

## The grabbers' extended pasture

Save the wetlands now

ILLEGAL occupation of state property has become an invasive phenomenon, so much so that the scowling eagle is not even prepared to spare the wetlands and marshy swaths that benignly ring the city around. They serve both as air-conditioning ducts, as it were, in summer, and as natural drainage channels in the rain-fed months.

But who cares for the city's environmental life-lines? Governance, indeed, is at its poorest there. What has basically triggered this serious note of concern is an expose our paper has done on brick and sand traders filling up a canal and wetland along Dhaka Flood Protection Embankment.

The huge encroachment activity near Rayerbazar Martyred Intellectuals' Monument is set to cause extensive water-logging in the adjoining areas such as Mohammadpur, Basila, Rayerbazar and Dhanmondi.

There has been multi-layered negligence of duty on the part of at least three authorities that one can readily identify. In the first, place it was for the Water Development Board outfit to have detected the illegal filling operation along the flood protection embankment and made attempts to resist it. Failing which, of course, they could report it to the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) whose primary responsibility it is to ensure conservation of wetlands in and around the capital.

This is for the umpteenth time that wetland conservation law is being violated; yet, Rajuk has been a mute spectator to it. Rajuk's failure cannot be explained away in terms of inadequacy of manpower alone; there have been instances of turning a blind eye to such illegal activities as well. Besides, why must the nation suffer through lack of logistical or manpower support for the oversight body when a properly envisioned development project could have catered for its logistical requirement?

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), too, seemed to have a role in it. The city fathers could prevent there cleaners and truck drivers selling garbage to the land grabbers to fill their illegally occupied wetland portions with. But they didn't.

The much-heralded reclamation drive for canals gone derelict through physical encroachments has all but fizzled out, so have been the campaigns to clear the rivers of illegal structures. The lakes, too, have been victims of intrusion. And now, the wetlands are being eyed wistfully on. There must be a unified authority to combat the big business of land expropriation.

## Khilgaon flyover or a criminal den?

A fallout of jurisdictional confusion

WHEN the Khilgaon flyover was built, the local residents had heaved a sigh of relief hoping that the ubiquitous traffic jam in the surrounding area would finally be a thing of the past. But it has turned out to be something of a criminal den at certain hours of the night in the very least, so suggests some of the on-the-spot newspaper reportage. People who have recently used the flyover either complained of being mugged or feeling scared of possible criminal assaults. Not only that, out of sheer fright, car drivers tend to over-speed through the flyover portending accident.

On the other hand, the flyover has also become some sort of a recreation zone for the local people. They throng in hundreds after dark fancying to breathe fresh air and buying goodies hawked extensively around. All this is improper, because a flyover should be used for the purpose it was built. Who is supposed to ensure that traffic rules are obeyed on the flyover? Does anyone care that converging on it in large numbers can cause fatal accidents?

It now seems obvious that there is no police vigil on the highway at any time of the day. The funniest part of the whole scenario is that in the case of any mugging or accident, the local people do not know which police station to go to. It might sound hard to believe, but the fact is that at least three entry and exit points of the flyover have fallen under the jurisdiction of three different police stations. No one knows for sure who is responsible for patrolling which part of the flyover. In an absurd situation like this, the criminals are having a field-day. The authorities should immediately have a designated, preferably unified, police authority to address the security concerns. Alternatively, a police station situated in the closest proximity of the flyover could perhaps be given full charge of maintaining law and order there.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

FOR a week or so, the newspapers have been publishing reports on widespread adulteration of different categories of food. The people of Bangladesh are the victims of food adulteration. But effective measures to check this public health related problem are not in sight. At a rally organised by the Paribesh Bachao Andolon (Save Environment Movement) in Dhaka on June 10, the environmental activists called for an end to the practice of using toxic chemicals in various food items, which is posing a serious health hazard. They expressed concern over mixing toxic substances with all types of fruits in the current fruit season by the unscrupulous traders, and asked the government to take appropriate measures to protect public health.

