

## Tell-tale recruitment policy

*Merit sacrificed at the political altar*

THE government's dramatic decision not to henceforth fill up any vacant post is neither cost-saving nor is it geared to raising the level of administrative efficiency. The lid on employment however will not be applicable to contractual appointments and recruitment to various cadre services.

The move is going to severely restrict appointment of five lakh job seekers in the lower administrative grades. In immediate terms, there are 1,50,000 vacant posts of second, third and fourth class employees together with vacancies in the non-cadre gazetted officers ranks. Actually, appointment to 50,000 non-cadre posts in different ministries and divisions has been under process till Wednesday when the moratorium took effect.

Evidently, the government's appointment shutdown has thrown thousands of job hopefuls out of gear, greatly aggravating the problem of educated unemployment.

One might think that this is an impolitic gambit prior to the polls, but the calculation seems to lie somewhere else. The door has been flung open to loyalists, favourites and cronies of the ruling party or coalition to be absorbed into key positions under contractual appointments.

So, it seems that a recruitment moratorium is being applied on a certain category of inconsequential jobs to make room and keep provision for appointment on contract to favourites.

This is like part of a choreographed concert played out in an orchestrated fashion. What are the other parts of the play? Well, citing crisis in the field level administration, 200 magistrates are planned to be specially recruited through an abridgement of test procedures. Also, under a revised rule, dating back to 1982, appointment to the BCS educational cadre will not be subject to as stringent criterion as had been followed beforehand.

Then we hear about special BCS exams for recruitment of police officers and despatch of half-trained cops to field positions prior to polls.

The poll implications are obviously there to read into the moves. What is perhaps no less worrying is day-to-day governance in a context where the administration is riddled with wrong people in wrong places. The prime minister has time and again stressed merit, eligibility and neutrality as the prerequisites for good administration. The nation urges her to ensure that administrative norms are not compromised.

### Bird flu

*Adequate preventive and curative measures needed*

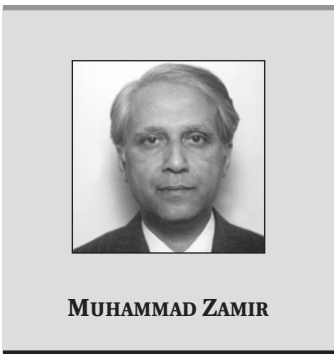
FOR weeks now the international media and the medical experts all over the world including the World Health Organisation have been highlighting the spread of the deadly disease -- bird flu. Since Bangladesh too lies on a major route of migratory birds it is also vulnerable to this disease. It is therefore imperative that the Administration takes all curative and preventive measures in tackling the disease effectively in the event of its occurrence.

While banning of imports from a number of countries is a move in the right direction it may still sneak in. There are also countries in the neighbourhood that are in the same ecological and climatic zones conducive to flocking of migratory birds and are also prone to the outbreak of the disease. It may therefore be a good idea to set a proactive consultative and mutually beneficial programme of various preventive measures. Our public health services should also monitor vigorously the incidence of any disease in commercial poultry firms. Our health inspectors should also check and prevent public sale of migratory and exotic pet birds. We should also launch an extensive media campaign towards building a public awareness about the deadly virus and its symptoms and effects.

In the meantime the planned import of 5000 doses of drugs for treatment of the disease from Roche of Switzerland is most appropriate. However, the cost of the drugs being high (about Tk.1800 for treating a single case) the government must also have a contingency plan for making the drug available at affordable and much reduced price, when needed. Our Directorate of Health should therefore negotiate with WHO for allocation of an appropriate quantity of drugs at reduced price out of its buffer stock of three million doses for which it has already entered into an agreement with Roche.

The signal given by WHO and the rising incidences of the deadly diseases in various parts of the world should raise our concerns to the optimum.

# Iran walking a tight rope



NEWLY elected President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran and his country has been under the spotlight in the past few weeks.

The West's mistrust of Iran came to a boil on 24 September with the UN watchdog agency IAEA approving a EU sponsored resolution that could eventually lead to Iran's referral to the United Nations Security Council for violating the nuclear arms control treaty. The Resolution was adopted with 22 of the 35 members of the Board of Governors supporting it, 12 abstaining (which included Russia, China, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Sri Lanka and Pakistan) and one opposing it. The European Union had proposed the Resolution and tried very hard to have it adopted by consensus. Their efforts however failed in the face of opposition from certain non-aligned States.

