

Food adulteration bill

Good first step, more needed

THE media has been relentless in its drive to cleanse the market of adulterated food products and outspoken in its exhortations to the government to take stern action to address the problem. We thus applaud the tough new bill against food adulteration that has been tabled in parliament, and sincerely hope that this is only the first in a series of reforms.

The bill itself is a good one that *inter alia* stiffens the penalties for manufacturing and selling adulterated foods. Clearly, this is a step forward, because one of the problems had been that the previous punishments were not strict enough to have sufficient deterrence value. We hope that the more stringent punishment set forth in the new bill will help persuade would-be adulterators to clean up their act.

Of course, the new bill should only be the first of many steps, and we urge the government to continue on this path and not drop the ball at this stage. The amendment of the Pure Food Ordinance that has been tabled should be only one part of a comprehensive effort to clean up the industry and services and help make life healthier and safer for the general public.

What is needed basically is a thorough revamping of the inspection and monitoring apparatus. The primary regulatory bodies, the BSTI and local bodies such as the DCC, must be fully staffed and funded so that they can ensure that the proposed act is fully implemented. There is no use in fixing stiff sentences if the mechanism to detect and apprehend violators does not exist.

The government should think about drafting a consumer protection law to go with the amendment to the Pure Food Ordinance, as well as setting up regulatory bodies and agencies that are devoted full time to the issue.

The food industry has taken a real hit due to the revelations of contamination and adulteration, and hopefully, the government actions will not only keep us safe, but also restore people's confidence in the sector, thereby helping to revive it.

The fact that the government is focusing on the problem is to be welcomed, but it is important to ensure that this level of pressure is kept up until thorough-going reform of the entire industry is accomplished.

An ignoble trade

Get rid of it, aggressively

A number of patients seeking treatment at the Pangu Hospital in the city are walking into the trap laid by brokers who take them to private hospitals of dubious quality, where they do not get the right kind of treatment and have to pay through their noses.

The orthopaedic hospital caters to the needs of accident victims, many of whom need emergency operation. But the facilities available at the hospital, which has only 10 operation theatres, are inadequate. And brokers are exploiting the situation by setting up their business of luring patients away. The victims are not left with much choice when they are in desperate need of surgical intervention. But the brokers could not perhaps run such a business without developing a nexus with insiders. There is no doubt that some of the hospital staff also get their share of the money pocketed from the patients and their relatives by the brokers. It is yet another example of how the gullible are being fleeced in a government-run hospital.

It is basically a reflection of poor management that such rackets can operate under the very nose of authorities. We want the hospital management to go into the whole affair and take punitive action against the recalcitrant among the employees. They have to dismantle the whole network and order the unwanted elements out of the hospital premises.

Patients and their relatives may be facing a more or less similar situation in many other public hospitals in the country. Most of them fail to cope with the heavy rush of patients due to a host of reasons, ranging from lack of facilities and equipment to shortage of doctors, so middlemen can have a field-day. These people are not only causing harm to patients, but are also turning the hospitals into a hot-bed of undesirable activity. The health authorities should reassess the situation as the number of people seeking emergency medical attention has increased sharply. We do need expansion of hospital equipment base and space, but unless we have freed the facilities of people who trade in human miseries, all that a physical increase in the infrastructure will mean is stepped up patient exploitation.

Whither UN reform?



THE agreed draft package of reforms for the historic UN World Summit slated for September 14-16 and endorsed by 32 core states appears nothing more than an apology for the word 'reform.' Reportedly, what the several weeks of bitter wrangling at the UN have been able to produce is a draft that addresses only the anti-poverty goals, the other six major areas of reform have either been diluted or omitted totally.

Some commentators had painted a gloomy picture, giving very little chance of success of institutionalising what they termed as a highly ambitious package of UN reforms. Their prediction that the "largest gathering of world leaders in history at a three-day United Nations summit in New York this week is headed for colossal failure" has perhaps come true.