Food encompasses cereals, starchy tubers, meat and fish, pulses, vegetables, fruits, eggs, milk and milk products, fats and oils, and flavourings and stimulants. According to the Pure Food Ordinance, 1959 "food means any article used as food or drink for human consumption, other than water or drug, and includes ice and aerated water, and any substance which is intended for use in the composition or preparation of food; any flavouring matter or any spice or condiment; and any colouring matter intended for use in food."

"Adulteration" according to Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (1996) means "debasement something or rendering it impure by mixing it with something inferior or harmful." Anyway, food adulteration is the act of adding or mixing something inferior, harmful, useless, and unnecessary substances to food. Adulteration of food and foodstuff is not new in this country. But the problem has aggravated in the recent years at every stage from production to marketing.

Excessive and improper use of pesticide chemicals for the produc-

tion of food in the categories of cereals, starchy tubers, pulses, and vegetables has already invited criticism and challenge. People are concerned about the effects of the pesticide chemicals on human health, wildlife, and the environment. Banglapedia writes that a survey conducted a few years back by the World Health Organisation has revealed that at least half a million people are affected annually due to insecticide poison in the developing countries, about 10,000 deaths occur as a result. Undoubtedly a sizeable portion of this figure falls to the share of Bangladesh.

The problem of food adulteration has, however, reached an alarming

The public health scientists and members of the medical profession have warned that if the alarming situation of food adulteration is not checked, people's health will be at stake, and particularly the country's future generation will suffer from many complicated diseases and in the long run they may get intellectually disabled.

There are laws to ensure supply of safe food and foodstuff for protection and preservation of public health. The Pure Food Ordinance, 1959, is intended to curb and remedy the evil of food adulteration. It is deemed to serve an important role in securing to the citizens a minimum degree of purity in the articles

1966, and the Cantonment Pure Food Rules, 1967, aim at preventing the adulteration of food in cantonments.

The Pesticide Ordinance, 1971, including the amendments of 1980 and 1983 and the rules made thereunder in 1985 aim at regulating the import, manufacture, distribution, sale and use of pesticide chemicals. Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) Ordinance, 1985, and the rules made thereunder, relate to the testing and quality control of certain industrial and commercial products including food and drinks.

Section 25C of the Special Powers Act, 1974, prescribes penalties

Second, food laws mentioned above have become inadequate to cope with the advanced techniques of food adulteration. So, these laws have to be updated keeping in view the prevailing circumstances of adulteration.

Third, as far as it is known, there is no coordinating body in the government to oversee and monitor the enforcement of food laws by different organisations under different ministries.

Fourth, adulteration of food affects people at all strata of the society. But political parties in the country are not normally seen raising their voice for combating food adulteration problem. Further,

side use in favour of integrated pest management, biological controls, and plant breeding for inherent pest resistance.

Chemicals sprayed on fruits and vegetables should be tested in properly equipped laboratories to ascertain the ingredients injurious to human health. An expert committee should closely monitor the results of these tests. Follow up action(s) should be taken on the recommendations of the expert committee.

Food laws have not only to be updated keeping in view the prevailing circumstances of food adulteration, but their strict enforcement has to be ensured.

A high-powered coordinating body in the government may be established to oversee the enforcement of food laws and government policies in this regard.

Political parties should raise their voice, both inside and outside the parliament for combating the food adulteration problem.

The CAB and the civil society leaders have been demanding enactment of an act for protecting the rights of the consumers. It is learnt the draft law is awaiting approval of the cabinet. Since the proposed law will have impact on the rich and the poor, the government may solicit the opinion of the people and the media by disclosing the draft law to the print media.

Public awareness about the hazardous effects of consumption of adulterated food has to be built. The consumers, particularly the rich consumers, should restrain themselves from the buying spree. This will act as a silent resistor to the unscrupulous traders' business.

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stage at marketing level. Hardly any category of food, whether cereal, vegetables, fish or meat, milk or milk products, fruits, pulses, fats and oils, is available in the markets unadulterated.

