

ACC still in a limbo

Govt indifference speaks volumes

Since its inception last November the ACC has made regrettably little progress, leading to the inescapable suspicion that, fine words to the contrary, the government is not at all serious about tackling corruption. The government has delayed and dragged its feet since the commission was formed, and the commission to this day lacks even the most basic tools that it needs to perform its watchdog function.

It has been reported that 5,050 cases that had been filed by the now defunct BAC are still sitting in limbo. Part of the problem is that it is unclear to what extent the ACC has authority to continue with these cases, and in any event it does not have the personnel to do so since the BAC prosecutors have apparently been instructed not to involve themselves with the ACC.

Almost ten months after inception, the ACC still lacks an organogram. Under the relevant act, both are the responsibility of the government, and the government's marked lack of urgency and indifference to finalising these seems to be a clear sign of the low priority placed on the matter by it.

The ACC has even put together a draft organogram and sent it to the establishment ministry for review. The draft has since been returned to the ACC for being incomplete, but the point is that it was the ministry's duty, not the commission's, to draft the document in the first place.

The ACC has been able to take one or two isolated actions here and there, but the evident lack of necessary government input has a major stumbling block to its effectiveness. It is clear that the ACC will continue to be ineffectual until the government gives it the support that it needs, and it is equally clear that now the commission has been formed that the government has zero interest in making it functional.

The whole point of the ACC was to make it independent, in contrast to the BAC. But if the first ten months of its existence are anything to go by, it is a fair question to ask in what way the commission can be considered independent and whether the government actually has any intention of letting it so operate.

Playing foul with the patient's diet!

Bring the responsible to book

THE DCC mobile court's latest finding is appalling, to say the least. Patients at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, the country's premier hospital, are getting rotten bananas and eggs along with adulterated milk and stale rice as their food. That's totally unacceptable.

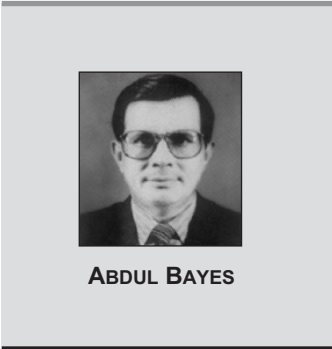
This is a kind of situation that cannot be explained away in terms of fund constraints. Whether the food allowance is sufficient or not isn't the issue here -- several patients might be actually paying for their diet -- what's pertinent is the lack of honesty in the service. A nexus between the buyers and suppliers has created a situation in which all the rotten stuff is being passed off as food for the patient. It is in fact a clear case of theft leading to the patients being deprived of good diet.

The dishonest elements are committing a crime whose culpability is hard to countenance. Supplying substandard food is in itself an offence, and it becomes doubly so when patients are made to ingest it. Rotten and adulterated foods can cause enough harm to people in a sound state of health, so it hardly needs any elaboration what they can do to ailing people. In fact, cure and convalescence of patients depend to a great extent on hygienic and nutritious foods.

The DMCH management cannot avoid the responsibility of what is going on inside the hospital. It has to ensure health and hygiene standards. To tell the truth, the findings of the mobile court must not have come as a big surprise to the management itself. All they need to do now is to act.

The DMCH is our number one public sector medicare provider. If hygiene standards are flouted so brazenly in this hospital, we shudder to think what is the situation in other public hospitals. The health ministry should perhaps intervene to get a move on in this area.

New deal from New Delhi



I HAD the opportunity of hearing from Dr Manmohan Singh, the Indian Prime Minister (PM), while inaugurating the New Delhi office of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). In fact, every PM's submissions are substantial as far as those reflect the views of the government (and most prominently the achievements). But Dr Singh's speech on that occasion -- and it is purely my personal point of view -- went far beyond the boundary of rhetoric to reach realities on the ground. To me, it spanned from academics to politics and to people. Allow me to draw upon some of his seminal remarks. Clarion calls"I do not claim to have any expert knowledge of the subjects of this area...But public office, I regard, is private education at public expenses. Therefore, my long association with public life, has given me some insights, which I thought, I would use this opportunity to share with you" -- said the PM at the very outset. He then informed the participants that, every morning he receives a large number of telephone calls and, specifically just before arriving at the occasion, he got three such phone calls. The PM is of the view

that all three phone calls go to sum up the top priorities faced by India and also South Asian countries as a whole in their quest for a life of dignity and self-respect for people. One child asked Manmohan that morning, "What are you doing to save our tigers?" This speaks of the need for a development strategy which is economically efficient and environmentally enduring. The second call came from a

the world who are groaning under grievous poverty but, nevertheless, grappling with growth. The PM expressed his hope that in the months and years to come, IFPRI's efforts would be brought to throw light on these formidable challenges that all countries in South Asia face in their search for a democratic and more just social and economic order.

