

## IMED findings revealing but academic

Fix responsibility for irregularities and preempt recurrence

**I**MPLEMENTATION, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Planning Ministry has in its report on projects completed in 2006 unearthed a number of irregularities associated with the implementation of Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP). The project commencing in 1999-2000 fiscal year with majority funding from World Bank, as part of the 20-year Strategic Transport Plan (STP), aimed at an improvement of the city's traffic and transport management system.

Ranging from use of low quality material in road construction through edges and mid-sections of roads having been dug several times to install gas, drainage and telephone lines to deviating from designs, you name it, and it happened with the project!

There are specific instances of irregularities, such as, out of planned 14 bridges, only seven were built, road lengths on physical verification were found shorter than claimed, maintenance cost outstripping allocations by wide margins and substandard materials were abundantly used.

Besides, importantly, there were invariably cost and time overruns.

If this is the way we have handled DUTP what can we expect of the longer-term generic project called the 20-year strategic transport plan?

The lessons learned are to be made use of. The serious lack of coordination between the agencies is the major lesson we have learned. The big mistake is, the agencies that have been involved in the project do not include the utilities like the WASA, Gas and Telephone organisations which are automatically drawn into the picture with their excavation activities. But the list of agencies basically sounds very unwieldy, include as it does, DCC, Roads and Highways, BRTA, DoE, Rajuk and Bangladesh Police.

A more compact and unified body including the utility organisation must be put in place in moving ahead with the implementation of the STP.

The frequent changes of project directors will have to be done away with to bring greater commitment, speed and consistency to bear on project implementation.

The fundamental issue relates to building transparency and accountability into the system of project implementation. This can be best ensured if the IMED is strengthened with a high profile, dynamic head of the division and empowered with an autonomous status as an oversight body.

## Travellers' woe

Same story repeated every year

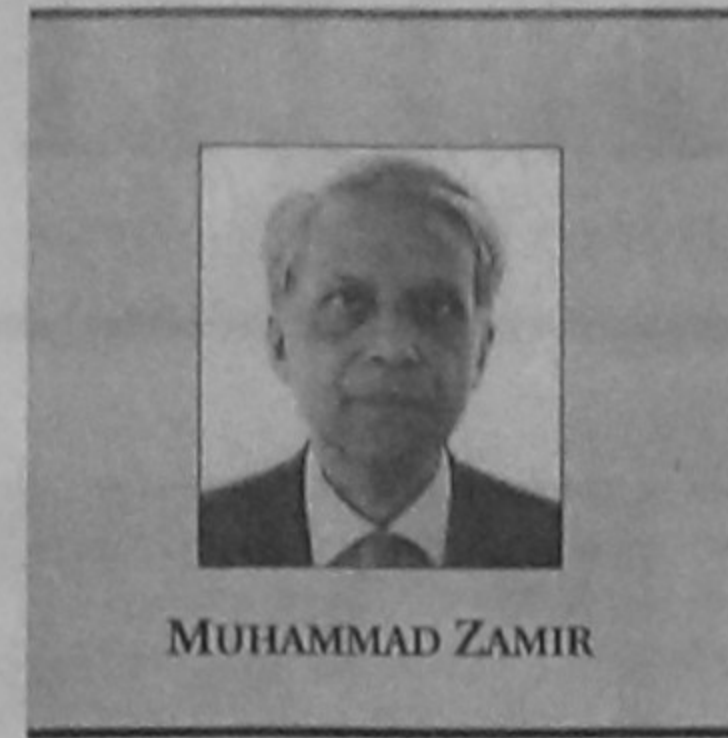
**I**T is good to know that the Bangladesh Railway has started to sell tickets in advance in response to huge number of people leaving Dhaka to celebrate Eid at different destinations. This is one occasion when many families leave Dhaka to be with the near ones at their ancestral homes. As a result, with the news of advance selling of tickets going around, travellers have begun to queue up at Kamalapur and other railway stations for tickets since 5 in the morning. It only speaks of the urgency of reaching home in time.

