

Reduced ADP for 2008-09 Implementation rate must improve

THE new ADP marks a departure from the pattern of ambitious development programs that we ended up revising year after year and yet not implementing even the whittled down physical targets of development. While in the past, financial targets got somewhat met with hurried low quality expenditure at the end of the year, the end results would invariably fall far short of the targets. This is glaringly exemplified by hundreds of unfinished bridges and culverts across the country as depicted lately in the pictorial news report in a prominent Bangla daily.

What we see is a reality check in regard to the new approach. The size of the new ADP is Tk 25,600 crore, a good Tk 900 crore lower than original ADP, but Tk 3,100 crore higher than that of the revised ADP of the outgoing fiscal 2007-08. The implementation rate of the revised ADP of last year was 55 percent, the lowest recorded so far. Usually, in the years past, between 85 and 95 percent of the revised ADPs were shown implemented.

The lowest implementation figure for the last ADP regrettable as it is, reflecting chronic deficiencies in the implementation machinery, has nonetheless a positive feature to it, of no mean significance. Set against the backdrop of anti-corruption drive, tough financial management policies and a general atmosphere of self-imposed caution, the potentially corrupt people desisted from malpractice and abuse of power this year. That might well have prompted conservative utilisation of ADP funds in the outgoing year.

But the fact remains that investment in future which the ADP signifies is only one-fourth of the allocations made in the revenue budget that has mostly to do with overhead costs like salaries, benefits and other recurrent and routine expenses. This imbalance together with the fact that the external dependence of the ADP has increased denoting to that extent an increase in the debt burden are concerns that would need to be addressed through a definitive improvement in the macro-economic indicators. The 57 percent of the ADP will be funded through mobilisation of internal resources, confined hopefully, to an increase in revenue earning rather than resorting to bank borrowing.

There are some good features in the new ADP. In terms of allocations, highest priority is given to agriculture, water resources and rural development followed by power, energy and education sectors, in that order. Nearly Tk 3000 crore has been allocated to backward regions. But we wish the allocation to food security were more than Tk 123 crore. The slight reduction in the lump grants is a positive feature. Under the agriculture, water resources and rural development heads, adequate attention ought to be paid to subsidies, social safety programs and infrastructure building for productivity.

Given the electoral roadmap this government will have six months of the ADP to set it firmly on course to fuller implementation. It would be a strategic step in the right direction if the government were to restructure and empower the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Planning Ministry as an oversight body for the ADP implementation process.

Primary education upgrade Finally, sector getting merited attention

THE Primary and Mass Education Ministry's proposal to create a separate BCS cadre service for primary education is a long overdue one, and we are gratified to see that the government is taking this up for consideration. As long ago as 1992, a government taskforce recommended this measure, and the government of the day pledged to adopt it by 2005, so it is to the credit of the current government that a step is being taken for the betterment of the sector.

Given the fact that there are some 1.7 lakh primary school teachers working in over 38,000 government primary schools around the country, and that the current situation makes it difficult to hire good candidates, this is an initiative that makes a lot of sense.

Indeed, more important than the mere creation of a new cadre service is a recognition of how crucial the primary education sector is and how crucial it is to have a true and renewed commitment to its all round development.

Bangladesh now has universal free primary education, and for many of the children this will be the only education they will receive, so let us trust that the creation of a separate cadre service will be the first step in comprehensive reform of the sector aimed at dramatically improving primary education and making it more effective and useful.

We all know the problems: the fact that government after government has used the primary education sector to dispense political patronage so that the sons, daughters, nephews, and nieces of petty officials and politicians can find a sinecure here when there is nowhere else for them to go. Add to this the malcontent of the school management committees and you have the abysmal state of affairs in the primary schools.

All this needs to change. We need to ensure that good, qualified, and conscientious people enter the ranks of teaching profession at the government primary school level. We need also to look at other measures that would help improve education, such as updating the curriculum and textbooks. We need to consider what more could be done to keep the children in school, perhaps the provision of one meal a day.

