

What's an ADP worth?

Obviously its implementation, not size

PLANNING minister AK Khandaker has hinted that the size of annual development programme (ADP) for FY 2009-10 could be around Tk 29,000-30,000 crore. He prefers the programme size to be big so that money can reach the poor, employment is generated and poverty declines. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), however, recommends that the ADP should be kept within Tk 26,000 crore mark in view of the low implementation trend in recent years.

We believe the debate over ADP size is misplaced, if not superfluous. The resources and expertise available within the government and outside it, among the think-tanks and research organisations, would be much better expended if these were directed to devising ways and means to ensure the fullest implementation of an ADP having been adopted. Anyone conversant with the history of ADP implementation in the country knows it too well, whatever its size, whether original or revised, the implementation deficits remained glaring. The pattern consistently has been that of grandstanding with an ambitious ADP in a new fiscal year, downsizing it in the face of below 25 percent implementation at the half-year point at the most, and then rushing through the remainder six months with the sole objective of meeting financial and physical targets. That way what we got was not only under-performance but also poor quality development work.

Apart from project selection often bearing signature of political rather than economic considerations and thereby affecting implementation, the problems apparently lie with the ministries themselves. In our front page report yesterday on the subject of non-implementation of ADP we find that the government is going to reduce allocation in the foreign aided projects in such priority sectors as power, energy and agriculture by 18-75 percent in the current fiscal year because of their failure to spend the allocated money. For the same reason, the donors which had committed funds are not disbursing. The huge pipeline bulges have been traditionally attributed to non-utilisation of allocations at our end.

The Planning Ministry and Economic Relations Division and the line ministries must hold regular meetings to discuss problems in implementing projects so that solutions can emerge out of effective brain-storming and collective wisdom. It can be easily realised that if powers are adequately delegated to project directors and they are not transferred out for the duration of project-work, implementation is bound to move apace. One other strategic move to help implementation would be to structurally strengthen and empower the Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Planning Ministry.

Observing May Day

The goal is to create a society where labour is given its due

THE observance of May Day is essentially a remembrance of the working men who sacrificed their lives in defence of their rights in Chicago's Hay Market long ago. In broad measure, though, it is a reassertion of the thought that equality matters in every aspect of human life, that men and women who toil day and night in search of a livelihood and decent living must be privy to all the good things that come with life. It is a fundamental truth we have known all these years. It is especially in Bangladesh that May Day takes on a huge degree of significance considering the long and insistent struggles our workers have regularly put up over the years in their enlightened interest.

May Day this year comes at a time when the world faces a steep recession, so much so that industries worldwide have either been shutting down or retrenching large numbers of their employees. For us in Bangladesh, therefore, it is of crucial importance that measures be adopted that will not only save jobs from being lost but will also create the conditions that will help accommodate the tens of thousands who happen to be unemployed. In this context, the plight of workers returning from abroad, particularly Korea, Malaysia and the Middle East, is a major concern. Their worries at losing their jobs translate into a national worry in the sense that they must be helped in finding new employment at home or abroad. Add to that the many issues which yet concern our workers in such sectors as ready made garments. These workers as well as those in other sectors of economic activity need to be reassured about a regular payment of their wages and other benefits together with assurances of better and healthy working conditions. It is here that management must come in. Empathy and skillful handling of problems are what constitute efficient management. Let that theme be held aloft this May Day.

Today, in Bangladesh, good, proper and productive industrial relations are an absolute imperative. That a nation's economy thrives when employers and employees have a healthy working relationship is a truth one cannot ignore. In the end, May Day is not merely a recalling of an occasion; it is at the same time a rekindling of social purpose, the purpose being the creation of an egalitarian society.

We're in this together

It is too bad that it has taken the electricity and water crisis to come to our door-step for us to notice that there is something amiss, but the silver lining of the ill-effects of environmental degradation being democratised is that just maybe we can now muster the political will to do something about it.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

IF there is one person whose insights and ideas we in Bangladesh could benefit from learning about, it is those of Van Jones, activist, author of *The Green Collar Economy*, and now a special advisor to the Obama administration for green jobs.

Van's insights seem simple and unremarkable, but until he started banging the drum on the issue with his best-selling book, the link between environmental pollution and poverty had been pretty much neglected.

In an interview with an environmental magazine last year, Jones succinctly made the case: "The only reason that we have the unsustainable accounting that we have right now is because incinerators, dumping grounds and sacrifice zones were put where poor people live. It would never have been allowed if you had to put all the incinerators and nasty stuff in rich people's neighborhoods; we'd have had a sustainable economy a long time ago."

It's a simple point, but no less insightful for, what, in retrospect, seems like a blindingly obvious observation. All great insights seem blindingly obvious in retrospect after someone else has articulated them.

