

ACC delivers a bit, at last

It must move vigorously and do more

AT long last, after almost a year of its setting up, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has come up with some creditable output by unearthing a case of 92 crore Taka tax evasion at Benapole land port customs. This is a very welcome and positive development. However, it is not enough to identify only the import-duty dodgers. Those that colluded with the businessmen in evading taxes must also be identified right up to the highest level. Without being able to identify the government functionaries involved in the corruption process it would be well nigh impossible to eliminate corruption from the society.

The long-felt need for a statutory body that would independently address the issue of corruption in the country was partly met with the setting up of the ACC in November last year. Regrettably, it commenced its journey in fits and starts. It had taken ridiculously long time to get organised and come up to a working mode. It suffered from internal dissension and squabbles amongst its members that did not augur well for the Commission, dashing the hopes of the public.

There is hardly any need to dwell on the evils of corruption that has eaten into the very vital of our society. Apart from smearing the image of the country by being branded as one of the corrupt nations in the world, our record in this matter has stood in the way of our receiving international assistance and foreign investment so very important for our economic growth. Needless to say, the nation has pinned very high hopes on the Commission, and is eager for more concrete actions that would start the process of eliminating the virus of the most serious ailment in the society.

We are gladdened to see that the ACC is underway, albeit belatedly, and one would hope that the teething troubles have been done away with, with the screening out of the staff of the erstwhile Bureau of Anti-Corruption, among other things. The country has reposed a historic and onerous responsibility on the ACC. It must live up to the expectations. It is our hope that the ACC will initiate more vigorous drive against corruption all over the country without any fear or favour and without any let or hindrance from any quarter.

Children's rights

Not in words but in deeds

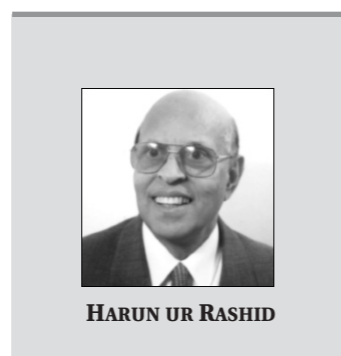
WE agree with the prime minister's statement on World Children's Day that it is our responsibility to keep this country and society safe for future generations. But whether we are sincere in doing so poses a big question. As the phrase goes -- 'children are the citizens of the future', and unless we nurture them well, care for and protect them, we can only worry for a bleak future. The government is signatory to a number of international and regional charters including UN Child Rights Charter and Millennium Development Goals to ensure children's welfare.

But in many cases we have seen that policies and programmes were discussed on paper but never implemented. It's not different in the case of children's rights either. Copious commitments were expressed but hardly implemented. The authorities seem high on policy making but short on its implementation. We want a vigorous and renewed process for full realisation of the commitments made on paper.

There are two aspects of children's rights. First, ensuring education for all children. Certain measures by the government in terms of providing stipend to make poor children school-going have yielded some positive results but lack of attention to the other aspect i.e. child labour is hindering that process. Poor economic conditions put these children under the curse of manual labour from their childhood both at the industrial arena and in the domestic confine. They are exposed to hazardous conditions in the factories while they face physical torture in the houses.

Both the government and the society must make an effort and play significant role in changing the situation. Public awareness campaign and strict remedial measures can prove fruitful. Mobile court can be deployed in the industrial areas to check illegal child labour. Several non-government organisations are already doing laudatory work in protecting children's rights. We would suggest that the government develops an interaction with these organisations to use their expertise to implement the policies it makes in this regard.

Why did India vote against Iran's nuclear programme?



HARUN UR RASHID

AT the recent meeting of the Governing Board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, the Board adopted a resolution (22 for and 14 against) recommending Iran to be reported in the future to the UN Security Council for the breach of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970.

Both Pakistan and India are members of the Board. India voted for the resolution (voting against Iran), while Pakistan abstained. The other Non-Aligned countries voted against the resolution (voting for Iran).

India's vote against Iran has surprised everyone both inside and outside the country.

The leftist coalition parties of the government have protested on the streets in India against the decision and urged to reverse it at a future meeting.

No one expected India would vote against Iran, when relations between Iran and India have always been friendly.

Even during the Shah's regime, Iran's relations with India had been good and often much better than that the relations between Iran and Pakistan. It is because both are bigger countries with huge natural resources and there is always a give-take-relationship between the two countries.

Iran's disappointment

Iran, being isolated from the US since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, wants to build relationship with the European Union, China, India and Russia.

Iran now finds that under pressure from the US, the European members of the IAEA Board (France, Germany and Britain) fell in line with the US. Iran must be disappointed that its first line of opening to the world affairs through Europe has stalled.

India's messages to Iran have ranged from warning to hopes that

improving its strategic relationship with the US, would not let Iran down at its critical time, because India has been one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 and since almost all Non-Aligned Board members supported the position of Iran, India would do the same.

