

The high-aiming ADP Implementation is the issue here

THE government has announced a Taka 30,000 crore Annual Development Programme (ADP) for the 2009-10 fiscal triggering a spate of debate over its size which has been dubbed as ambitious by most economists.

The AL government could not possibly settle for any lower financial target despite the negative historical trend of underperforming ADPs, both in quality and volume, because of certain obvious compulsion. The government has its electoral pledges to fulfil based on its developmental philosophy and the compelling need to create jobs and augment domestic demand in a bid to cushion off the adverse ripple effects of global economic meltdown. As it is, ADP being an instrument through which public expenditure is made and in our context it has been the lowest as percentage of GDP in the whole regionally tilt away from revenue expenditure is to be welcomed.

So, we are not per se critical of the new ADP's size, except to warn against government borrowing in the event of revenue collection shortfall that could bring in additional problems for economic management. Basically, we have questions about how prepared the government is to implement the ADP, precisely to avert a mismatch between fulfilment of physical targets and that of financial targets. The planning minister AK Khandker has stated that the ministries will be asked to start implementing the next ADP at the beginning of the financial year in tandem with arrangements made for timely release of project funds so that the implementation process is completed within schedule.

Yet, given the structural deficiencies in the implementation machinery and the long-winded procedures that go with these, it would take much more than mere intention or exhortation to move the juggernaut of implementation. Conservatively estimated, it would require at least 50 percent improvement in the capacity of our project implementation machinery in a single year to make any definite difference in the rate of project execution, according to the BIDS research director. Actually, there are two sets of bottlenecks that will have to be removed. In the first category fall delay in planning repeated amendment to a project, delay in approval or correction of the project and donors' conditions. The other hindrances range from procurement snags through land acquisition and litigation to lack of well-developed work plan and unstable project management.

The previous ADPs have largely floundered on the rock of governments using it as instrument of political patronisation and rent-seeking. Since the new ADP will shoulder the burden of a large number carry-over projects -- 851 to be precise in a reflected sense the AL government inherits the inadequacies of the past project portfolios. As for the 35 new projects, and 487 unapproved projects for which no allocations have been made the government will need to be extremely careful in implementing them.

After Cyclone Aila ...

Water, cooked food and medicines are the need

THE severity of Cyclone Aila, which hit southwestern Bangladesh last week, is only now beginning to come into sharper focus. The number of the dead appears to be going up and is now close to two hundred. The damage caused to homesteads and crops has been serious enough to be compared to the loss caused by Sidr in 2007. The state of things at present seems to be getting increasingly newer dimensions with every passing day. Survivors have been left without food and drinking water. A very large number of them are marooned all across the region, with relief workers unable to reach them with the help they need. Add to that the incidence of diseases, such as diarrhoea, which have been afflicting them.

Obviously, there is a huge need to take stock of conditions in the Aila-hit areas. There are all the questions which have come up regarding the ability of embankments, set up in the aftermath of Sidr, to withstand the fury of nature. It is clear, now that Aila has come and gone, that the embankments proved singularly unable to prevent the damage that has been done not only because of the weakness in their structure but also because they have not been maintained in good condition over the last few years. This fresh instance of natural disaster should now make the authorities sit up and take action so that the effects of such disasters are minimized in future. Apart from that, one wonders if prior to Aila's hitting the shores adequate warnings were served about its ferocity and speed. People in the affected areas could have been advised to move off to safer places in time. Obviously, the speed and fury with which Aila approached the coast were underestimated by those who should have been able to gauge its capacity to cause damage in good time.

The question of what must be done now to help the distressed becomes critical. The survivors, who have lost their homes and all that comes with them, are in need of cooked food. Provisions can surely be made to satisfy such a need, seeing that giving them rice and other food at this moment will be pointless since they have no cooking facilities. Together with that, a supply of drinking water is a must. In this respect, the services of union parishad members and other local personalities can be utilized. All available means of transport, particularly boats, barges, speedboats, et cetera, must be made use of on a round the clock basis to supply fresh drinking water to the victims of the disaster. At the same time, let the authorities as well as the NGOs send out whole medical teams to help the survivors cope with the diseases that have been adding to the all-round misery.