But it is Van's second insight that is perhaps even more radical in terms of its implications for the future.

To this day, the conventional wisdom is that environmental preservation can come only at significant economic cost and that going green will require a trade-off in terms

of economic growth and development.

Rubbish, says Van, not to put too fine a point on it.

In fact, the opposite is true: we can solve the problems of poverty and the environment at the same time. In fact, he argues, it is only possible to solve them both at the same time.

It is only by retro-fitting the world economy to go green that we will create the sustainable jobs needed in a post-industrial world that will pull people out of poverty.

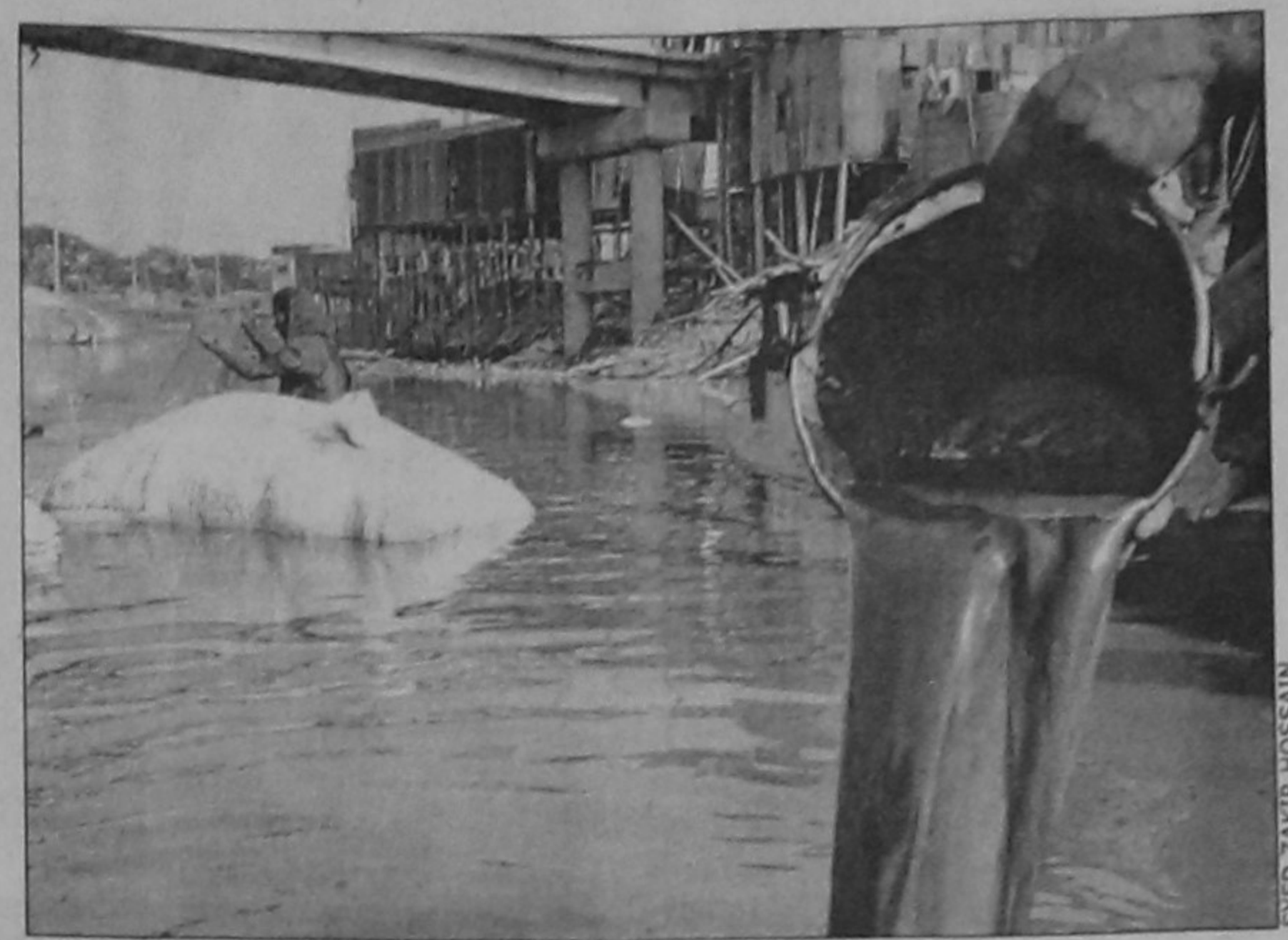
Just as the industrial revolution powered the 19th and 20th centuries, it is green jobs that will power the economic engine of the 21st century.