It is further good news that Bangladesh Railway authorities have decided to introduce separate trains from September 24 till the day before Eid and from the day after Eid till October 9. Though it apparently sounds good but our experience says that every Eid time travellers face all sorts of problems including shortage of tickets, which are again found in black market.

There seems to be no end to the suffering of the long distance passengers, especially during the holidays. Railway being the cheapest mode of transportation at such times, the rush for tickets turns out to be a regular feature. And with the advent of Eid a group of corrupt insiders start to hoard tickets to sell at high price during the last hours to desperate passengers. A great deal has been written on this corrupt practice but nothing tangible has happened to turn the tide. The corrupt elements are still active and we believe last minute passengers will have to collect tickets from them, if the authorities fail to contain them.

The road transportation sector also experiences all sorts of corrupt practices during the holidays. Not only prices of bus tickets increase manifold, the maddening rush and non-availability of tickets cause a lot of pain to the passengers. This time around some motorbus owners have claimed increasing toll collection by the extortionists to be the reason why bus fare had to be increased, but we believe it is not the only reason. The relevant authorities will have to ensure that it is not a way of justifying the price hike. We hope the authorities responsible for maintaining law and order will remain extra vigilant to ensure safe journey of the people during the Eid time.

# The RMG sector needs streamlining



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**T**HERE are three sectors in the Bangladesh economy which have prospered over the years -- readymade garments, the providing of employment opportunities to Bangladeshis abroad and pisciculture and shrimp farming aimed for export. The success in these sectors has had little to do with the government. The drive and the movement forward came from entrepreneurs from the private sector. These sectors are now contributing approximately US dollar 17.8 billion in foreign exchange every year to our country. They are keeping the country afloat and have also been the force behind the creation of employment opportunities for millions of people. The RMG sector in particular, has been the source of employment for nearly two million women. That in turn has indirectly helped in gender empowerment, female literacy, better nutrition and family planning.

Many Analysts and so-called experts, over the last two decades, have been very skeptical about the continued growth of the RMG industrial sector. Questions were raised about the sustained success of our RMG industry in the post-MFA period. They have been proven wrong. Subsequently, various regulatory aspects pertaining to the export regime in this sector raised doubts as to whether the knitwear and the woven sectors could both do as anticipated. Till now, the Cassandras have not been proved correct. The level of adapt-

ability that has marked this sector has enabled it to grow despite many constraints.

We were informed towards the end of August by the president of the BGMEA that there was a possibility that Bangladesh's garment exports will hit US dollar 25 billion by 2013. It was pointed out that buyers were impressed with the country's quality products and competitive pricing. This was so despite this industry's rickety infrastructure and growing short-

age of skilled manpower in mid-management.

The BGMEA forgot to add a few other factors that are also seriously affecting growth in this sector -- inadequate gas and power supply, higher freight charges in the local and international markets, yarn price hike, higher transport costs and increase in prices of requisite capital machinery.

To this has now been added the possible decision by Wal-Mart (the world's largest retailer of clothing and annual importer of nearly US dollar 1.7 billion from Bangladesh) wanting a 2 percent rebate on its current orders of Bangladesh RMG products. A Wal-Mart representative has remarked that this is still not confirmed. However, there is speculation that this is on the way given the current trend of economic downturn in the USA. This assumes greater seriousness given the fact that the price index for exportable local apparel items

appear to have declined by more than 1 percent over the last fiscal year, while, according to RU Mirdha, 'the cost of doing business in Bangladesh, particularly in the RMG sector, increased by 15 percent.'

Another aspect that is affecting profitability in the RMG sector has been the exploitation by international buyers of the inexperience of our local manufacturers in this sector in the area of international marketing. Despite evolving suc-

cess, most of our RMG business, even today, is done through middlemen. Our marketing network still leaves a lot to be desired.

