

Adviser's observations on chief investigator's past

The government is left embarrassed

THE claim of Alauddin Ahamed, an adviser to the Prime Minister to the effect that Abdul Matin, the chief investigator in the war crimes trial, had been associated with student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami in the pre-liberation days has created a sort of stir. It has undoubtedly generated a confusion and a degree of commotion.

The government, it is learned, is in a process of investigating the matter, as part of which it has already heard Abdul Matin on what he had to say. Pending the investigation, we prefer refraining from passing any opinion on the issue.

We are constrained, however, to make two points at the stage: first, why is the investigation being undertaken by the government post-facto on the basis of a claim by somebody, that too based on information given by another party leader? The appointment process began early on, so why was the aberration not pointed out in due course. The suggestion here is: why in the first place no verification was conducted of Matin's credentials before choosing him to the post of Chief Adviser.

Secondly, if the claim turns out to have been made without foundation then where does the credibility of the adviser stand before the public? Is his sense of civic responsibility not called into question or doesn't his reputation before the public dwindle?

If, on the other hand, his observations are proved right and claim established by facts then we would still take issue with his methods. Why did he go public with his claim without any proof in hand to substantiate it? His primary responsibility would have been to go to the Prime Minister first, and then work on her advice. He could also inform the investigating authorities about what he had heard so as to initiate probe into the veracity of the claim. Either way, the adviser has acted in a way that has not only embarrassed the government but also raised some questions about the decision-making process in the government at the top.

Of course, the investigators will have to be men or women of proven integrity, probity and moral rectitude. Anyone found even remotely connected with the elements that are going to face trial forfeits his right to investigate such cases. That is the plain truth which needs little elaboration.

The capital's vulnerability to earthquakes

Put in place a management strategy

WHILE the people of Bangladesh are getting apprehensive of earthquakes, particularly the people living in the metropolis, we are getting different figures regarding the total number of buildings that are vulnerable to earthquakes. Some recent statistics given out at a roundtable suggest that 43 percent of buildings in Dhaka city, including school and hospitals, are vulnerable to moderate or strong earthquakes. The roundtable was arranged to share the lessons of the recent Haiti earthquake.

The figures have resulted from a study conducted two years ago by the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme. Numbers that one came across in the past were much higher than what we have now. Sitting as we are, on one of the most active tectonic plates, the spectre of disaster should be occupying our minds at all times, more so of those who are entrusted with disaster management. And thus there is need for a comprehensive study to ascertain the actual state of vulnerability of the capital as also other major cities and towns, to earthquakes.

Although the Capital has been divided into four zones one would need more specific data regarding other aspects of the city's infrastructure to help in formulating a management strategy in this regard. Specificity is what we emphasise upon, because around that would revolve the entire pre and post disaster management actions.

We are certain that the Haiti catastrophe has many lessons for us which the government will do well to recognise and act upon. To start with, a thorough risk analysis of the capital must commence forthwith in order to evolve a realistic post disaster plan. Reportedly, Dhaka had featured very high in the Earthquake Disaster Risk Index (EDRI), which emerged from a study at Stanford University, conducted in 20 cities around the world in 1999. Given the changes in various factors that helped develop the index it can be assumed that the risk index of Dhaka has gone up since then.

Also in this regard comprehensive disaster management standing orders should be formulated forthwith. Although we have become adept in handling calamities such as cyclones and storm surge and floods, and there are appropriate standing orders in this respect, we are not aware that there are those concerning handling of earthquakes, particularly how the medical and other essential services would function given that these would also be affected by the quake.

Police modus operandi

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POLICE activities, or to say more technically, modus operandi, remain shrouded as ever in an eerie mist of ambiguity in Bangladesh. Before going into details in support of the above statement let us have a look at what Internet has to say about modus operandi:

"Modus operandi (plural modi operandorum) is a Latin phrase, approximately translated as 'method of operating.' The term is used to describe someone's habits or manner of working, their

method of operating or functioning. It is often used in police work when discussing a crime and addressing the methods employed by the perpetrators. It is also used in criminal profiling, where it can help in finding clues to the offender's psychology. It largely consists of examining the actions used by the individual(s) to execute the crime, prevent its detection and/or facilitate escape. This can then be used to aid in the eventual apprehension of the suspect(s)."