One can't blame those that see the UN as all but moribund, if not already dead. This feeling stems perhaps from a desire to see the world body to have delivered rather better than what it has been allowed to in the sixty years of its rather chequered existence. The

rather heavy reform agenda was termed a non-starter by many observers, not because it was per se not implementable, but because there was lack of consensus among the member states, both on the substance as well as the spirit of the reform proposals. It only shows how divided the world continues to be and how a parochial slant is given to issues that ought to be viewed globally.

The need for recasting the UN

If the UN Secretary General has been singled out, as the CEO of the world body, for his failure to exercise stricter control over his agencies, the Security Council, in particular the United States, cannot shirk its responsibility in letting this happen, which it has done by conveniently turning a blind eye while shortcuts and subterfuges were being resorted to for almost ten years to make a quick buck out of the oil-for-food program.

not allowed to intervene timely, or because it was not capable of doing so, that compels one to think seriously about reforming the UN. More so, since the mutual deterrence has vanished with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the Soviet empire, the prospect of the UN fiat running the world order, being overtaken by the dictates of the realists, unilateralists, and the neo-cons of the powerful states, as was the case following the end of the Cold

Goals with a lofty aim of halving world poverty by 2015 suffered a setback when the UNSG failed to get the commitment of the richest country in the world to provide 0.7 percent of their national GDP as foreign aid. There may be some merit in Washington's argument against relating 0.7 percent to foreign aid in that it wants more free enterprise and a more enabling environment for sustained development, but there is no way that poverty alleviation by

only implied the heads of states to arrive at an acceptable definition of the phenomenon, he had gone so far as to call for formulating a "a good definition of terrorism that we can all live with." One wonders whether it would be at all possible. Demand from the Arab countries for an exception to Kofi Annan's proposed definition of terrorism as any violence perpetrated by non-state actors targeting civilians for political reasons stemmed from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the Palestinians use terrorism as a tactic to resist Israeli occupation.

The only person to have been pleased with the outcome of the negotiation appears to be the US Ambassador to the UN. No wonder the "recess appointee" John Bolton had introduced as many as 750 late amendments that many see as an effort to effectively shelve the reform idea for a long time, if not for good.

The UN was far from perfect and still remains so. Reform to keep up with the changing world dynamics is a sine qua non for it to be effective. Some feel that there can be no meaningful changes without taking into account the US agenda. And without US 'consent' UN reform is well high impossible. Such an eventuality carries risk of the world organisation becoming a handmaiden of some national governments to serve their strategic interest. That would be an entirely unacceptable proposition.

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The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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internally to make it more cost effective (its bureaucracy is amongst the largest and perhaps the costliest in the world) has been felt since long. The damning indictment of the world body, delivered by the Volker Report, demanded that changes in the way the UN is run should be brought about without delay. But, while the oil-for-food program scandal has demonstrated that it is not only the third world governments that lack transparency and probity, management reform was not the only issue that the UN member states were seized with. Some of the developing countries are in very good company when it comes to sloppy oversight, dual control of humanitarian programs, shirking of responsibility, mismanagement and corruption.

If the UN was a natural corollary to a failed international body that the League of Nations was, in that the League was unable to prevent what it was designed to, no such fault can be attributed to the UN. But if our planet has been spared the spectre of a world war in the sixty years of UN existence, it is more due mainly to the mutual deterrence imposed on each other by the two superpowers than the diplomatic skills of the UN or its conflict preventive mechanism. But a damaging consequence of the superpower rivalry has been the conflicts between their surrogates, indulged in to spread and maintain respective spheres of influence.

It was the failure of the UN in preventing these wars among other things, either because it was

War, and done more abrasively since the start of the so-called war on terror, appears to be a fait accompli.

Of the seven major areas of reform, the expansion of the Security Council was the centrepiece. The three options of the Secretary General are all but on the backburner, for the time being at least, fallen through because of regional rivalries on one side and the reluctance of the US to accord the right to veto to any new members on the other. Without equal powers to the new members or doing away with the veto powers altogether, gradually, as suggested by some, the Security Council would have been a body of equals with some more equal than others.

