

Focus on ADP

Implementation needs speeding up

A midterm review of the progress on the Annual Development Programme (ADB) chaired by Finance and Planning Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam has revealed a rather bleak implementation status. The overall performance during July-December, 2006 was estimated to be two percentage points slower than in the corresponding period of FY 2005-06.

The implementation deficit is mainly put down to political unrest during the first four months of the current fiscal 2006-07 when the BNP-Jamaat led coalition had been in power. 2006 being a pre-election year, the coalition government seemed keen on particular projects with lump allocations, so that there was an opaque implementation of the ADP. The first caretaker government which ruled during the remainder two months of the first half of 2006 reportedly released money slowly causing a rather sluggish ADP implementation.

It is disappointing to note that of the 43 ministries and divisions as many as 20 cut a sorry figure implementing below 20 percent of their share in the ADP followed by 20-29 percent by 11 ministries and divisions. Rural Development and Cooperatives Division topped with 62 percent implementation as the home ministry came out second best at 47 percent. At the other end, primary and mass education ministry slumped to 34 percent from 52 percent last year.

Now what are the options for the interim government to accelerate the pace of development? Internal resource mobilisation through tax collection can be geared up in a context where there is no political pressure to encounter in going after habitual tax evaders. Secondly, insofar as foreign currency component of the projects goes, the development partners are in a better frame of mind to disburse money as they have in so many words made known.

Keeping such plus factors at the back of our mind we should immediately downsize the ADP and draw up hardcore compact list of priority projects that are capable of being implemented within the remainder of the fiscal 2006-07.

We quite agree with the finance adviser, however, that the bottlenecks in terms of implementation need to be identified by the various ministries, so that these can be eliminated through well coordinated efforts to make any real headway possible.

Spurious medicines, substandard clinics

A grave threat to public health

THE on-going drive against adulteration and production of spurious and substandard commodities has already revealed how deep-rooted the problem has become in the absence of supervision, inspection and control.

It seems things are going wrong in almost every important sector. After mind-boggling stories regarding adulteration of foods appeared in the newspapers, we have come to learn that a mobile court found in the city a factory producing insulin illegally, and the law enforcers also had to close down over 50 clinics, nursing homes and diagnostic centres in Mymensingh town which could come nowhere near the requirements set by the health authorities.

The news is indeed cause for great concern. Insulin is known to be a life-saving drug and when it is produced illegally, that will put the lives of the users at risk. Yet, these fake medicine factories, which are discovered from time to time, seem to be enjoying a kind of impunity that could only be result of the authorities' insensitivity to such an important public health issue. What is particularly worrying is that the fake producers are never punished the way they should be. Only that can explain why the unscrupulous elements still dare run the illegal business and cause incalculable damage to the users.

No less worrying is the fact that clinics and nursing homes have mushroomed in the cities and towns like grocery shops and it is not at all clear what service these ill-equipped medicare centres run by lay persons provide to society. The law enforcers have discovered clinics run by fake doctors and nurses! Again, this poses a grave threat to public health and it is really difficult to comprehend how so many of them could exist in a town where surveillance is supposed to be reasonably good. If this can go on in a town, how can we blame the quacks swindling people in rural areas?

The mobile courts are doing a good job. However, it has to be ensured that people responsible for manufacturing spurious drugs or setting up clinics that cannot cater to our health needs are not only arrested but also tried and convicted for committing a culpable crime against citizens. Finally, the government should develop a mechanism for the courts to operate round the year.

Davos meeting revives WTO hopes



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

the Director General of WTO, that a new global accord was vital for the developing world.

This hopeful note will assist stakeholders in trying to find a meaningful compromise and flexibility on several remaining issues. They include a new US offer on agricultural subsidies, more innovation from the EU with regard to agricultural tariffs and a better offer from India and Brazil on industrial goods and services. These factors have assumed

renew the special powers. In that case, any deal struck by negotiators runs the real risk of being picked apart by US lawmakers. US Trade Representative Susan Schwab has been particularly stressing on this for the last month.