The areas of concern for the public health scientists, members of medical profession, Consumers' Association of Bangladesh (CAB), and civil society members include: (a) using urea fertilizer and artificial colour for processing rice to make it whiter and colourful; (b) spraying harmful and spurious chemicals on fruits for early ripening, increasing shelf-life, and providing attractive gloss on the skin; (c) colouring vegetables with harmful dyes for giving a look of freshness; (d) using formalin, a chemical used by the medical students to prevent dead bodies from degrading, in fish to make them appear fresh; (e) artificial colouring of pulses; (f) adulterating milk and milk products including sweetmeat; and (g) adulterating aerated water.

of food and thereby protecting and preserving public health. The ordinance, *inter alia*, defines food, explains the circumstances under which an article of food shall be deemed to be adulterated, prohibits manufacture or sale of food not of proper nature, substance or quality, prohibits manufacture or sale of anything similar to or resembling an article of food, prohibits keeping adulterants in places where food is manufactured or sold, prohibits sale of diseased and unwholesome food intended for human consumption, prohibits use of false labels, prohibits false advertisements, and authorises entry into premises and seizure of food believed to be adulterated by an authorised person or inspector. The ordinance also prescribes penalties for contravention of any of its provisions.

The Pure Food Rules, 1967, contains the details for the purpose of carrying out the objectives of the Pure Food Ordinance, 1959.

The Cantonments Pure Food Act,

for adulteration of, or sale of adulterated food, drink, drugs, or cosmetics.

The reasons for widespread adulteration of food and foodstuff in the country may be identified as follows:

First, a number of organisations such as health department, food department, BSTI, city corporations, municipalities, police department, etc. are responsible, severally and collectively, for the enforcement of food laws. But there is a lack of effective coordination among them. There even exists confusion among them regarding certain action(s) to be taken to combat adulteration of food. A report published in The Daily Star of March 13, 2004, regarding the use of formalin in fish showed that top officials of the Ministry of Health, Dhaka City Corporation, Public Health Laboratory, and BSTI pointed fingers at one another, no-one knowing which body should combat the practice of using formalin in fish.

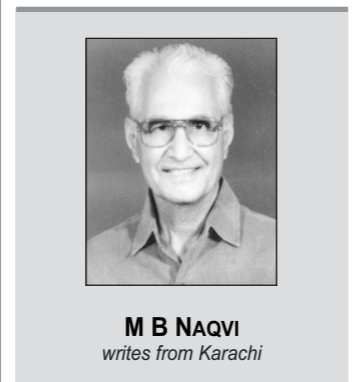
the rules of procedure (ROP) of parliament contain provision for discussing matters of public interest in the House. But hardly any discussion on this matter of general public interest takes place in parliament.

Fifth, the common people of the country are not conscious about the disastrous effects of adulterated food and foodstuff on human health. The traders, both wholesalers and retailers, face no resistance from the relevant government agencies and the people in the operation of their unholy business.

The public health scientists, the agricultural scientists, the CAB and the civil society leaders have come out with their views and suggestions to combat the food adulteration problem in the country. These include:

Since the continued use of chemical pesticides has been a matter of growing public concern for their effects on human health, wildlife, and the environment, steps should be taken to reduce chemical pesti-

# Swirl of diplomacy around North Korea



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

THE US has spent years trying to isolate North Korea. Bush had included it in his Axis of Evil. North Korea in the meantime has pursued a tough policy: It withdrew from NPT and threw out the IAEA inspectors from the country; resumed work on its nuclear programme. It has recently confirmed it possesses a few atomic weapons. It has not attended the six-party Conference -- of North and South Korea, US, Japan, China and Russia -- for over a year. The Conference was to seek ways to force North Korea to give up the Bomb.

North Korea balks at that. Western experts think it has one or two nukes. Their use is clearly to deter aggression. Whether a few nukes will do so is debatable. However, a certain amount of deterrence does attach to atomic weapons. If extrapolated, the Indo-Pakistan experience of 2002 crisis would suggest the nukes are useless.

How and when can North Korea rationally use its weapon(s)? Either in anticipation of an American-led invasion or during a conventional war when things look bleak to Pyongyang. Supposing, choosing a target poses no problem to North

Koreans, what happens after Pyongyang has spent its atomic arsenal? Would not the US take out all major towns in North Korea in retaliation, if not preemptively? All concerned will then have ample time to ponder over the point of it all.

