has, by its inaction, permitted the extremists to continue to train, organise, and carry out operations with impunity. That this government has not been serious about bringing the extremists to justice is beyond dispute and should be obvious to all.

So it is easy to see -- for those not blinded by partisanship -- that when it comes to culpability for religious extremism there is no equivalence between the government and the opposition.

Unfortunately, in this country too many people are blinded by partisanship, and many who are not appear to be motivated by some sort of reflexive need to apportion blame equally, and not take one side or the other, even when the facts clearly indicate that such even-handedness misses the point.

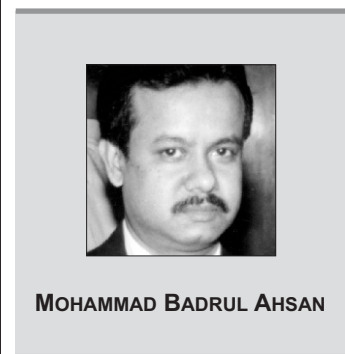
The reason I bring this up is that it is important to apportion blame

be groping in the dark. The question we need to be asking ourselves is how the extremists have been able to advance their agenda so effectively over the years, and what the implications of this might be in terms of formulating a strategy to defeat them.

Let us say that we can divide the country up into the extremists and their supporters on one side, and those who oppose the extremists on the other. Obviously, those who oppose the extremists are in the majority by far. But if that is the case, then why have we not been able to stamp out the extremists, and how is it that they were able to stage an attack of such audacity?

The simple reason is that the anti-extremist forces in the country are bitterly divided and it is this division that the extremists have exploited to entrench themselves around the country.

The curse of a father



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

crucial chapter of our history from near oblivion. Frankly speaking, in as much as we have lacked the political will to try those who were guilty, we have also lacked it to show that we ever wanted to hear the full story.

Eli Wiesel, the Nobel laureate activist, once cautioned that to forget a holocaust was to kill twice. In that sense we have killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the members of his family again and again since they were killed on the night of 15th

the throes of conflict over how much to hide and how much to reveal. Perhaps history is risky business if something is done before its time. Iris Chang writes in *The Rape of Nanking* that it could be career-threatening and even life-threatening in Japan to give an opinion about the Sino-Japanese war or the Emperor. In 1990 a gunman shot Motoshima Hitoshi, mayor of Nagasaki, in the chest for saying that Emperor Hirohito bore some responsibility for World War II.

killers. We are yet to know who had hatched the conspiracy. Did the killers approach the CIA or did the CIA approach them?

Perhaps we aren't going to get anywhere with that question. Perhaps nobody is going to tell us how it started. But we all know how it ended. The undisputed leader of the country was riddled with bullets, every identifiable member of his family hunted down like trapped animals. It didn't matter to the Americans all right, because they were

our politics, which pervades like a curse and haunts the hope of political stability. It sits in our national psyche like a crisis of conscience, a kind of psychosis that has been running from generation to generation, some of us screaming for justice, others busy covering up. Thirty years later, the river of blood of a single night is still running to divide this nation. There are people rotting in jail, the trial is foot dragging, and the final closure on the longest-lasting mystery in

down?

I am sure many of us would like to know what it was like in the last hours of a celebrated man, who was a great leader, may be not so much of a statesman. He had his failings in running a war-ravaged country, surrounded by greedy men who were toadies. He couldn't control his son, brother, nephew and other relatives, who were seeking power and fortune. He couldn't control many of his close associates. He was a man who believed that the same populist style which had brought him in power was also going to keep him in it.

Still it was wrong to kill him in the first place. It was more wrong to kill his family and relatives. But it was even worse not to bring to justice those who were responsible for one of the most heinous crimes in our political history. If we are facing escalating violence and bloodshed in politics today, it is the howling spirit of a moral crisis that was created on that fateful night, when the father of a nation was killed to settle political scores with him.

George Santayana has said what is crucial for us today: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Our problem is even worse. We remember and do nothing about it. It's the curse of a father, which has crippled us. We are condemned to do nothing and watch our children repeat it.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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August 1975. Somehow the tragedy has cut a deep swathe inside our heads, the right side of the brain being unable to connect with its left. It is scary business if we think. We, as a nation, have failed to agree even on the dead.

It must be said that Lawrence Lifschultz has left many of us in the dust. He has pieced it together before any of us, so be it after thirty long years. But we can understand why he waited, why he couldn't tell the story for as long as Eugene Booster lived. He was promise bound. It was decent for him to keep his promise.