Nevertheless, whatever be the dynamics over the next few weeks, it is clear that the Doha Round is not dead. The WTO is a 'member-driven' organisation that is again trying to stand on its feet

conomic, systemic and political costs of failure. It is slowly being understood that an acceptable and agreed multilateral trade system will be the best insurance against protectionism. Mr. Lamy, an astute politician, has also underlined the geopolitical consequences of failure. He has correctly stated that 'we live in a world which is potentially extremely unstable.' He has also highlighted that developing countries including Bangladesh have invested a

for more than two years. Contrary to the Uruguay Round, the Doha Round has already cleared a lot of conceptual and technical brush. What remains are tough political decisions, but even that is negotiable given the correct spirit.

The participants in the Doha Round negotiations have to appreciate that continued delay could only complicate the situation even further. A protracted timetable will see a US Farm Bill and a new EU Common

trades. They will want it so that they can have separate and immediate deals towards elimination of tariffs in their sector products. Such narrow-deals would then drain of business-community support for a broader multilateral agreement because politically influential industries would have already gotten what they want.

Lack of quick progress could also weaken the constraints that multilateral rules place on countries' behaviour. This will be particularly applicable in a trading world where China is emerging as an economic colossus, not always disinterested in obtaining bilateral and regional trade deals. This is pertinent because the signing of more bilateral agreements will make it harder to finish the Doha talks.

The political leadership must now come forward and make the necessary sacrifices. They have to do this so that fresh windows of opportunity can be opened for marketing services like telecommunications and insurance. A suitable agreement would also channel billions of dollars in trade-related aid for poor countries to help them build the necessary infrastructure to boost exports.

Bangladesh needs to monitor development with great care. We should also re-activate most urgently discussions within the LDC group of countries. This will be required to identify better least common denominators that could better serve our interests as a whole, and individually.

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POST BREAKFAST

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special importance given the lack of compromise between the US and the EU on the size of cuts to subsidies and tariffs protecting their farm industries and the absence of an acceptable common ground between rich and poor countries over access in trade in industrial goods and services.

The evolving scenario has become significant given the crunch deadline in the United States in June, when the 'fast-track' negotiating powers of US President George W. Bush expires. There has been a shift in that country with regard to ground political reality. The new Democrat dominated Congress might not

after months of indecision and chaos. There is also realisation among the main actors that all trade negotiations were a mixture of 'politics, economics and tactics'. They also understand that unless and until there is redistribution of the 'huge gains' created by globalisation and trade liberalisation, there will be a problem with public opinion and trade. This time round after Davos, it is also being spelt out that there has to be a 'sense of engagement at the top level' and this 'must percolate down' to those conducting the detailed negotiations.

Fortunately, for developing countries, a view is finally gaining ground that there will be eco-

lot in the process and believe that the WTO will enable them to reap the benefits of globalisation. In that context he has suitably

warned that if the process were to fail, then, the developed world, instead of playing their role in injecting more stability, would probably be doing the reverse. Such a state of affairs for obvious reasons would not be desirable for any country. It could also undermine regional stability in sensitive areas.

We all need to understand that the current stalemate is not as bad as it looks. In fact, I believe that it is not as bad as the impasse in the Uruguay Round in 1990 that delayed completion of those talks

Agricultural Policy. If that happens, common sense dictates that all bets will be off.

Longer delay might also mean that the benefits of any new trade liberalisation will not start being realised until some time in the middle of the next decade at the earliest. That unfortunately might make outcome of such multilateral trade talks increasingly irrelevant. This would be so because world business tend to operate on the basis of 18-month product cycles.

Persistent postponement might also generate the likelihood of some manufacturing interest -- such as the chemical industry -- demanding that they should be detached from the Doha negotia-

Reconstituted CTG: Instilling hope



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

ments of the people in preparing a flawless voter list.

The situation came to such a pass that reconstitution of the EC by persons of probity, charisma and neutrality was a necessity not to be ignored any further. With experiences so bitter and ordeal so high for the nation, the CEC and commissioners now appointed to form the new EC should work as the sentinels of the constitution without fear or favour. Dr. ATM

government.