of a "Second Green Revolution". "Our government will be launching a National Horticulture Mission that is aimed, in part, at stimulating this "second Green Revolution", in a range of "new crops and commodities". The puzzles Foodgrains demand in India has been dwindling in recent years, despite stability in food prices and persistence of low nutritional

merely focus on 'outlays'. The effectiveness of spending must improve both in terms of administrative efficiency and the impact on target groups. We cannot allow a situation to persist in this country where food surpluses and accumulating food stocks co-exist with starvation, deaths and persistent malnutrition. The real challenge is one of delivery and of reforming administrative system..... There is much that

globalisation and the liberalisation of trade impinge upon our traditional knowledge? "It is easy to talk about rationality of open markets, but one must be alive to the rationality of social practices. Agriculture is just not a business in our country, for millions of Indians it still remains a way of life. How can we preserve the cherished way of life of so many, and yet be a part of the emerging process of globalization?"

Necessity vs luxury These are the chiming challenges that the politicians of this region regularly face. Researches are a necessity and must always be alive to them. The economists' assumption of 'ceteris paribus' is not a luxury available to politicians. In the real world, other things rarely remain the same as changes are pushed for. The erstwhile publicly funded researches and investments in rural infrastructure should pave ways for private sector participation. The public-private participation in agricultural researches and investments are areas to be explored in years to come. Boarded on the plane, I reckoned that the "New Deal" from New Delhi should provide sufficient food for thoughts for all governments of the regions. Agricultural sector must get due attention to keep us on an even keel. That implies, inter alia, small and marginal firms should survive with new technology, credit and infrastructure.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Dr Manmohan Singh emphasised his government's commitment to the launching of a "Second Green Revolution". "The New Deal" aimed at ensuring food and nutritional security of the people, would augment farm incomes and employment. The "New Deal," from New Delhi should provide sufficient food for thoughts for all governments of the regions. Agricultural sector must get due attention to keep us on an even keel. That implies, inter alia, small and marginal firms should survive with new technology, credit and infrastructure.

young man who said, "What about employment?" Generation of employment opportunities for the youth tend to remain as a challenge. In Bangladesh and India as elsewhere, the lack of opportunities for work has contributed to many socio-economic and political ills. The third telephone call to the PM related to bio-safety. According to him, "we have immense possibility of bio-technology -- both in areas of health and areas of agricultural development, a new beginning can be made, but there are also risks, there are question marks. There are worries about the side-effects of the new biotechnologies".

There is, perhaps, little doubt that the three phone calls that the Hon'ble PM of India received that morning point to the emerging priorities of the nations in this part of

New deal Dr Manmohan Singh then emphasised his government's commitment to the launching of a "Second Green Revolution". "The New Deal," aimed at ensuring food and nutritional security of the people, would augment farm incomes and employment. He referred to the new challenge that governments have to deal with in formulating policy with regard to the food economy, which is the emergence of the private sector, both in research and infrastructure. What does this "New Deal" entail? It is intended to reverse the decline in investment in agriculture. It means stepping up investment in agriculture including research. That happens to be one of the key areas of interventions. An important dimension of this "New Deal" is aimed at ensuring food and nutritional security of the people, while at the same time, augmenting farm income and employment will be the launching

standards among the poor. However, statistical evidences does not point to deterioration in the health indicators, rather, there is an improvement in human development indicators pertaining to health status of people.

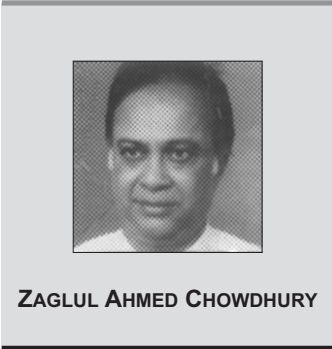
The second puzzle purports that consumption of more expensive cereals has gone up even among poorer households, while the demand for so-called "inferior cereals" has stagnated. What are the health and nutritional implications of this food preference in the long run? "We need a better monitoring of food availability and food access situation in the country and in South Asia as a whole".

