

## Red Tapism Frightens the Bureaucrats?

THE much talked about independent Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was finally established though the main opposition parties are sceptical about its functioning independently. It is certainly too early to be pessimistic. But, for the country that has topped the list of the most corrupt countries of the world for the fourth consecutive times, fighting corruption is bound to be a huge ask. Only time can say where the ACC finally lands in. The beginning looks good though. The ACC has served a notice to 13 ministries asking them to report on the whereabouts of 1,028 vehicles purchased under different government development projects between 1995 and 2001, after a newspaper report claimed that the cars were being used illegally. The notice, perhaps the first of its kind, has created quite a stir and some of the till-now almighty secretaries have expressed their disappointment for ACC's sweeping allegation against the high government officials. Another secretary however was brave enough to say how and where do these project cars go. According to him, the fear of red tapism to get the development project vehicles discourage many to go by the prescribed process. It usually takes two to three years if they are to be acquired legally, he adds. So in most cases a particular ministry just starts to use the car the moment the project is over, without bothering to follow the legal process. An interesting case ahead, no doubt.

## Sweepers lock horns with the Authority

Dhaka-Chittagong railway communications remained suspended for over three hours on January 2 as sweepers bespattered Comilla Railway Station with human excreta protesting arrest of a colleague.

The mob smeared the Station Master's office, booking office, ticket counter and platform with feces forcing the railway staff at the station to stay away.

Arrest of Laxman Chandra Das one of the sweepers, and passenger Harun-ur-Rashid on December 26, irked people whose job is to keep the station clean. Due to their unconventional way of protest, the railway traffic came to halt for three hours.

Noakhali bound Upadul from Dhaka and Sylhet-bound Paharika from Chittagong could not reach the station in time due to the demonstration. The railway traffic resumed at about 1:00 pm.

The sweepers cleaned up the mess after railway authorities and police promised them to set the arrestee, laxman, free. He was nabbed during a clash with smugglers. The smugglers were carrying phensidyl and liquor on a Chittagong bound train, police and railway sources said to The Daily Star.

## Born at DMCH

**A**BOUT 80 per cent of pregnant women give birth at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). They come here as it's fairly low in cost. Recent surveys have shown that the doctors in this and other such government hospitals are reluctant about assisting these deliveries. They rather go for the expensive caesarean section that multiplies the cost. It has also come to light that some staff engage in stealing drugs and medical accessories while the patients are later reluctant to buy them. This adds to the 'hidden cost' of childbirth. A normal delivery at DMCH, including drugs and other accessories, costs roughly Tk 2,500 while through caesarean section, the costs rises to Tk 5,000 and Tk 10,000. Most of the patients are poor, and they come to the public hospital since it is supposed to provide treatment free of cost but they end up being forced to pay much more than their expectations. Roni Begum, 25 had come from a local slum a few hours prior to her delivery. She had been told that she would have a normal delivery. Half an hour into her admission the attending doctors asked her husband Arif, a rickshaw puller, to bring a number of drugs and medical accessories for caesarean section. Arif failed to pay for the cost of the drugs and accessories and took his wife back home about two hours later. She gave birth to a baby within half an hour of returning home. A common sight at the maternity section is that of worried attendants of patients rushing about for medicines and other things the doctors urgently require. A senior doctor said that the hospital has "a poor fund to help extremely poor patients in cases of surgery".