The Millennium Development

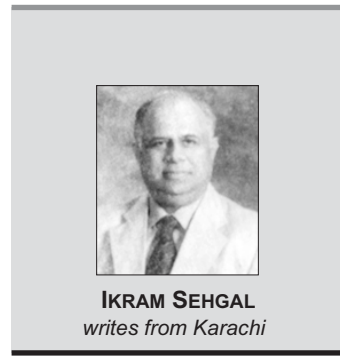
2015 is possible without US contribution.

Another reform, nipped in the bud by the US, not surprisingly, was to make the Security Council the sole authority to authorise the use of force beyond one's own territory. A redeeming feature though has been to get the big powers to commit in principle to militarily intervene to prevent genocide in any part of the world.

In the absence of details, it is assumed that the proposed Human Rights Council that was to replace the much-maligned UN Human Rights Commission will not see the light of the day very soon.

Terrorism continues to resist formulation of a consensual definition, no wonder. Not long ago the UN Secretary General not

First year scorecard



IN a country where Prime Ministerial longevity is counted in days, weeks and months, survival past the one-year mark is by itself no mean achievement for any PM. If only for that Shaikat Aziz fully deserves the congratulations the President showered him with on receiving his government's one year performance report. Skeptics abound. Mr JI Hussain of Rawalpindi in a recent letter to the "NEWS" Editor opined: "It is difficult to comprehend what is there to rejoice about, not much has been accomplished in the last one year." Taking the liberty of prioritising eight issues of concern enumerated by him in a slightly different sequence, and dovetailing a couple for the sake of clarity and brevity, examination thereof is required in more explicit detail.

Mr Hussain maintains that "law and order situation is deteriorating," coupled with his other assertion, "the property and honour of the common man is not safe." Law and order is a Provincial subject in theory and not a Federal one, in actual fact for all of Pakistan's 58 years the internal security situation has been a Federal prerogative, with the Provincial law enforcement agencies (LEAs)

doing mostly what is dictated to them by the Centre. After 9/11, even the pretence of Provincial autonomy has been discarded, the "war against terrorism" is Federal-led and has been fairly successful. Shaikat Aziz regime can hardly claim credit, the war being fought directly under Presidential control. Terrorists of all ilk have been taken to task, with real-time information provided by our intelligence agencies, with hi-tech support by US agencies such as the FBI. During the process,

possible for those who can pay the price of a good lawyer." The superior judiciary has failed in making sorry examples of habitual liars who blatantly misconstrue the truth with utter confidence that they will not be brought to book, perjury is rampant in courts at every level, it is being a recognised as regular "business." The poor have no hope of getting justice because of their inability to pay for good lawyers. To give the poor an even chance at justice, in civil suits the legal counsel should

including this.

Including maintaining that "poverty and unemployment are on the increase," Mr Hussain says, "there is no control over skyrocketing prices." The government's claims of dramatic economic resurgence is true. A combination of calculated measures and conforming to prudential regulations has helped stabilise the economy and put it on the right track. Let us not forget Dr Ishrat Hussain, the outgoing Governor, State Bank of Pakistan, give him

responsibility to monitor the land mafia and eliminate land scams. B + stellar economic performance touching on A is dragged down by the failure to close the rich-poor gap to a low B.

Mr Hussain says "corruption is rampant," it is alive and well in Pakistan. This despite an excellent sustained performance by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in bringing politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen to book for a wide range of corrupt practices. NAB's weakness is in

monetary honesty, some in his Cabinet share that reputation. Thereafter it becomes spotty, for political convenience Shaikat has accepted that old habits die hard.

"The Education Sector continues to reflect declining standard," says Mr Hussain. Even though education is basically a Provincial subject, the PM must tackle education problems on a war footing, on a "Task Force" basis guided by renowned academics. Providing sound, wholesome education is vital to the country's future, at the moment the performance is an F, a dismal failure. Similarly when Mr Hussain says that "health facilities are dismal," he is understating the obvious, the situation is pathetic and miserable. The rich who make up less than 1 percent of the population can afford medication and hospitalization, what about the rest? While public sector investment is a must, massive incentives must be given to the private sector to encourage them to fund philanthropic medical facilities. Regrettably this sector also gets an F.