The idea of using nuclear or other Weapons of Mass Destruction to strengthen national security is jejune. These weapons cannot be used in real life, especially between the US and a third world country. Riposte in kind makes the use of any

North Korea has amply indicated that it would give up the nuclear option if (a) its security was guaranteed by the US; and (b) the US should reinstate something like the early 1990s' arrangements of fuel and food supplies. But a new factor is that it may be unwilling to give up its nukes programme.

Point is North Koreans have deliberately defied the US and are standing firm, ready to fight if necessary. This self-confidence arises from the fact that they are not

the US, are not involved. The only powers friendly to North Korea are China and Russia -- for strategic reasons. Out of the pro-American bloc, South Korea has sometimes acted almost like China. Still the South remains one of America's reliable friends and is fully meshed with the American defensive systems, although its public opinion is solidly for unification with the North and is wary of America.

It may be an aside, but no overview of Asia can fail to take account

the US or those the US permits? It looks ridiculous to North Koreans that the possessors of world's largest arsenal of nuclear WMDs should show such repugnance to these WMDs in non-friendly states. The WMDs are good for US to have but bad in the hands of North Koreans.

Americans have many and varied purposes, of course. They accept Israel's right to have a big nuclear arsenal. They want no other ME

That is one side: The other is the American aim of containing the rising power of China. The US has seized upon the supposition of China's continued aggressive hostility toward Taiwan. It is therefore strengthening what is in intent an anti-Chinese alliance with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia and any SE Asian states that may sign up.

Third, the US wants to control oil and other strategic raw material from the source to processing facilities including through American MNCs. Former Soviet Central Asian republics are already being integrated into this new imperial system. Who, except those who love the new US power system, can countenance promoting US foreign policy?

It is hard geo-strategic designs of control and hegemony that drive the US foreign policy. The ultimate American aim is not old-style land grab or cornering of spheres of influence to sell home-produced goods. It is worldwide control to enable large American corporations to make investments -- and profits -- in mega projects of key raw material, infrastructure, transportation and modernisation of the armed forces. America's military power and its political influence now seek to keep all its private capital -- clearly surplus to purely American needs -- profitable. Only those who are smaller shareholders or camp followers can support the larger American purposes.

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PLAIN WORDS  
North Koreans ask simple questions. Do the Americans have God's mandate to ensure that nobody can fabricate atomic weapons except the US or those the US permits? It looks ridiculous to North Koreans that the possessors of world's largest arsenal of nuclear WMDs should show such repugnance to these WMDs in non-friendly states. The WMDs are good for US to have but bad in the hands of North Koreans.

WMDs unthinkable and pointless for all.

For now, US has shown some flexibility, on Chinese advice, by reiterating directly to North Korea that it recognises its sovereignty and will not invade it. It remains uncertain whether Pyongyang will return to the Six-Nation Conference as a result. Instead, it insists on proper bilateral negotiations with US. An earlier report had suggested that North Korea wanted China to arrange a visit by US Secretary of State to North Korea. The report was denied. However, that does not signify: it is a long-standing North Korean demand presumably have a treaty with America, guaranteeing its security; for it, the six-party Conference is pointless.

Some facts remain relevant. Commitment was also made to establish strict control of any efforts for abuse of influence. It is never too late to take steps to publish, as promised, the accounts of wealth of the Prime Minister, Ministers and all individuals of equivalent status including people's representatives. It would in fact add tremendously to the Prime Minister's and her Government's credibility.

pushover. The Americans couldn't have forgotten the 1950s War with North Korea. They would not be in a hurry to fight it again. This is basis enough for a deal between North Korea and US, with South Korea, Japan and Australia allies also signing the parchment. The format for talks is not significant, while preserving peace is.

North Koreans naturally keep a wary eye on what is happening around the Korean peninsula. The South Koreans certainly have a relatively softer policy towards its Northern neighbour. The line up over North Korea is like this: on one side is the America-led alignment comprising South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Australia and may be Indonesia later. In this line up the Indians, the new strategic partners of

of what India is going to do. It is as yet a largely non-aligned nation, though the US is wooing it strenuously and has promised to help it become a global Major Power. Already Indian and American Navies are jointly patrolling Far Eastern waters and in Proliferation Security Initiative. The question is: would India continue its traditional non-alignment in Asia on substantive matters or its new found love for America will become the fulcrum of new policies. Anyway, for America's Asian policy, the question of India's final choice would be a matter of great interest, and also to North Korea, China and Russia.