To all of the above has now been added another significant problem -- vandalism. What increases the anxiety level is the fact that the industrial units that have come under attack have included factories that have tried to comply with the tripartite agreement reached in 2006 between representatives of the different stakeholders including workers and the owners. According to the media, nearly 150 factories have suffered since January 2008. This has included 24 cases of vandalized units in the months of August and September. Labour unrest, according to industrial specialists, has also affected nearly 400 units. This is quite a high percentage, almost 10 percent of the entire garment industry manufacturing force. There have also been reports that some of the acts

of arson and vandalism were undertaken by people who could not be identified by the owners or security personnel of the factories concerned. They have since been identified as outsiders.

Another disappointing aspect was claims by management of affected factories that law and order enforcement personnel were sometimes available at the time of the incident but did not actively try to contain the situation. This has quite understandably raised

## POST BREAKFAST

The government could take a more hands-on engagement with the leadership of the RMG sector in dispute resolution. In this context, with the agreement of all parties, they could initiate the formation of an arbitration facility through which disputes could be settled without workers resorting to violence. The workers will also have to understand that they have to behave more responsibly and stop unnecessary violence and vandalism based on rumours and external instigation.

demands from factory owners that the government needs to provide them with adequate security.

When questioned about their destructive behaviour, agitated workers have pointed fingers at the owners. They have claimed that some of the conditions included in the tripartite agreement have not been respected by the management and the owners. They have alleged that at different times they do not get paid on time and do not receive some of the other benefits that have been promised. The owners on the other hand claim that such assertions are not true and that 'certain vested quarters' are deliberately instigating unrest and trying to destroy the competitiveness within this industry.

I do not know if all the allegations made by the workers are true. It is however clear that all is not well in the state of Denmark (as Shakespeare's Hamlet would have put it).

I also take this opportunity to point out that the absence of 'living wages' within this industry is creating frustration, unhappiness and making these workers susceptible to external provocation. I do not know why our owners in the RMG sector cannot pay at least US dollar one per day to their workers. How can they expect workers to be able to perform without this minimum salary -- given the absurd and steep rise in the prices of basic commodities like rice, edible oil and vegeta-

bles? I am not even mentioning milk or fish or other sources of protein. Yes, there has been a welcome attempt towards food rationing during Ramadan. It has had a marginal effect. This is a step that needs to continue. The BGMEA and the BKMEA could perhaps seriously look at setting up fair price subsidized shops within their factories, where workers from that unit could buy essential food staples at slightly cheaper prices. The two associations could perhaps sit with the Ministry of Commerce and arrange for an agreed course of action where the TCB would be the focal point for such an exercise.

The government could also take a more hands-on engagement with the leadership of the RMG sector in another area -- dispute resolution. In this context, with the agreement of all parties, they could initiate the formation of an arbitration facility through which disputes could be settled without workers resorting

to violence. The workers will also have to understand that they have to behave more responsibly and stop unnecessary violence and vandalism based on rumours and external instigation.