The most important expectation of the masses is "good governance," that entails no compromises. Without a political constituency, the PM does overtime in doing a fine balancing act between what is correct and the compromises he has to make to stay in office, if not in power. The ultimate scorecard on this good man's performance will only be possible after his stint, a true reflection of how low he has had to stoop to conquer.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.



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Pakistan's Provinces have badly lost ground in overall crime control. On the one hand, the LEAs have become far more efficient and effective in exterminating terrorism, and on the other hand, with additional wide-ranging and sweeping powers given thereof (and despite the Police Reforms), the police have become more corrupt and brutal, particularly in the rural areas. With unemployment increasing, so has violent crime. For internal security and crime control, the government's B + for anti-terrorism is reduced to C bordering on F at the Provincial level.

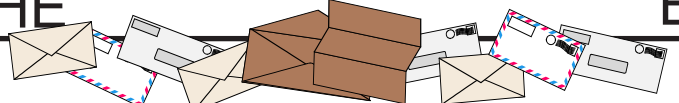
Mr Hussain's assertion that "the judicial system has failed to deliver" lies in an antiquated system that favours the rich in total exclusion of the poor, interpretation, "justice is being only

be paid by taking a percentage of the damages he (or she) obtains for his (or her) client, like in the US judicial system. The judiciary should be financially independent with a full time administration wing under the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. As long as the Federation and Provinces are the paymasters, justice will be subverted to their requirements. The new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is considered a moderate activist along with some other Honourable members of the apex Bench, more power to them in coming to terms with their conscience in discharging their duties. There is lot of rhetoric about reforming the judiciary, when it happens we will see. Shaikat Aziz's score in this respect is a B bordering on C, one feels he is serious about improv-

some of the credit. Even with the oil crisis hitting us hard, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has estimated our next annual GDP growth at 6.5 percent. This is an excellent performance economically. Regrettably the so-called economics has not reached the poverty stricken. The rhetoric fails to note that benefits are mostly flowing to the already rich, only a small group of middle class are graduating into the "rich" category, the steep rise of essentials is beggaring most of them into the poverty category. The buying power of the common man has been badly eroded, the dream of the middle class to own even a small property has evaporated. The increase on real-estate prices are due to extraneous reasons beyond the government's control, it doesn't absolve them of their

being selective, a dismal failure to pursuing even well documented cases of those "connected." The acid test for NAB, is two-fold, viz: (1) shun motivated persecution, and (2) relentlessly pursue corruption, particularly among the influential. The judiciary must develop its own effective "Accountability Department". One does not doubt the Army's own judicial system, regrettably interaction in civilian fields with associated corruption and unethical practices gives an adverse perception to the Army's image. NAB's "plea bargaining" concept undermines the whole concept of accountability, criminals can simply buy their way out of prison, mostly out of ill-gotten proceeds. White-collar crime becomes a "calculated risk" at worst. Shaikat Aziz personally gets an A for

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.

Katrina disaster

The people of the southern part of the United States of America are experiencing the hardest time of their life. They are scrambling for food and shelter, aged men, women and children are dying and languishing in the hospital. National Guards and law enforcers are in the streets to prevent looting and disorder. The trail of devastation is too big to count it instantly. It will take a year to recover from this devastation, it is the greatest natural disaster the US has ever experienced. The international news channel BBC, CNN and SKY NEWS are broadcasting non-stop the plight of the hurricane torn New Orleans State's people. It seems to me that I am watching any famine or war stricken area in Africa or Iraq. It has been branded as the new Tsunami. Anyway, the next thing to ponder here is, who is to blame for this horrible scene? Is it natural calamity, or human activities

are responsible for it? Of course, it is nature that we have to blame for the disaster. But human society and activities do influence nature negatively or positively. We have seen the hostile face of nature in several parts of the world in the last few years. Scientists and meteorologists predicted this type of consequences long before, but leaders from all over the world are yet to make any unanimous decision on how to minimise the effects of human activities detrimental to the environment. As a result, initiative like the Kyoto Protocol has been an unfulfilled hope for the ill-fated people of the world. Think about Kyoto, America has always bypassed this protocol to avoid economic loss. The US is now defeated by the nature for its own actions. Implement the Kyoto Protocol; be kind to nature so that it can also be kind to you.