Now, I am sure that I was not the only reader who has spent the last week pie-eyed at the revelations in *The Daily Star* about the appalling levels of pollution in the waterways in and around the environs of Dhaka city.

As is always the case in matters such as this, the poor are the ones who bear the brunt of the problem. It is no coincidence that the worst hit are the river gypsies and those who must squat in squalid tenements on the banks of filthy water because they have nowhere else to go.

If you or I or anyone from the ruling class lived by the banks of the Turag and were forced to wash every day in dank, malodorous fluid that barely merits the dignity of being called water, you can bet that we would have heard a lot more about it a lot sooner.

But the truth is that in this country which



Everyone's problem.

measures just a few hundred miles from top to bottom, into which some 150 million of us are squashed together, and whose capital is slated to be one of the world's four most populous metropolises by 2020 with a population of 22 million, we can't isolate ourselves from the filth.

In one sense, this has always been Bangladesh's bane. No matter how rich you are, you cannot fully isolate yourself from the poverty all around you, the pot-holed roads, the slums, the crumbling infrastructure.

Now we even see it with water and power. It used to be that the poor didn't have regular access to electricity and clean water. These days it is pretty much everyone.

Sure, the ritziest parts of the city have been the last and the least affected, but hit they finally have been, and even residents of Gulshan and Baridhara recognise that the day of reckoning is just around the corner.

In a sense, though, the fact that we are all finally feeling the pinch is no bad thing: it means that we are all in this together.

It is too bad that it has taken the electricity and water crisis to come to our door-step for us to notice that there is something amiss, but the silver lining of the ill-effects of environmental degradation being democratised is that just maybe we can now muster the political will to do something about it.

The good news is that we have the political will, we can fix things. It is not too late. Of course, it will take radical re-imagining of our options and priorities and creative and inventive policy prescriptions.

But, and this is Van's insight that we need to take to heart, fixing the environmental mess is the only way to create the job opportunities that the economy is in such dire need of.

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Taming the Taliban

So, if the fierce faith of the Taliban bothers us, our frivolous life bothers them just as bad. Two diverse worlds have become impervious to each other, each spiteful of the extremes of another. The Taliban has transformed faith into tyranny. We have transformed tyranny into faith.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IN his book *Taliban*, Ahmed Rashid, a renowned Pakistani journalist, writes about his conversation with Mullah Wakil, an aide to Taliban leader Mullah Omar, in 1996 in Kandahar. Wakil gave an insight into the Taliban movement, explaining that one of its objectives was to "live a life like the Prophet lived 1400 years ago." The Taliban wanted to recreate the time of the Prophet in order to revive that way of life, he claimed.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that the same Taliban is pushing that ideal to its logical conclusion. But then again, they are not the first in history to take things too far. The Khmer Rouge once wanted to recreate Cambodia and sent everyone to the countryside.

The idea was to abolish money, private property and religion. They killed anyone they could find wearing glasses. Spectacles were the symbol of decadence. They could threaten the revolution.

Not to say, every revolution comes to

change the world, and it starts with an idea. The Chinese Cultural Revolution aimed at destroying counter-revolutionary values and symbols. Class conflict was the driving force of the French revolution. Creation of a classless society was the goal of communist and socialist revolutions.

So, it's only natural that the Taliban should also have an idea, since what they are trying to do is bring about a revolutionary change in the world. That idea is to denounce the infidels, their system, practice and influence.

Education, employment and sports for women are forbidden to start with. Movies, television, videos, music, and dancing are also banned.

Some of the proscriptions might sound silly. People can't hang pictures in their homes, clap during sports events, fly kites, or possess drawings, paintings, stuffed animals and dolls. Men are required to wear regulation beard extending farther than a fist clamped at the base of their chin. Lobster, wine, nailpolish, firecrackers, statues, sewing catalogues and Christmas

cards are obviously scorned.

But this is how the Taliban would prefer to live in the world created by them. It may have a ring of contradiction to it, but they don't mind killing for that life, not to say they don't even mind dying for it. They are ready to go back 14 centuries if that's what it takes.

And, they made a showdown of that determination from the very first day they had carved out a swathe of influence in Swat, once a popular tourist destination in Pakistan.

All the women vanished from the streets and offices. Girl schools were blown up, and bodies of dancing girls were dumped on a public square. The music stores were shut down and the barber shops displayed signs announcing that un-Islamic cuts or shavings were not available.

That world inexorably collides with ours. Our world promotes faith in living, whereas the Taliban promotes living in faith. In their frenzy, they are ready to turn the clock back to the sixth century, where this life is merely a preamble for the next.

During their conversation, there was one other thing Wakil said to Rashid. The sharia didn't allow politics or political parties. "That is why we give no salaries to officials or soldiers, just food, clothes, shoes and weapons," he added.