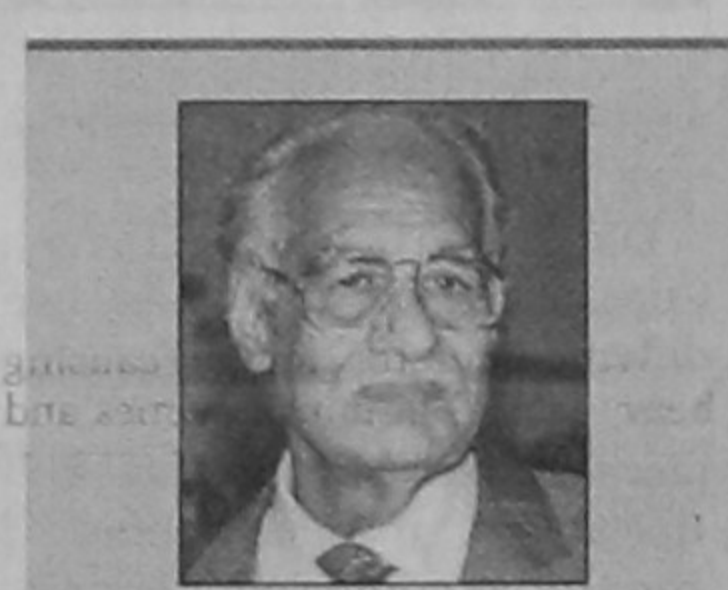
The government has to be a more active player within the matrix of the RMG sector. It is not enough to leave most of the lobbying to the private sector. We have to use our persuasive powers as leader of the LDC group to contain the damage that has been unleashed by Ghana and Mali. These two countries have persuaded Mr Jim McDermott, Chairman of the Ways and Means Sub-Committee of the US House of Representatives to exclude five categories of Bangladesh textile and apparel products from facilities under the New Partnership Act (NPDA) 2007. We have to make it clear to the African countries that Bangladesh's duty free access to the US market under NPDA will not hamper schemes as contained within the paradigm of the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

We have to clarify to the poorer African countries that the real challenge will come from China (after the US withdraws its safeguard measures in January 2009) and not Bangladesh. We have to explain also to the US government that this Act is aimed at reducing extreme poverty worldwide and Bangladesh needs to be included within the list. One hopes that the coming UNGA session in New York will provide the opportunity to the Bangladesh leadership to do just that.

We have difficult times ahead of us pertaining to the RMG sector. This will need greater perspective planning and coordination. The government will have to help the entrepreneurs as well as the workers so that they can survive and prosper within the emerging competitive environment. Both sides need the support.

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# Terrorists of different breeds



KULDIP NAYYAR  
writes from New Delhi

**M**ANGLED bodies, wounded people and fear-stricken faces -- every bomb blast, anywhere, leaves this image in its wake. Recent serial blasts at Delhi were no different. What is different is that this blast confirms the existence of Islamist terrorism in India.

Unlike the past, when Pakistan was a straightaway suspect, this time the search is within the country. Still, the Indian Mujahideen, the terrorist outfit which has taken the responsibility is linked with Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami and the Lashkar-e-Toiba, the two groups said to be operating from Pakistan. Defence Minister A.K. Anthony has put the blame on Pakistan but in a general way.

Delhi blasts have followed a familiar pattern -- low-intensity bombs, timer devices and e-mails to the media for information -- that has been seen in Jaipur, Bangalore and Ahmedabad. Apparently, the group gets a malicious satisfaction in killing the innocent and selects crowded places like markets to increase the number of casualties. One thing is certain that the killers have no qualms of conscience

although their functioning suggests that they are a highly educated lot. That they should indulge in mayhem in the holy month of Ramadan should not be a surprise.

What is disturbing is that the big cities -- where they operate seem to have a network of people who support, shelter and guide them. True, money can buy such helpers. But the latter are like-minded and convinced about the righteousness of their task. This indicates that India has come to

added reason for Muslims' alienation is New Delhi's tilt towards Washington.

Indeed, the Muslim community has got disillusioned from the ethos of secularism which the dominant opinion in India upholds. Muslims have experienced how the reality is different when it gets translated into an equal treatment. The Sachar Committee has proved the hollowness of government's claims with facts and figures which it has col-

lected from official sources at the centre and in the states.

Therefore, the community is tempted to go it alone. The coming polls may show some evidence of it. The Muslim vote can influence some 120 Lok Sabha seats. The feeling of going it alone is understandable, but not beneficial. It may give vent to the community's exasperation and may divide the society further. This is not in the interest of Muslims who have the largest population in India, next to Indonesia. Even otherwise, the smouldering differences between Hindus and Muslims can catch fire, much to the glee of the BJP which is back to its Hindutva agenda with a

vengeance.

