

DOWN TO EARTH

The Spectre of Adulteration

By A S M Nurunnabi

Adulteration practices are ubiquitous at present in the city as elsewhere. The incidence of such practices affects not only foodstuffs and medicines but also every conceivable area of consumption. The widespread nature of the menace has become a cause for alarm among classes of people. The adulteration techniques are also found to be novel and ingenious which keep changing to avoid detection and effective deterring actions.

The main targets of adulteration use to be foodstuffs like milk, edible oil, flour, sugar, medicines, etc. Nowadays it is difficult to get unadulterated milk or edible oil. Since the adulteration practices don't spare antibiotics and other life-saving drugs, they pose a serious threat to the health of the people. Instances of pieces of fruits sold by vendors on city pavements which are treated with colour and saccharine to make them attractive and sweet are plentiful. Adulteration of edible oils is rampant. These are common instances of threats to our health in our daily life.

To many, the Zinzira area of Dhaka is considered to be the home of fake and low quality goods. There were reports on the existence of factories making large-scale production of adulterated vegetable ghee and marketing it by using well-known

brand names. There are also reports of manufacture in this area of fake dry-cell batteries, bearing well-known brand names, adulterated mustard and soyabean oils, cosmetics, spurious China-made transistor radios, locks and a host of other spurious products which find easy market among the rural people. Dholai Khal area in the city similarly carries ill-repute as a source of fake mechanical items. Another source of adulterated foods is the large number of minor hotels and restaurants serving dubious quality foods to customers under poor sanitary conditions which pose a serious threat to public health.

The growing menace calls for strong deterring actions. It is felt that the existing laws for dealing with the problem are not adequate or stringent enough. These laws are also reportedly not properly enforced on account of several factors. First, the laxity and indifference of the enforcing agencies concerned. Powerful and organised groups are said to be behind the adulteration rackets. It is alleged that these groups possessing considerable financial clout manage to render ineffective any serious drive against them through devious means and taking advantage of any loopholes in the existing laws. The isolated cases that are detected are said to be

small fries and they hardly make little difference to the large-scale adulteration scenario.

The Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) has the statutory role of looking after the quality control aspects of all manufactured commodities ranging from foodstuffs to all other consumer items. Some sources allege that in spite of statutory requirement for various industries and manufacturing units in the country to get clearance certificate of the BSTI, such requirement is not followed in many cases. There are also allegations that after getting their samples of products certified by the BSTI, the certified quality is not maintained by some producers later.

The importance of the BSTI in checking the tide of adulteration is said to be pivotal, since it is the only organisation in the country vested with the authority to certify the quality and standard of a product by proper testing, thereby freeing the market from adulterated and low quality products.

If the adulteration culture is not tackled with a firm hand, it involves the risk of exerting adverse impact on the economy of the country by the creation of consumer preference for foreign goods. Thereby the healthy growth of our industries is liable to be impeded.

Kshmiris for tripartite talks to end crisis

SRINAGAR, Feb 16: Major Kashmiri separatist groups asked India and Pakistan today to start tripartite talks to end a six-year old rebellion against Delhi, saying most Muslims in the region backed the proposal, reports Reuters.

Favouring tripartite talks to end the Kashmiri dispute, we appeal to India and Pakistan to allow our delegation to visit New Delhi, Islamabad and Azad (Pakistan-ruled) Kashmir to initiate tripartite talks," the All Parties Hurriyat (freedom) Conference, which bands more than 30 Kashmiri separatist groups, said in a statement.

The resolution followed claims by a leading separatist group that a "referendum" earlier today had revealed an overwhelming support for peace talks involving India, Pakistan and Kashmiri separatists.

The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), headed by Pakistan-based Amanullah Khan, said 95 per cent of the people polled in India's northern state of Jammu and Kashmir voted for tripartite talks to end the Kashmir crisis.

It was not clear how the JKLF had conducted the polls, although residents said

the question was raised in Friday prayers congregations in mosques in the Kashmir valley.

Jammu and Kashmir is predominantly Hindu India's only Muslim-majority state, although most Muslims in the state live in the Kashmir valley. Jammu, in the south, is Hindu-dominated.

"JKLF held a referendum in the state today whether to start bilateral or tripartite talks to end the Kashmir dispute," a JKLF spokesman said in a statement.

"At least 95 per cent of the people of Jammu and Kashmir voted for tripartite talks," he said.

