

ACC still a non-starter

The deck must be cleared to make it function

WHILE the anti-corruption commission (ACC) was long in coming, it nonetheless raised our hopes and expectations of good governance and public accountability. But going by what has happened so far, with and at the ACC, leaves us with no doubt that its start has been most disappointingly flawed with no sign of it taking off properly in the near future. It would not be wrong to suggest that it has been a painful gestation for the commission.

That an important institution like the ACC, a supposedly statutory body, would be set up without an organogramme and minimum ancillary support being in place, to allow it a proper start, is simply incomprehensible and only betrays the government's lack of seriousness in the matter. Not only the government's but also the ACC's credibility has been put on line by the slipshod manner in which things have been handled since the Commission was set up. Comments from various agencies of the government, contradicting each other, have only helped to confound the problems.

What also causes concern is the fact that there appears to be lack of cohesion among its members, some of whom have gone about ventilating feelings and opinions about what has gone wrong with it and how the commission ought to function. And each of them appears to be speaking in the most self-righteous manner about it. One cannot help wonder if the signs of internal dissension are not putting across negative signals about the inherent capacity of the commission to perform its writ.

The ACC Chairman's functioning should leave no one in doubt as to who is in charge. It doesn't behave a body such as the ACC to have its members going about in different directions; and, it is for the ACC chief to not only curb the discord, and create a congenial work environment, albeit with the full cooperation from his colleagues in the commission.

The government being the architect of the commission should be obliged to accord all kinds of assistance to it, so that it can work to fulfill its mandate.

Mongla Port underperforming

Shipping ministry should be assertive

MONGLA Port has long been known to be functioning well below its potential. This appears to have been confirmed by the recent findings of the parliamentary standing committee on shipping ministry.

The committee has ascribed the poor performance of the port to the working of an 'organised mafia' and the shipping ministry's failure to take steps to make things better. It has also recommended a 50 per cent cut in the port staff, which is redundant and responsible to a great extent for labour unrest and the anomalies in cargo handling.

The need for maintaining the viability of the port can hardly be overemphasized. The north-west region of the country is its natural hinterland. The port needs to be modernised and well-equipped to handle the ever increasing volume of both export and import freight, particular in the post-MFA era when the RMG sector will be facing a much stiffer competition. Smooth and efficient handling of cargo at the port is an essential precondition to boosting trade with other countries.

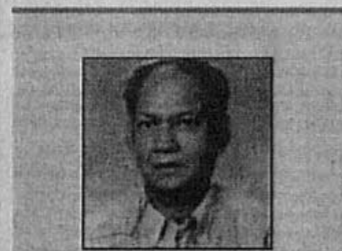
It is welcome news that the government has adopted some measures to simplify the procedures of cargo handling and customs clearance at our ports. The procedural complexities have to be removed in order to refurbish the image of our ports which has been tainted in recent times by underperformance and lack of security.

The government ought to take note of the recommendations of the parliamentary committee with a view to eliminating the inhibitory factors. Obviously, the number of ships calling at the port has fallen sharply because operational costs are high while efficiency is far below the expected level.

The government cannot allow a hub of trade and commerce like the seaport to be controlled by goons and musclemen. However, the most important thing is to regain control over the situation and rid the port of the undesirable elements and unacceptable practices that have turned it into a burden on the exchequer.

The authorities must act decisively to make the port function to its full potential.

Can Abbas move the ME peace process forward?



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

MAHMOUD Abbas (Abu Mazen) has been elected with a comfortable majority as the successor of the icon of Palestinians' struggle for independence, Yasser Arafat, and people of goodwill around the world will wish him well.

Yasser Arafat passed away in November last in a military hospital in Paris. He could not be buried in the Holy City of Jerusalem due to the opposition of his ferocious detractor Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon. Nor could Arafat see his dream of an independent Palestine realised although he traveled around the world as the President of Palestine and accorded treat-

ment of a head of state. His last four years were of virtual house arrest in Ramallah as Sharon unleashed death and destruction on his defenseless people. Indeed under the prodding of his friend Sharon, US President George

President Clinton invested all eight years of his tenure to find a solution to this half-a-century old conflict. The Oslo Accord of the mid-nineties to which both Palestine and Israel were signatories provided the perfect platform for a settlement. We may recall that

ment was within sight. The talks must resume from where it was left off and that point of resumption is Jerusalem. As we know by now that Jerusalem is the Holy City of the three monotheistic faiths -- namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is clear

In order to understand the dynamics of the situation, we must take into account that in Palestine like in Israel there are peace camps as war camps. Thus the failure of Sharon's policy of strong arm for the last four years when he has rained death and

in meaningless noises and will not move forward.