However the Muslim community may be smarting under a sense of denial, it has to strengthen the pluralistic society by playing a lead role. Some Muslim leaders should take upon themselves the task of finding out the credentials of the so-called Indian Mujahideen who are trying to destroy India's fabric of secularism and causing harm to the Muslim community.

A few days ago, some Muslims had announced that they would go

into the blasts at Jaipur and Bangalore to pick up concrete evidence which the governments have failed to collect. Many Muslims believe that those who are being arrested on suspicion are nowhere connected with the blasts. The country is facing a real challenge. The majority and the minorities are going apart and government doesn't seem to have any idea how to span the distance. Jawaharlal Nehru also envisaged such a situation. There is something in what he said: Communalism of minorities can be fought and curbed but communalism of the majority would take the shape of fascism.

vicarious satisfaction of pulling down the celebrities whom they can never reach in name or fame.

In Maharashtra they call themselves by the name of the Shiv Sena and in Orissa, the Bajrang Dal. Their religion should not be a dupe because they are the scum of society. Their strong point is that they either operate with the connivance of the state or with the confidence that the society has no guts to intervene to fight against them. They wish to wield political power but seldom come near it because the voters fear them, not trust them. For some time, Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray has been quiet. Party,

age has mellowed him but partly he has come to realise that Maharashtra is part of India, not that India is part of Maharashtra. His notoriety began with the ultimatum to north Indians to leave the state but converted the sentiment into Hindutva and joined hands with the BJP.

Raj Thackeray, his nephew, has come to reignite the same anti-north phobia when the uncle has preferred his son as the successor. Many poor Biharis had to leave Mumbai following attacks on them and the destruction of their scanty belongings. But film actors are still on the top of the list.

Talented Jaya Bachchan was Raj Thackeray's target because she said she did not have to necessarily stick to Marathi in Maharashtra and would speak in Hindi since she belonged to UP. Unfortunately, when public opinion was building up in her support, her husband Amitabh Bachchan offered an abject apology. Why don't people put up fight against injustice? Amitabh Bachchan chose the least line of resistance.

Another person to surrender to goondaism is Maqbool Fida Husain, the leading painter. Artists and others fought for his right to show Bharat Mata naked. While dismissing the 3,000 cases against him, the Supreme Court said that there are many such pictures, paintings and sculptures and some of them are in temples. Husain should have come back to India but he preferred to celebrate his 93rd birthday at Dubai. It is a pity that decent people have no appetite to confront the indecent.

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

# Agriculture should get top priority

TMA SAMAD

**I**T is encouraging that the present caretaker government has attached highest budget to agricultural sector. It is a correct assessment and realization that if we can bring a breakthrough in agriculture then only the country can stand on a strong footing. If our agricultural foundation is not made strong, then the industry we seek to build will not have a strong basis either. More important, if our food front cracks up everything else will crack up too.

Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) has done a splendid job by developing quite a good number of high yielding rice varieties because of which though the population has increased manifold and on the other hand cultivable land has decreased due to industries, housing and other factors, yet the diligent farmers of this country have proved that they could achieve the target and feed the entire population by their untiring effort.

According to Department of

Agricultural Extension sources, even after two devastating floods and cyclonic storm Sidr Boro cultivation achieved more than its target i.e. 187 lac tons against 174. Aman target has been fixed to 131 lac ton, similarly target for Aus has been fixed to 22.93 lac ton.

There has been bumper crop not only of boro but wheat, potato, and maize also. Target of wheat was 8.84 lac tons but the achievement has been 9.65 lac tons, while the potato production was 92 lac ton against 70. All credit goes to the farmers for their splendid endeavour.