Already some bold steps taken by this government in separating the judiciary from the executive and reconstituting the EC and ACC has created confidence in people's mind and has led people to believe that this government will not resort to rhetoric, it means business. Most encouraging, as a former Governor of Bangladesh Bank Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed has diagnosed the ills plaguing the country and in

world tycoons manipulating the business world of the country seems to be a step in the right direction. But no steps should be taken too hurriedly without weighing facts and evidences so that those rounded up can escape through the loopholes of police investigation because of shoddy evidences against them. Undeniably true, it is not just the severity of punishment but certainty that is important. Seemingly

ing from their posts.

And so the big shots in the past government even after indulging in corruption moved freely because they knew it for certain that no action could be taken against them if the prime minister had not so desired. True, corruption has corroded not just the whole system of governance but the very soul of Bangladesh. Now as the new Chief Adviser of the CTG, has assured the nation of freeing the country of

ers appointed there on political consideration were always safeguarding the interest of the political masters and eventually every work related to election like voter listing, removing the flaws in the electoral roll and even the job of updating the list landed in controversies and a disaster. Despite all protests and criticism hurled from all quarters the EC that has now been abolished wanted to go ahead with the election scheduled for January 22 with such flawed list without even feeling the pinch of conscience.

The move to constitute an expert committee for examining the preparation of voter ID cards as the new CTG adviser Mr. Tapan Chaudhury indicated in a press interview on January 18, will prevent scope for fake voting and is a welcome step. The completion of the project, as Dr. Masroor Ali, Head of the CSE Deptt. BUET told in a media interview in the recent past, may cost a big amount of money that our country at this critical period can ill afford other than the time span required to complete the job, but even then this caretaker government that has achieved significant success through eradicating ills in some ailing sectors in a very short span of time may fulfil its commitment to the nation, if necessary, by seeking donor assistance to the project in the interest of a free, fair, transparent and credible election.

BITTER TRUTH

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Shamsul Huda, a seasoned civil servant and a charismatic personality with suave manner now appointed as new CEC, people fairly hope, can fulfil the nation's expectation as he underscored the need for electoral reforms after assuming his office. The pledges made by the new chief adviser about holding of a free and fair election through the introduction of voter ID cards and transparent ballot boxes and most important of all, flawless voter list, in his address over radio and TV has reinforced people's faith in the new

his maiden address he made it plain that pervasive corruption and plundering of national wealth by a handful of dishonest people who had no identity in the political and economic activities of the country just a few years ago have pushed the country to a disastrous state. The chief adviser's assurance that stern action would be taken to curb the influence of corruption and black money through restructuring of the ACC has created a sense of confidence in people's mind.

The move taken in arresting the godfathers in politics and under-

the task of strengthening the ACC is the prime need of the hour because persons burdened with age and loyalty to the past government and having look at the perks and facilities that their positions in those constitutional posts entitled them to, had been there for more than two years seemingly to allow protection to the stalwarts of the past government who indulged in unbridled corruption even when they knew that rules have been framed in a way that they could never work independently. Even then they never thought of resign-

the influence of black money and muscle power on election, may attempt dramatic changes at the earliest. Otherwise there is possibility that the nation would again be trapped in the quagmire of dirty politics and instability.

Take the case of the EC, a constitutional body not subservient to anyone, not even the prime minister or president of the country, that was entrusted with the sacred job of holding the parliamentary election and that did the job most perfunctorily only because of the fact that most of the commission-

OPINION

Where is DCC in the streets of Dhaka?

SHAMSHIA I. MUTASIM

Y childhood nostalgia brings fresh the memories when the municipal authority, in the mid sixties and I think even in the seventies, would have the streets sown with water and swept by cleaners early in the morning. The concern of the municipality then was to get the roads clean before the citizens were up and rushing to work, schools and other businesses.