There is much work to be done to bring our primary education system up to decent standards. The decision to give the sector its separate BCS cadre service is a good first step towards giving primary education the importance it deserves. Let us hope it is not the last.

America's flawed imperial policy



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

It's however not because of any dearth of smart bombs or cruise missile in US's arsenal. What it lacks, instead, is enough of effective administrators capable of understanding the world and changing it to suit the US' positive objective, if any. Unfortunately, for an imperial America, and also for the recipients of its missionary ardour, there reigns only chaos and lack of coordination between and within the institutional components of the imperial enterprise.

THE much-touted American century practically began with the end of the Second World War, when a new shape of things emerged in all economic, socio-cultural and politico-strategic arenas with the world's centre of gravity shifting to the other side of the Atlantic. Notwithstanding a rival superpower America, with her tremendous power, enjoyed undisputed primacy in global affairs, with a pax Americana surreptitiously replacing pax Britannica in a world exhausted with the blood-letting of the devastating war.

America's meteoric ascendancy, and its place at the apex, was vindicated after the ignominious collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The nerve-racking Cold War was won by America, further confirming its superiority at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

But only seventeen years

later, the American century seems to be heading towards a premature and catastrophic finale. But, in the meantime, she also, in a differently nuanced bid undertook an imperial enterprise like her British predecessor -- making, however, no headway and getting stuck deeper in a morass.

In Afghanistan, for example, the Taliban, whom the Americans routed in a swift military invasion in 2001, are now ascendant, and without the presence of Nato forces the US-installed government of Hamid Karzai would have melted like an ice-cream sundae by now. Yet, the writ of that government doesn't extend beyond Kabul, the highly fortified capital. In Iraq, too, five years of occupation, brutal military action and hundreds of millions of dollar in expenditure failed to cow down its defiant people. Notwithstanding occasional

surges, the US is apparently

staring strategic defeat in the face there. Anti-Americanism pervades the world, forming public opinion on a global scale against its neo-imperialism under the cover of an anti-terror stance. This leaves the US allies round the world domestically vulnerable. Her attempts to promote and export democracy abroad has already resulted in burlesque of a kind. This anachronistic exercise in a globalised world has further exposed her shenanigans and depravity in occupied Iraq in the name of freedom and democracy.

Those are what are heretically resisted by Hamas, Hizbollah, the Baathist insurgents, Shia militants of Iraq as well as Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters collectively in the vast swathe stretching from the Asian shore of the Mediterranean Sea to the Oxus and the Indus in the East, turning it into a zone of futility for

the United States whose writs are challenged by open defiance.

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Unfortunately, for an imperial America, and also for the recipients of its missionary ardour, there reigns only chaos and lack of coordination between and within the institutional components of the imperial enterprise. The policy makers aren't interested either in facts and figures or the prevailing realities on the ground, as markedly demonstrated by the Iraq invasion and growing signs of failure in spite of a quick victory in Afghanistan. Instead, only their hubris is upheld by compliant executors of their policies.



In its imperial venture, the worldwide presence of Americans seems to be a disjointed mass of contractors, advisers, consultants, brokers, political appointees or earnest college graduates and underpaid officials. They are all deployed without either a clear concept of the imperial mission or the skills that are required to garner success. Most of them sit cowering in the highly protected Green Zone churning out reams of meaningless "policy guidelines."

They perform rely on private armies like "Blackwater" or privatised corporate intelligence gathering, which alone is a \$ 50 billion a year industry. In spite of all these forces arranged to enforce order in occupied countries, the Americans have

brought only chaos to societies like Iraq and Afghanistan that already had stable internal order. In so doing, the US has managed to destabilise and radicalise a large part of the world.

Compared to the motley collection of agencies for imperial management, the British Empire was the only truly global empire in modern history that had the distinction of leaving behind functioning administrative and political institutions capable of maintaining order in successor states. The British Empire, for all its faults, brought order in chaotic conditions and created potential for the spread of democratic liberalism that still survives.