New Delhi appeared to be unmoved by the appeal.

AFP adds: Leading Kashmiri Muslim separatist group repeated a claim today that Muslim militants were not holding four Westerners hostage in Kashmir and said they were being detained by the Indian army.

A spokesman for Harkatul-Ansar, which the Indian authorities believe is behind the kidnapping of the two Britons, an American and a German, also claimed to be ready to mount a "rescue operation" to free the hostages.

Chechnya war may have been a mistake, says Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Feb 16: Russian President Boris Yeltsin admitted today that the war in Chechnya, which started when he poured troops into the north Caucasus republic in December 1994, may have been a mistake, reports AFP.

Speaking to factory workers in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk, Yeltsin said he had made mistakes during his five year tenure as president "and may be one of them was Chechnya," ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

"I have spent many sleepless nights wondering whether, perhaps, one could have acted differently," said Yeltsin, speaking on the first day of his campaign for re-election.

However, Yeltsin accused the Chechen separatists led by Dzhokhar Dudayev of repeatedly breaking accords reached with the Russian authorities, and said "It is difficult to reach an agreement with the Chechen gunmen."

"One has to use force against them, so that the Chechens can live peacefully, and we will help them in that," Yeltsin said.

Interfax news agency quoted Yeltsin as saying that if Russian troops were withdrawn from Chechnya "gunmen will seize Dagestan, Karachayevo-Cherkessia and other republics and there will be international terrorism and banditry."

He added that Russia had enough forces guarding Chechnya's borders to prevent gunmen and weapons entering the republic "through Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran or Pakistan."

On Thursday, Yeltsin called for the separatist leaders to be arrested and shot.

\$50m IDA credit for agri research

WASHINGTON, Feb 16: Bangladesh will get an assistance of 50 million US dollars (Taka 204 crore) from the International Development Association (IDA) for the development of agricultural research management, reports BSS.

A credit agreement has been signed here Thursday between the government of Bangladesh and the IDA, which is an affiliate of the World Bank, lends on concessional terms to selected developing countries.

Bangladesh's ambassador to the USA, Humayun Kabir, and Meiko Nishimizu, Director, World Bank, signed the agreement.

The project will increase the efficiency of the national agricultural research system. It will support Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and the Agricultural Research Institutes (ARI) to carry out priority research on crops, fisheries, livestock and forestry.

Cold claims 8 in Bucharest a day

BUCHAREST, Feb 16: Romania's coldest winter in 25 years has killed 150 people among the homeless and beggars in the capital Bucharest, a medical expert said today.

Victims were now freezing to death on the streets at a rate of eight a day, professor Vladimir Belis, head of the Bucharest Forensic Institute, told Reuters.

Over the past few weeks temperatures across Romania fell to record lows of minus 28 Celsius (minus 18 F), with heavy snowfalls and blizzards.

Polls not free, fair: FEMA

The Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), a non-government organisation funded by Western donors, has said Thursday's election was not free and fair, reports UNB.

"The term free and fair is not applicable to this election. The election process was certainly flawed from the beginning for a variety of reasons," FEMA said in an interim report released to the press yesterday.

It said the election day was preceded by violent clashes, arrest of opposition leaders, hartals and blockade and intimidation of voters by both the ruling and opposition parties.

In Dhaka, although most polling stations seemed to have been secure, less than one half of the EC officials showed up in several polling stations, it said.

The FEMA report said the election was not well administered as it saw various irregularities like not applying indelible ink which permitted some voters to cast ballots more than once and stuffing of ballots.

There seems to be some discrepancies between the number of voters, as observed by the FEMA mobile teams and the declared results, it said.



Jumatul Wida — the last Juma prayers in the month of Ramadan — was observed yesterday. — Star photo

BNP to elect Leader of the House soon

Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday said the ruling BNP, which achieved absolute majority in the 6th parliamentary elections, would hold its parliamentary party meeting shortly to elect the leader of the house, reports UNB.

With the elections of the leader of the house, the party will request the President to appoint a new cabinet, the BNP leader said and hoped that Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia would be re-elected.

Briefing newsmen at a local hotel in the afternoon on the outcome of the Thursday's elections, the former deputy leader of the house said his party had already won 164 seats in the 300 member parliament, out of the 165 where election results so far announced unofficially.

On low turnout of voters in the elections, he said: "The turnout, whatever it is, has a legal bearing."