What about us? Why couldn't one of us tell the story? For thirty years we have been struggling to cope with this tragedy, our nation living in

People don't tell a story for one of the two compelling reasons or both. One is the pervasive sense of danger inherent in the story. Another is perceived lack of interest in the target audience. That is when truth slips through cracks of opportunism as people tend to swing between conscience and convenience, each version of the story giving play to the compulsive imagination of one who tells it.

We have heard many versions of the story, all versions leading to the same despicable horror that the most popular leader of this country was eliminated in the middle of a night along with his kith and kin. On the face of it, it was a slaughter, a methodical killing of a powerful family that was viewed as good riddance by their trigger-happy

used to assassination of one president roughly every 20 years. For us it was a new beginning, the first-ever cruelty factor in politics that showed that the quickest way to defeat a formidable enemy was to do away with him.

Those who killed Sheikh Mujib killed him with extreme prejudice because they didn't even spare his underage son, newly-wed daughter-in-laws, and everyone else related to him. Come to think of it, it flung open the doors of hell as crime, violence, deception and betrayal found a permanent place in our national life, our hearts seething with terrible rage that sublimates the horror of elusive justice.

It remains to be the original sin in

our memorable history is yet to come.

Lawrence Lifschultz has told us the story. He has told us how it was plotted, how the wrath of a foreign diplomat found its way through conniving men in a newly independent country to wipe out its leader and his family. But someone needs to tell us the other side of the story, how those who opened fire on the most charismatic Bangladeshi of all times, found him that night, how he reacted when he saw that his gun-toting countrymen had come to take his life. What did he say to them? Could he believe his own eyes? Was he still smoking his pipe? What were his last words? Did he say anything before the assassin's bullets cut him

OPINION

Use of pesticides: Abuse of life?

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THE recent drive followed by newspaper reports against food adulteration generated a huge interest among the members of the public. Each and everybody want fresh, harmless and non-adulterated food for survival. If foods are poisonous, how could we sustain a sound physical and mental health?

However, the ongoing hullabaloo is one side of the coin. Poisoning may occur at various stages of a food item -- production, preservation and processing. The current drive is centering preservation and processing stages. At these stages, foods are adulterated with mixing preservatives, colour or taste-enhancing materials consisting chemicals. These chemicals, mostly synthetic in nature, are surely harmful for not only human bodies but any living being.

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To kill insects and pests, we are

making our food items intoxicated. Insecticides are applied to seed and plant to give those a poisonous cover so that the insect would take the sap of the plant and die. But a portion of the poison remains in the plant as residue.

The residual effects of these chemicals are so pervasive that

bon and organic phosphorus. DDT, chlordane, heptachlor, dieldrin, aldrin, endrin etc are in the chlorinated hydrocarbon group while malathion, parathion etc are in organic phosphorus group. They are so dangerous that a quantity equivalent to a size of aspirin tablet of Aldrin can kill 400 quails.

immense power to enter into the most vital process of body and change them in sinister and often deadly ways. They destroy the very enzymes whose function is to protect body from harm, they block the oxidation process from which the body receives its energy, they prevent the normal functioning of

years.

The agriculture production increased after introduction of the green revolution, a byproduct of agricultural imperialism. But at the same time, it brought a lot of menace for not only human beings but all living creatures. The success of green revolution crops solely

Every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals from the moment of conception until death, said Carson in her book.

There is a relation between green revolution and invention of pesticides. The insecticide industry is the child of the 2nd World War. In the course of developing chemical warfare, some of the chemicals created in the laboratories were found lethal to insects. However, the discovery did not come by a chance. Insecticides were widely used to test chemicals as agents of death for man.

Economic development now-a-days has become byword in Bangladesh. But the country is paying enormous price for this much-hyped progress, which has brought in its wake ecological devastation and numerous problems.

There was no research or data available about the share of economic and health costs of environmental degradation emerging from growing pollution of soil, water and air in Bangladesh. But the gastroin-

testinal, liver, cancer, kidney, heart, asthma and tropical diseases increased manifolds in the country. The sprouting of hundreds of clinics and hospitals, and rush of huge number of people for treatment abroad, are the proof of gravity of the situation. The country is paying a heavy price to bear the cost of treatment and loss of manpower due to illness and untimely deaths.

It's human nature to shrug off what may seem to be a vague threat of future. We are still unheeded of the gravity of the danger. But time has come to pay heed to this ominous danger before it goes beyond control especially when alternatives to the use of harmful chemicals in agriculture are available.

Nazrul Islam is a freelance journalist and environmentalist.