

## Shortfall in ADP utilisation

### Enhancing implementation capacity key

MOST ministries and divisions of the government fail to utilise the full financial allocation made to them annually. Indeed the Annual Development Programme (ADP) for the current fiscal is also not likely to be implemented in full. It has been found that, on average, only 67 percent of allocation was spent in the first 11 months of the last fiscal. Given current trends of ADP implementation, the pattern that emerges is that work is sluggish at best for the first half of the year. With only six months to go, the various bodies go into hyperdrive in an effort to expend allocated resources.

This brings into question two issues: the quality of spending given the race with time and the efficiency of planning. Some fundamental rethinking in project implementation is required if we are to get the value for money. Whilst policymakers go through the motions of expending budgetary allocation in the remainder six months, it is highly unlikely that the taxpayers' money is being well spent.

Going by what has been reported in this paper, Local Government Division has utilised 78 percent of its allocation while the Bridges Division has utilised less than 50 percent of its financial target. Yet with each passing budget we see a scramble by various ministries and divisions for more budgetary allocation than that of the preceding fiscal. Unspent monies are a waste in terms of development goals remaining unachieved. This is where a rethinking is required on what sort of projects are to be undertaken so that we can break out of this cycle of sluggish implementation.

## Dilapidated railway workshop

### A stumbling block to railway's modernisation

IT is disquieting to note that the Carriage and Wagon Repair Workshop of Bangladesh Railway's East Zone has been in a ramshackle state for more than a decade. The poor condition of the repair shop seriously hinders routine maintenance of the coaches and freight train wagons of the country's most vital rail zone covering Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions.

The workshop, according to a TDS report, has been running with antiquated machinery, most of which had outlived their lifespan and now are running with dwindling efficiency. The tin-roofed shops have large holes that let in rainwater pour into machinery, damaging them and waterlogging the workplace in the rainy season. Apart from these lacunae, the workshop is seriously understaffed. With its poor capacity, the workshop can only take care of two units (one coach) while the daily repair demand is five units. For the overall development of the workshop, a project titled 'Improvement of Pahartali Workshop' was taken up in 2007 but the project is yet to get rolling.

We urge the government to take immediate action to expedite the improvement project. In Bangladesh, railway is a widely connected, rapid, safe, cheap and environment friendly transport system. Amid growing connectivity with neighbours, railway modernisation should be a priority. To capitalise on the strength of this vital mode of transportation we need to invest more in railway and build state of the art servicing centres for railway vehicles.

## COMMENTS

**"Modi, hopefully, is no Manmohan"**  
(June 8, 2015)

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

We have nothing left to bargain with India in order to get our legal share of Teesta water. Now we have to depend on their compassion hoping they will take pity on us to keep their promises.

**"No democracy in Bangladesh"**  
(June 8, 2015)

Enayet Mowla

Did we ever have democracy in Bangladesh?

Mir Ahmed Siddiquee

Democracy in Bangladesh is only on paper.

Shahidul Islam

Narendra Modi is not going to listen to you, Khaleda Zia. He got everything from this government.

Talha Kamal

Hope this meeting will bring some positive outcomes and will help the return of democracy in Bangladesh.

**"Thousands celebrate historic India-Bangladesh border pact"**  
(June 7, 2015)

Rohit Shrivastava

Great news! Finally, the sufferings of people living in enclaves seem to have come to an end.

# The emperor has no clothes

SADIQ AHMED

THE challenges of growing urbanisation in Bangladesh are well-known. Nowhere is it more apparent than in the large metropolitan cities, especially in the capital city Dhaka. The recent mayoral elections in Dhaka and Chittagong, although marred by controversy, are nevertheless a major step forward in completing the process of elected local governments for urban centres of Bangladesh. While the controversy over the election process continues, the more important question is, irrespective of who has won, will this process of establishing elected urban governments make a difference in terms of results for the residents?

The theory of elected local governments is well-known. Decentralised administration, based on a systematic devolution of responsibilities and accountabilities, is often regarded as a solution to addressing local level issues for a defined urban or rural constituency. To make the concerned administrations responsible and accountable to their respective constituencies, the idea is to have elected local governments for these constituencies.

Good practice experiences of advanced countries and many developing countries show that a decentralised elected local government with vested political authority and well defined responsibilities can make a difference in terms of quality of life of the residents. Indeed there is often a healthy competition between different city governments within a country to attract investors and residents to locate or relocate based on the quality of related services.

The population of Bangladesh is now approaching 160 million. With some 15 million residents, the metropolitan city of Dhaka is larger than many Western European countries. The Mercer 2015 Quality of City ranking puts Dhaka at the low end -- at 211 out of 230 global cities

ranked by the survey. The liveability of other Bangladeshi cities is similarly poor. This is a sad reflection of the failure of urban governance in Bangladesh.

