

What lies ahead in 2011?

SALEEMUL HUQ

At the global level, on the issue of tackling climate change, the year 2010 started disastrously with the failure of the negotiations in Copenhagen, Denmark, at the fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2009, with the recriminations of that failure continuing well into 2010.

Fortunately, by the time of the sixteenth conference of parties (COP16) in December 2010 in Cancun, Mexico, some confidence had been restored and a positive, albeit much less ambitious, outcome was in fact achieved with the Cancun Climate Agreement being adopted.

One of the significant changes that occurred as a result of the failure of the negotiations in Copenhagen (and a reason for relative success in Cancun) was the realisation that a legally binding, all-encompassing agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol (which was what was attempted in Copenhagen) was likely to take several years to achieve and that a step-by-step series of smaller agreements was the more realistic option to take the process forward. This was in fact what was achieved in Cancun.

Another outcome was that the level of important actions on tackling climate change has shifted significantly away from relying on a top-down global agreement to be achieved first before actions at national and local level are taken.

Indeed, much of the action on climate change has shifted to the

national and local level in all countries, both rich and poor. These actions are likely to play an important role in enabling a greater bottom-up thrust to reaching a global

including high level figures such as the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, the Chairman of the Adaptation Fund Board as well as senior figures from the headquarter

initiative on CBA may be launched at this event in March.

The second opportunity at the international level is the possibility of hosting the third summit level

doing to tackle climate change at home as well as make them more united in the international negotiations on climate change in preparation for COP17.

The third opportunity is at the national level in the implementation of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), which is already being allocated funds from the National Climate Change Trust Fund from the government budget and will also attract donor funding through the Climate Change Resilience Fund being set up by the government with the donors.

While Bangladesh has rightly received much attention, and indeed praise, for taking these proactive steps, the onus is now on the government to implement them in a transparent and effective manner. Given that tackling climate change is a new subject and we still have a lot to learn about what works and what doesn't, it is inevitable that mistakes will occur in the implementation of some of the activities.

It is vital that the government not try to deny or hide such mistakes, but rather accept them when they occur and take corrective actions. Only then will we be able to make effective use of the financial resources being allocated for implementing the national climate change plans.

Let me end by outlining some ways in which this can be made more effective. First, the government should make transparency of information of paramount importance by putting all contracts awarded (including their budgets)

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agreement by COP17 to be held in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011.

For Bangladesh, there are several opportunities during the coming year to play a significant role both at the global as well as the national level. I will highlight below three ways in which this can be done, two international and one national.

The first opportunity will be in March 2011 when Bangladesh will host the fifth International Conference on Community Based Adaptation (CBA5) to Climate Change, which will attract several hundred international participants

ters of the World Bank from Washington, UNDP from New York and the Asian Development Bank from Manila.

This will put Bangladesh at the forefront of an extremely important area of adaptation, namely identifying, accessing and assisting the most vulnerable communities in the most vulnerable countries, which is a growing area of interest in the field of adaptation and is now known universally as CBA. Bangladesh has an opportunity to become a world leader in this aspect of adaptation to climate change. It is likely that a global

meeting of the Climate Vulnerable Countries, which was initiated by President Nasheed in the Maldives in 2009 and was then held for the second time in Kiribati in November 2010 and hosted by President Tong.

Bangladesh has offered to host the third meeting some time in November 2011. This will again be a tremendous opportunity for Bangladesh to host high-level ministers from around twenty vulnerable countries from Asia, Africa, island countries and Latin America, and enable these vulnerable countries to both share what they are

Yet another crisis hits Pakistan

MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

The New Year has not been a good start for Pakistan politics. Ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led government suffered a severe blow when its key ally Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) decided to quit the ruling coalition and sit in opposition benches last Sunday (Jan 2, 2011).

Things were never in order and there have been dark clouds hovering over Pakistan politics for quite some time, the make shift arrangements and loose understanding between partners in the government always meted out signals of uncertainty. No wonder, in a politically crucial move, the Karachi-based MQM's decision was announced.

Without MQM's 25 seats, the PPP's coalition numbers 160 seats in the 342-member National Assembly, 12 short of the 172 required for a majority. The PPP has the support of only the Awami National Party in the lower house now.

With this move, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), led by former Prime Minister Nawaz

Sharif, comes to the centre stage and could play an effective role in breaking or making of the government. It certainly would play a major role in the event of any possible parliamentary vote of no-confidence against the ruling party.

A PML-N spokesman commented that it was now the moral duty of PPP to prove their majority in the National Assembly. "The prime minister should take fresh vote of confidence from the Parliament," he said. He confirmed that the decision to quit was final and that MQM will now sit on the opposition benches in the National Assembly and the Senate.

The MQM has been a tough partner for the PPP. It never appeared to be compromising or take a soft stance on many policies of the government. It has been critical of the government's fuel price policy, its failure to improve security and stamp out corruption. In an earlier move, MQM, the second largest party in the coalition, pulled its two federal ministers, Babar Ghauri and Dr. Farooq Sattar, from the cabinet showing its reluctance to continue as a coalition partner.

This means the US-backed gov-

ernment of President Asif Ali Zardari may now collapse because it will lose its majority in the National Assembly. If the MQM sticks to its decision to join the opposition, the

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government will fall. Forming a new one will likely be a protracted, delicate process. If the government collapses, it could mean a call for early elections, which are otherwise

due in 2013. That would plunge the country into political uncertainty and distract leaders from tackling security and economic problems.

But Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani thinks otherwise. He is confident of getting support from other parties and continue in office. He firmly stated that the government would not collapse despite the MQM move. "The government is not going to fall," he said. Sources close to the government say that talks are already underway to form a new coalition. We may see some surprises in next few days.