The surprise in the pack was India. Its support for the EU Resolution came in for serious rebuke from many of India's domestic political parties. The CPI (M) which recognises Iran's right to develop its nuclear technology under international safeguards was particularly critical. Yashwant Sinha, former Foreign Minister and one of the leaders of the main opposition Hindu nationalist BJP party also alleged that India had buckled in under intense US

and British pressure. Despite such criticism, Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran's comment articulated the reasons for the vote rather well 'it was a considered decision keeping the country's national interests in mind' (AFP). Most observers feel that India's decision was dictated by its own relations with the US and her need for nuclear collaboration with that country. By her action, India signalled, as aptly described by Kuldip Nayar, that it was willing to ride two horses at the same time. I am referring here to Indian interest to receive Iranian gas

interests of both countries were at stake. It also underlined that China was no longer prepared to allow its energy factor being undermined in Iran as had already happened earlier in Iraq.

Russia's decision also exhibited its unwillingness to take on extra pressure over its assistance to Iran in the construction of the light water reactor at Bushehr. It may be recalled that this is nearing completion and Russia is supposed to supply nuclear fuel needed to run it. Such cooperation is however vehemently opposed by the

tary-industrial complex are expecting to clinch several arms sales deals with Iran. They are worried that a future UN Security Council Resolution advocating sanction against Iran, because of IAEA, might end their chances of multi-billion dollar contracts and affect both political as well as economic interests.

In any case, the IAEA Resolution represents a victory for Washington and the EU. IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei might have indicated that there is still room for diplomacy and that there was no question of referring

Both EU and the USA need to remember that they are now inter-acting with a new President who is known for his conservative opinions. It will hardly help matters by pushing him into a corner and reducing his options of flexibility. He is an elected President and not a dictator who unleashed wars against his neighbours and chemical weapons on his countrymen.

secret Iranian nuclear facilities -- a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water production plant near Arak. The US believes that these facilities can, not only contribute to Iran's development of a complete nuclear fuel cycle, but also enable them to build nuclear weapons without importing nuclear material. The fact that Iran has not as yet agreed to sign the Additional Protocol of the IAEA, and has now shown that it can build centrifuges' have clearly contributed to such worry.

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secret Iranian nuclear facilities -- a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water production plant near Arak. The US believes that these facilities can, not only contribute to Iran's development of a complete nuclear fuel cycle, but also enable them to build nuclear weapons without importing nuclear material. The fact that Iran has not as yet agreed to sign the Additional Protocol of the IAEA, and has now shown that it can build centrifuges' have clearly contributed to such worry.

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Korean Scud-Bs, Scud-Cs and Nodong ballistic missiles. It has also developed short-range artillery rockets and has already flight tested indigenously built intermediate range missiles. Iran has explained that its interest in such armoury has largely been because of perceived instability in the region -- interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and establishment of US bases in the Central Asian region. The Iranians feel encircled and have started taking precautionary strategic steps.

The recent refusal by President Bush to rule out any option in dealing with Iran has also created its own dynamics. The British Foreign Secretary has tried to calm the waters by starting that military action against Iran is 'inconceivable'. This will however not reduce international apprehension. Neither will it persuade Iran to be more compliant between now and the publication of the IAEA report in November, despite the IAEA and its Chief ElBaradei receiving the Nobel Prize for peace.

Both EU and the USA need to remember that they are now interacting with a new President who is known for his conservative opinions. It will hardly help matters by pushing him into a corner and reducing his options of flexibility. He is an elected President and not a dictator who unleashed wars against his neighbours and chemical weapons on his countrymen.

The next few months will be critical in the coalition's exercise of restoring a semblance of democracy in united Iraq and fostering democratic traditions in Afghanistan. That should receive priority over everything else.

Iran will be another distraction that both the USA and the European Union can do without.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to mzamir@dhaka.net

# Saarc poverty alleviation fund: An imperative need

ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE seven South Asian countries eventually established the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) in 1985 at Dhaka summit attended by the heads of all the seven countries. The regional alliance of the seven countries pledged to alleviate the grinding poverty in the region since its inception and repeated efforts were made to materialise this main objective of the Saarc. But due to various reasons it could not make substantial progress towards poverty alleviation, though commitments by the leaders to alleviate poverty in the region have been regularly made in all the Saarc summits so far held. So vast segment of people in the region are still standing in the place after twenty years, where they had once stood with poverty.

The independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (Isacpa) was formed by the Saarc leaders in the sixth summit held in 1991 in Colombo, realising the imperative need to address poverty and also to suggest strategies and measures to alleviate poverty in the region. The commission submitted its report in the seventh Saarc summit held in 1993 in Dhaka and suggested a radical conceptual framework for poverty alleviation through social mobilisation. The summit, however, welcomed the report and made commitment to eradicate poverty from South Asia through an agenda for action.

A three-tier mechanism was approved in the eighth Saarc summit held in New Delhi in 1995 with a view to dealing with the issue of poverty eradication. The first-tier comprised the secretaries to the governments concerned with poverty eradication

and social development in Saarc countries. The second-tier was comprised of finance and planning secretaries and the third-tier comprised finance and planning ministers. A ministerial meeting of the three-tier mechanism for poverty eradication held in New Delhi recommended that the Saarc countries should establish network arrangements for regular exchange of information to share experiences on poverty alleviation. At the ninth summit, the Saarc leaders

ment Centre (Shrdc) which was established in Islamabad in 1999 with the objectives of undertaking research, imparting training and providing information on human resource development to cater to the future need, could not make any remarkable progress in achieving its regional goal.

The heads of government of the Saarc countries also urged all donor agencies and international bodies to increase their support and assistance to the poverty eradication programme

South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (Isacpa) in the eleventh summit and also undertook a realistic approach to the poverty eradication programmes in the region. As mandated by the eleventh Saarc summit held in Kathmandu in January 2002, the first Saarc Regional Poverty Profile was also prepared. Meanwhile the reconstituted Isacpa finalised its report, outlining the strategy and road map for alleviating poverty in the region.

leaders noted with concern the pressing problem of poverty alleviation in the Saarc countries and agreed to create the fund with contributions from all the member countries.

According to a report published in The Daily Star on September 22, the Saarc members may set up a fund of \$500 million to one billion for poverty eradication programmes in this region. Decision on the matter may be taken in the forthcoming Saarc summit. A technical committee compris-

according to the draft modality of the Saarc Poverty Fund. Besides, a difference of opinion between India and Pakistan has surfaced on the size of the fund. Pakistan desires the initial fund size to be over \$ one billion while India seeks an initial amount of \$ 500 million on the grounds that it is still in the primary stage and the fund size can be increased after observing the results. International donor agencies like World Bank and Asian Development Bank may also contribute to Saarc Poverty Fund. The leaders of the Saarc countries are expected to reach the consensus to provide a fillip to the quest for necessary fund to finance the Saarc poverty alleviation projects, which is an imperative need.

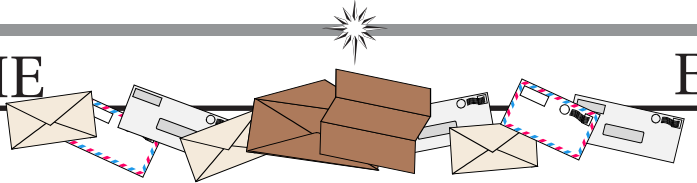
More than one billion people in the seven South Asian countries have once again started to see a ray of hope as the Saarc leaders have agreed on a plan to create a poverty alleviation fund to deal with the overwhelming problem of poverty alleviation. The poverty alleviation pursuits of Saarc need to be supported by necessary fund. The 13th Dhaka summit is looking forward to productive deliberations that will take the two-decade-old regional forum into the third decade with more action-oriented programmes for closer cooperation in various fields including poverty alleviation.

Poverty in the Saarc countries is widespread with a complex phenomenon of both income and non-income components of poverty. After limping for quite a long time, the regional alliance has started its real journey towards cooperation. Bangladesh and Pakistan agreed to the need of forming a Saarc development fund for alleviation of poverty in the Saarc countries. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had floated the idea and proposed for formation of the Saarc development fund during her talks with the Prime Minister of Pakistan who visited Dhaka in last November to discuss Saarc and other bilateral issues with his Bangladesh counterpart. Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz who is also the current chairman of Saarc, agreed to create a fund for poverty alleviation programme in the South Asian region. Both the South Asian

ing representatives from the central banks of all the member countries has already started working on the modality of the fund. The committee has already reported its progress at the Saarc Finance Governors' symposium held in Mumbai in September. The Daily Star report also said that the contribution of each country to the fund will be determined on the basis of a certain country's foreign currency reserve, its import and export volume, balance of payment position and size of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Allocation from the fund for each country will be determined on the basis of its per capita income, poverty rate and other related indicators.

