

More authority for ACC*There must be guarantee against arbitrary action*

THE clear public sentiment is that the Anti-Corruption Commission ought to be doing its job, and doing it well. That it has so far failed to do that is not only depressing but also deeply disconcerting. We now understand that a raft of measures to re-energise the ACC is being contemplated, much of it aimed at empowering the body to seize the property of people alleged to be corrupt and to place the accused in detention. Rather intriguingly, the ACC itself is pondering the question of tagging the existing anti-corruption law to the infamous Special Powers Act.

Our position on the issue of arming the ACC with new powers is clear. We believe firmly in the principle that the commission should be able to assert its authority, in these politically charged circumstances. Any grant of extraordinary powers, such as those being aired, can result in an arbitrary use of such authority. And once arbitrariness comes into the working of as important a body as the ACC, there is no knowing how far matters will go. More precisely, what guarantees will there be for the country that a grant of additional or plainly juridical authority to the ACC will not be applied wrongly against individuals perceived to be corrupt? Let us have a clearer picture of what might happen if the ACC is actually given the powers it wants to possess. The organization may detain a person and seize his property. But what happens if the matter is taken to court, the individual concerned is found not guilty and is then let off? The resultant disrepute the ACC might then come into cannot but be a gross instance of justice being made a travesty of.

There are thus the pitfalls associated with any talk of granting extraordinary powers to the ACC. One of these would be to link the ACC Act, vis-à-vis detention of individuals, with the 1974 Special Powers Act. The SPA, by the way, has been a mechanism of arbitrary authority the nation has never been comfortable with. In the circumstances, we can refer to the best practice situations as they operate in Hong Kong. In India, the CBI has been doing effective work in investigating graft in high places and guaranteeing punishment of the guilty. These are precedents the ACC should work on rather than crave an enhancement of powers. For a so far under-performing ACC, the thought of additional authority coming to it is pretty disturbing.

Massive seizure of spurious products*Punish the guilty but reassure good traders*

OVER the past few days the combined forces of the army, RAB and police have been carrying out raids against spurious fertiliser and cement including such items as foodgrains and pulses and seized huge quantities from bulk store houses and fake factories. The law enforcers also seized sizeable quantities of engine oil and things used in making adulterated fertiliser products. Add to these, the recent discovery of a huge quantity of foodgrains in a store house that was found patently unfit for human consumption. All these are criminal acts calling for legal action.

People of the country have generally welcomed the move and the media too has highlighted the raids. Hoarding which creates artificial scarcity of commodities and push the prices up must be deterred by all means.

But production, import and stocking of these commodities are essential and interrelated economic activities. Therefore, as much we are appreciative of these much needed raids we believe that authorities should also keep in mind the necessity for avoiding any undue panic in the market place which may affect the supply side of the economy. Genuine importers and dealers should not get wrong signals that may result in slowing down imports in particular.

The present government should, therefore, take some pragmatic steps that will serve as incentives for genuine importers to keep flow of imports uninterrupted. Our farmers have been worst hit particularly since last year, due to non-availability and shortage in the supply of fertilisers. Besides piling of goods is also caused due to failure of the networking of transporters of respective regions in reaching the commodity at the farmers' doorsteps. We should bear in mind that mere hit and run operations may not succeed in clearing the mess that exists in the production, import and distribution of fertilisers in the country.

Roadmap to good governance

DR ABDULLAH A DEWAN

NO NONSENSE

It appears *prima facie* that with the exception of accountability the CTG largely satisfies all of the characteristics of a GGOV. But questions have been raised in some quarters about how the current CTG emerged. Who is calling the shots? How did President Iajuddin Ahmed, who himself concomitantly held the position of the CA to the CTG, make his choice of Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed to be the CA prior to resigning from that position?

their men being caught. Privately, however, their worries are translating into increasing pressures on the CTG for holding free and fair election (FAFE) as soon as possible.