The challenges of Dhaka and other Bangladeshi urban cities are manifold including severe traffic congestion, acute slum concentration, non-functioning zoning laws, air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, inadequate water supply, inadequate sanitation and dysfunctional solid waste disposal system. The reason why these problems persist and have indeed grown more acute over the years is mainly due to the inability to resolve the challenges of city governance. I have analysed this subject in great detail in my book written jointly with two co-authors in 2007, titled Making Dhaka Livable. The problems of Dhaka city governance we discuss in that book remain remarkably fresh as they have not yet been addressed.

There are three main city governance problems: lack of well-defined expenditure assignments; lack of financial autonomy; and lack of accountability.

In cities of countries that function well and deliver quality service to its residents, expenditure assignments between the city and higher tiers of government are well-defined with no overlap. These cities have assigned sources of funding with a combination of well-defined fiscal transfers from the national government, assigned sources of tax revenues, and the ability to borrow from domestic sources. The city government is fully accountable to its residents and not to the higher level national government. The elected mayors of these cities have a considerable amount of authority and are also very sensitive to the perceptions of the residents because they know that they can be booted out of power by the residents irrespective of their political allegiance to the national government.

The prevailing urban governance in Bangladesh is a far cry from this high

quality city governance. City corporations and municipalities are not comparable with the concept of city government endowed with considerable political and financial autonomy. There is no well-defined expenditure assignment between the national government and the city corporations. Even basic functions such as schooling and local-level policing are managed at the national level whereas in most decentralised cities these are local responsibilities. There are multiple service agencies for housing, water supply, sanitation and urban transport with little or no coordination.

**A decentralised elected local government with vested political authority and well defined responsibilities can make a difference in terms of quality of life of the residents.**

Regarding financial autonomy, all local governments, including city corporations headed by the mayor, depend upon the largesse of the national government to function. Total local taxes as a share of GDP are a dismal 0.2 percent of GDP, which is lower than even the operational cost of local governments. All development spending at the local level has to be financed by the national government. These transfers are not based on any pre-assigned formulae but depend on the political will of the national government. City corporations do not have any authority to borrow locally; in any case the

borrowing option is irrelevant because without any independent source of funding they cannot service their debt. Without clearly assigned expenditure responsibility and financial autonomy, it is natural that a typical mayor looks more to the national government than the constituency for survival.

In this local governance environment, it is no wonder that the previous mayors of Dhaka or any other metropolitan city in Bangladesh have failed to deliver results. So while the newly elected mayors are enjoying their electoral victory, like the Hans Christian Anderson folktale of the Emperor who marched down the streets of his kingdom imagining he had donned new clothes when he had none, they will soon realise that the Emperor, indeed, has no clothes. Even with the best of intentions, the new mayors will likely get frustrated and handicapped by the lack of authority and control over resources to deliver results.

The new elections give the government an opportunity to empower the mayor with an enabling governance environment. While full decentralisation that converts city corporations into city governments will take longer as political support at the highest level is missing, at the least stronger efforts can be made in assigning expenditure responsibilities with no overlap, defining principles for resource transfers based on factors including population and equity, and strengthening the revenue performance of assigned revenues, especially the property tax. A well-defined property tax system starting with North Dhaka should alone yield enough resources to finance basic urban services like waste management, sanitation, cleaning of lakes and upgrading of roads and footpaths. It is time that the Emperor had some new clothes.

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## WHAT LANGUAGE do "boat people" speak?



AMITAVA KAR

THE English language is loaded with euphemism and American euphemisms are in a class of their own. As George Carlin, the American comedian noted, people used to get old and die. Now they become senior citizens and then pass

away. Sometime during my lifetime used cars became pre-owned vehicles and false teeth became dentures. The poor in the US, like everywhere else in the world, used to live in slums. The economically disadvantaged now occupy substandard housing in the inner cities. They are not broke; they have a negative cash flow.

People are fooled by the system that if you change the name of the condition, you can somehow change the condition. No more deaf or blind people. They are hearing or visually impaired. No one is bad at math. They are math-challenged.

The US government did not engage in mass murder in Vietnam, they carried out pacification. The US military did not torture prisoners in Iraq, they used enhanced interrogation techniques. Propaganda campaigns have unfolded alongside the battlefield for generations. But Israel has brought a whole new level of dehumanising language.

There is no Hebrew word for assassination, so killings of Hamas operatives are described with a phrase meaning "focused obstruction." Instead of civilians, slain children and women are sometimes called "uninvolved." By calling them "uninvolved", Israel is admitting that here's someone who is not trying to harm them but they won't give him any other identification. It was not a child who wanted to learn how to fly a kite; it was just somebody who didn't shoot at them.

