

The ADP sounds ambitious but doable

Emphasis rightly placed on implementation

THE National Economic Council has unveiled Annual Development Programme (ADP), 2007-08 that is refreshingly not the run-of-the-mill type we have been accustomed to seeing as the handiwork of political governments. This is because of the fact that the new ADP is a political pressure-free product of an interim government. It didn't have to pander to political considerations getting the better of economic judgement. ADPs in the past, by and large, have been employed as instruments of distributing favours to constituencies of ruling party MPs, ministers and top party officials so that the development agenda acquired a partisan rather than a national character. Moreover, the project formulation quality being poor and misdirected, its implementation also suffered in the end.

The just-announced ADP with a Tk 26,500 crore outlay which is 23 percent higher than the revised ADP for fiscal 2006-07, on the face of it, may look ambitious but given the higher expectation of external resources input, measures put in place to bolster mobilisation of internal resources, and above all, steps taken to streamline project implementation, the overall goal seems realisable.

It is good to see that disparity in regional allocation has been bridged and high priority has been received by the power sector with an allocation topping 31 percent from the previous level. Fourteen new power plants are expected with a generating capacity of 2,505 MWs. Human resources development and poverty alleviation have received sizable allocations.

Of particular importance is the focus on timely implementation of projects. First, as an antidote to frequent transfer of project directors which badly hindered project implementation it has been decided by the National Economic Council (NEC) that project directors would be appointed for the entire duration of the project plus six months from the deadline of the project implementation period. Secondly, if the content and cost of any unimplemented or partially executed projects do not require any changes, then it will be left to the ministries concerned to extend the project period without referring to Planning Commission for approval. Last but not least, the NEC has asked the secretaries' committee to recommend a process to the advisory council whereby the procurement procedures for different projects can be simplified.

In the end, we would like the project Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Planning Ministry to play a hands-on role in the present context.

Recovery of siphoned off wealth

World Bank offer should be seized

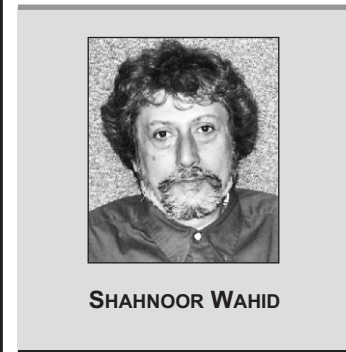
WE are happy at the World Bank assurance that it is ready to provide all assistance with regard to recovery of our stolen assets siphoned off abroad. It should be taken up without a second thought since, we are certain, that will help quicken repatriation of the nation's wealth that the corrupt politicians and businessmen have stashed away in other countries. By this we are sure the ongoing anti-corruption drive will not only receive a great fillip it will go a long way in righting a wrong that the greedy bunch had perpetrated on the nation.

To say the least the nation has been thunderstruck at the reported figure of cash that some politicians and businessmen had earned through foul and illegal means and despatched to other countries. Frankly, these do not fall under the category of corruption or bribe or mere kickbacks. These are acts deliberately undertaken without a thought of the damage that these people were inflicting upon the country. We must find a different vocabulary to describe these abominable acts. What we have are blatant cases of organised plunder of national wealth by those that the nation had entrusted its wealth to protect.

We understand that so far the government has been able to repatriate around 300 crore taka, which, going by the accounts given out by some of the arrested politicians, is but a tiny portion of the siphoned off money. We would hope that the government would not only expose these anti-state elements but would take all measures to ensure that they receive the severest of punishments for the harm that they have done to the country. Apart from that, the government should take all measures possible to unearth the system and the nexus of various people that operate the system of making and then transferring money outside the country; it must be broken once and for all.

As for the effort against corruption it will be well to remember that while the ACC's effort has so far been very laudable its effectiveness can be proved by bringing the corrupt to trial without delay through cast-iron prosecution. The trial must be transparent and according to the law of the land.

Antecedents do matter



SHAHNOOR WAHID

TODAY we shall talk about antecedents, but let us begin this column with a prelude. We actually begin with two befitting quotations.