Outcomes and outlays To the PM of India at the moment, the real challenge lies in implementation and in delivery of services. "Our government would like to emphasize 'outcomes' and not

local governments can do to address this challenge. They must be more actively engaged in monitoring both availability and access to food at the local level and play an active role in improving the food security of the people".

Liberalisation and realisation The newly emerging global dimension of the local and national level food and livelihood systems need a close care. How can national governments deal with the challenges of food and nutritional security in a globalised market? What challenges are posed by globalised markets to the food security of the poor people? How to take globalisation as a win-win game? Both opportunities and risks loom large on the horizon. More importantly, in what way

Kadrigamar's killing embroils Sri Lanka in new crisis



THE assassination of Sri Lankan foreign minister Laxman Kadrigamar has come as a bolt from the blue for the island state, which is already embroiled in the twin problem of civil war caused by long drawn Tamil militancy and spectre of a political instability because of the minority character of the present government headed by prime minister Mahindra Rajapakse. Kadrigamar a close political and personal friend of president Chandrika Kumaratunga, was regarded as the most respected and important figure in the ruling circles probably only after the president and his killing has brought the country almost on the brink of a turmoil. The gravity of the development has been so severe that a state of emergency has been declared and troops and security forces are combing the capital and elsewhere for two suspected gunmen, when he shot the foreign minister who had just completed swimming in his home compound at night Friday. The killing has once again brought the small but relatively economically and socially advanced nation in the South Asian region in the headlines of global news. The assassination of Kadrigamar will have manifold repercussion both within and outside Sri Lanka for the reason that he was inextricably linked with

the current turbulent phase of history of the country.

The violent death of the foreign minister came at a time when a confused and complex scenario existed about both the civil war and future of the government. Recently, a hope had emerged for a better time both for a settlement of the bloody conflict over Tamil issue and reconciliation of the government with the opposition. The government of president Chandrika Kumaratunga had succeeded in reaching an agree-

with the rebels and this has reduced the government into minority. The situation prompted the opposition to demand midterm polls and political instability was stalking the island state. Both these came as contrary to expected healthy developments. Then occurred the murder of the foreign minister, who was known as a hardliner on the issue of Tamil militancy. The suspicion of the killing has been raised evidently on the Tamil rebels. This means whatever narrowing down of the differ-

since been hanging in the balance. Kadrigamar, who was also foreign minister from 1996-2001 in the previous Freedom party-led coalition, again became minister with the same portfolio when the coalition was back to power last year following midterm polls. He held strong views against the Tamil militancy although favoured continuing of the peace process without much concessions.

Six rounds of talks between the government and the Tamil Tigers during Ranil's time raised hopes for

ities involved in the issue, the dialogue gave hopes since both sides made significant concessions. The government conceded to some demands of Tigers while the later abandoned their main position -- an independent state for the Tamils -- and agreed for autonomy. The road to peace through negotiations is undoubtedly bumpy but what was remarkably encouraging was the marked willingness to find common ground towards a permanent settlement of the problem. Notwithstanding

politician was seen as "traitor" by the militants. He was clearly on the high list of "targets" and this is borne out by the fact that he was being guarded by more than 100 elite forces. Still, the laxity in the security cost his life.

Kadrigamar's killing will definitely exacerbate the government-rebel differences although the militants denied their involvement in the murder. But their late denial after initial silence may be difficult for the government to swallow. President Chandrika, visibly shocked and badly loser by the death of one of her closest aides, has blamed "political enemies" without directly blaming the rebels. The connotation may broadly include political opponents as well or even others. However, the main suspects are obviously the Tamil militants. The development has raised fears of resuming hostilities between the two sides. However, president Chandrika's observation that she wants to carry on the peace process despite this killing may not result in immediate increase in acrimonies. The killing may spawn new equations within the ruling coalition. The government's former ally communist JVP favoured Kadrigamar as prime minister for his status and tough attitude towards the Tamils. The death may also affect international involvement in the peace process like that of the Norwegian government, which mainly brokered the peace initiatives.