What else can they give? Endless flogging, chopping of hands and stoning to death, according to many. In fact, it's like the Day of Judgment every day under the Taliban, any deviation from the sharia is

dealt with urgent hands, adulterers abolished, fornicators finished, music lovers mauled, drunkards destroyed, shavers shamed, man measured by the length of his beard, woman by the length of her veil.

Of course, our world has its flaws. It's also driven by some kind of a frenzy, extreme on life as the Taliban is on faith. In fact, the Taliban frenzy is an outcome of our frenzy, a by product of our excesses, the children of strifes smothered by inordinate greed and cruelty unleashed on them.

Toady, if they are insisting on returning to ancient days it's because they see it as an improvement over the dark ages in which they were condemned to live.

So, if the fierce faith of the Taliban bothers us, our frivolous life bothers them just as bad. Two diverse worlds have become impervious to each other, each spiteful of the extremes of another. The Taliban has transformed faith into tyranny. We have transformed tyranny into faith.

In the past, revolutions came to take this world forward. They promised to do so by bringing men closer to each other. Liberty, fraternity and equality were the catchwords.

For argument's sake let us believe the Taliban will bring us closer to God. Let us say it will work if they reverse the world. But will that bring us closer to each other? More than flogging, stoning and chopping, that should be our biggest concern.

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Durban anti-racism conference outcome

The document reaffirms that fundamental importance of freedom of expression and stresses its compatibility with existing international law that prohibits incitement to hatred.

NAVI PILLAY

THE UN anti-racism conference was held in Geneva this week and the world did not stop turning, as the conference's detractors wanted us to believe. In fact, the world might be a better place now that the conference approved by consensus a document that builds on the commitments made in Durban eight years ago to combat racial discrimination and intolerance all over the world.

Despite decades of advocacy, despite the efforts of many groups and many nations, despite ample evidence of racism's terrible toll, racism persists. No society is immune, large or small, rich or poor. The conference in Geneva was an opportunity for all nations to come together and agree on a common document enshrining a common aspiration: to defy racism in all its manifestations and work to stamp it out.

Yet, a number of voices had advocated a boycott of the review conference for well over a year, long before a single word was put to paper. This opposition was for the

most part based on fears that the Geneva meeting would trigger a repetition of the virulent anti-Semitic activities of some non-governmental organisations at the margins of the 2001 World Conference in Durban. The odious actions of a few had tainted the reputation of the entire process from Durban in 2001 to the conference in Geneva in 2009. Ten UN member States, including Canada, Israel, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and five of the 27 EU countries, decided to stay away from the Geneva gathering which the UN General Assembly had called to review the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), the final document of the 2001 conference.

The absence of these countries loomed large when, on the first day of the conference, the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad delivered a speech attacking Israel, the US, and other western states, effectively using this UN forum for partisan political rhetoric.

However, such divisive stance was roundly rejected the following day with the

adoption by consensus of a document that is the final world of the conference. Member states showed their determination, spirit of compromise and respect for diversity to move as one on a common and very urgent cause. This agreement will hopefully have lasting beneficial effects for the countless victims of racism, discrimination and intolerance worldwide.

In the document, states undertook to prevent manifestations of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, especially in relation to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. States also agreed to promote greater participation and opportunities for people of African and Asian decent, indigenous peoples and individuals belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. They committed to ensure that discrimination would not overtly or covertly hamper access to employment, social services, health care and participation in other spheres of life. Multiple forms of discrimination will also be tackled.

The document reaffirms that fundamental importance of freedom of expression and stresses its compatibility with existing international law that prohibits incitement to hatred. This should help bridge the artificial divide on sensitive issues related to religions, which could fuel a self-fulfilling prophecy of a clash of civilisations.

Moreover, the outcome document represents an important recognition of the injustice and atrocities of the past and proposes means to prevent their recurrence. These include a commitment to prohibit violent, racist and xenophobic activities by groups that embrace supremacist ideologies.

The Durban review conference has provided a platform for a new beginning. The few states that chose to stay away should now evaluate the outcome document on its own merit and substance. Many of these states participated in its drafting and were part of the emerging consensus up until the very eve of the conference. This is why I am hopeful that they will rejoin international efforts to combat racism and intolerance as laid out in this important document.

We should not concede ground to those who are intent on stirring controversy that contributes to intolerance. Thus, it is all the more crucial for us -- men and women of good will, states, international organisations and civil society alike -- not to get distracted from the main objective; to nurture discrimination-free societies and a world of equal treatment and opportunity for all of us, or at the very least for our children, and our children's children.

Naval Pillay is UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.