"In all institutions from which the cold wind of open criticism is excluded, an innocent corruption begins to grow like a mushroom -- for example, in senates and learned societies." Thus said Friedrich Nietzsche when talking about corruption. And listen to what Mahatma Gandhi said, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed."

Well, had the Mahatma visited Bangladesh in recent times he would have seen to his amazement that this loan-ridden poor country can provide more than enough to a lot of people's greed. With his antecedents, he would

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

This Gani chap comes from a remote village where even today one has to walk two miles to reach his house. Understandably, he never lived in a decent house or had a decent urban life, therefore, once in power he decided to destroy everything under his jurisdiction to gain what he never had. But in doing so, he little realised that one day his greed would spell doom for him and his two innocent children. We reserve our comments about his wife.

have wondered aloud how it could be possible to become a millionaire overnight. In bewilderment he would have involuntarily uttered, "Hai Ramal!"

Metaphor aside, the crude reality is infuriating and yet sad. Like a terrible plague corruption, both individual and institutional, is spreading across the country and weakening the foundation pillars of our society. The horrendous revelations on a daily basis are taking a severe toll on our mental health and forcing us to think anew whether we are worthy of the admiration of the world -- admiration for a nation that earned its freedom through an armed war of liberation; admiration for giving blood to protect its language; admiration for the rich literary and cultural heritage we possess; admiration for allowing our women folks to educate them-

selves and earn a living; admiration for taking measures to contain the onslaught of various life-threatening diseases, and reducing maternal and child mortality and morbidity and so on.

But the collective achievements of the hard working people over the decades are now faced with threats of obliteration and defilement by a section of people who have been undertaking massive conning operations through the decades to reach the helm of power only to fulfill their evil agenda. These people have no antecedents whatsoever to be where they have been, and their acts and activities only accentuate the greed they have within.

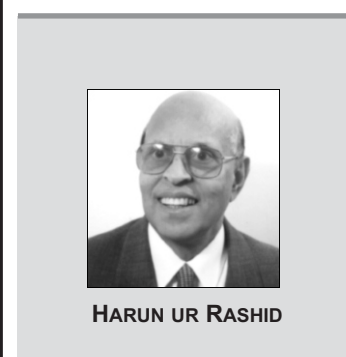
Imagine a small time clearing and forwarding agent, deft in getting things in and out the backdoor, somehow landing on the seat of a state minister holding

a powerful portfolio. No wonder all his hair would "stand up" in disbelief, and he would try to swallow 20 crore Taka to protect a murderer. His antecedents say that he would indulge himself in all sorts of corruption under the sky to go to where he could never imagine going in his wildest dreams.

When you live close to the bedroom of power, and if you have plenty of greed and no amount of qualm, no wonder you would grab an abandoned house in Gulshan or cut a 10 million dollar deal quite casually after a family dinner. You want what your family never had. It is again the matter of antecedents.

When you leave your ancestral thatched house in remote Bariakanda and land yourself in Baridhara, no wonder you would go crazy and want to own all the houses and flats you see there.

Breach of diplomatic norms & practices



HARUN UR RASHID

BOTTOM LINE

It seems that the people's mandate is very clear to the CTG. Cleanse the corrupt elements and remove muscle power and black money through due process of law. Recover the illegal money from within and outside the country. Create an environment of stability and peace in which a fair and credible election can be held, and voters can exercise their inherent right to elect a government.

affairs of a state. The UN Charter recognizes this core principle in its Article 2(7).

States, poor or rich, weak or strong, have to understand and appreciate the equality of states in so far as sovereignty is concerned.

What diplomats can or cannot do

There are certain diplomatic norms that are to be followed by every diplomat posted to any country. A diplomatic agent is the head of the mission sent to the host state. The functions of diplomatic agents are described in Article 3 of the 1961 Vienna Convention, which, among others, includes the following:

- Promoting friendly relations between the sending state and the receiving state, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations (note that the word "political" has been omitted).
- Ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving state and reporting thereon to the government of the sending state.

The above paragraphs are relevant in the context of public conduct of some chiefs of diplomatic missions posted in Bangladesh. I assume that they are fully aware of the diplomatic norms and practices under the Vienna Convention. There are certain "no-go areas" for diplomats, and one of them is interference in the internal affairs

of a state.