Laxman Kadrigamar was a respected figure in international arena and South Asia in particular. His commitments to the SAARC and South Asian fraternity is wellknown during his two stints as foreign minister. It is not only the Sri Lanka but the region will miss him as well.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

Kadrigamar's killing will definitely exacerbate the government-rebel differences although the militants denied their involvement in the murder. Laxman Kadrigamar was a respected figure in international arena and South Asia in particular. His commitments to the SAARC and South Asian fraternity is wellknown during his two stints as foreign minister. It is not only the Sri Lanka but the region will miss him as well.

ment with the Tamil rebels for relief operations caused by the "Tsunami" and thereby raised hopes for restoration of the stalled peace dialogue between the two sides. The opposition led by former premier Ranil Wickramasinghe pledged to support the deal on the relief works and in the process the differences between the government and opposition had also somewhat narrowed down. But the brighter conditions turned otherwise rather unexpectedly. The supreme court has struck down the government-Tamil accord on disaster management, calling it "illegal" and also questioned the sources of huge funds of billions of dollars from international community and this dealt a serious blow to the government-rebel understanding.

At the same time a key ally of the ruling coalition -- communist JVP -- has withdrawn support from the government protesting the deal

ences between the government and the rebels had occurred over the "Tsunami" relief operations -- the verdict of the supreme court notwithstanding -- may now go back to square one or even further worse. The killing of Kadrigamar, who was also seen as a likely prime minister in some quarters in the ruling coalition, may also result in new political polarisation.

The peace talks are stalemated for long and took a beating following exit from power of former prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, whose government had initiated the dialogue with the rebels but was dismissed by president Chandrika evidently for the former's being "soft" to the Tamil militants. The elections that followed brought Chandrika's supporters in power under a new prime minister Mahindra Rajapakse and chances of a settlement of two-decade old civil war through discussions have

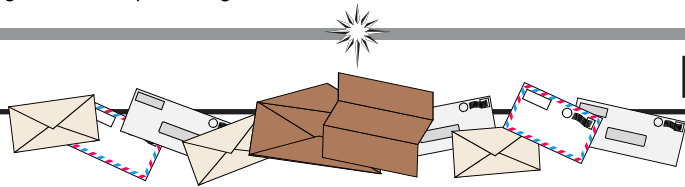
a negotiated settlement of the contentious civil war in the country, which was virtually bleeding to white because of the long drawn conflict centering minority Tamil's armed struggle for a separate homeland in the north of the country. There was no decisive outcome of the civil war as the success in the battlefield swung from one side to the other and occasional cease fire produced no tangible results and hostilities resumed in quick time. However, situation marked a qualitative change when the government of prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe took an active pro-peace policy with the rebels over three years ago, which facilitated a dialogue that went for several rounds in different venues abroad making some progress in the vexed problem.

While it will be height to folly of expect easy resolution of the Sri Lankan civil war given the complex-

differences on some key areas, both sides demonstrated commendable attitude in carrying forward the parleys. Admittedly, talks occasionally went into rough weather and even at one stage had been suspended indefinitely but both sides never spoke of chances of resuming hostilities. The deal on "Tsunami" relief operations brought them little closer, but serious differences between two sides persisted.

Laxman Kadrigamar was an influential figure in the government both as a politician and foreign minister. He was playing a key role in matters with Tamil militants since international community was also involved in the process. The foreign minister earned wrath of the rebels as he succeeded in getting the rebels black listed with several foreign governments and agencies. Besides being a Tamil himself, the oxford-educated lawyer turned

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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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.

An anonymous Tagore?

A few days ago while reading the newspaper a name on one of the headlines caught my attention-- the inside story was about a man who claimed himself a controversial speaker before delivering a speech in a discussion meeting on Plassey Day. In that meeting he said that we are an independent Muslim country but our national anthem is written by an anonymous Rabindranath Tagore!

In Bangladesh it's a very common phenomenon that the political leaders always use the religious belief of the general people as their election weapon. Islam is a great religion and the term 'Islam' literally means

peace. But in our country we often find that some people in the name of Islam are doing certain things to serve their own purposes, which are not and never supported

by Islam. In these cases the bigots always use the religious emotion of the common masses, most of who are ignorant of the basic tenets of Islam.