It is true that the emergence of Mahmoud Abbas as the leader of the Palestinians has brought an element of hope, which is tinged with doubt whether he can move the Peace Process forward. He has a Herculean task ahead of him. The Hamas, which boycotted the elections, is willing to give him time to bring about a change in the regime of occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel, which has rendered life intolerable for the Palestinians. The security situation is delicate to say the least. A single suicide bomber can upset the apple cart. On the other hand the military in Israel has to exercise utmost restraint.

The Middle East is living in hope and fear. The eyes will be focused on President George W Bush. He has four years ahead of him. He spent the last four years of his presidency in flattering Sharon and turning a blind eye to the killing spree of the Israeli premier. Will he change his ways, time will tell.

Arshad-Uz Zaman is a former Ambassador.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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Bush refused to meet him. Thus the Peace Process that the predecessor of Bush, President Bill Clinton had brought to a near successful conclusion, died a natural death.

The election of Mahmoud Abbas has been hailed by President Bush and Ariel Sharon. For the Peace Process to have any chance of success, it must be resumed from where it was left off during the Clinton presidency.

Arafat dealt with Israeli Premiers Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak, both considered doves in contrast with Sharon who is a confirmed hawk. In the White House sat President Bill Clinton, who had established himself as thoroughly impartial between the Palestinians and Israelis and his White House doors remained open for Arafat as for Barak. It is on the issue of Jerusalem that the negotiations broke down when a settle-

ment was within sight. The talks must resume from where it was left off and that point of resumption is Jerusalem. As we know by now that Jerusalem is the Holy City of the three monotheistic faiths -- namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is clear

In order to understand the dynamics of the situation, we must take into account that in Palestine like in Israel there are peace camps as war camps. Thus the failure of Sharon's policy of strong arm for the last four years when he has rained death and

destruction on the hapless Palestinians. In order for the talks to resume between the Palestinians and Israelis it is essential for Washington to ease Sharon out of office. He has been too long associated with the strong arm policy and is too old to change his ways. Since it is clearly understood that Washington has a central role in the Palestine-Israel dispute, she alone can bring about this change. Otherwise the dispute will end up

Instituting good governance

Role of civil society imperative

ABDUL KHALEQUE

GOOD governance can hardly dispense with the co-operation and support of Civil Society which is a non-government organisation capable of contributing to the socio-economic and political development of a modern country. Essentially, it is non-political in the sense that its members do not belong to the category of activists in favour of, or against, any political party of the country. In a democracy, everybody who has a voting eligibility has a constitutional right to politics also. In this view, members of an Election Commission, non-party caretaker government and members of any institution of supposedly political non-partisan character may not be absolutely innocent of any political ideology and partisanship.

The society in which we live in a democracy or in a dictatorship is a political society in which a person legally recognised as a criminal is also a political person unless otherwise declared by law. Yet, we identify some people to have had the least possible political identity and partisanship. When such persons well versed in knowledge and experience have capability to mobilise communities and come up with suggestions and opinions in various matters related to social, economic and political problems and form themselves voluntarily into a group or a forum in order to concern themselves with problems that face a society and try to find out remedies or solutions, the group or the forum is usually designated as a society of eminent citizens or a civil society, the members of which have populist image and social weightage to count upon. Usually Human Rights groups, welfare

oriented women organisations, righteous religious and social groups, academic and research institutes bring new insight and approach to people-oriented and participatory development. They tend to become actors in relation to government, local authorities, employers and systems that have impact on people's life. They fight for various issues and causes that stimulate people to participate in

do not get any resource for their programme from the government. These NGOs along with a few thousand others depend on foreign donations, bank loans and their own meagre resource-oriented programmes purportedly for ultimate reliance on their own resource. It must be recognised that the role of Rotarians, Lions, women organisations, scouts and some philanthropic

the demand for local self-governance which are gathering momentum under the aegis of donor countries and donor international bodies on the one hand, and the increasing role of the state under the globalisation ethos in most of the underdeveloped countries needed for planned development, on the other, have perplexed management of economy.

At the moment, the following important issues have drawn attention of the civil society:

- The high density of homeless, incomeless poor and floating population in the capital and other metropolitan cities;
- Progressive ruralisation of "Model Towns" and unap-

- caring for consequences;
- Bank loan defaulters, gas and electricity thieves;
- Use of child labour in domestic employment and shops;
- Non-application of Labour Laws in garment industries;
- Gruesome murders, gang rape, political skirmish, persecution of women, trafficking in women and children;
- Insecurity of female labour, and school, college and university going girl students.