Holding early elections may help both AL and BNP to let "law-breaking" party ruffians go Scott free, regardless of which party captures the PMO, because protecting one's own hoodlums would require letting other party's hoodlums wander about unscathed.

When the politicians clamour that the "people" want the CTG to hold a FAFE and transfer power immediately, which people are they referring to: people in the political party or people of the country?

Some obvious questions are:

Who is the CTG serving? Aren't they serving the people and at the same time configuring a model of good governance for the politicians to follow?

Isn't the CTG working tirelessly to dismantle mischief and machinations of all forms, and to conduct a FAFE desired by the people and the politicians?

Weren't the goals of the CTG clearly articulated by the chief

adviser on January 21? Aren't some of the goals being realized at a speed improbable under any political government?

What is the verdict of the people about the performance of the CTG? Aren't they applauding what has so far been achieved?

Can the modus operandi of the CTG form the precursors to good governance for the next political government?

Abdul Jalil (AL) hailed the CA's address to the nation and extolled the menu of reforms proposed in the address as being consistent with the AL's long standing demands.

On the other hand, politically debased but rhetorically unbowed Mannan Bhuiyan (BNP) scoffed at Jail's hailing of the CA's address to the nation:

"Those who were rejected by the people in the previous election, whose brutality and repressive attitude stripped the people of their voting rights, have nothing to be happy about the chief adviser's speech. They can, of course, be happy for the delay in holding the election, as it has defered their defeat."

The CTG advisers are enjoying the overwhelming country-wide

support of the people. They also need the unblemished cooperation of the politicians to create the much desired level playing field for a FAFE. Unfortunately, Bhuiyan's unctuous statements and bellicose attitude serve only to bevel the atmosphere needed for a political reconciliation between the two political rivals while sparing the country from the vicious vitriol of politics.

The CTG indicated that they would stay in power until a FAFE was held. They considered the CA's address to the nation a "roadmap" for the future of the country and the CTG would function in the spirit of that roadmap.

The roadmap to good governance may be one of the primary reasons why politicians are ill at ease. They may be afraid that such roadmap and their implementations by the CTG would put them in a quandary because the politicians won't be able to live up to these lofty expectations once elected to power.

Good governance (GGOV) has the following eight major characteristics: it is accountable, transparent, responsive, equitable and inclusive, effective and efficient,

follows the rule of law, participatory, and consensus oriented.

Achieving GGOV assures that corruption is minimized, minorities' concerns are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable are reflected in decision-making. GGOV requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.

It should be noted that GGOV is an ideal which is almost impossible to realize in its totality. Not too many countries have come close to achieving GGOV in its entirety. However, to ensure sustainable human development, efforts must at least be made to try and achieve this ideal.

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While these curiosities are legitimate constitutional issues, they will be rendered irrelevant if the CTG realizes the aspirations of the people who are desperate for a FAFE and a reprieve from both corrupt and politicized administrations.

One can construe that the CTG advisers are mutually accountable to each other and that eleven enlightened individuals

cannot all be doing undesirable things at the same time. They may as group be considered "benevolent dictators" committed to serve only people's interest. Their dedicated efforts will establish their legitimacy.

The CTG's modus operandi and the speed with which many long awaited reforms and bureaucratic overhauls are being accomplished may become problematic for future political government since the speed and scope of these changes cannot possibly be matched by the elected government.

One hurdle, aside from the entrenched conflict between party interest and public interest, is that elected government will have to channel things through the parliament and the bureaucracy. The difference between the modus operandi of the CTG and the elected government is that the former operates like a "benevolent dictator" with little or no accountability while the latter must operate within the framework of parliamentary democracy.

Some experts are already thinking that once the EC, the judiciary, and the ACC become truly operational as constitutionally independent bodies (CIB) and a "National Security Council" as a think tank watchdog body is formed, there won't be any need for a CTG. But these thoughts at this time are a little premature let us not count our chickens before they hatch.