Well, there are all the professional angles in the above definition, as one would expect. As far as our knowledge

goes, in the modern world, the above procedures and steps are strictly followed professionally by the members of the police force and that is why getting away after committing a crime, small or big, is so difficult there. A highly efficient, transparent and accountable system of policing has been developed in the developed countries with the strong backing of the constitution, as a result, political people or bureaucrats find it extremely difficult to influence a criminal investigation.

Now, a few words about our police force and the manner in which the force operates in maintaining law and order in the country. Despite some good work done once in a while, it has yet to earn name and fame as a disciplined, hard-working, honest and effective force. The phenomenal increase in crime and criminality across the country is testament to the failure of the police force in being effective, either because of deep-rooted corruption or lack of motivation. It is being said with a dash of sarcasm that instead of striking fear in the hearts of the criminals, policemen try to strike a deal with them.

This is not an off-the-cuff remark, not really. This writer has nothing against the police force in general to inspire him to paint a sordid picture. Ask any odd number of people on the street and they would agree with the above statement without a moment's hesitation. They will hardly have some good words for the police, and most of them will come up with first-hand stories of horrendous encounter with the police at some point in life.

They will tell you how innocent friends or relations suffered at the hands of the police. They will recall how even honest police officers failed to help the victims from the corrupt network of policemen who were hell-bent on extracting money from them, making threats of filing false cases. Those scars are deep enough, and they bleed anew when memories come back. Therefore, it needs no emphasising that there is widespread distrust, suspicion, misgivings and fear about the police in the minds of the common people. They seem to fear the police more than the real criminals do.

So much about efficiency, corruption and lack of motivation amongst the policemen in this country. What about their skill in conducting investigations and training in apprehending armed goons? Often we hear of armed robbers robbing people in broad daylight on the streets, with a couple of policemen with

shotguns standing nearby doing nothing. They would not even chase the robbers once the crime had been committed. Sometimes policemen or even police officers cannot match the speed, skill and ferocity of the armed criminals and become victims themselves.

In this country, on a number of occasions, police constables and even police officers got stabbed or shot by criminals when the former tried to grab them with their hands. As far as our knowledge goes, this is against the rule. In no country of the world do policemen do that. If one would watch police videos on TV or read some of the training manuals then it would become quite clear that policemen or police officers draw their gun or keep their hands on the butt of the service pistol while approaching criminals, armed or not.

Let us take the murder of the police officer named Goutam. He did not draw his service pistol before approaching some suspects in the middle of the night in a crime-infested area of the old part of the city. He went too close to frisk them. His assailants saw the opportunity and shot him from a close range. Did Goutam forget about the rule? Many more questions surrounding the murder of this officer crowd our minds. We wonder when the mystery will be solved.

Handguns are now being used rampantly by the criminals to kill and maim. Thousands of small weapons are finding their way into the heart of the metropolitan city. Hardly do we hear of regular haul of such arms in the borders by the BDR or the police. In the past, block-raids by joint forces in certain localities brought good results. Many thugs and a good number of small weapons have been recovered in the process. Similar actions in criminal-infested areas could give satisfactory results.

Over and above, the laws and the legal system have to be made more efficient and up-to-date if we want to see the police force working efficiently. Having good laws is not good enough. There has to be political will as well. We need to go for strict and exemplary punishment. At the same time, we have to take into account the burgeoning population and the unemployment issues. Unless we increase the number of policemen and train and equip them better, we shall find walking the roads in the near future, even in broad daylight, a dangerous proposition.