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Social vulnerability in coastal areas

The coastal areas of Bangladesh are the most susceptible to climate change, hence it is vital to identify the vulnerable social groups in these exposed areas. We first require a working definition of social vulnerability. In climate change literature it is often termed as "the exposure of groups or individuals to stress as a result of the impacts of climate change and related climate extremes."



NAVIL MANSUR CHOWDHURY

BANGLADESH is recognised around the world as a disaster-prone country. This isn't because God is angry with us (as some would maintain!) but rather our unique location at the crossing point of two different environments (the Himalayas in the North and the

Bay of Bengal in the South). The topography is low and flat, with 10% of the land barely 1 metre above the mean sea level (MSL). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2001 identified countries like ours as the most vulnerable to climate change.

The threats to Bangladesh from climate change can be

broken down into the following effects:

Increase in cyclone intensity

A rise in sea surface temperature (SST) is associated with increase in wind speed, which would lead to more depressions turning into cyclonic storms that hit Bangladesh.

Higher storm surges

Winds and atmospheric pressure changes associated with cyclones generate storm surges. Any increase in SST will lead to greater convective instability, leading to an increase in the wind speed and higher storm surges.

Coastal erosion

Climate change and the resulting sea level rise (SLR) have a long-term impact on coastal erosion. This is particularly true for the central coast of Bangladesh that is the most active amid continuous accretion and erosion.

Back water effect (BWE)

BWE refers to the reverse flow of the water from the sea to the river due to a rise in the level of water at the mouth of the river, which is an effect of SLR. BWE occurs mainly at estuaries such as the Meghna estuary. This exacerbates the flood and the resulting inundation during the flood season.

The policy measures available to Bangladesh to meet this threat are unpalatable at best.

What can we do? Well, simply put, our choices are to retreat, adapt or mitigate. Given our limited land area, retreat doesn't seem to be a practical solution. As such, adaptation and mitigation are our best bets.

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these exposed areas. We first require a working definition of social vulnerability. In climate change literature it is often termed as "the exposure of groups or individuals to stress as a result of the impacts of climate change and related climate extremes." Social vulnerability can be further broken up according to differing determinants into individual and collective vulnerability.

Individual vulnerability is determined by access to resources, diversity of income sources and relative status of individuals in society. Coastal communities in Bangladesh and most countries are dependent on sources of income that are "climate dependent." Some examples of such sources are agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture. Other major sources of income include remittance and wage income.

As such, coastal households whose income is primarily made up of "climate dependent" income generating activities tend to be more susceptible to the negative income shocks arising from climate shocks.

Collective vulnerability is determined by institutional and market structures (e.g. social security systems and insurance, infrastructure and income). The effects of a natural shock are often mitigated by resorting to common property resources (CPRs) such as common grazing grounds.

Such access is often deter-

mined by the relative access individual households have to CPRs. This is, in turn, determined by the inequality that exists in that particular group. Hence, income inequality provides a close proxy for collective vulnerability. Both definitions and resulting proxy measure of social vulnerability can be used to identify the most socially vulnerable groups in the target area. The actual policy implications would be to provide support to the most exposed and vulnerable groups on a priority basis in the beginning, followed by other groups.

Given that adaptation to climate change seems to be the way to go, coastal areas should be targeted for diversification in terms of economic activities. This would reduce the dependence on "climate dependent" economic activities and lessen the vulnerability of the dependent groups. Better-shared management of CPRs should also be on the agenda, with an emphasis on more equitable access to all members of the community. The issue of social safety nets has been raised many times. In this light, such mechanisms must take into account the need for external assistance, given that a natural disaster would affect the entire community in question.

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As the oceans rise

It is absolutely certain that generations from now someone will remember that even before that night in St. Paul, care was provided to the sick in America. Obama also asserted that future generations would say that "this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal..." The man and the moment have met.