In this connection, may I refer to a reported statement of the US Ambassador after meeting with the chairperson of the BNP at a local hotel on May 25. The meeting was billed as the farewell call on the former prime minister by the outgoing ambassador.

After the farewell call, the ambassador reportedly stated to the waiting journalists: "We touched on a lot of issues including election, reforms and the voter list. I think it would be difficult for the political parties to share ideas on these if the ban is not lifted. I call on the government to lift the ban on indoor politics."

It may be that, as an official representative of a friendly country, she publicly stated what she was advised by Washington.

In my view, it would have been proper and appropriate for the ambassador to convey the message to the non-party caretaker government (CTG), and not to journalists publicly.

The issues on which she has expressed her views are entirely internal matters of Bangladesh. The statement is perceived as a direct interference in the domestic matters of Bangladesh, and is totally in breach of diplomatic norms in terms of the Vienna Convention.

I had the privilege of serving as ambassador/high commissioner to both developed and developing

countries for more than 11 years, and never have I seen any head of a diplomatic mission of friendly countries to flagrantly violate the basic diplomatic protocol. In one or two developing countries, any indirect comment on an internal matter led to their sudden departure from the host states.

Ambassadors posted in other developing countries do not publicly express views on internal matters. If their governments advise them, they do it discreetly with the representatives of the government of the host countries.

Why some of the diplomats from friendly countries in Bangladesh interfere in our internal matters is not understood, unless they think that people are supportive of such public statements, or that they can get easily away with such breaches of diplomatic norms since their governments provide aid to our country.

Issues that matters to ordinary people

The issue of the lifting of ban of indoor politics is an important one, and many a times many advisers of the CTG have come out with statements that the CTG will do so when it is appropriate.

The CTG may have information and facts due to which it is not withdrawing the ban on indoor politics. In the government's agenda, there is a sequence of things that has to be addressed in

You would also want to own the most expensive cars in the world. You cannot part with the corrugated iron sheets and saris and blankets meant for the poor people of your area. It is also a matter of antecedents.

And the "Jungle King," Osman Gani, has proved once again what nondescript antecedents can do to our forest resources. It can level a pristine forest in a couple of years and destroy all the flora and fauna therein, along with the rare varieties of animals and birds.

This Gani chap comes from a remote village where even today one has to walk two miles to reach his house. Understandably, he never lived in a decent house or had a decent urban life, therefore, once in power he decided to destroy everything under his jurisdiction to gain what he never had. But in doing so, he little realised that one day his greed would spell doom for him and his two innocent children. We reserve our comments about his wife.

The daily overdose of stories of men and women having insatiable greed in their system, like some pathological disorder, are leaving a bad taste in the mouths of all. Many columnists have said it many times and in many ways,

but it needs to be said again: How much money does a man need? How low can a man stoop to fulfill his gut(ter) level greed? Where would he stop, unless stopped?

Greed seems to be endemic in the political parties and in some sections of government offices, and the alarming news is that it is becoming more and more pervasive. Even two decade ago, corruption was not so manifestly rampant, open and extensive. Colleagues avoided being seen with a known corrupt person. A corrupt person avoided being seen in social functions.

But things have taken a turn for the worse. Corrupt people flaunt openly their ill-gotten wealth. They team up with local political powers to protect their wealth, and earn more through misuse of power.

Perhaps, psychologists and social psychologists should undertake research work to fathom the minds of these people and reveal what turns them into such money-hungry monsters. Their antecedents are worth looking into.

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order of priority. No one is privy to the order in the agenda, other than the decision-makers in the government.

Political parties and civil society of Bangladesh may demand many things from the CTG, and the interim government, in its own way, responds to their demands within its means.

It seems that the people are in no hurry to have an election until the right environment is created. Rather, they want speedy trial of corrupt persons, adhering to due process of law. Their primary concern is the high prices of essential commodities, and the CTG is fully aware of this.