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Quagmire of higher education

ANM NURUL HAQUE

BY THE NUMBERS

Dhaka University which came to get fame as the Oxford of the East, was a significant player in the field of research and other academic pursuits. Satyen Bose did his "Bose-Einstein" statistics as a young teacher of this university amazing the world. That glory of this illustrious university is now a tale belonging to the past. It now attracts world's attention only for pitched battles between rival student groups.

Eventually the UGC recommended that the government should take appropriate steps for curbing the misuse of autonomy by most of the public universities as those are introducing new departments, recruiting redundant and unfit teachers and officials and also promoting and providing them with extra-financial facilities, which essentially means that spending on education would shrink further.

Both the numbers of students and university have marked a sharp rise over last few years. But the quality of higher education has eroded instead of being improved. A growing number of malpractices including weak teaching, scarcity of contact

hours between students and teachers, lack of teacher's morality and dependence of students on photocopy notes, have long since been eating into the vitals of our education in its highest tier.

Now let us come to where a much more serious problem persists. The university teachers, who used to enjoy a very high social profile, have now chosen to make fortune through political maneuver. Consequently, the students have lost seriousness in academic pursuits and have become interested to procure a certificate by hook or by crook. This situation has led the higher education towards an extremely unfortunate direction.

Such a crisis in the public universities has created justifica-

tion policy of setting private universities and as many as 54 of them have sprung up in the recent years. But these private universities remain off-limits for many deserving students from non-affluent background because of their inordinate costs.

UGC, the apex body for controlling higher education in the country, has neither executive authority nor any legal mechanism for taking action against universities for aberrant practices. According to Section 5(1) of the President's Order (1973), the functions of the UGC include, to assess the needs of the universities for their academic pursuits and to formulate plans for its development, to receive funds from the government and disburse such funds to the universities.

UGC suggested for formation of the Accreditation Council having representatives from all stakeholders, for ensuring quality of higher education and for bringing in accountability and transparency in the management of the universities. It also suggested a standardized recruit-

ment policy of teachers for all public universities to provide openings for qualified faculty members through a transparent process.

UGC sent the recommendations to the education ministry, proposing to introduce a uniform grading system in all universities to ensure standardization of the degrees that they offer. But the Ministry of Education is yet to finalize these proposals which need serious consideration. Not only that, the country does not have any full-fledged education policy even 35 years after independence, despite six education commissions were constituted.

It is really painful to find that not a single university of Bangladesh has been included in the list of 500 top universities, though it contained the names of 93 universities of the Asia and Pacific region, including three from India.

The Institute of Higher Education of the Shanghai Zhejiang University recently carried a world-wide survey on more than 2,000 universities, ranking 500

universities in terms of their excellence in research and other academic pursuits. None of our universities has also been included in the list of 100 top universities of Asia and Pacific region, and not a single university of Bangladesh has been included in the list of 500 top universities, though it contained the names of 93 universities of the Asia and Pacific region, including three from India.

Dhaka University which came to get fame as the Oxford of the East, was a significant player in the field of research and other academic pursuits. Satyen Bose did his "Bose-Einstein" statistics as a young teacher of this university amazing the world. That glory of this illustrious university is now a tale belonging to the past. It now attracts world's attention only for pitched battles between rival student groups.

Education is the area, which has been kept above all political rivalry in most of the countries in the world. Sadly, the politicians of Bangladesh are conspicuously devoid of such sense. Naked politicization in every field of

national life has not spared the education sector and political nepotism in recruiting unfit teachers has also contributed to the decline quality in higher education.

Compared to five universities in 1971, the country has now 24 public and 54 private universities. But the quality of education has declined instead of being improved. To be more frank, the quality of our higher education has hit the bottom ruining the future intellectual health of the nation.

As reported by the UGC, the public universities enjoying full autonomy under 1973 Ordinance have indulged in all sorts of improprieties. The Ministry of Education should not be so careless about its regulatory functions of the universities. The caretaker government with its moral leadership and fearless administrative behaviour should come forward to safeguard the most precious of all our assets -- the students, for being educated properly.

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