

Staffing still a Gordian Knot

How will ACC fight corruption?

A director of the now-defunct anti-corruption bureau (Bac) has reportedly issued a letter to its staff in clear violation of a cabinet division directive, which has placed all the former Bac staff members on the reserve list and made them accountable to the division.

The cabinet division has also decided to absorb the Bac staff after due screening. But it is not at all clear how the former director is still working in that capacity. It seems an administrative mess-up has created a situation where government orders can be flouted with impunity. How can a former director issue letters when the government has taken a clear position on the matter? Why can't the government resolve it with due speed and clarity of purpose? It is also not clear why the screening process is taking such a long time. The tragi-comedy has been pushed to a farcical point, thanks to inept handling and undue procrastination in execution of government orders.

The incident has to be viewed as something more than an administrative lacuna. If the newly formed Anti-Corruption Commission remains busy with matters pertaining to organisational structure and organogram for such a long time, how can it take up the task of containing corruption? The purpose for which it was created will be defeated if the commission remains enmeshed in an administrative tangle. The government has to act quickly to put an end to this.

The latest report on how the former Bac director is still working indicates that the administrative set-up of the ACC did not figure prominently in the plan of making it operational. The time factor has been ignored or not attached due importance to. Only that can explain why the government is taking such a long time to implement its own decision. The ACC is intended to be a strong deterrent to corruption; but if its take-off becomes such a lengthy and cumbersome process, then its standing in the public eye is bound to be lowered. The delay in making it operational will only mean deferred action against corruption, believed to be the number one problem of the country today.

New traffic laws

Existing laws need to be enforced first

THE announcement that the government is intent on amending the Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1983, in a move to get tough with traffic offenders, certainly addresses a pressing need. However, we are of the opinion that before any new laws need to be added to the books, the first thing the government should set its mind to is to ensure the enforcement of the existing laws.

There is no argument that traffic related offenses are a huge burden on the country and cost us greatly in both economic and human terms. The fact that close to 10,000 people are killed every year in traffic accidents is a sobering thought, and it is no secret that the highways are frighteningly hazardous due to reckless driving.

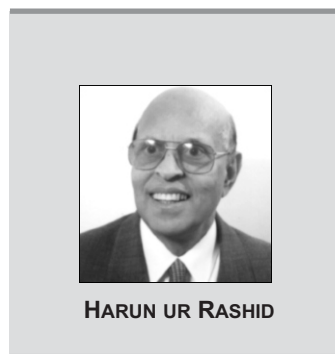
Nor is this the only problem with respect to traffic in the country. Black smoke emissions from vehicles which should not be permitted to ply the roads choke the air, endangering everyone, the streets are clogged with illegally parked cars, and it is estimated that as many as 70 percent of licenses, fitness certificates, and registration papers are fake or fraudulently obtained.

So stiffer action against reckless driving and other traffic-related offenses is to be welcomed. However, by amending the relevant laws, the government is solving the wrong problem. The problem is not that existing laws are insufficiently stiff to deter the criminal behaviour, but that they are not enforced.

The root of the problem is the pervasive corruption in the BRTA and among transit police that permits people to flout the law with impunity. Toughening the law will have zero effect if the corresponding corruption is not checked.

Before the government passes any new laws, it should focus on implementing and enforcing the ones that are already on the books. It might just find that if it does that then there is no need to pass new legislation. Passing new laws without dealing with the underlying problem will, we fear, end up being a largely futile exercise.

Revamp of the UN



HARUN UR RASHID

WHEN we talk about the UN, we mean largely two things: one is the UN as a political organization, represented by the General Assembly and the Security Council, and the other is the UN Secretariat, headed by the Secretary General.

One fact we need to recall is although the UN is the creation of five victorious nations of the Second World War (the US, Britain, France, Russia, and China) to bring peace and order in international affairs, the UN was established in the name of and on behalf of the people of united nations.

The preamble of the UN Charter states specifically that "We, the people of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our life time has brought untold sorrow to mankind... have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims."

Therefore, it is the people of the world that counts. The founders of the UN have wisely viewed an important role of the ordinary people of the world within the framework of the UN. They are as much stakeholders as the member-states are. It underlines another fact, that governments of member-states must listen to the views of their people in what they do and fail to do in the UN. One can say that UN is for the people and by the people.