This is by all means corruption of thought by language. Words like these are used to hide the truth, conceal reality. They mask a decision's unpleasant consequences as in "collateral damage" for "dead civilians". "This is a typical case of the way the framework of thought is consciously manipulated by an effective choice and reshaping of terminology

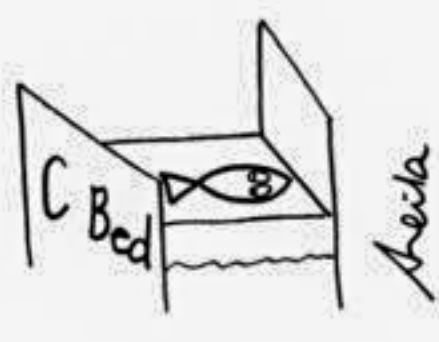
so as to make it difficult to understand what's happening in the world," says Noam Chomsky in *Stenographers to Power: Media and Propaganda*. "A very important function of the ideological institutions-the media, the schools, and so on-is to prevent people from perceiving reality, because if they perceived it they might not like it and might act to change it, and that would harm privileged people who control these things."

The Americans and the Israelis, however, do not have a monopoly over cloudy, vague language. In 1945, Emperor Hirohito informed his people of his country's unconditional surrender that followed two atomic bombs and the loss of three million people with the words,

want to discuss it any further.) An alcoholic is called "convivial" or "cheery". When someone has "lively wit" it means he has a knack for telling jokes that are dumb and cruel. "Austere" and "reserved" mean unhappy and depressed. "Hands-on mentoring" of a junior colleague is usually code for an affair. A bureaucrat warning a minister that a decision would be "courageous" is saying that it will probably end his career.

Politically correct euphemisms are the worst. Good and bad have become "appropriate" or "inappropriate". A serious problem becomes a less alarming "challenging issue". Thus all our problems became challenges. And now, everything is an

I must tell the grey nurse shark that we no longer have any "dead fish" - we have "negative marine life outcomes".



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"The war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage." No kidding.

While circumlocution like this may mislead, some are simply motivated by kindness. For example, Chinese people don't like being too direct in turning down requests for interviews. So they will often say that something is *bu fangbian*, meaning not convenient. This does not mean retry next week. It means they don't want to do it, ever.

The British are probably the world champions of euphemism—foreigners, even those with a good command of the English language, may miss to get the underlying message in such bland remarks as "I hear what you say." (Translation: I disagree and do not

opportunity. The question is whose.

I think a euphemism is a kind of lie, and the lies peoples and countries tell themselves are revealing. Describing Rohingya migrants as "boat people" is disturbing and unacceptable to me. Calling them "boat people" is to deny the circumstances that compelled them to take such desperate measures. They do not live on boats.

How about calling them "a people kicked out of their native land because of their ethnicity and religion, now trying to just survive by whatever means available?"

How's that for some euphemism?

The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

l e t t e r s @ t h e d a i l y s t a r . n e t

### Gone, but not forgotten

I want to pay my tribute to former *The Independent* Editor Mahbubul Alam. He was a giant among giants, a gentleman among gentlemen. There's an old saying, 'Out of sight, out of mind,' but that's not always true. Take Mahbubul Alam as an example. The first anniversary of the death of this former editor and doyen of the Bangladesh newspaper industry was June 6, but for reasons I cannot explain he has never really left my thoughts. It would seem he's made permanent residence in a small corner of my brain and he flashes a torch from time to time just to let me know he's there.

Mahbubul was the first Bangladeshi newspaper editor I had the pleasure of meeting some 20 years ago

on my first visit to Bangladesh and my admiration for him was instant. My opinion then, as it is now, is that he was a consummate professional and a gentleman in every respect. Anyone would find it impossible to dislike him. What I particularly enjoyed was his frankness and willingness to call a spade a spade and serve his opinions without even a hint of sugar coating, apologies or excuses. He was a man of considerable knowledge and experience in many fields.

Why I remember Mahbubul so often is perhaps because it was he who encouraged me to write about corporal punishment in Bangladesh's schools. It was my privilege and pleasure to know him. He is gone but not forgotten.

Sir Frank Peters  
On e-mail

### Custodial deaths

Custodial deaths are totally unacceptable. *The Daily Star* has published a report titled "Man dies in custody" on May 31, 2015. A man named Ishak Mia died in police custody on May 30. Police said it was suicide while the family of Ishak Mia said he was tortured to death. Now the police must prove that they are not responsible for this death. If they are proven guilty, the police personnel involved in this incident must be tried under section 15 of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013. We urge a proper and transparent investigation into this incident.

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