Preventing radicalisation

Our preparation to combat the extremists cannot wait for evidence of the likelihood of further hostile acts against us. We should, therefore, be forewarned and forearmed. The act of forewarning could itself constitute one of the most effective deterrents to the bigot's appetite for attack.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

BANGLADESH polity is now challenged by hostile groups that profess a philosophy of life and of government that is inimical to our own. In fact, we are now facing an adversary who is armed enough to commit widespread violence. In our free society, while our defenses and deterrents are largely prepared in open fashion, our new antagonists have succeeded in building a formidable wall of secrecy and security. So, to bridge the gap and warn ourselves in time, we have to rely more and more upon our intelligence operations. There is a need to break through the shield of secrecy of the bigots. Special techniques, which are unique to secret intelligence operations, are needed to penetrate the security barriers of the extremist outfits.

Our preparation to combat the extremists cannot wait for evidence of the likelihood of further hostile acts against us. We should, therefore, be forewarned and forearmed. The act of forewarning could itself constitute one of the most effective deterrents to the bigot's appetite for attack. Intelligence should not be a tabooed subject. What we are striving to achieve should be an advertised fact.

The most serious occupational hazard in the intelligence field is prejudice. While we are all creatures of prejudice, we must be able to avoid bending of facts obtained through intelligence to suit or defeat a particular political viewpoint.

We have to admit that we are not really at peace with the so-called religious extremists because they have declared war on our system of government and life. The reality is that we are faced with a closed, conspiratorial and scheming enemy. We cannot hope to maintain our position securely if our opponents are confident that they can attack us at the time and place of their choosing and without any forewarning.

The only silver lining in an otherwise ominous scenario is that the denial mode, insofar as the existence of the extremists is concerned, has perhaps disappeared. The unfortunate part, however, is that, as in other sectors, we have been disappointingly reactive in responding to the threats to internal security. The whole approach appears to be ad hoc and on a case-to-case basis. Somehow, we want to assure ourselves by imagining that a hydra-headed monster has surfaced all on a sudden and will wither soon to the relief of a concerned population. No wonder, therefore, that some of our incorrigibly garrulous politicians have in the past set a time limit of two to three months, after which the specter of

the so-called religious extremism and the bomb-scare would be gone for good. Under these circumstances, authorities in Bangladesh need to:

- Designate a lead anti-terrorism police and intelligence agency;
 - Develop a comprehensive strategy, which encompasses legislation, international cooperation, intelligence and law enforcement personnel and strong public involvement, to tackle terrorism;
 - Allocate sufficient resources to establish and subsequently make fully operational a counter-terrorism unit within the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Bangladesh Police.
- Bangladeshi intelligence and police agencies do not possess an overarching operational coordination structure. High-level coordination is accomplished through the "Core Committee," which functions as a crisis-response body bringing together senior officials to share information and devise overall strategy. However, the Core Committee is too senior a body to deal effectively and efficiently with breaking investigations. District-level core committees apparently exist, but appear to be hampered by the policy of centralising all decision-making on terrorism issues in the capital city. A permanent working-level body would ensure implementation of the strategy and better coordination of the measures decided at a higher level.

Under the above circumstances, the authorities need to:

- Pursue consolidation and further specialisation to improve effectiveness among the agencies dealing with counter-terrorism;
 - Establish a permanent working-level body with personnel from the intelligence as well as police agencies;
 - Expand access to existing databases initially and work towards setting up uniform databases that can be populated and searched by vetted employees from all agencies with a terrorism portfolio.
- We may consider deterring those who facilitate terrorism and those who encourage others to become terrorists.

The Terrorism Act 2006 of UK makes it a criminal offence to directly or indirectly encourage the commission, preparation, or instigation of acts of terrorism, or to disseminate terrorist publications. This offence includes statements or publications that glorify terrorism.