Failure of the UN

Under the Charter, the UN has three core functions: (i) maintenance of peace and prevention of war, (ii) protection of human rights, and (iii) promotion of socio-economic development.

Did the UN prevent wars? No, simply because the five veto-carrying members of the Security Council (US, Britain, France, Russia and China) have looked at conflict issues in the Council from their perspective of political gains

and failed to take action to prevent or restore peace and order.

During the Cold War era, one country's friend was another's enemy. As a result, there have been more than 100 armed conflicts in the Third World, mainly in Africa since the creation of the UN, and millions of people have died. The illegal Iraqi war killed more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians.

Therefore the original aim of preventing war "the sorrow to man-

threats is to hand them a needless victory.

Poverty is the mother of human rights but great powers are only interested in political rights and not economic or development rights. The international community represented in the UN failed to eradicate poverty in poor countries. Out of six billion people in the world, one billion people own 80 per cent of the wealth and another billion live in dire poverty on less than \$1 per day. And

in 1995, the General Assembly established no fewer than five reform working groups and there is now a website devoted to the UN's reform processes. Does the continuous push for reform suggest that reform is bound to fail this time as well?

The Secretary General submitted the following proposals to make the UN effective as an organization to the leaders of the world to be discussed in September this year:

Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are all contenders. The Bush administration is very cool about Germany which opposed the Iraqi war and support only Japan. So even if the members could hold the first meeting, a number of states are calling for changes. This implies that the discussions on reforms will not be easy sailing.

Negative image of the UN Secretariat

At the headquarters in New York,

BOTTOM LINE

The UN is a political organization and like other political bodies, it has its strength and weakness. The UN consists of 191 member-states with a variety of conflicting interests and is too large an organization to keep focus on a common approach to regional and global issues. The diversity of the members is good but contributes at the same time to the weakness of the organization.

kind" was breached by the same powers which took the initiative in establishing the UN.

The question is Why? There are many reasons and only a few that deserve mention:

After the Cold War, people expected a new world order. Power brings responsibilities. But the US, being the lone super power, failed to discharge its responsibilities. Power is like beauty. If you have it, you don't need to go around saying it. Shakespear wrote about power in these words in *Measure For Measure*: "O! It's excellent, to have a giant's strength; but tyrannous to use it like a giant."

The idealism of US President Roosevelt behind the creation of the UN evaporated and the big powers have been seen not as countries that usher in freedom but as instruments of exploitation and injustice, otherwise the Middle East would not have witnessed Israelis and Palestinians fighting a ruthless war since 1948 until today.

Many political analysts say that the war on terrorism is misconceived because if it is war, it may go on forever. It may not be easily won because it is essentially a war on ideas, however distorted they may be. Some experts say terrorism, like poverty, is probably always with us. Awful as it may sound, we have to live with terror, even as we fight it. To be dominated by a fear of terrorists, to credit them with greater power than they really have, and to tear up your freedoms in the face of their

in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of the desperately poor has doubled since 1980.

With respect to development, each year our world spends \$50 billion on aid and \$1,000 billion on armed forces. The figures show sharply the lack of commitment of nations to alleviate poverty. In 2000, all nations committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of these goals is to halve global hunger and severe poverty by 2015.

The target of devoting 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income to aid has never been fulfilled. For example, the US spends 0.14 per cent and Australia 0.26 per cent of their Gross National Income. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Luxembourg have achieved or surpassed the target. Britain, France, Spain, Ireland, and Belgium are all increasing aid spending and have pledged to reach the target in between five and ten years.

UN reform proposals

Contemplating reform of the UN has been the pastime of the UN diplomats for decades. The UN will be 60 years old and reforms are due for a long time as the UN does not reflect the power and geographical realities of the post-Second War World. In 1960, one diplomat conducted a review of the UN development machine and concluded that the UN "had more than its fair share of experts in the art of describing how things cannot be done."

Before the UN's 50th anniversary

Codifying the rights of countries in clear terms to take pre-emptive military action; Legitimising intervention in states where genocide or crimes against humanity are occurring; Expanding the Security Council from 15 to 24 nations, although not touching the power of the US, Britain, France, Russia, and China to veto decisions; Striking deals with countries to provide instant-response troops and other resources for emergencies and natural disasters; Vastly increasing development aid to the developing countries to 0.7 per cent of rich countries' Gross National Income.

