

## Fighting corruption

After two years, where are we?

ONE thing we have to thank TI's Corruption Perception Index for is that it has placed combating corruption squarely at the front and centre of the nation's consciousness (though no political government ever saw fit to meaningfully address the issue while in office).

Corruption had long been a blot on the national psyche as well as a drag on the economy, and the media, civil society, and private sector had long bemoaned how the tentacles of corruption had seeped into every corner of the country, leading to chronic underdevelopment and resulting social injustice. But the truth is that it was not until the CPI rankings placed Bangladesh at the bottom of the index five years in a row that the nation sat up and took notice.

This year's ranking places us tenth from the bottom, but as has been pointed out, this is due more to other countries' scores falling than Bangladesh's score improving significantly. Nevertheless, we should not get too caught up in looking at league tables and other subjective criteria, but instead should look at hard facts.

Now that corruption is one of the major issues before us, we need to look at whether the much-vaunted anti-corruption drive that the nation has been conducting the past two years has really had much of an impact.

It must be said that the anti-corruption drive itself, focusing on the big fish, and not so much on institutional or petty corruption, and weighed down by a greater load than it could handle in terms of investigation and prosecution, has really not delivered to the extent that one would have hoped. Indeed, if those initially netted in the drive are eventually exonerated due to procedural or evidentiary blunders, it is possible that the culture of corruption will worsen.

However, we have more to be hopeful about with respect to institutional reform and the passage of laws such as RTI. These will take time to have effect, but are steps in the right direction. The main achievement has been the creation of a culture where corruption has once again been stigmatised and identified as wrong.

We need to build on our successes in this regard. Media, civil, society, and the community need to continue to make this a priority issue. It is clear that public sentiment against corruption has hardened and that tolerance for corrupt practices has diminished. What we need to do now is to keep up the pressure such that the political will to continue the fight against corruption is felt by the political parties.

## Mixing melamine with baby food

Take guard against the lethal hazard

THE import and marketing of the toxic milk powder which reportedly contains melamine, a poisonous substance, has added to the worries of general consumers. The Chinese experience with contaminated baby food is a wake-up call for us.

What is surprising is that no screening mechanism could be installed by the BSTI to find out whether all the imported milk powder is fit for human consumption. If allowing adulteration of foods, in a milder and less pernicious form, is a gross neglect of duty, the failure to detect melamine in milk to be ingested by infants and babies must have been a criminal offence. It is not known how such milk powder could be imported and marketed with impunity. Are we not required to be particular about the quality and purity of the food products we export to the developed world? Can't we expect that the rules would be similarly applicable when we are importing foodstuffs from abroad?

The government has decided to cancel the licence of the two companies which marketed such toxic milk powder. Mobile courts have also been set up in some places to prevent sale of such products. In Chittagong and Sylhet some shop owners were penalised. Obviously, the law enforcers have to take a tough stand on the issue. Seizure of milk powder from shops and clamping of a nominal fine do not, however, appear to be enough to deal with those committing offences amounting to infanticide. Those who mix poisonous substance with baby food are as culpable as those who import and sell it; yet, the authorities whose job it is to screen it out are to blame equally, if not more. For it is true that lax monitoring by the agencies concerned is exposing our people to all sorts of hazards.

The government ought to get a move on to assess the magnitude of the presence of toxic milk, ban its sale and put forward suggestions to fend off such hazardous product in future. Meanwhile, the media should be used to make the people aware of the risks involved in consuming toxic milk powder. Simultaneously, the milk importers' association should take guard against procurement of hazardous milk by any of its constituents.

## Will Pakistan be another Iraq?



**Brig Gen  
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PERHAPS no other country is as painfully aware as Pakistan about its geopolitical attributes, which have proved to be a bane as much as a boon. Its locational factor has become a matter of great discomfiture, more so now, with the US deciding to sally into Pakistan territory regardless of all international norms and diplomatic niceties -- for the purpose of chasing the al-Qaeda / Taliban as a part of its counter-terror operations in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is finding out the hard way that its policy of supporting the US in its global war against terror and working as the frontline state in the US war in Afghanistan is going against its national interest, an outcome that is quite contrary to what President Musharraf had hoped his strategy would gain -- his own perpetuation, along with Pakistan's territorial integrity. Both hopes have been frustrated, and Pakistan, regrettably, will have to sleep on the bed, which Musharraf had made under US pressure.