Prof Chowdhury reiterated that the turnout would have been higher if there had been no threat and intimidation of voters by the opposition activists.

Pointing out a "positive" aspect of the elections, he said: "BNP, which is in power, has prevented scope for an extra-constitutional government."

"It was moral and legal responsibility for the BNP to hold the elections to uphold the Constitution," he said. "Had there been no elections, there would have been a constitutional gap, and this election had closed that gap."

When his attention was drawn to Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina's statement, requesting the President to form a caretaker government saying the BNP government lost its legitimacy after the "farical" election, Prof Chowdhury said: "Every statement should be responsible." "This government is legal," he said.



Eid shopping rush at a city market after a two-day hartal yesterday. — Star photo

Eid shoppers throng city markets

By Staff Correspondent

With Eid-ul-Fitr less than a week away, the city's main shopping centres did brisk business yesterday after three days of shutdown due to the Opposition's barricade and hartal programmes Feb 13-15.

City dwellers thronged in droves to the city's many markets, department stores and shopping malls in a mad rush to complete their Eid shopping.

The exorbitant prices, traffic jam and political uncertainty failed to dampen the enthusiasm of the shoppers. The inviting illuminations most shops sport at this time of year, seem to have done their job well.

Shops had kept their doors open all day long and late into the night—a trend likely to be repeated over the next few days.

Hawala Case Charge sheets against 3 more ministers soon

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Indian top investigating agency, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has gathered evidence to chargesheet three more ministers of Narasimha Rao gov't in the multi-crore rupees Hawala case, reports BSS.

The CBI has already submitted chargesheet against three former ministers VC Shukla, Madhavrao Scindia and Balram Jakhar.

The ministers against whom it has collected evidence are Food Minister Buta Singh, Minister for Textiles Kamal Nath and Minister of State for Civil Supplies Krishna Sahi, said Asian Age today.

The agency is finalising the process of charge sheets against 18 to be submitted to the designated court before

February 22, the date set by the Indian Supreme Court for the next hearing in the much talked about case.

Of the 18 chargesheets, the agency is likely to submit 10 are against politicians while the rest are against bureaucrats named in the 'Jains' diaries for accepting pay-offs.

The name of the country's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee which figured in the case, is being given a clean sheet by the investigating agency as "there is no prima facie evidence against him."

Investigation could not be pursued against the two state governors, Shiv Shankar and Motilal Vohra because of their immunity cover though their names figure in the list of Jain's beneficiaries.

9 lawyers want EC to cancel polls

By Staff Correspondent

Nine leading lawyers have demanded that the Election Commission cancel and reject the elections held on February 15.

In a joint statement yesterday they said "If the EC is true to its oath, the passing off of a fraud in the name of election would not amount to upholding the Constitution which mandates that will of the people to be reflected through an election and not a fraud to be committed upon the Constitution."

The lawyers viewed that the EC should, after cancellation of the entire election, recommend to the President referring the matter to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court for its opinion and advice as to the scope for holding the election beyond 90 days as well as for the formation of a non-partisan caretaker government.

Signatories to the statement are: Shamsul Haq Choudhury, Barrister Amirul Islam, Barrister Shaikat Ali Khan, S S Haldar, Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Abdul Baset Majumdar, Mohammad Oza Farooq, Mahbub Alam, Mohammad Mohsen Rashid and Subrata Choudhury.

Rally to protest alleged rigging in C'Nawabganj

From Our Correspondent

CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Feb 16: The Opposition parties today called a rally in the town tomorrow protesting manipulation of elections results and widespread rigging.

Three persons were injured in clashes with the police during the polling hours yesterday.

Although polling in 116 centres of Nawabganj-3 and 48 centres of Nawabganj-2 was not held, the authorities had started announcing results of those constituencies, alleged the opposition parties at a press conference today.

The press conference was addressed by AL leader Dr Bulbul-e-Gulistan, JP leader Rulul-e-Islam and Jamaat leader Professor Rafiqul Islam.

Jamaat requests President to take over power

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abbas Ali Khan yesterday requested the President to immediately take over power and form a neutral caretaker government to hold a fully contested election within 90 days, reports UNB.

The President should exercise his constitutional power as the BNP government has lost its legitimacy following the Thursday's farical elections," he told a rally at the north gate of the Baitul Mukarram mosque after Juma prayers.

Khan, the Nayeb-e-Ameer of the party, announced a three-day siege from February 24 of road, rail, waterways and ports as well as the secretariat, banks, commercial establishments and all government, semi-government and private offices.