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state to acquire it. The world has noticed the aggressive conduct of Israel; it never tires of invoking the Holocaust and centuries of racial oppression on Jews. Yes, they were wronged by Europeans and even Americans, not Arabs or Muslims. In Muslim kingdoms, they used to prosper. But look at what are the Israelis doing to Palestinians. Are they not actually visiting race-based oppression on Palestinian Arabs? Why should, by agreeing to American demands, Iran and North Korea contribute to the promotion of America's objectives?

Central US objective in Asia is establishing a new imperial system that will extend over much of Eurasia -- may be eventually displacing the Russian control over many of its ethnically distinct regional units.

## OPINION

# Hon'ble Prime Minister, you can do it

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN

By asking the State Minister for Energy to resign, the Hon'ble Prime Minister has provided excellent evidence that commitment and will at the highest political level is the key to fighting corruption. We commend her decision.

However, the resignation cannot be viewed as an end in itself. It must be followed up by investigating deep into the case and bringing to justice the guilty. Otherwise it would turn out to be more of symbolism than anything else.

The resignation (or virtual sacking?), perhaps the first of its kind in Bangladesh, has also created an excellent opportunity

to inform the public what has been going on in the energy as well as many other sectors. If other resignations were due, it is not too late.

The Prime Minister has also created an opportunity for herself and her colleagues in the Government to look back at what their party promised when they sought the mandate of the people. They pledged through their election manifesto to establish a "corruption-free prosperous Bangladesh", and promised a number of high priority specific actions for uprooting corruption. Now that the Prime Minister has given us one example, she can deliver other commitments, only if she wants.

We don't see any reason why the appointment of Ombudsman

If the concern is genuine, we would appeal for a dispassionate answer to the key question as to who is responsible for this national embarrassment. We believe that the Government has the power and means to bring to justice those who are abusing entrusted power for personal or group interests, and imposing this humiliation to the country and the vast majority of the people who have nothing to do with it except being the victims of all its negative implications.

has not yet taken place. We do believe that if the Government wanted, conditions could be created where the Anti-corruption Commission set up in response to the public demand could function independently and effectively. The Prime Minister has the capacity to deliver on the promise her party made to establish transparency and accountability in public procurement.

Commitment was also made to establish strict control of any efforts for abuse of influence. It is never too late to take steps to publish, as promised, the accounts of wealth of the Prime Minister, Ministers and all individuals of equivalent status including people's representatives. It would in fact add tremendously to the Prime Minister's and her Government's credibility.

Now is also an opportunity to send another strong signal by preventing the approval of the budget proposal to whiten the black money, which is a pure and simple recipe for institutionalization of corruption. People want this proposal to be rejected outright. Failure to do so will not only reward those who are involved in corruption, but also encourage them to do more of it,

while at the same time it would also expand the network and power-base of corruption encompassing greater and greater number of people in this menacing disease. It will also provide clear evidence that there is a lack of political will at the highest levels to fight corruption. We are sure that the Prime Minister doesn't want this for the sake of the people of this country, and for our

international image about which, as far as media reports go, she and her colleagues in the Cabinet are quite disturbed - for good reasons.

If the concern is genuine, we would appeal for a dispassionate answer to the key question as to who is responsible for this national embarrassment. We believe that the Government has the power and means to bring to justice those who are abusing entrusted power for personal or group interests, and imposing this humiliation to the country and the vast majority of the people who have nothing to do with it except being the victims of all its negative implications. Otherwise, there would be reasons to believe that

the network of corruption resides within the Government, or may have even stronger support base.

Finally, we appeal to the Prime Minister to move ahead and demonstrate the political will to take the challenge on. She has already indicated that it can be done. Specific follow up actions are now needed to fulfill commitments made so that corruption can be reduced to the extent that she would be commended for generations. If not now, the challenges will become more daunting tomorrow, for which the next generation would never forgive us.

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