It's a historical fact that in 1947 India and Pakistan were divided on the basis of religious majority. But after that in 1971 the emergence of the new country, Bangladesh, was on the basis of Bengali Nationalism which was an ultimate consequence of the great Language Movement of 1952. The people of this new country have two identities-- one is Muslim and the other is Bengali. Mixture of these two identities has given birth to Bangladeshi Nationalism for which we find an amalgam of Bengali culture and Islamic heritage in our everyday way of living. So along with our identity as Muslims it is impossible to deny our linguistic and geographic identity.

Kamrul Hasan
Dhaka

Mr. Tancredo's solution

How do you define extremism? Republican Congressman Tom Tancredo of Colorado said that if a terrorist attack were to occur in the US by Muslim extremists, then the US response should be to bomb Mecca. Okay, let us get this straight: Does that mean if an Irish Catholic radical group goes off the deep end and hurts Americans, then the US should level the Vatican?

Yes, we think Mr. Tancredo was suggesting exactly that. Does Mr. Tancredo's country want to punish a small group of extremists by doing something so off-the-wall extreme that it would horribly kill millions of innocent people?

Is this the thinking ability of a US Congressman? I guess he needs some sort of training as a

politician. If training doesn't work, he should receive medical treatment.

Ihtikaf
Dhaka

Azan in TV advertisement

A TV advertisement on ATN is composed with Holy Azan of Muslim religion, which is totally against the norm of advertising. I urge the higher authorities of the company to investigate the matter and withdraw the advertisement from ATN, Canada, or recompose the background music of the advertisement excluding Azan from it. According to Muslim religious practice, Azan cannot be mixed with music due to its purity and supreme value, neither can it be used as a commodity of commercial value such as advertising. I strongly protest this act of

payless2india (www.payless2india.com) advertising team and urge its higher authorities to investigate the matter.

Mohammad S Jamal
Canada

Why more DC-10s?

Biman management seems to have opted for petty and short-term interests again. Numerous troubles with the vintage DC-10s, and even a recent bad landing (resulting in the loss of the aircraft) did not change the way this airline operates. Th aviation minister, who has claimed to be losing sleep over the 25 year old airframes, have somehow again gave his blessings for acquiring two more of the same. Biman's decision making methodology thus should be scrutinized by the government.

DC-10s were very popular with airlines all over the world and have served their worth. But it is a very old design and

cannot compete with the 777s and the A330/A340s anymore in this age. The newer airplanes are much safer and carry more people and cargo while consuming less fuel. Also, Biman's DC-10s have a history of maintenance problems and breakdowns in foreign airports and maintaining an old airframe like the DC-10s also requires a lot of time and money, which can be better spent on newer acquisitions.

This is not the first time Biman has taken such baffling decisions. Just a few years ago, it acquired two old F-28s from Indonesia, which turned out very costly in terms of purchase price and subsequent operational difficulties. Before that, Biman leased two B-737s for short periods even though it had no previous experience of operating that type. Time and

again, Biman has taken these decisions over allegations of fiscal mismanagement and trade kickbacks from agents of foreign aircraft operators.

Biman has already selected the Boeing 777 and Airbus A330-200 as part of its future fleet improvements. The finance minister has already given his approval for acquiring four (instead of the ten Biman was asking for) and that process should be completed on a fast track. If at all Biman needs to acquire more aircraft on an urgent basis (in order to maintain schedule), it should have leased two aircrafts of the newer types (777s or A330s) that would have provided better service for the money. And they would also help Biman train and prepare for the arrival of the new aircrafts in the near future.

Shafqat
Seattle, USA

DESA grilled over graft

The above refers to a news item which appeared in DS on August 11,

2005. Much has been written in the past concerning corruption in DESA, and each time the question is raised on the above the authorities including the minister himself assured that they had initiated necessary steps to contain corruption and alleviate systems loss. However, no steps have so far been proved to be effective to contain the above, rather all their efforts are going in the opposite direction unabatedly.

I think it is about time that the government does something constructive to get rid of this perennial problem. In this respect the government should immediately issue licence to private entrepreneurs to establish power plants in different areas who will generate electricity or buy electricity from PDB, in order to curb the monopoly enjoyed by DESA.

Humayun Hyder
Zigatola, Dhaka.