Why did India vote against Iran?

It is believed that the US has put extreme pressure on India to vote

long-held policy of morality, fairness and justice in international relations? Has not its image suffered among developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America?

Iran's response

Iran has not taken any step to cancel the gas deal with India. The next IAEA Board meeting will be held in November and if India again votes against Iran, observers believe that Iran might consider cancelling the whole deal.

on the issue

India is not a member of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970 and yet the Bush administration is willing to pass on nuclear technology to India. Furthermore India is known to have between 45 to 95 nuclear warheads that could be delivered through long-range ballistic missiles -- Agni II and III.

It is important to note that the NPT Treaty does not prohibit developing, research, production and use of

nuclear weapons states, and rejected it. The result was the NPT of 1970. It provides a promise of a world free of nuclear weapons.

The Treaty makes an obligation on the nuclear weapons states who are members of the NPT, such as the US, Britain, France, Russia and China to nuclear disarmament under Article VI under strict and effective international control. These states have not kept their bargain, while they insist on other countries not to develop nuclear programme.

While the nuclear weapons states refused to disarm nuclear weapons they want other developing countries to keep their bargain in accordance with the Treaty.

The first requirement is for the five nuclear weapons states (recognised under the Treaty) to commit themselves unequivocally to the elimination of nuclear weapons and agree to start work immediately on the practical steps and negotiations required for achievement. Once they have made the commitment at the highest political level, non-nuclear weapons states should join in to implement them.

Conclusion

It does not make sense in fact while the US, Britain and France insist on Iran to stop peaceful nuclear programme, permissible under the Treaty; they are not interested to commit themselves to the elimination, even by stages, of nuclear weapons. Rather the Bush administration is reported to be conducting research on making "smart nuclear bombs".

Trust begets trust. Obligations under the Treaty are not one-way street. Both parties, nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapons states, must keep their obligations under the Treaty. There lie the fault lines in the Iranian nuclear programme saga.

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BOTTOM LINE

While Iran has been insisting that its nuclear programme is peaceful, the US and its allies suspect Iran's words. Essentially it is a question as to who do you believe -- Iran or the US. India has aligned itself with the US's view. India is not a member of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970 and yet the Bush administration is willing to pass on nuclear technology to India.

India would not allow the US to scuttle the improving cooperation in Iranian-Indian relationship. Its second line of opening was India and India failed to keep up Iran's expectations.

US's concern on Iran-India relationship

Iran and India signed a deal to supply gas through pipeline to India through Pakistan, much to the annoyance of the US. It is because Iran will earn billions of dollars in the deal. During the visit of the US Secretary of State to India in March this year, she expressed her concern about the deal with Iran.

During India's Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Washington in July, the US offered a deal of nuclear cooperation with India with a view to making India "a global power". Dr. Singh, while addressing a joint meeting of Congress, stated that it was "an honour reserved for the United States' closest allies" and quoting Bush that the relationship between India and the US "had never been stronger".

Iran thought that India, despite

against Iran. The US has reportedly told India that its nuclear cooperation with the US is yet to be approved by the US Congress and it is better that India would vote against Iran so that nuclear cooperation deal remains in tact.

India wants desperately the state of art nuclear technology for its security and for power and prestige. India's government buckled in under the pressure and abandoned its long-held principled position, according to political observers.

India's vote against Iran seems to have been based on the doctrine of realpolitik, pursued by Kautilya, Machiavelli, Cardinal Richelieu and Henry Kissinger. Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister, once said that there were no eternal friends or perpetual enemies. What is eternal and perpetual is national interest. That has been the motivation of India as manifested in the vote.

But the question remains : Was it India's interest to vote against Iran in the long run? Has it not jettisoned its

Iran may consider to align itself strategically with the Central Asia Republics, China and Russia, some say its third window of opening to global politics.

Question of belief

While Iran has been insisting that its nuclear programme is peaceful, the US and its allies suspect Iran's words. Essentially it is a question as to who do you believe -- Iran or the US.

India has aligned itself with the US's view. On the other hand, Russia and China believe Iran's story and made it known that they would oppose it at the Security Council because diplomatic negotiations have not been exhausted with Iran.

Some say that Israel is lobbying the US to have a strong stand against Iran, even striking the nuclear plant in Iran as Israel destroyed in 1981 Iraq's Osirak nuclear plant by air strike. Vice President Dick Cheney of the US at one stage threatened that Israel might take similar action because of security risks.

Some relevant facts

nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under Article IV. It goes on further in the same Article that all parties to the Treaty undertake to facilitate, and have the right to participate in, the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful purposes of nuclear energy.

Another fact is that Israel has developed nuclear weapons since 1968 and is believed to have between 75 and 200 nuclear warheads in a region which is unstable and Israel is not far off from Iran.