Wrangle for Council seats

Germany, Japan, Brazil, and India who have formed a joint lobbying group for permanent seats would like to initiate a resolution that would call for the General Assembly to make them permanent members, according to Plan A. Plan B would allow new members to become semi-permanent, serving four years in the Council. Many regional countries will oppose Plan A and the Non-Aligned Movement reportedly supports Plan B.

The initiative of the big four has annoyed many other developing countries and regional powers. For example, China, and South and North Korea have reservations about Japan, Italy opposes Germany, Pakistan opposes India, and Argentina and Mexico oppose Brazil. Indonesia, South Africa,

about 15,000 permanent employees work out of a total 51,000 a few years ago. There are about 20 Under and Assistant Secretaries General who assist the Secretary General. All of the senior appointments are made by the Secretary General who is "the chief administrative officer of the organisation" (Article 97 of the Charter). Generally such appointments are made from countries that are major financial contributors to the UN budget.

Under Secretary General Kofi Annan, the image of the UN Secretariat has suffered badly. It came under severe criticism for allegations of fraud and misuse of power of senior UN officials in the handling of the oil-for-food programme in Iraq (\$60 billion programme).

The inquiry is being conducted by the former US Reserve Bank chief Paul Volcker. It has been reported that some senior officials of the organisation may even face criminal prosecution. Furthermore Kofi Annan's son is reportedly involved in the scandal. One US Senator called for the resignation of Annan.

UN Secretariat needs to be more transparent and requires accountability to its own agencies and public. The Chief of Staff of the Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown (former administrator of UNDP) admitted that the UN "must win back the trust of the world public opinion." The structural changes of the Secretariat will be geared toward helping the organization respond faster and more openly to

crises.

Bangladesh's role

It needs to be appreciated what Bangladesh can achieve or cannot achieve in the UN. On the face of it, it seems Bangladesh's capacity to exercise real influence in the UN is limited.

However, Bangladesh won the trust of the international community in getting elected twice to the Security Council (1979-80 and 2000-01). The influence of Bangladesh can be effectively pursued if Bangladesh and like-minded countries can form a bloc to make their views known to other members and achieve success. Bangladesh is a Least Developed Country and naturally its emphasis will rest on increased development aid and democratization of the Security Council.

Bangladesh's strength partly lies in the fact that the country is also a member of three important inter-governmental organizations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, and the Organization of Islamic Conference, to which many countries do not belong. The unique position makes Bangladesh privy to views of these organizations and helps us to interact effectively with other countries.

Conclusion

The UN is a political organization and like other political bodies, it has its strength and weakness. The UN consists of 191 member-states with a variety of conflicting interests and is too large an organization to keep focus on a common approach to regional and global issues. The diversity of the members is good but contributes at the same time to the weakness of the organization.

Despite its shortcomings, the UN has achieved its success in areas that falls under Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, and a host of other UN agencies have done excellent work in developing countries. One journalist has described the UN, as having a heart of gold but limbs of clay. This statement sums up the widening gap between the noble objectives of the UN Charter and its deeds. Finally, the UN is what its powerful members make of it.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladeshi Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Tax on books and journals: In whose interest?

CHOWDHURY K A NEWS

IMPORT duty and VAT on higher education textbooks and journals does a disservice to our interests. Such taxes should not be there in a country active in human capital development, a key to long-term economic growth. Unrestricted inflow of knowledge is also vital for enlightenment of the citizenry.

If it were possible for many of us to know what is out there, we would have penetrated the illusion of the annually organized Ekushey Book Fair, which displays mostly books written in Bangla. The Dhaka Book Fair, also annually organized, and for the last eleven years, though it promises on the surface to let us see what is out there, is now no more than a remnant of its original conception.