Pakistan had very skillfully exploited its locational advantage, sitting as it does at the confluence of the South Asian sub-continent, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, during the period of the Cold War. It was a frontline state during the US war against

## STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

To many it might seem an outlandish idea. Admittedly there will not be exactly an "a la Iraq" in Pakistan, but it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the US forces in Afghanistan may be tempted to physically draw a cordon sanitaire around FATA, which provides the operational depth to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and over which Pakistan has little control, to hem in the terrorists and then deal with them piecemeal.

the Soviets in Afghanistan, which allowed it to transform a "peanut" size US loan of \$270 million to more than two billion.

Its demographic make up, combined with its geographical location, accorded it the added importance which was not lost upon the US, in particular, and the West in general. And in that lay the root of the travails that Pakistan now faces.

What had once resurrected Pakistan from a peripheral state in the US's international and geopolitical equation in the eighties has come to threaten its very survival as a sovereign state. A dynamic that had in the past accorded tremendous geopolitical benefits has devalued to a point where the integrity of the country is under serious threat and where it might have to meet the fate that the Iraqis have suffered and are still suffering as a result of the US interventionist policy. It is a nightmare scenario that many in Pakistan are apprehensive about but may not be willing to either admit, or, even less, express.

This frightening prospect faces many of those countries that have joined the US bandwagon in its fight against global terror, either willingly or because of economic and political constraints, because in the name of global war on terror and for the

expressed purpose of guaranteeing security to mainland US, it has demonstrated little regard for the sanctity of international borders -- as Pakistan is experiencing much to its dislike.

It is worth noting that US interest in Pakistan is not only because of its role in the war against terror and the ongoing Afghan war. With the change of the geopolitical dynamics brought about by the breakup of the Soviet Empire the US was faced with two major adversaries, one a country whose economic might, although insignificant compared to its own, has powered its plans to enlarge and modernise its armed forces for safeguarding its economic interest.

China is seen as a potential threat to US hegemony, and which the US feels must be counterbalanced. The other adversary, the rise of "political Islam," manifested in the proliferation of various Muslim terrorist groups given the lead by the US nemesis, al-Qaeda. In both the equations, Pakistan features strongly in the US reckoning as a very important factor.

Unfortunately, the US war in Afghanistan is going poorly, and the US feels that it is Pakistan that should take the blame for its reversal in Afghanistan, whereas in reality it is the failed US global

anti-terror strategy that has impacted on the Afghan war. And as long as the Taliban remains in Afghanistan and the al-Qaeda able to wield its influence internationally, the US feels it will not be safe.

Thus, Pakistan faces a very serious challenge from the strongest military power on this globe. And willy-nilly it might capitulate in the face of US pressure to meet its strategic needs.

But the apprehension is not something that has evolved of late only in the perception of many Pakistanis. That such an eventuality, of physical US involvement in Pakistan, had been considered a possibility for a long time is clear from the reference made to it in an article appearing in The Hindu of April 23, 2003, which suggest that the average Pakistani, devastated by the demonstration of what the mighty West can do under the guise of taming "rogue" or "terrorist" regimes, is worried about a la Iraq. "It cannot be denied that there is in Pakistan a genuine worry that some day the country will face the same fate as Iraq and face the new American doctrine of 'pre-emptive strikes'."

As Qazi Hussain Ahmed, leader of Pakistan's biggest Islamic party Jamat-e-Islami, said in a recent interview to Reuters: "Thinking that our turn will not come is like



Shades of Iraq?

closing your eyes to the truth."

Perhaps Pakistan's time is come. From what one has witnessed, the brazen violation of a sovereign state's territory, the principle of preemptive strike might be extended along with the extension of the area of operation. And with it, when one takes into account comments of US president during his meeting with his Pakistani counterpart recently that "the US wants to help Pakistan to protect itself," coupled with the view of the US planners that Pakistan is not capable of fighting terrorism by itself, and Obama's statement that Pakistan is using the US military aid to prepare for war against Pakistan rather than on terror, the possibility of doing an Iraq in Pakistan becomes very real.