The road cleaning is contracted out now and the DCC perhaps feels proud and modern for being able to outsource. However, without being equipped for "managing outsourcing" the jobs being done can be as bad as not being done. I do not have to elaborate at this point.

The DCC and its body, popularly elected, are supposed to provide us the amenities of proper civic life which we can demand also as the highest tax payers of the country.

To fulfil its role we have seen the development of the Dhaka Municipality founded by the British Raj in 1864 gradually underwent transformation by amending Local Government Laws and finally it became the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in 1994 which is self governed to run the affairs of the city.

DCC, as we know is an administrative entity composed of a clearly defined territory and its population. The area under the corporation is further divided into wards and individual ward has a ward commissioner popularly elected for promised deliveries to the residents.

The responsibilities of the DCC revolves around the amenities a local government authority is to provide to its citizens. These are:

- Safe and accessible roads with pavements for pedestrians, street lighting, etc.
- Waste management.
- Purified water distribution

system. not clear.

Ours being a populous city with nearly 12 million people crowding it we miss pavements in most of the roads which acts as a deterrent for pedestrians.

The scenario in the main and commercial areas are worse. I am not sure if there are any zoning law as cars are parked anywhere; one example would suffice: In Gulshan main avenue two well reputed international fast food chains are located. Atrrociously, all their customers park the cars on the street causing jam and much inconvenience to the passengers of other vehicles. Numerous other examples can be cited but this is referred to as it is shocking to note that even international chains apparently take advantage of absence or non-compliance of regulations.

Hoarding in these streets creates nonsensical landmarks. Certainly there is a body authorised to approve the hoardings which come in all sizes and heights and at

all locations but do they follow the contents of the hoardings? Some of these are quite insinuating and do not reflect either our lifestyles or values. The international businesses too, when they do their external communication in a local language, expression to suit the local values and sentiments and the hoardings that I mentioned belong very much to local businesses.

Often multitude of gas stations/fuel pumps happens to be another nuisance that is adding to the trouble of the passengers, e.g. in Tejgaon-Mohakhali road there are six such pumps (both petrol and CNG) and each of them leads to waiting cars, scooters, buses lined up in huge queues on the streets.

Fearful increase in the number of beggars on the street is a vexing problem and nobody knows who would take charge of keeping away the beggars. The obvious answer is the local government authority, the DCC, has to analyse the demo-

graphic pattern of the city it manages. Dhaka has grown and is growing, and before it is too late DCC must recognise that there is the need for more electricity, pure water, access to health services, parks and availability of mass transit system, be it the bus, the underground railway or commuter train.

As DCC does not provide many or all of the services in the wards the residents are subscribing and forming their own neighbourhood associations which collect garbage from the households, often provide street security and also take the privilege of constructing gates on the streets. Can they do it, if so who authorises them? Perhaps fund raising automatically empowers them with the inherent right to do so.

In Uttara a major private transportation company parks all its buses on the main avenue. The worst part is not only the occupying of the street space but that

the

roads under these buses are all broken and uneven. The authority may think of entering into a partnership with the bus companies as it saves huge amount of money for not having a garage/parking lot of their own and as the roads are used anyway by them. The bus owning companies will take proper care of maintaining those roads -- which will also lead them to impart corporate citizen's responsibility and be a role model for others to follow.

The DCC has its limitations we fully appreciate, but even then do they do the minimum of not only providing the basic services but also looking into the compliance side of it? The DCC can make good use of public communication by having community based meetings with the citizens and invite them to raise issues/ways to resolve them and also for the big businesses/organisations to come up with Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

I would like to end the account of what I see of the Dhaka streets by quoting Charles Kingsley, the famous town planner, that "man is now in a position to conquer and civilise Nature, to master his environment and to lay the foundations of a new society, in which cities would no longer appear as diseased patches soiling the purity of the landscape...." and hope that authorities in DCC will feel accountable to the Dhakaites for electing them and making them the decision makers of DCC and will bring in some quality in our everyday life. It is the public, the people who are and always be the key to success and failures of the elected bodies and they cannot be ignored in any way, can they be?

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