GEORGE F. WILL

JOURNALISTS consider themselves crusty, unsentimental creatures who, their battered fedoras shoved back on their heads, have slouched out of Ben Hecht's 1928 play "The Front Page," oozing skepticism from every pore. Actually, they are round-heeled romantics, such pushovers for a new swain that they did not laugh until their ribs squeaked when Barack Obama concluded his triumphal St. Paul, Minn., speech by proclaiming: "I am absolutely certain that generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for

the sick..."

It is absolutely certain that generations from now someone will remember that even before that night in St. Paul, care was provided to the sick in America. Obama also asserted that future generations would say that "this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal..." The man and the moment have met.

Obama's words mesmerise a nation accustomed to leaders who routinely use words with antic indifference to their accuracy. The No Child Left Behind law promises, indeed requires, that by 2014 all children will be "proficient" in reading and math. That will not happen. Obama vows to reduce

carbon emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. John McCain says 60 percent. Whether either goal should be reached, neither will be. Commentators, too, use words in peculiar ways, as when they speak of Obama and Hillary Clinton needing to bring together "the two wings of the party." There is the left wing, and the other left wing. As one precise commentator has said, Clinton and Obama differ about as much as the Everly Brothers.

As the primary season folds seamlessly into the general election campaign, there are few certainties, but this will be the first presidential election contested by two sitting senators, so this will be just the third time the country has

elected a sitting senator (Harding in 1920, Kennedy in 1960). And there is an asymmetry between the senators' possible trajectories: McCain, although a very familiar figure, has a downside risk from becoming better-known concerning one issue; Obama has an upside potential from becoming better-known regarding an elemental fact.

McCain is fortunate. The eerie narcissism of Clinton's speech the night that Obama clinched the nomination distracted attention from McCain's badly delivered speech the same night, in New Orleans. If he really opposes torture, he will take pity on the public and master the use of a teleprompter.

He said: "The American people didn't get to know me yesterday, as they are just getting to know Senator Obama." McCain, who has been running for president for 10 years, has never entertained the thought that the country might sometimes have a surfeit of him. Does some statute require that he

appear on at least one of the five Sunday morning talk shows every week (ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, Fox News)? He has appeared on them 67 times since 2004. He has been such a ubiquitous figure, it will be difficult for him to seize the attention of a public that thinks it knows everything about him.