It was conceived as a true international book fair where a cross-section of the world's best publications would come into the view of the masses. International publishers, through their country distributors, attended enthusiastically for the first three years or so. But then, as past and present governments tightened the knowledge inflow through taxation measures, participation dwindled. Participation also dwindled because the Dhaka Book Fair had been progressively made into

the alter ego of the Ekushey Book Fair. Technically, the global book supply chain is affected through the taxation measures. The legal and economic incidence of the government's tax measures had been without disparity, i.e. the country distributors or the book importers bear the entire burden of the taxes.

and standard channel for the acquisition of books and journals. The brain drain, the nature of the book selling market, and the sorry state of research output from national universities can in considerable part be attributed to the sieving of know-how through the taxation of foreign books and journals. Development of

against English literary works, or on the so-called "dual-purpose" educational materials. The need for a grip on a second language is poignantly felt nowadays. In contradiction to the adopted national book policy, steps such as using different tax codes to decide on the size of tax liability of book/journal imports and instituting

books for the nation should be imported. Are academic books for the nation not needed? Anyway, the current operating and regulatory environment is non-conducive to knowledge inflow.

Our Finance Minister recently commented: "Reform is not revolution." Indeed, one asks not even for

the PSI applicable to "other books" is between 10-20 percent. It is a big crime nowadays to import academic textbooks and journals. Total VAT comes to 3.5 percent. Besides these duties, taxes, VAT, and surcharges, importers also bear air/sea freight, customs clearance fee, inland transportation, insurance, bank charges, and other invisible expenditures.

Let us now produce the big picture that the numbers do not convey. The resulting liability for the book importers or distributors is such that they are at times left with a discount/commission margin of at most 3 percent per volume of import. A capital-intensive venture with such a return is not much of an incentive for any entrepreneur. The tragedy is that many corrupt officials' margin in this country is at least 300 percent.

The author is a Bangladeshi external student at the London School of Economics.

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Various reasons abound as to why knowledge inflow should be tightened. For example, it has been said that importation of foreign books poses threat to the local publishing industry, to our linguistic culture, and to our religio-indigenous self. It must be realized that there is no equivalent to a McGraw Hill or a Brill publishing house in this country. Most of the higher education textbooks and journals cannot be created and/or marketed by our local publishers, and book importers or distributors are needed to serve the national and private universities of this country through a benchmarked

educational opportunities is at risk. A host of activities have been made inevitable due to the taxation policy, especially activism by international publishers in the area of intellectual property rights and lobbying for the welfare of their country distributors - a vital element in the overall supply chain of these international publishers.

Some foreign books, which are there in our libraries, lie dormant because of the language difficulties of our students. The surprise is importation of English language textbooks and reference materials are tightly controlled now than ever before. Duty had been levied

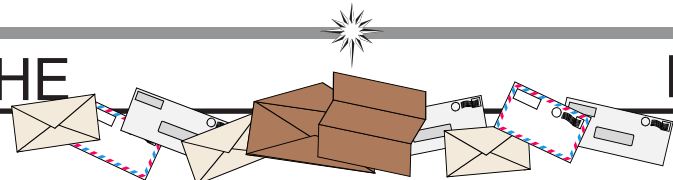
a VAT system in the last year or so defy common sense. Non-tariff measures are also being made unbearable -- the pre-shipment inspection penalty is at an all time high (not to mention that a pre-shipment inspection charge is mandatory). The current tax code classifies academic textbooks, references, and journals as "other books," and that results in an increased tax liability for the book importers or distributors of international publishers. How can the authorities classify academic material as non-academic "other books"? In fact, the provision in the national book policy states that all required

reform but for review of the import/taxation policy in the realm of higher education textbooks and journals.

All the parties to the issue -- the relevant ministries, the distributors of international book publishers, the local publishing industry -- should sit and discuss a way out of this quagmire.

Let us part by looking at some numbers. Import duty is at the rate of 15 percent on so called "other books." Advance income tax is set at 3 percent. Import Development Surcharge is 4 percent. Pre-shipment inspection (PSI) charge is 1 percent. PSI penalty for not doing

TO THE EDITOR 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.

Road crossing and our traffic police

The general people hardly use the overbridges or walkways to cross the roads. Road crossing goes on most frequently at the sweet will of the pedestrians here and there, almost unnoticed by our efficient traffic police leading to fatal accidents and traffic jam. The traffic rules are there only to be ignored by both the public and the traffic police.