The Terrorism Act 2000 of UK makes it illegal for certain groups to operate in the UK and extends proscription to include international terrorist groups like Al Qaida. The Terrorism Act 2000 of UK broadened the



Prevention is better than cure.

basis for proscribing organisations to include those that promote or encourage terrorism.

Like UK, we should agree that the area of action to counter radicalisation is a battle of ideas, challenging the ideological motivations that extremists believe justify the use of violence. In particular, we should work with communities to help them discourage susceptible individuals from turning towards extremist activity.

Operational decisions on whether and how to conduct counter-terrorist operations are a matter for the police. There may be situations where the police believe they have no choice but to take action on the basis of the specific intelligence they have received.

Successful prosecution in the courts, based on gathering the necessary evidence and apprehending those involved in planning acts of terrorism before they can carry out their intentions, should be our preferred way of disrupting terrorist activity.

To maximise the impact of financial intelligence, and make it harder for terrorists to operate, our money laundering and terrorist finance measures require finan-

cial institutions to "know their customer," keep proper records, and report suspicious activity. Irrespective of any final charges, every terrorist suspect should be subject to financial investigation.

Most terrorist activities are encouraged and sustained by an ideological inspiration. In other words, terrorism is not divorced from ideology. One has to look for the said ideological moorings. In this quest, in Bangladesh, it is strongly likely that there will be some accusatory finger-pointing towards some political party. In the event of such a possibility turning into reality, the government of the day has to take tough actions without bothering about the political fallout.

That would demand political sagacity of a very high order and may be a tall ask in our perilously polarised polity.

There is no doubt that the battle against extremism will be long. However, since the violence of the so-called religious extremists in the recent past is a manifest attack on the long cherished values of the mainstream, our strategy and thought process should undergo substantial change.

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Pollution and waste management

The concerned departments of health, LGRD and the environment, in association with the Dhaka City Corporation, should undertake an integrated effort to identify the problem spots and then remove them. One measure could be to create an environmental police force to monitor and assure effective implementation of regulations.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE advent of summer this year has underlined once again the vulnerabilities of the residents of Dhaka. Photographs published in the print media and coverage in the electronic media has highlighted the paucity of clean fresh water and long queues of frustrated, angry inhabitants. There were also references to prevalence of severe diarrhea, with around 1,000 people mostly children and slum-dwellers hospitalised every day at the ICCDRB. Attending physicians have mentioned that the admission rate was about 4-5 times higher than usual.

We have a serious situation that needs to be tackled on a priority basis. I am not referring here to just the scarcity of water. It is also not just the delivery problem. It is contamination and pollution of the water at source and also as delivered to the consumers.

Access to clean water for drinking or for other purposes is not just a need. I believe that it is a human right that deserves protection and re-affirmation. It needs to be safeguarded from greed and exploitation.

The print media over the last few weeks have drawn the attention of readers to the pollution that is taking place in rivers and water bodies in and around the city of Dhaka. They have also published reports about the sorry state of affairs in matters of solid waste management, sewerage, sanitation and hygiene and the efforts undertaken in this regard by the Dhaka City Corporation. Graphic pictures in colour have shown in detail how waste and toxic chemicals are being dumped in different river points into the Turag at Kamarpara, near the Bank

Colony in Savar and also into several points into the Buriganga, Balu and Sitalakha.

A study recently conducted by the Institute of Water Modeling, with the support of the World Bank, has also revealed that the water being supplied in certain points of Dhaka has "extremely high organic pollution." The same report also mentions the high concentration of dissolved solids, sulphates, ammonia, cadmium and the heavy metal chromium. It has also been pointed out that in some localities like Hazaribagh and Tarabo, near the Buriganga, the concentration of some chemicals is higher than elsewhere. The tanneries in these areas have been identified as the polluters.