Given the volatile political history of Pakistan and the ongoing ground situation along its border (on both sides), it seems improbable that Pakistan politics will have the fortune of constancy. Constitutional rule has long eluded the country and the leaders could hardly offer definitive political programmes which could bring genuine peace and stability.

Departure of General Mosharaf raised some hopes of a civil government in Pakistan, a government that would be democratically elected and devoid of corrupt or controver-

sial individuals. But these expectations remained unfulfilled.

In fact, the internal factors in Pakistan are largely determined or to a great extent influenced by external events. Pakistan has been forced to give space to the US, which is fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. In course of time, Pakistan also finds itself in a state of war for decades. Conflicts in Afghanistan and involvement of US forces in and around its borders have been too much for any leader and the people to put up with. And relationship with India needs regular fine tuning.

The alleged militant camps inside Pakistan also disturb peace in the region. All successive governments failed to contain the elements detrimental to peace. It now appears that Pakistan would have to meet the external challenges sooner to have an organised house or it has to have a stable government first to handle the external issues. It is easily understandable that unless a stable government is in power it cannot address any issue, be it internal or foreign.

First the inner party squabble has to be settled, then the inter-

party understanding has to be reached and then only a national solidarity is a possibility. The infighting and differences between Asif Ali Zardari and Yusuf Gilani bears no good sign for the ruling party, Nawaz Sharif is waiting in the wings to have a say in power sharing, Parvez Mosharaf is also planning to stage a comeback at an opportune moment, and other smaller parties also have a role to play as coalition partners.

Again these parties did not develop a common platform to be united, and that possibility seems a far cry, as Nawaz Sharif will certainly not team up with Parvez Mosharaf and the religious parties are also against the so-called moderates or pro-US parties.

We may witness a provisional solution to the present crisis; a lasting stability is not in sight. Ideally, Pakistan should now have a bold and honest prime minister, an unbending home minister and a visionary foreign minister. The trio could achieve everything that Pakistan needs badly peace and stability.

Indeed, henceforth, the amount of financial resources that will flow from the global level to the national level will not just depend on making pleas at international fora such as the COPs but rather on the level of performance of the countries. Those countries that are able to demonstrate performance (including robust in-country monitoring and evaluation systems) will attract more funding from the international level. Bangladesh has an opportunity to be a leader amongst them.

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Completing hung up projects

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

Timely implementation of projects has become a major headache for the government. Despite sincere efforts by the prime minister to speed up implementation of projects for the last 20 months, no appreciable progress in this regard is seen. In fact, the government is somewhat worried about the consequences of this situation.

The government aimed at completing 287 on-going projects and 140 time-barred projects by the end of financial year 2010-11. It is apprehended that the projects cannot be completed in time because of bureaucratic complexity, procrastination in the process of tendering, delay in acquisition of land, withholding of allocation or release of fund.

This may ultimately result in an increase in the cost of the projects, whose objectives may also be frustrated to a large extent. During the first quar-

ter of the present year only 9% of ADP has been implemented. Furthermore, along with such a huge ADP (Tk.38,000 crore) there is pressure of the large number of new and old projects.

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repeatedly issued directives to speed up implementation, no sign of achievement of the targets has been seen so far due to directives from the courts to postpone work in certain projects and some hurdles in planning in some other cases.

As compared to 10% performance during July-September 2009 the perfor-

mance during the same period of this year is 9%. For the same period performance was 7% in 2007-08 and 9% in 2008-09. We are disappointed to observe that a new government has been halting the projects of its prede-

cessor ever since 1990. This has resulted in increase of hung up projects to 3,000 from 1991 to 2006.

A research conducted by Diganta Palli Unnayan has revealed that in implementing these hung up projects there would be additional requirement of Tk.7,000 crore. This is very unfortunate and shows the attitude of the

politicians towards the common people.

By stalling progress of implementation of projects the opposition parties' popularity may be dented for a while, but it ultimately goes against the public interest. There is hardly any scope for showing sentiment in handling works relating to development.

We appeal to our politicians, particularly the major political parties, to refrain from this narrow outlook in handling development works. They should think more closely about the difficulties in formulating and implementing development projects because of our inadequacy in every stage of the planning process.

In addition to the constraints noted above, we have to pay due attention to corruption in the process of planning. It is said that corruption exists right from multilateral donors down to a junior level officer in the ministry of planning. We do not have any strategies as to how to curb corruption. In

Bangladesh, it may not be an overstatement that things do not move without bribery. It is up to the government to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Commission to curb corruption.

The Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation Division (IMED) may play a vital role in improving the quality and speed of implementation of projects. Without adequate number of appropriate personnel we are not provided with the service actually needed. The government may think of replacing the generalists of the division with professionals. In addition, due attention is required for placement of officers in the planning cell of the concerned ministry. This will accelerate the process of planning and improvement in quality of evaluation of projects.

With regard to selecting a project, attention must be given to its merit. Political consideration may be avoided as far as possible. Hung-up projects must not be ignored because the people are not only deprived of the benefit

of these projects they also lose public money, and the pace of progress in the country is slowed down. It is desirable that pre-investment feasibility study be made compulsory in case of all projects. If any fault is detected proper administrative action may be taken against the person concerned.

We agree that there are serious constraints in implementing projects in a poor developing country like Bangladesh. The constraints are mainly inadequacy of proper manpower, corruption, bureaucratic tangles, unstable political situation and lack of political appreciation in evaluating projects.

We are, however, inspired by the personal attention by our present prime minister to speed up implementation. We hope that with sincerity of purpose and hard work of the present government the implementation of the projects will be quickened soon.

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