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Pakistan has little control, to hem in the terrorists and then deal with them piecemeal. How long it takes to neutralise the terrorists, and how much Pakistan chips in as its part in the so-called war against terror.

Pakistan finds itself between the devil and the deep sea -- the Marriott bombing is a warning to the fledgling government to distance itself from America and the blame leveled by the US that it is not doing enough as a frontline state -- puts it in a quandary.

Pakistan's job has been made even more difficult with public resentment rising against the US violation of its territory, coupled with the perception of the common Pakistani that the global war against terror is actually war against Islam. It calls for a great deal of statesman-like acumen and political wisdom to address the issues. It is to be seen how much of the two attributes the new Pakistan leadership can display in reconciling the dichotomy.

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## The art of customer service

Customer service can be defined as an art. The attitude towards customer service is the primary determinant of the quality of service that a company delivers. If the management thinks that customers are a nuisance, who always want something for nothing, that attitude will permeate the company, and service will be lousy. The best kind of customer service is when management enables employees to put the customer in control.

A.Z.M. SAIFUDDIN

A few days back, I went to a shop in Singapore. As I entered it, a salesperson greeted me like a guest. I was amazed to experience the comfort a salesperson can ensure to arrive at the right decision. She tried to understand what would suit my friend best. A very important question comes to my mind, "Is customer service an art?"

Proliferation of media, growth in telecommunication, mushrooming financial institutions, and mobility of people across the world have opened our eyes to the development of the modern world. People are exposed to the changing business world.

In our trade-dependent country we have seen a phenomenal growth in the service industry.

To take it to next level and package it with a professional touch "customer service" has become a key factor, but we see a lack of this particular aspect in the professional field.

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The best kind of customer service is when management enables employees to put the customer in control. This requires two leaps of faith: first, that management trusts customers not take advantage of the situation; second, that man-

agement trusts employees with this empowerment. If we can make these leaps, then the quality of customer service will zoom; if not, there is nothing more frustrating than companies copping the attitude that something is "against company policy."

A company that takes responsibility for its shortcomings is likely to provide great customer service for two reasons. First, it's acknowledged that it's the company's fault and the company's responsibility to fix. Second, customers won't go through the aggravating process of getting us to accept blame -- if we got to the airport on time and checked our baggage; it's hard to see how it's our fault that it got sent to the wrong continent.

"Pointing the finger" is the flip side of taking responsibility.

As computer owners we all know that when a program doesn't work vendors often resort to finger pointing: "It's Apple's system software." "It's Microsoft's special way of doing things." "It's the way Adobe created PDF."

A great customer service company doesn't point the finger -- it figures out what the solution is, regardless of whose fault the problem is, and makes the customer happy. There is a saying: "You're either part of the problem or part of the solution."

We have also experienced that great customer service companies don't shoot the messenger. When it comes to customer service, it could be a customer, an employee, a vendor, or a consultant who's doing the pointing. The goal is not to silence the messenger, but to fix the problem that the messenger brought so that other customers don't have a bad experience.

One of the most common justifications for anti-service is "what if everyone did this?" For example, what if everyone bought a new wardrobe when we lost their luggage? The point is: Don't assume that the worst case is going to be the common

case. There will be complainers, yes, but generally people are reasonable. If we put in a policy to take care of the worst case, it will antagonise and insult the bulk of our customers.

To put it mildly, customer service is not a job for everyone. The ideal customer service person derives great satisfaction by helping people and solving problems. This cannot be said of every job candidate. It's the company's responsibility to hire the right kind of people for this job because it can be a bad experience for the employee and the customer when you hire folks without a service orientation. In our country, we need to seriously look into this. Customer service is yet to be understood by us properly.

The goal of customer service should be delighting customers. For example, the signs in the lines at Theme Park that tell us how long we have to wait from each point are purposely overstated. When we get to the ride in less time, we are delighted. Imagine if the signs were understated -- we'd be angry because theme park lied to us.