The US has kept quiet when three countries, India, Pakistan and Israel manufactured nuclear weapons and did not become members of NPT. No pressure was put on them because these countries do not pose threat to Israel and maintain good relations with the US.

Nuclear powers in breach of NPT

In the 60s, nuclear weapons were held by a handful of states. The world looked at the prospect of dozens of

Politics, party and people

G M QUADER

POLITICS of a political party is its political sentiments or beliefs. Activists of the political parties are to direct all their activities in order to achieve or implement that political sentiment or belief.

People unite under the fold of a political party to drive consolidated effort to make reality their similar aspirations in respect of administration of government. Internal strength of a political party lies in the numerical quantity and dedication of its party activists. But the real strength of a political party is the patronisation of people and it grows with more number of people supporting its political stand and goal.

In order to implement its own political agenda political parties need strength. Enough of political strength a party can master for fulfilling that goal is only through addition of public support. In order to achieve cognisance of more and more people in favour of their views political parties are under compulsion to float programmes commensurate with the hopes and aspirations of the people. Ultimately, the political sentiment or belief of any political party is to match the expectations of the people in order to make it viable.

Declared politics of any political party are summarised in the end to the overall welfare of the people and the country. People become inclined to the party which offers more attention to their needs. It also gives rise to the expectation that the political activists would consider interest of the public above their own personal interest especially in respect of material gain. It is natural, as leaders by definition are to be the last to take benefit and to be on the front to face any danger or misery. Political parties are expected to provide leadership to the society and thus accept the above as occupational hazard.

This prompts the political leaders and activists to declare them as selfless and dedicated for the cause of the people and also declared a pro-people political agenda to attract attention and support needed to make their politics a success.

All the above is true for Bangladesh till the political party ascends to power. After the party goes to power the opposite is seen to happen. The activities of the political party when in control of state power are observed mostly to be for fulfilment of the self interest of its leaders and or the activists of the party. They tend to

after re-introduction of parliamentary democracy in 1991 till date.

Much of politics has been reduced to nothing but a game between few rich, dishonest and powerful individuals to capture and stay in state authority by hook or by crook with the use of money and muscle. Money spent by the political parties to capture state power is considered as an investment to be realised with profit during the tenure of power. Political parties are, therefore, also used as business houses where investments are made by many individuals with an intention of realising profit.

Politics is the path and political parties are the vehicles to carry the nation through the path to the point of being able to build a society based on social justice, rule of law and free from discrimination and deprivation. And only proper political party with correct politics can lead the nation to its goal as per the hopes and aspirations of the people.

forget their commitment to give priority to peoples' need and work for the benefit of general people. Unfortunately, most of their activities are contrary to the public interest. In that way, politics is revealed as act of treachery and fraudulent and is considered so by mass in general.

Betrayal of the people's trust by the politicians and making mockery of their own commitment to the people is possible since in our system the government can operate without any accountability. The point that also plays a vital role is that it is quite possible to manipulate the election results by using black money and muscle power. Political parties once in power consider that as a life time opportunity to make fortune. They then use money along with muscle power acquired by providing irregular benefits to the suitable type by misuse and abuse of power to win the next election bypassing the true verdict of the people. Unfortunately, no exception could be observed in any of the prominent political parties

As a consequence, people are being separated from the political process. As it is, people are not allowed to play effective role in politics. Neither do people find activities of the political parties as beneficial for them. This has resulted loss of spontaneity in participation by people in any political activities. People are required to be hired to attend the political rallies. Even the political activists are not expected to perform without payment.

Unfortunately a political party here comprises to a considerable extent of people with black money and/or muscle power ganging up on the basis of bondage of self-interest. To fulfil self-interest and group interest ignoring any ethics become the norm among them. With out any motive to do good to anybody outside the party and resorting to any means even illegal to serve the self-interest and interest of fellow party men, can such grouping be called a political party?

Are the above political parties

powerful? What is the source of their power? The main source of power for political party is people. A group of activists and their leaders mostly driven by self-interest (and not the support of the people) are the main source of strength of many a political party in Bangladesh at present. In the name of politics the main emphasis is on increase of organisational strength of the party. In order to do that the party activists are allowed to earn more even illegally to become rich and to acquire more muscle. In addition, anti-social elements with black money and muscle are also encour-

forced to do so.

In order to compel the political parties to accept any deviation from the existing path, the effective accountability of the parties to the people must be established. And to ensure accountability two things need to be done.

Firstly, elections are to be held in an absolutely free and fair environment. Election Commission is to be strengthened further with new sets of rules and regulations and it is to be staffed with people acceptable to all the important political parties. Election Commission must have the authority to disqualify candidates violating code of conduct as laid down by the commission. Election Commission must be in a position to regulate the expenditure of the contesting candidates with especial emphasis to deter use of black money and muscle. Just to cite an example, common posters and common projection meetings can be organised by the Election Commission for all the contesting candidates and any further campaigning may not be allowed, etc.