The rally organised by the city unit of Jamaat-e-Islami, also demanded scrapping of the "mock election" and resignation of the "illegal government."

Presided over by city ameer ATM Azharul Islam, the rally was also addressed by party leaders Maulana Matul Rahman Nizami, Abdul Kader Molla, Quamaruzzaman, Advocate Yusuf Ali and ATM Masum.

Jamaat secretary general Maulana Matul Rahman Nizami urged the Election Commission to cancel the result of the Thursday's "one-party, farical elections."

WP demands fresh polls under caretaker govt

The Workers Party (WP) yesterday reiterated its demand for immediate dismissal of the BNP government and constituting a caretaker government with neutral, non-partisan advisers, headed by the President, reports UNB.

The caretaker government would run the country until a new government is formed through a free, fair and impartial election, said the left-leaning party in a declaration from its rally at Topkhana road in the city.

Workers Party general secretary Rashed Khan Menon read out the declaration and demand cancellation of the "voter-less" election and fresh polls under a caretaker government to be headed by the President.

The rally requested the President to scrap the election, suspend formation of the 6th parliament and not to call the elected persons to form a new government.

Calling for formation of a new government will be "illegal" as the Thursday's general election itself was "politically and legally unacceptable," the Workers Party said.

Party politburo members Haider Akbar Khan, Rono, Bimal Biswas, Shah Alam and other central leaders were present at the rally, presided over by the party's city unit secretary Nurul Hasan.

The Midnight File

Elections in Italy on May 9

ROME, Feb 16: Early legislative elections will be held in Italy on May 9, the Italian cabinet decided today, according to a report by the Agi news agency, reports AFP.

Terrorist training camp seized in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Feb 16: NATO forces have seized what they describe as a terrorist training camp, uncovering an arsenal that included sniper rifles, submachine-guns and children's toys wired to explode, reports AP.

Eleven men at the site, including three men with Iranian identification papers, were detained Thursday. The site, a former ski chalet on government land 20 miles west of Sarajevo, was taken over the same day, without a shot being fired, NATO said Friday.

Six of the other detained men were Bosnians and the nationality of the two others has not been determined.

It was the first time the NATO-led force in Bosnia had captured foreign fighters since taking over peacekeeping duties in December. US troops had worried about the danger of attacks by anti-West Islamic fighters who had fought alongside the Muslim-led Bosnian government, but it was not clear whether any of the men detained Thursday fell into that category.

According to the Bosnian peace accord, foreign troops who are not part of the NATO-led force are banned from Bosnia. Bosnian officials repeatedly had assured NATO that all foreign forces had left the country.

NATO troops found 60

weapons at the former ski chalet, five miles south of the government-held village of Fojnica. In addition to the guns, troops found rocket-propelled grenades, hand grenades, detonators, blasting caps and large stores of explosives, NATO officials said.

They also discovered models of buildings that may have been the intended targets of terrorist activity, but officials gave no specifics. Investigations were in progress, spokesman Lt. Col. Mark Rayner said, but refused to give further details.

EC: Turnout

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The EC, until yesterday, announced unofficial results of 119 constituencies. Announcement of poll results was suspended at 6 pm yesterday in view of the holy Shab-e-Qadr.

The results of 12 parliamentary seats are yet to be received by the EC, the sources said.

Polling was held in 250 seats in the 6th parliamentary election held Thursday, amid an Opposition boycott and widespread violence across the country.

The ruling BNP won in 118 seats and lost one to an independent candidate, according to the EC's unofficial results.

Voting was suspended in two constituencies — one for the death of a candidate and the other for litigational problems.

Army withdrawn from city points

By Staff Correspondent

They army installations set up at various points and troops deployed in the city on the eve of the 15 election were "withdrawn" in the early hours yesterday.

Armed forces took up positions late Wednesday night at Elephant Road-Bata intersection, New Market, Science Laboratory crossing, Sonargaon hotel intersection, Russell Square, and at the mouth of Sonargaon road near Kathal Bagan.

In these areas heavy machine guns were installed behind sand-bag encampments. The CEC had earlier assured the army may be sent back to barracks by Feb 17.

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They also discovered models of buildings that may have been the intended targets of terrorist activity, but officials gave no specifics. Investigations were in progress, spokesman Lt. Col. Mark Rayner said, but refused to give further details.

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