It is also very important to integrate customer service into

the mainstream. Let's see: sales make the big money. Marketing does the fun stuff. Engineers, well, we leave them alone in their dark caves. Accounting cuts the paychecks. And support? They do the dirty work of talking to pissed-off customers when nothing else works.

Herein lies the problem: customer service has as much to do with a company's reputation as sales, marketing, engineering, and finance. So integrate customer service into the mainstream of the company and do not consider it a profit-sucking necessary evil. A customer service hero deserves all the accolades that a sales, marketing, or engineering one does.

Suppose a part breaks in the gizmo that a customer bought from us. First, take responsibility: "I'm sorry that it broke." Second, don't point the finger -- that is, don't say: "We buy that part from a supplier." Third, put the customer in control: "When would you like the replacement?" Fourth, promise to deliver: Send it at no additional charge via a faster shipping method than necessary. That's the way to create effective customer service.

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## Let there be no more gaps

Bangladesh is behind schedule on reducing poverty, measured by the share of poorest quintile in national income/consumption (MDG 1); on completion of primary schooling (MDG 2); on gender parity in tertiary education (MDG 3); on reducing maternal mortality (MDG 5); and on some of the targets for MDGs 6 and 7.

DUNCAN NORMAN and CHRIS AUSTIN

REDUCING global poverty is the biggest challenge we face today. As the UN's recent MDG Gap Taskforce highlighted -- it will take the sustained and committed efforts of rich countries -- north and south, as well as the private sector, faith groups, and civil society from across the world for us to meet this monumental challenge.

At the start of the new millennium, world leaders gathered at the United Nations to make a promise -- that we would do

everything within our power to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals agreed at that summit set clear and measurable targets on a range of vitally important issues such as increasing the number of children in school, improving health care, cutting maternal and child deaths, combating major diseases, and stopping environmental degradation.

All of these things make a huge difference to the quality of people's lives across the world, and we have seen big changes. There are now 41 million more

children in school, 3 million more children are surviving every year, and 2 million more people are receiving treatment for AIDS.

But -- halfway to 2015 and in the run-up to this month's meeting on the MDGs at the United Nations -- we now need to ensure that the promises of the international community do not become mere aspirations.

We must work together, in this 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to deliver the MDGs so that every person has health, education, shelter and security.



Together we will progress.

We know that real progress can be made. Here in Bangladesh, you have already achieved gender parity in primary and secondary schooling (MDG 3). Bangladesh is also on

track towards achieving the goals of halving the proportion of population below the national poverty line (MDG 1).

It is also achieving universal primary school enrolment (MDG 2), and reducing the

under-five child mortality and the infant mortality rate (MDG 4). The country is also on schedule for some of the MDG 6 targets, such as containing the spread of communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and also those of MDG 7 such as reducing the proportion of population without safe drinking water, and reforestation.

But despite the progress we have made so far, and despite the goodwill and the good work of millions, our goals are simply not being met, and there is much more we need to do.

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mortality (MDG 5); and on some of the targets for MDGs 6 and 7.

And then there is the threat of climate change reversing the gains already made. Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to impacts such as sea level rise and salinity, floods and drought. Cyclone Sidr last November illustrated all too starkly how extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more intense.

Therefore, each and every one of us needs to act, today, to make 2008 a turning point.

Earlier this month, the UK and Bangladesh governments jointly hosted a high-level conference on climate change in London. This has only helped put the international spotlight on how Bangladesh is adapting to climate change.

It has also has re-emphasised how much more needs to be done, both domestically and

globally to stop things from getting worse.

At the global level, the United Nations meeting on September 25 will bring together representatives of G8 and European governments with their African, Asian and Latin American counterparts, as well as faith leaders, business leaders and civil society organisations from across the world -- and we must commit to step up the pace and to work relentlessly, year on year, until we meet our goals.

We have the technology. We have the knowledge. We have the wealth. All we need now is the will to ensure there are no more gaps. Only by acting together can we succeed. We cannot fail.

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