It seems that the people's mandate is very clear to the CTG. Cleanse the corrupt elements and remove muscle power and black money through due process of law. Recover the illegal money from within and outside the country. Create an environment of stability and peace in which a fair and credible election can be held, and voters can exercise their inherent right to elect a government.

The CTG is being assisted by the armed forces to meet its agenda for welfare of the people. On May 23, the army chief released a document highlighting the successes of the CTG in five months (Daily Star on May 24)

Many say that no government in the past, elected or un-elected, could do during the last 36 years what the CTG has done within such a short time. In a democratic country, some may disagree with the assessment, but facts are facts and they are openly visible.

To fulfill the mandate the CTG may take time to lift the ban on indoor politics, for reasons best known to it. Political parties may demand the withdrawal of the ban, and it is perfectly all right in a democratic country.

But suggestions, in public, from diplomats for lifting of the ban on indoor politics is not acceptable, not only diplomatically but also because it tends to offend many citizens in the country. Instead of promoting friendly relations between the people of two countries, such statements do the opposite.

Bangladesh is a responsible member of the international community. The people achieved independence by making supreme sacrifices. They are rightly very sensitive to undue interference in their internal affairs by other states.

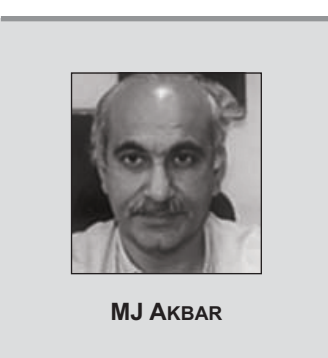
We are a self-respecting nation, although poor. Many people in the country have not forgotten the role of many governments during the difficult times in 1971.

What Bangladesh needs is market access of its commodities to industrialized nations, import of oil at concessionary prices, and targeted aid without conditions from friendly countries, to eliminate poverty. We would appreciate statements from diplomatic agents on these issues, and not publicly on our internal affairs. Let the CTG do the job for which the elected president of the country installed it on January 12.

It is noted that the mind-set based on the concept, "the strong do what they have power to do, and the weak accept what they have to accept," of earlier times has disappeared during the later half of the 20th century.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Speechless



MJ AKBAR

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh gave a thoughtful speech at the annual session of the CII (Confederation of Indian Industry for all you yokels who do not know what the country's most powerful acronym stands for). He asked the captain, majors, colonels and generals of Indian business to remember that those who are not members of the CII are also Indians. The speech was overdue by about three years, but no matter. The poor are ever grateful for the smallest mercies.

He also made the speech to the wrong group. He should have begun with an audience of one.

There is an exclusive telephone system in Delhi meant only for the Very Very VVIPs called

BYLINE

Bharat's young men are brandishing country pistols in preparation for civil war over employment. Bharat is indifferent to good intentions, and impervious to statistics. Bharat is ready to torch the super highways being built for the vehicles of 9 per cent growth. The capital of India is Delhi. The capital of Bharat is the home of the farmer who has committed suicide.

Rax. It is an internal line for the highest of the high in government. Dr. Singh should have picked up his Rax phone and called his finance minister for a cup of tea. Over tea, stressing each sentence till there was no room for misunderstanding, Dr. Singh should have read this speech to finance minister P. Chidambaram.

Mr Chidambaram has produced three budgets. How come no one told him that Prime Minister Singh was interested in the welfare of the poor, and that he had thought out a Ten Point Charter to save the nation? Each one of the issues raised by Dr. Singh could have been addressed in the national budget. None was.

Why should the CII listen to the prime minister when his own cabinet could hardly care less?

Let's start with executive salaries, which Dr. Singh condemns as "excessive remuneration" which can lead to "social unrest." Let us say that the owner-chief executive of a major company pays himself around Rs 2 crores as salary for working hard, and delivering profits as chief executive.

He pays the maximum-slab tax on this sum. How much does the government pay him for being the owner? The latest issue of India Today informs me that in just one year, 2006-2007, Dr. Singh's government permitted the shareholders of 1,100 companies to pocket Rs 40,000 crores in dividends. Did they pay any tax on Rs 40,000 crores? Not a rupee. Take out a calculator and do the math.