It is also learnt that the relatively rich members of the Saarc are less enthusiastic about the fund as they will have to contribute more to the fund and will receive less from it,

## 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.

### We are proud of them

It's a matter of great honour for us that our sporting personalities like nation's pride the table tennis queen Zohera Rahman Linu, the Guinness record holder, national cricket captain Habibul Bashar and national cricket sensation Syed Ashrafui have been nominated for the Unicef's special ambassadors.

We wish them all the success on their new feather of responsibility and honour.

**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
Agrabad, Chittagong

### Oil price in international market

Oil price in international market has started to fall. The price of Kerosene oil has fallen to \$67.13 per barrel from

### University of Dhaka Without a solid leader

I am an arrogant and unfortunate Bangladeshi by birth. I don't like my people but I do like the culture. I don't like the fact that we don't have any real leaders to follow. I don't understand the fact that in a small country likes ours how can we have that many so called leaders without any right leader to follow. Stupid that we are still allowing it. Most of our leaders and business entrepreneurs happen to be controversial or tinted with corruption. No wonder five times in a row we are at the top unbeaten as the most corrupt nation. Look at our neighbouring country India. I personally don't like them but it looks like I have no choice other than following them. Seriously, how many leaders and business entrepreneurs they have created? How many to name, they are all world class leaders

and entrepreneurs. They are setting an example and standard for their nations.

What do we have in our country? We have all big mouths with no productive ideas. It's been 34 years after independence, all we have achieved is the top position in corruption. Thanks to all our so called leaders for the gift and for not giving us any direction to improve. Why we as a nation have to be so miserable? Literally we are like tigers without claws. We can roar but can't bite.

**Hasif Hossain**  
Unix System Engineer CompuCredit Corporation  
245 Perimeter Center Parkway

### "When agony ends in death"

I was horrified to see the October 19 story titled "When agony ends in death". I mentioned how an influen-

tial person raped 13-year old Armina with the aid of his two accomplices, and then set her on fire three days later. The poor girl fought with her injuries for nearly 10 months before leaving for eternal peace. What's worse is that one of the arrested culprits was set free. Is there no justice in this country? Is it a crime to be born poor and not to be born into an influential family? How many more innocent children like Armina will be snatched away ruthlessly from their dear ones, and how many more criminals will still stay at large to commit more such heinous crimes?

**Oeshwik Ahmed**  
Lalmatia, Dhaka

### Vegetables dearer

I read the write up on vegetable price in your paper and to my experiences Bangladeshi people are lazy and

dependent on the farmers in the villages and expect to get the produce cheap prices. In China 70 percent of the vegetables are grown in the backyard and balcony of their apartments or houses. Hey Bangladeshi, you need one or two plants of chilli to satisfy your whole family and you can grow it on your backyard or in front of your kitchen. When I was a kid, I saw my grandma did, although our village in Jessore is famous for growing green chillies for century. If you want to eat, work a little bit, not look at the sky to rain those things free.

**Baz,**  
Canada

### Traffic jam and Ramadan

Traffic jam is a common phenomenon for the commuters of Dhaka city and they have already got accustomed to it but unfortunately it

becomes unbearable during the period of Ramadan. Many factors work behind this, such as: everyone wants to return home before the Iftar, moreover, there is a rush for shopping etc. Beside this, we can easily identify another cause that is during the month of Ramadan a large number of poor people move to the Dhaka city for collecting Fetra which inevitably increases the floating population of the city and thereby aggravates the situation.

Traffic police always pledge a jam free Dhaka city before each and every Ramadan but the city dwellers actually know how empty their promise is. We want a jam free Dhaka city and for this the traffic management system should be upgraded and modernised. We don't want any lip service, what we want is "result".

**Akhi and Himel**  
Dept of Law, DU

### Corruption

Decade back when I used to visit different countries they said to me 'you are from the poorest nation' in the world. My feeling was unpleasant but I thought I am poor but not a criminal. Now a days people say 'you are from the most corrupt country' on the planet. This time I feel guilty, insulted, low esteemed - I have nothing to reply back.

Now it is the month of Ramadan, month of self purification. Throughout the nation can we observe a meaningful corruption free week? It will involve police, tax officer, court, customs, immigration, doctors, secretariat and all other government and semi-government offices. Let us give a sincere trial. May Allah help us in this holy month of Ramadan

**Dr. MD Mozahedul Islam**  
Brunei, Darussalam