Md. Harisur Rahman, JU
Beginning of the

end?

Nature can be very ruthless, so the world's most powerful nation is feeling helpless. What has happened to its anti-terrorism campaign? Why can't they protect their poor people in the wake of a natural disaster? Why Mr. President is visiting the affected people three days after the 'Katrina' strike? Why the most powerful nation is busy with other nations' businesses? You just cannot do whatever you like, Mr. Bush.

Mawla Chowdhury
Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd.
Chittagong

Evaluating the king!

The king, in the distant past, was an oppressor, violator of human rights. So how should we assess him now?

We always tend to dwell on the past and forget the present. When in fact we should always dwell in

the present remembering the past. So is it possible to forgive our past oppressors?

Then again, we seem to forget that the whole process of life, society, statehood and law and order was a communal evolutionary process. It is almost like time frames - now we are where most of the developed nation were then. So can we welcome our past oppressors?

Sazzad Hossain
On e-mail

Islamic militants

I think the recent investigations on the activities of militants in Bangladesh have unearthed some very important information. Most of the arrested militants, including Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman, have past links with ruling alliance member Jamaat. A major source of funds for the militants is some mid east based NGOs and it is apprehended that these NGOs

have close connection with Jamaat and IOJ.

The leaflet by JMB suggests what kind of state it wants. JMB's letters to Sathkhira journalists expose another side of the organisation. In recent letters JMB expressed its opposition to observation of Victory Day, Ekushe February and 15 August. They did not oppose March 26, November 7. Moreover, they are against Tagore songs, implying that they are against the current National Anthem.

There are political leaders who want to change the history of the country. It seems Sheikh Mujib's main fault was his contribution to the country's independence, which was achieved on December 16, 1971.

Jewel Ahmed
Basabo, Dhaka

Weekly holidays

Our government again missed a

perfectly good opportunity to declare Saturday-Sunday holiday. It seems certain "fundamentalist" elements in the coalition always try to twist the government into making such unhealthy business decisions. This would also account for why almost a month after 400 bomb blasts the master-planners are still scot-free.

This government's short-sightedness will eventually lead our beautiful country into more poverty. These three days of effective holiday per week are a bit too much for our economy to handle. More than 30 years have gone by, but our leaders seemed to have learned nothing. Their only concern seems to be cheap popularity and filling up their pockets.

I want to ask two questions:

1. Were we "less Muslims" in pre-Ershad days when there was a Sunday holiday?

2. Are folks in Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Brunei any

"less Muslims" than we are where they have Sunday holiday?
Adnan Siddiky
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Islam

I would like to concentrate on a specific side of ours. If it holds true we really should be amending ourselves. As we say living by good examples, unless we notice them how we would be following them? It is worth mentioning here that when we criticise Islam, we actually criticise our own opinions, judgements or experiences. It has to be noted that Islam is independent of our opinions, judgements or experiences. Excepting the few basic things in Islam like 'Ikhlas' and so on, everything in Islam is dynamic. For example two children might disagree on the result of 2 x 2 based on their early skill in simple maths. But the actual result of 2 x 2 will remain

independent of what the learning brains see, opine, judge or experience.

Abdullah Al Mahmud, UK

Rupsha river terminal

Near about 50 thousand people use the Rupsha terminal every day and most of them cross the river on smaller engine boats as only one ferry boat is now in operation in the river, after the opening of the Khan Jahan Ali Bridge to traffic on May 21. The boats quite often carry 30 to 35 passengers, and sometimes the number exceeds 40.

A few days ago some people died in a tragic boat accident in Rupsha ferry ghat. For the safety of people, I believe there should be at least three ferries on this route.

Md Sakibur Rahman Khan
Shsamsur Rahman Road, Khulna