Why preach about Rs 2 crores a year, with tax, when you have

handed out an untaxed Rs 40,000 crores a year to the members of the CII? Does Dr. Singh listen to himself?

Just after he finished scolding the CII about salaries, he went on to ostentatious weddings, because the expenditure on them "insults the poverty of the less privileged, it is socially wasteful and it plants the seeds of resentment in the minds of the have-nots."

Very noble. Could we know how many such weddings Dr. Singh has attended as prime minister, when he could have sent a polite (perhaps even warm) letter to the couple being wed ostentatiously, wishing them a very happy future but indicating that he would prefer not to give legitimacy to such vulgarity by his presence? Why preach about vulgarity when you

do not have the courage to reject it?

The sixth point of this Social Charter should have been Message Number 1, given the heavy damage that the continuous price rise has done to Congress fortunes. Dr. Singh has named at least one of the villains.

I had better quote the strong words used by the prime minister to avoid any accusation of misrepresentation. "The operation of cartels by groups of companies to keep prices high must end ... It is even more distressing in a country where the poor are severely affected by rising commodity prices. Cartels are a crime and go against the grain of an open economy. Even profit maximisation should be within the bounds of decency and greed!"

I hasten to point out that the exclamation is the prime minister's, and not an intrusive addition from the fevered brain of a mere journalist. What do we learn from this searing paragraph?

- Cartels exist and control prices.
 - They are willing to push up prices even of basic commodities, the bread line of the poor.
 - Cartels are a crime.
- So what has Dr. Singh's govern-

ment, now in power for over a thousand days, done to punish this crime? Even one gesture, executive or legislative, would be worth knowing. When an ordinary thief steals, the majesty of the law imprisons him and the less than majestic baton of the police turns his back into a sore mess.

When a criminal cartel of businessmen, probably all CII members, robs the poor of food, and exceeds the limits of decency and greed (the prime minister's words, not mine), all that the prime minister of India can do is plead self-restraint! (This time the exclamation mark is mine.)

Why preach when you are so utterly helpless?

There is a certain inevitability about Point No. 9 on Dr. Singh's Social Charter, because everyone in public life tends to use this cane as a crutch. May I quote? "Nine, fight corruption at all levels. The cancer of corruption is eating into the vitals of our body politic. For every recipient of a bribe there is a benefactor and a beneficiary."

How true. So who is this mysterious recipient? Trust me, without a recipient; with hand outstretched and power in his eyes, no one would pay a bribe. No businessman enjoys giving a

bribe. He would rather spend the money on creature comforts. So who does he give the money to?

The politician. What has Dr. Singh done to curb corruption in his government? Nothing. His personal honesty can no longer disguise the fact that money is being made at a rampant pace by many of his ministers. He knows this, and is silent. Why preach about the mote in the other's eye when there is a beam in your own?

Point No. 10 has an inevitable ring to it as well. He asks industry to "finance socially responsible advertising." I hope you know what "socially responsible advertising" means. It means taking out acres of full-page ads, paid for by taxpayers' money, telling the world how wonderful the government is. With Dr. Singh's picture at the top, of course.

"India has made us," says the prime minister. "We must make Bharat." That is a good two-sentence one-liner, which rather forgets to mention that Bharat is no longer in any mood to be patronised.

Bharat is setting Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and Bengal and Haryana on fire. Bharat has trapped both the BJP and the Congress in Rajasthan.

Bharat has decided that downward mobility might be more useful than upward mobility -- there is no point aspiring to be the equal of a Brahmin when the illusionary job quotas are for the depressed classes.

Bharat's young men are brandishing country pistols in preparation for civil war over employment. Bharat is indifferent to good intentions, and impervious to statistics. Bharat is ready to torch the super highways being built for the vehicles of 9 per cent growth. The capital of India is Delhi. The capital of Bharat is the home of the farmer who has committed suicide.

Dr. Manmohan Singh has given us three budgets since he became prime minister. All three were budgets for India. He has only one budget left. The election process will have begun by the time his budget of 2009 is due. Perhaps he can make the next budget for Bharat. As we have noted, the poor are always grateful for small mercies.

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