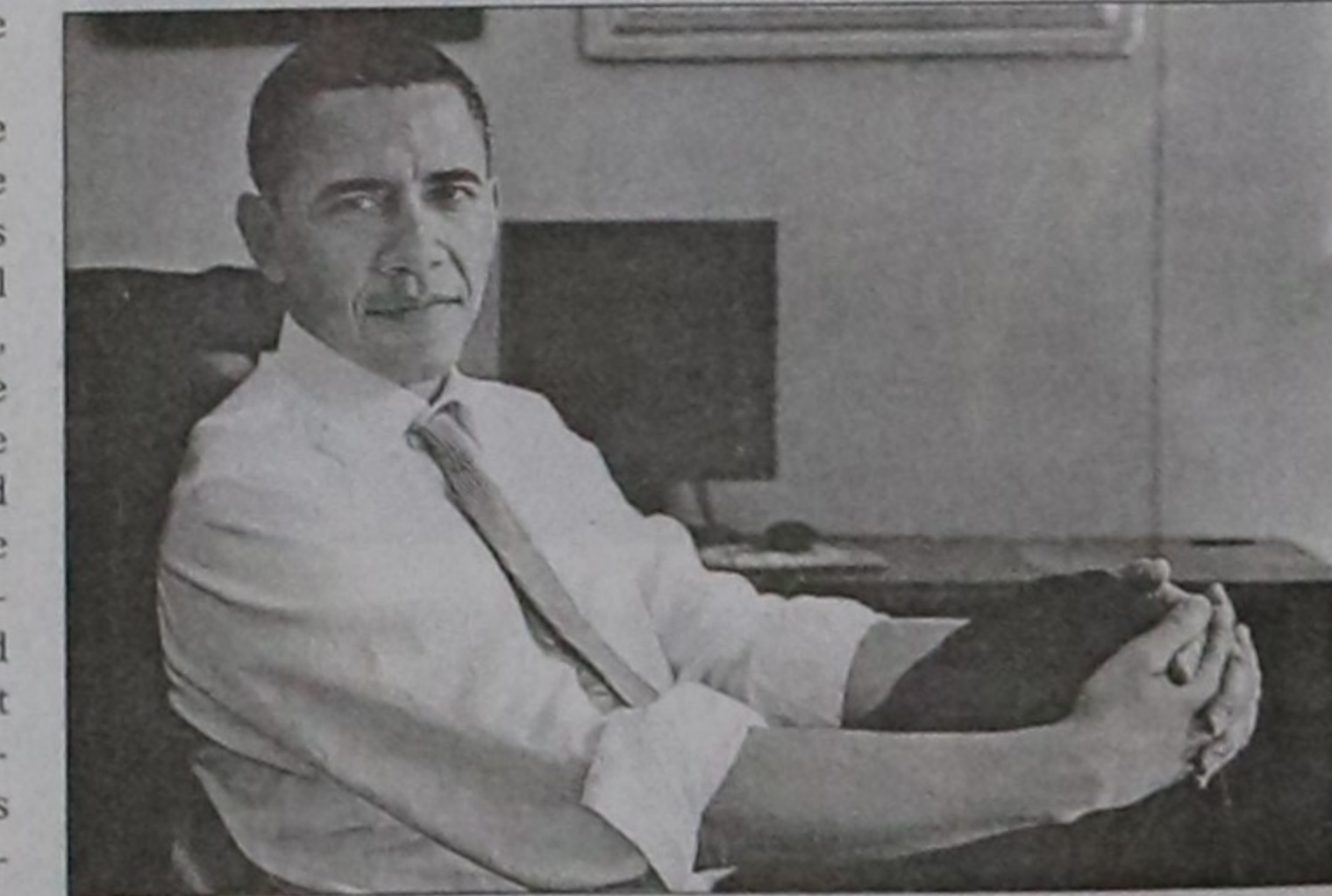
But it does not. Because of his cultivated persona as a "maverick" Republican, many -- perhaps most -- voters do not know he is pro-life. When the fact that he is becomes well publicised, and Democrats will make sure it is, Clinton's female supporters will stop sulking in their tents and will rally round Obama.

Something that millions of Americans think they know about Obama -- that he is a Muslim -- is injurious. When they are disabused of this idea, he will rise. McCain might think Obama cannot rise high enough to win because he, McCain, can get the support of white, blue-collar, culturally conservative Democrats who decisively pre-

ferred Clinton to Obama in the primaries.

But there are fewer of these "Reagan Democrats" than there were when that category was identified 28 years ago. That label might not yet be as antiquated as, say, "Wendell Willkie Republicans," but its significance diminishes as the economy and the educational and social profile of the electorate change. War-weary Americans are preoccupied with domestic discontents, but McCain sounds at best perfunctory when talking about things other than those that really interest him, things that fly or explode -- the sinews of national security.

Neither candidate can know his current electoral strength because polling is in unexplored territory. No poll is any better than its template for predicting turnout -- the size and composition of the Election Day electorate. So Republicans reading alarming polls might be insufficiently alarmed. Obama's candidacy might increase total turnout, and



especially participation by African-Americans and young people. If so, some House and Senate races, and some states, may be more competitive than they currently seem.

In 2004, 12 states were won by 5 percentage points or less. Six were won by Bush (Florida, Ohio, Iowa, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico) and six by Kerry (New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Michigan,

Wisconsin, Minnesota, Oregon). Bush's six have 73 electoral votes. Kerry's six have 69. But Florida, that geographic afterthought -- some of it was tardy emerging from the sea, and its highest point is just 345 feet above sea level -- might disappear, depending on "the rise of the oceans."

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