Besides, the following issues related to governance have emerged to the jeopardy of public interest:

- Metropolitan laws are not enforced effectively;
- Schools and colleges are not regularly inspected;
- Nil success in SSC and HSC in some schools and colleges;
- School and college governing bodies do not work;
- Classes are not held for shortage of teachers in government sanctioned posts;
- Formation of independent Anti-Corruption Commission;
- Separation and independence of Judiciary;
- Appointment of Human Rights Commission.

It was apparent from the above that for good governance in Bangladesh, a lot of issues need urgent solution for which the government and other related social forces and organisations are required to take appropriate and well-coordinated steps in the interest of public welfare and socio-economic and political development in the fast-changing world order and in accordance with the inescapable globalisation ethos in the age of science and technology. We believe that no government deliberately follows a policy of bad governance at its own peril.

Abdul Khaleque is a former IGP of police.

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decisions that affect their lives.

Civil society organisations foster transparency, accountability and have, in fact, become essential to the development of coherent programs and projects. A vibrant civil society is a critical pre-condition for a more equitable, democratic, pluralistic and humane society. Along with civil societies, non-government organisations (native and foreign) have been playing increasing role in its multifarious facets. They bring communities together around specific issues and concerns like water-supply, small credit, saving scheme, small-scale infrastructure, education, health etc purported to develop self-reliance, reduce poverty and develop rural Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, there are world famous NGOs like BRAC and Grameen Bank whose contribution to the country's development is pronounced and broad-based. It may be noted that these NGOs along with the famous Community Health-Complex at Dhamrai

trusts have been outstanding as civil societies with their respective programmes to improve the well-being of the people and to create a peace-loving tolerant society. In fine, it may be said that if the state fully embraces the concept of good governance and implements the rule of people's welfare-oriented law, and financially and otherwise encourages NGOs in a spirit of mutual co-operation, Bangladesh will certainly make a headway towards socio-economic and politico-cultural development of the people.

A new pattern of governance is emerging in Bangladesh with the gradual withdrawal of the government from its social and economic performance role. The transition has been accelerated by donor pressure for policy changes and institutional reforms in spite of left political and labour protests. The donors tend to act as catalysts coming with the incentive of resources to implement the structural adjustment package. The doctrine of *laissez faire* and

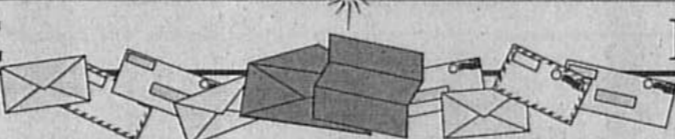
Whatever may be the perplexity in socio-economic policy and in the institutional viewpoint of governance, the most important thing is the quality of governance which expresses itself through a lot of attributes such as accountability, transparency, honesty, rule of law, efficiency, work culture, public welfare, public duty and right, security of life and property, empowerment of women and other deprived segments of the people, sustainability equity, justice etc. And for that, the effective functioning of all organs of the state in appropriate contexts and in their mutual relation as a collective combine has to be ensured.

In Bangladesh, one may come across a galaxy of persons and institutes to constitute civil society, substantially free from political partisanship but basically and primarily motivated with larger interest and welfare of the country. Various issues draw their attention, they hold learned deliberations and make diverse articu-

proved industrialisation of government controlled residential areas;

- Misuse of Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure;
- Polluted air and garbage accumulation in the metropolitan cities;
- Open latrines used by city and town residents and floating people;
- Footpaths constructed for pedestrians but occupied by shopkeepers, hawkers, construction materials etc;
- Tragic road and river accidents and absence of punitive accountability therefore;
- Illegal occupation of government land and river beds by criminally and politically powerful people with impunity;
- Drug and alcoholic addiction of youths and motor vehicle drivers and fatal accidents on highways;
- Desperate corruption by all segments of the society and the bureaucracy without

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

New faculties at SAU

Sher-e-Bangla Agriculture University (SAU) is a higher agricultural education institution located in the heart of the capital of agro-based Bangladesh, where students from almost all parts of the country are studying to become agriculturists. They are committed to contributing their best in the development of Bangladesh agriculture.

However, it is a matter of regret that SAU is offering courses under only one faculty, i.e. Faculty of Agriculture. Many citizens of the country consider this as inappropriate and unprofitable on the part of a national public university to run with only one faculty. It is not only a deprivation to the students interested to pursue higher education in different fields of agricultural science, but also to the country's farming community.

