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It was very encouraging to see that the Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB) had pushed a legislation called Consumer Protection Act 2000, which actually incorporated the points mentioned above. The draft proposal also identified that our supply chain problems have a certain "Bangladeshi flavour," hence, they should be handled accordingly.

But where is CP Act 2000? It is already the middle of 2007. For the reasons mentioned below, as far as CP is concerned, time is of the essence.

Tip of the iceberg

One has to realise that the remedies discussed are mostly enforcement based. Specialised units, independent statutory bodies, or parts of government departments, are normally given the responsibility of enforcing the law. The duties of this body would be varied, to say the least; starting from case by case administrative assessments (mergers) to pure "economic espionage" (price fixing). Well-trained technical staff would be needed to ensure that the legislation is correctly enforced.

In addition, jurisprudence must also be given time to develop and align itself with the idiosyncrasies of the enforcement. The situation in practice may be different from the one originally perceived in the legislation. Adjustments must be made to take care of loopholes.

For the reasons mentioned above, our government should introduce the legislations as soon as possible. We have to remember that enactment of the laws in this case is merely the beginning, and not the end, of the solutions.

Conclusion

I have heard experts talk about the current inflation and the government's role in it. The argument, often very elegantly put forward, is that the economy cannot be run by an iron hand. You need an "invisible hand" to tame it. They usually refer to the contingency plans adopted by the government to stabilise prices.

However, to deal with the cartels and the unscrupulous conduct, one would need to use a firm regulatory hand ultimately. RTP and consumer protection is based on the reverse argument of "laissez-faire." The government just needs to get its direction right. These are cases of market failure, and to rectify the situation the first thing that is needed is comprehensive competition and consumer legislation. And it is also vitally important for our national interest that the new law be an enforceable one.

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