In order to put an end to this problem, I would suggest that on the spot penalty be introduced with immediate effect.
Dr. S.M. Rahman
Gulshan-2, Dhaka

After coming home I was astonished to unfold it, because it was not a CD but a video-tape. I wonder if anybody owns a VCR now-a-days.

The very next day I returned the video-tape and asked whether there was any CD of any movie. But the answer was negative.
Ishrat Jahan Mitilata
DU

A suggestion to the ruling party

The cowardly and tragic killing of the late Kibria has shocked everyone, irrespective of party lines as has been observed in the press and even on the floor of the parliament. The government has categorically mentioned that it was in no way involved in the dastardly killing. The government machinery within a short time has completed the inves-

tigation and is in the process of taking help from FBI. We do hope that the real culprits will be brought to justice.

Life moves on and in the process of by-election is set to take place to fill up the parliamentary seat left vacant at the death of the late Kibria. But can the ruling party -- as a mark of respect to the decent politician -- not put up a BNP candidate for the seat? The government has a huge majority in the House and the result of the by-election will in no way affect them. But the gesture will have a great impact particularly in the mind of the saner section of the society. That will be a befitting way to show respect to a personality, who had immense contribution to our liberation as a free country.

No sensible person can condone the way SAMS Kibria was killed. We do not know if it was

done by some ambitious persons to get into his shoes. In a liberal democratic set-up it is not acceptable as the society as a whole has reacted to and protested the killing. Only an investigation can bring the inside story out and for that a thorough investigation by a powerful institution should be in place. The Hon'ble Prime Minister has rightly said the government will investigate and find out the culprits whosoever he is and how powerful he may be.

I hope the government is sincere. We wish the joint investigation all the best. As a nation we have a right to know who master-minded the killing and what was his motive. Let this be the last of such tragic events for the nation.
Khasroo Ibn Shams
Motijheel, Dhaka.

Professionalism too

much to ask for?

Star Cineplex at Bashundhara City Complex claims itself to be one of the best movie theaters, providing services that other movie theaters in Bangladesh do not. Recently, Star Cineplex has taken a very commendable step by screening movies and documentaries based on our Liberation War.

I did not see the war, I was born in '79 and grew up abroad. However, I am always eager to know our history. I have read about "Stop Genocide," a documentary made by one of the greatest movie directors of our country Zahir Raihan and I've been trying to watch this movie for the last few years. So, when I heard that Star Cineplex was screening "Stop Genocide" on the occasion of our Independence Day, I was exhilarated. I even invited two of my friends who are

foreigners.

On March 25, we went to Star Cineplex and at the ticket counter, I specifically asked for tickets for "Stop Genocide." The theater staff behind the ticket counter mentioned that "Stop Genocide" would be followed by a feature film, "Joi Jatra" in the same theater and we don't have to purchase separate tickets to see the feature film. Although, watching "Stop Genocide" was our main objective, we figured it would be nice to see the feature film as well.

At 5:30pm, the show started but "Stop Genocide" was not being screened. Instead, the show started with "Joi Jatra." We were wondering what exactly was happening. After 20 minutes we spotted an usher and asked him why "Stop Genocide" was not being screened. Apparently, he didn't know anything about it either. My

friend and I were irate at this point and didn't feel like sitting at the theater any more, since we were there, primarily to see the documentary. The feature film was just like a bonus to us. We wanted to speak to the management and the person representing the management tried to give us excuses like, the print of "Stop Genocide" was in real bad condition and only one projector was functioning at that point etc. I politely told him that we just didn't get my point or didn't try to understand me. I was not particularly irate because the documentary I was trying to see was not being screened. The frustrating issue here was the total lack of professionalism.

How could they have handled this appropriately, you may ask. Well, for starters, the guy behind the ticket counter could have informed me that "Stop Genocide"

was not going to be screened. The ushers at the theater could have told us about the technical difficulties or whatever problems they were having. But no one seemed to care enough.

I don't care about the fact I purchased three premium tickets and didn't even see the movie. What really tormented me was the level of unprofessional behaviour of the management and staff at Star Cineplex which claims to be this and that but doesn't live up to its claims. My friends, who had never been to any movie theater in Dhaka, were asking me if this was how movie theaters were operated in Bangladesh. I couldn't say anything, what could I? I guess professionalism is still an unfamiliar concept in our country.

Faisal Kamal
On e-mail