Here it will not be out of place to mention that if we can utilize the scientists' effort definitely the output will be maximized. There should be a strong linkage between extension and research because the extension workers are important intermediaries to carry research innovations to farmers. Researchers pass new ideas to farmers through the system. In turn, farmers can use the extension network to help researchers become more aware of the real problem of the field. Hence, if

Scientists working in the research and development (R&D) be considered for promotion through up-gradation. However, this should be done through a process of evaluation of merit and contribution only, not on so called seniority. The mechanism for the promotion should be such that a scientist remains and serves within his /her field of specialization without being transferred to other divisions for the sake of promotion only.

researchers, extension workers and farmers can work together there is no reason why we will not achieve self sufficiency in food provided if we can utilize every inch of fallow land and remain firmly committed.

Bangladesh has signed an agreement with the World Bank for having six hundred crore taka for National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP) with an objective to improve effectiveness of the national agricultural technology system. Agricultural research support component will aim to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the national agricultural research system through: (a) promotion of a pluralistic institutional structure by enabling entry of new partners to support the research system; (b) making agricultural

research more participatory and demand-driven; (c) developing technologies to promote sustainable intensification and diversification of agriculture and for post-harvest value addition; and (d) bridging the yield gap between what is possible and what is being currently achieved by farmers.

It is a huge task to implement the project and should be seen as a national responsibility where researchers and extension workers are the key players. This is no doubt a pragmatic decision of the present government. But the gloomy scenario in Agriculture Research Sector is shortage of senior talented and skilled scientists due to their emigration to different countries, particularly Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Higher edu-

cation and training are an investment in the future of an individual and the nation as a whole. For producing a single PhD in the third world countries it costs around TK. 30-35 lakh. With loan and grant money these scientists were trained over the last 25 years. So it will take again 20 to 25 years time to compensate for the loss of trained manpower already occurred. But here again everything can wait, not agriculture.

Present system offers very little to flourish their scientific talents and creativity. Even if one is lucky to be posted in a proper place after having been trained from advanced laboratories and academic institutions yet in most cases new responsibilities do not match his/her expertise. Naturally

a sense of frustration arises when they find their scientific base acquired over the years is eroding.

There are instances that even after having a PhD degree one had to serve as SO/SSO for almost 10-15 years. Sadly true, many opportunities for participating in training/seminar/workshop are missed due to cumbersome process and dilly dallying tactics of the bureaucratic system which is sometimes humiliating also, thus leading to frustration in the mind of a scientist. The government has to think seriously and invent ways to retain the agricultural scientists in the face of their exodus to developed countries.

Here, one may argue that a man cannot be desisted from accepting a lucrative offer or better opportu-

nity and it is the fundamental right of a citizen to choose his/her options. Besides, brain drain cannot be considered as a loss to the nation because they will be earning foreign currency which in turn makes the country benefited. But uncertain earning can in no way make a country economically moving.

**Suggested remedies**  
Scientists working in the research and development (R&D) be considered for promotion through up-gradation. However, this should be done through a process of evaluation of merit and contribution only, not on so called seniority. The mechanism for the promotion should be such that a scientist remains and serves within his /her field of specialization without being transferred to other divisions for the sake of promotion only. Scientists' job in all the R&D organizations should be made pensionable making equal opportunity available to them in all national institutions.

Retirement age for the scientists should be made 60 years

instead of 57 years with a provision of extension upto 65 years subject to outstanding contribution and enduring ability. Here it may not be out of place to mention that university teachers and judges of the upper judiciary are enjoying 65 and 67 years limit respectively so I find no reason why scientists should not be allowed to continue working upto 65 years in the greater interest of the country.

Warrant of precedence as an instrument should be given to scientists working in R&D organizations as practiced in the cadre services so that the scientists enjoy the same social status.

Top/managerial positions should be made regular so as to make the incumbents more effective and decisive and not suffer from procrastination. BARC's status should be enhanced in the light of ICAR of India and PARC of Pakistan and full autonomy should be given so as to make it more effective and efficient.

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