When asked, some Wasa officials, on condition of anonymity, have admitted that the water in these rivers are so polluted that, even after treatment with required chemicals, it is not completely free of ammonia. The presence of other elements reduces the transparency of the water and sometimes gives it an undesirable smell. Experts have indicated that drinking such polluted water for a long time increases the risk of different diseases, and definitely affects the liver. There is also heightened possibility of jaundice.

Wasa generally meets about 15% of its water needs from surface water sources and the rest is obtained from deep tubewells exploiting underground water aquifers. Due to pollution of surface water, increasing population and industrial growth, Wasa has been forced to sink such tubewells in places like Mirpur, Shyamoli, Khilgaon and Bashabo. This, in turn, is lowering the city water table at a faster rate than the rate of recharge. This is proving to be an emerging

threat for the continued sustainability of Dhakawhich is expected to have a population of about 22 million in ten years.

This depressing scenario has been further compounded with reports from scientists that underground aquifers are being recharged from surrounding rivers, and that pollution from such rivers is also finding its way into the aquifers. Industrial irresponsibility of discharging effluents directly into rivers in Tongi, Hazaribagh, Tejgaon, Narayanganj, Savar Ashulia, Gazipur and Ghorasal, without required treatment, is now having disastrous consequences.

A report recently published has pointed out that there are over 7,000 industrial units of different sizes in the greater Dhaka metropolitan area. They include dyeing mills, tanneries, pharmaceutical units, engineering workshops, chemicals and pesticide factories, rubber and plastic units, paper and pulp and cement units. Of these, the dyeing factories and the tanneries are the biggest polluters. Studies have shown that of the discharged untreated liquid waste, 61% are industrial in origin and 39% domestic. It is also clear that the only sewerage treatment plant in Pagla can treat only about 10% of the industrial waste.

Our Department of Environment officials know that dyeing factories are expected to treat their waste and that the vast majority of these units do not do so, and discharge their waste water directly into the sewerage system and the rivers. As a result, the oxygen level in the Buriganga, the Turag, the Balu and the Sitalakha, in most parts is less than one in per microgram (unsuitable for aquatic life).

This is an example of deliberate negligence. Relevant government officials know that under the Environment Conservation Rule, 1997, every industry needs to have in-house effluent treatment plants. This requirement is being flouted because of the criminal nexus that exists between greedy factory owners and inspectors. It is strongly recommended that heavy penalties be imposed not only on the guilty factory owners but also on the inspectors who have been recalcitrant in performing their duties. Here is an opportunity for the government and

the Anti-Corruption Commission to demonstrate that they are agents of "change" and that they believe in good governance.

The next step should be to re-locate the tanneries away from Dhaka. I understand that there are plans in this regard. This might require two to three years but needs to be undertaken on a priority basis through public-private partnership and in a comprehensive manner. I am sure that development partners would be willing to help out in this task. This is the only way to ensure better health for the people, and that is essential for future economic development.

It has been encouraging to see that our legal community has taken the initiative to persuade the High Court to issue a suo moto rule asking the government to inform the Court within a month about what steps have been taken to prevent environmental pollution, as pointed out in the writ petition filed on July 15, 2001. One hopes that the judicial process will establish accountability and lead to some improvement.

At the same time, it is vital that the relevant officials in the Dhaka City Corporation responsible for solid waste management, sewerage, sanitation and hygiene are taken to task for their inefficiency. There is prevalence of corruption in this sector also. There have been many reports in the print media about lack of observance of rules and regulations by clinics in disposing of their used articles. This is leading not only to contamination but also to the spread of diseases. Such conditions are unwanted and should not be tolerated.

The concerned departments of health, LGRD and the environment, in association with the Dhaka City Corporation, should undertake an integrated effort to identify the problem spots and then remove them. One measure could be to create an environmental police force to monitor and assure effective implementation of regulations. The cost of creating and maintaining such an outfit could be met from the municipal yax paid to the Dhaka City Corporation and the sewerage tax paid to Wasa.

We have to get out act together, and soon.

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