An overall reform of election process may be considered. Introduction of proportionate system which exists in Australia and also in most of the European countries (except in UK, where it is what we follow) may be considered. In the new system each political party would declare their list of contesting candidates mentioned serially as per priority. Voting would take place throughout the country and people would vote for the party and not for any particular candidate. Finally, each political party would be

allowed the number of parliament seats in exact proportion to the total number of votes received by the party. The members of parliament would be selected serially from top of the list supplied by the party prior to election. Since the capacity of any local individual is likely not to be substantial to influence the overall result of election and there would be lesser personal interest of any local individual, it is expected that the use of money and muscle may be reduced to a great extent in case the reform is materialised.

Secondly, constitution must be amended to ensure effective accountability of the government for its day to day activities which is almost non-existent at the moment. In order to do so the power and authority of parliament must be enhanced to make it comparable to that of government. The government should be made vulnerable to parliament. To be more specific, one example may be suggested that is to amend article 70(1) of the constitution. This provision compels the parliament members of any party to extend support to the party from which he/she is elected and thus allows the government sure support of a captive majority in parliament for all its activities. This provision allows the government to ignore the effective role of parliament and as such to avoid any accountability through the parliament.

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GM Quader is an MP.

OPINION

A close look at the 'Tuesday Group' initiative

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

I have been carefully following the various reports in the local dailies in connection with the holding and sponsoring of an international seminar on the electoral process by a group of diplomats calling themselves 'Tuesday Group'. Frankly speaking the more I think of the whole matter the more confused I become. What is it that the group is trying to achieve or provide? Bangladesh is passing through some trying times. But as far as its electoral process is concerned I do not think we need a group of diplomats to tell us what it is all about. Elections in

this country were held in the past and were found free and fair by the international community too. Is the group worried about the workings of democracy in this country? I believe they should be more worried about their countries' strong ally Pakistan. Why not make a regional Tuesday Group and hold a seminar on democracy and electoral process in Islamabad instead of Dhaka?

If the group's long term goal is preparing grounds for importing and installing democracy just like the two of its powerful member countries are engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq, please spare us! I believe that Bangladesh should distance itself from

the group's current agenda. It is my assessment of the situation that whatever the group is up to it tantamounts to interfering in our internal affairs. I fail to understand as to why the group is so persistent in holding the seminar. It is the prerogative of any sovereign nation to decide as to what is good for her and what seminar may or may not be held on its soil. Turning down permission to the group is therefore within the rights and prerogative of Bangladesh. I therefore see no reason for the group to be either "disappointed" or upset.

The more I think of it something else strikes my mind. The group does

not include a single member or members from any other third world countries including Malaysia, Indonesia or Vietnam. Therefore it looks like a group of diplomats from a selected small number of countries, "rich and powerful", of the West wilfully and consciously trying to, perhaps, intimidate us. I wish some of the third world countries could form a similar group and call for an international seminar to discuss how democracy and democratic principles are murdered by some of the leading countries of the West in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Do we need to remind the group about the highly questionable electoral

process, which saw the elections in the most powerful country, which took place only a number of years back under serious allegations of fraud? Forgive me for saying so but I am afraid that these highly conscious diplomats are themselves suffering from some of the typical aspects of the third world syndrome of which they are so critical about.

Continued insistence by the group implies to me that there is more to it "than the eye can meet". What is it that the group is looking for or trying to achieve? It may sound rather offbeat to many but democracy today means different things to different peoples in different lands. I

am, for one, fully committed to the universally accepted cardinal principles of democracy but shall always resist imposition of the same through any seemingly coercive means directly or indirectly.

On a more sombre note, individually each of the diplomats representing individual countries could have intimidated their respective countries' concern to the relevant authorities of the government in a more "diplomatic" way. To my mind that is what would have been appropriate than the present tactics adopted. Although I know that many of my friends would argue that the government should have allowed the semi-

nar to be held; after all what is there for us to hide, besides this would only reflect that creditable aspect of our open door policies and faith in democratic traditions. I am afraid, I do not agree with that argument in this particular instance. One has to draw that fine line of distinction between licence and freedom. This falls into that gray area of granting licence. I believe that much propagated innocent good intentions of the group would come to light for good or for worse shortly before or after the national elections to be held in 2006.

Coming back to the heart of the issue once again I find that the group's move has been highly coun-

terproductive giving rise to a few pertinent questions only.

I believe the whole thing stems from the attitude that they, the members of the group, have invested their expertise and resources in this poor nation for rather an extended period and hence they are entitled to say or do as they so please. With all the humility at my command I wish to point out that we may be poor, we may have failed in many aspects of our governance and state management but our souls are not to be sold.

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