To speak the truth, the SAU syndicate had long ago approved the opening of three new faculties, viz. (i) Faculty of Animal Science (ii)

Faculty of Fisheries and (iii) Faculty of Agri-Business & Management at SAU. SAU can start operation of those faculties only after receiving clearance from the UGC which is under process.

It is expected that the UGC would expedite the process, thereby allowing SAU to open the above mentioned three new faculties in the greater national interest. Professor M. Zahidul Haque Chairman Department of Language Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka-1207

'Crossfire'

'Crossfire' has become a familiar word in more than 7 months, since the formation of Rab with the aim of curbing terrorism. Much has been written about it in different dailies. This word was probably the most spectacular phenomenon of the year 2004.

Almost every day, the electronic media spends at least a few minutes

in providing the news of deaths in crossfire. It is a highly purgative way to liquidate the miscreants. People are convinced that this stratagem has been undertaken to ward off any legitimate action against the government. Rab, undoubtedly, has improved the law and order situation to a great extent. People can now have a sigh of relief as Rab has been able to bring the confidence of people back upon the law enforcing agencies. Many terrorists have left their homes. Rab's attire has made a great impact on the common people's mind. Any one caught by Rab is feared or believed to be dead in crossfire.

My objection is to death in custody. All the deaths in Rab custody are of similar kind. The terrorists along with Rab members go for recovering arms. Then they are attacked and in every case, the terrorists are killed. Killing the criminals cannot be a permanent solution. If they are brought to trial, many other abettors directly or indirectly associated with them will be unfolded. Those godfathers have

to be identified so that none dares to commit this sort of misdeeds again. Crime must be disconnected from politics.

If every political party of our country addresses the matter with due sincerity, the criminals will have no place in society.

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Knitting factory fire

The Global Union Federation representing workers in the garment industry has demanded immediate government action in the aftermath of a factory fire that has left at least twenty-three workers dead and many others seriously injured near Dhaka. The fire broke out on the fourth-floor of the building which housed the Knitting and Processing factory in Narayanganj.

It took firefighters four hours to extinguish the blaze. Dozens of workers were injured as they desperately tried to escape down the nar-

row smoke-engulfed stairs. Those who died were unable to escape because many of the exits were blocked, and the fire extinguishers were not working.

Steps to improve health and safety in the industry, as well as legal action against those found responsible for criminal negligence in allowing the existence of such unsafe conditions, have to be taken. The Federation has also asked the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) to work to improve conditions in the industry.

Tragically, factory fires are all too common in Bangladesh. Obviously, this is very damaging to the image of Bangladesh's export-oriented garment industry. Neil Kearney (General Secretary) On e-mail

A leader without credibility

Once Britain had a vast empire but

had no respect. Later Britain had no empire but had respect. At present Britain has no empire and no respect either.

After the Second World War, most of the former colonies became independent from Britain and other colonial powers. Since then Britain has played a great role in the world arena in bringing peace and stability around the globe. If there was an incident of discrimination and injustice against any person on nation even in a remote area, Britain had voiced its concern strongly against it. In short, Britain was the safest custody of humanity and justice. Moreover, Britain had always played a balancing role throughout the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular. Following the creation of Israel in Arab lands in 1948 by Britain itself, Britain was engaged somehow, directly or indirectly, in bringing peace to the Middle-East.

Under the same legacy, though the British prime minister's recent

initiative to revitalise the roadmap peace plan is a laudable step, it won't bring any fruitful outcome except some unrealistic promises and recommendations. Because, to Palestinians and Arabs Mr Tony Blair has no credibility. Mr Blair is suffering from image crisis in his own country also. People around the Middle-East (except Israel) see him as an ultra biased leader like US President Bush. That's why no peace is possible under the leadership of Tony Blair.

Unless and until an equitable and balanced view is taken of the Middle East conflict, peace will remain an illusion. Md Abdus Salam LLB (Hons.) University of Chittagong.

Rab and crossfire

Rab, the elite force, has been performing tremendously well to contain terrorism. It is really a revolutionary attempt on the part of the present government. To ensure peace and

security, Rab teams are doing a very good job, the result of which is a conspicuous improvement in law and order.

But the way they achieve their goals is not beyond criticism. It is obvious that every man has an inherent right to get justice whether he is a criminal or an innocent person. But nowadays people are being deprived of justice owing to 'crossfire' that violates the right to life of every human being. As a result, the image of Bangladesh in the external world is being tarnished.

Moreover, on account of crossfire the 'Godfathers' of the perpetrators are not being brought to full public glare. So, to unearth the Godfathers, the government should take the initiative to prevent 'crossfire' incidents. Finally, we should also cooperate with Rab in its attempt to bring back peace and security. Motasim Billah

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.