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The devil is in the details

To facilitate smooth progress of work we have to list all plausible problems that appear prominently or dimly on the implementation canvas. Each one has to be dealt with seriously. Overt problems may be less critical than the hidden ones. Time fixed assignment demands that we learn how to wade through the thicket of details.



SAADAT HUSAIN

WE have lofty visions. We have elegantly crafted mission statements. We have well-defined goals and objectives. But when it comes to implementation, more often than not, we flounder at each step -- much to our disappointment. We might be baffled as to what went wrong and why we failed to deliver despite our sincere intent to carry out the mission. The theoretician will defend his case;

he will contend that his model is based on plausible assumptions, robust parameters and adheres to internal consistency framework. The policy planners will argue that their package reflects the hopes and aspirations of the people and is meant to realise the promises pronounced in the election manifesto of the party in power. They would like to see the program implemented in real life, at the earliest.

At the ground level, a job has to be accomplished by an individual or more

than one individual -- a group or organisation as it would be called. The implementer has to have adequate legal, administrative, financial and logistic support. More important, he must have the required expertise and motivation to accomplish the job.

If it is a one-man institution internal organisation is not very important. Usually, most big programs are carried out by more than one person calling into play the dynamics of the organisation. Setting up an effective organisation for successfully addressing a formidable problem or accomplishing a substantial program is not an easy task.

Small problems and issues afflict the environment. They create glitches that delay the process and at times put the whole program into disarray. Micro-enforcement poses serious obstacles, which defy routine solutions.

The first problem is designing the organisation and assembling competent individuals to fill in the positions and build the team in order to accomplish the job. A rigorous exercise including all the relevant variables is not carried out in designing an appropriate organisation to match the burden. Many extraneous variables crowd the decision-making process.

Predilections and narrow interest of strategic persons and groups disturb the scientific decision making process and undermine the objectives of the organisation right from the beginning. Selection of personnel is similarly vitiated by subjective considerations that run counter to the interest of the organisation. These problems are not always visualised earlier, they unfold as one gets down to work.

Aligning physical logistics along with administrative, legal and financial ones may be a nightmare at the implementation level. These problems are brushed aside at the formulation stage. They conspire to throw a monkey wrench in the implementation process. It may take months or years to overcome these snags. They may be camouflaged in academic discussions; there is no way to obviate them at the ground level.

Procuring material and human inputs to proceed with the work is also a vexing job. Purchase and procurement are prone to be influence-ridden. Finagling a

purchase or work order does not depend on application of linear formula based on rigid parameters. Predilection and interest of the powerful individuals or groups work to create bends and distortions that militate against smooth and fast procurement.

The final decision is determined by the complex interplay of the power dynamics on the one hand and the force of established rules trying to find a niche through some robust nodes on the other. The outcome is often uncertain and delay is inevitable in the circumstances.

All preparatory work done, the implementer comes to the work-station to carry out the assigned task. He is all too eager to start the work. Unfortunately, he is appalled to discover the craters and crevasses on the ground. Pernicious physical setting, hostile climate and natural hazards have joined forces to build up formidable constraints against launching of the program.

Habitual absenteeism of strategic personnel, contract failure, overt and veiled threats by local muscle men and non-cooperation from the local administration may exacerbate the problem further. Progress of work may also suffer because of low level of social development in the area.

Delinquency and desertion of workers, particularly the skilled ones, are apt to interfere the schedule of work. Frequent interferences by the local administration and influence peddlers on various pretexts may ultimately result in work stoppage.

Programs are based on fascinating ideas, their implementation hinges on harsh realities. Reality is defined by netlesome issues which elude inexperienced eyes. Planners, policy makers and elite intellectuals prefer to shy away from real-life problems, dismissing them as too small and mundane. This approach is arrantly counter-productive.

To facilitate smooth progress of work we have to list all plausible problems that appear prominently or dimly on the implementation canvas. Each one has to be dealt with seriously. Overt problems may be less critical than the hidden ones. Time-fixed assignment demands that we learn how to wade through the thicket of details.

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