

## Anti-corruption drive must be a continuing one

*Nothing should be done to reduce public confidence in ACC*

WE were taken a little by surprise at Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's rather sweeping remarks on the Anti-Corruption Commission's operations under Dr Fakhruddin-led caretaker government on the floor of Jatiya Sangsad Wednesday. They sounded overly critical of a task performed under realities in the caretaker interregnum that was fraught with pushes and pulls through which the ACC had to navigate and function.

It seems to us that the ACC's work is being confused with that of the National Coordination Committee. For, the ACC had neither to do with the arrests or detentions nor the subsequent plethora of bails that were granted belatedly, which was something of a legal anachronism, apparently in the interest of a relaxed and participatory atmosphere for the election. It is still obscure from public view as to who were the actual protagonists of the so-called minus-two formula or attempts at simulating birth of a third political force, or, indeed, whether the NCC was merely acting out the play from the front. It, definitely, was not the ACC.

People from both sides of the fence were affected by the anti-corruption drive. It is to be expected that with one voice they will express their grievance over it. But as the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should tread above all this. For, the Prime Minister herself has stated before the House that it was necessary to shake the society off as corruption had seeped into all fields. The PM cannot forget that, among other things, it is the issue of corruption and BNP's identification with it that contributed to her landslide victory in the polls.

If grounds existed to raise questions about the ACC's accountability and transparency, and if there are genuine allegations against any functionary of the ACC taking bribe or resorting to favouritism, then these must be probed and corrective action taken. Make the ACC organisationally strong, corruption-free and operationally sound by all means, but let's ensure also that public confidence in the national anti-corruption body does not dwindle and that it works with vigour and greater commitment. In this regard we are heartened by the PM's repeated assertion that the anti-corruption drive will be given all the independence it needs to root out corruption in the country.

## The odour in drinking water

*It is a clear danger to public health*

DHAKA dwellers, both at home and at their work places, have been experiencing a health hazard through the piped water supplied by Wasa. For the past one week, inhabitants of such areas as Kamalapur, Gopibagh, Mugdapara, Shantinagar, Rampura, Bashabo and Jatrabari have been complaining about certain smells in the water. Even at Karwan Bazar, where a number of offices and other establishments are located, there have been reports of the malady. Obviously, questions have once again been raised about the quality of the water being supplied by Wasa.

Officials at Wasa have, of course, pointed out that one of the reasons behind the bad smell of the water could be the pollution in the river. Now that is an explanation which does not hold good, for the simple reason that the treatment of water through the Sayedabad water treatment plant has so far more or less been satisfactory. If that is the reality, one does not quite understand why all of a sudden drinking water should develop the kind of odour, people have been experiencing of late. Here too Wasa comes up with another explanation, which is that an excessive use of chemicals at the Sayedabad plant may have been a contributory factor to the problem. There is, an official has noted, no harm in drinking the water! We wonder what makes him feel so sure when there are allegations that the sewer lines may have cracked and mixed up in some areas with the underground water supply network. The point here is that if water does not taste like water, there is surely something awfully wrong with it. Bad taste or smell has a way of putting people off. Should Wasa not be keeping this truth in mind?

A thorough inquiry into the situation is now a necessity. It is public health which is now at risk. Sophistry to explain a bad condition away does not help.

## Humility, not humiliation

Do we need to worry because we are a weak nation, or get overly concerned because India is strong? In the end, lasting relationships are built on mutual respect. It may be humility to admit that one is weak, but it's humiliating when that admission is forced by fear of the strong.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE Gandhi Peace Foundation once published a compilation, which included an essay from famous economist Kenneth E. Boulding. In *Why Did Gandhi Fail*, he argued that it was a fatal mistake for a weak nation to behave as if it were a strong one, which was precisely what India was doing. That was way back in 1964, when the country was still finding its feet on the ground. If alive, Boulding would have wanted to eat his words. India is a strong nation today.

Forty-four years later Boulding's words are still valid though, if not for India but for Bangladesh. Let us accept that we are a weak nation compared to India. So, how should David behave with Goliath? No sooner than next week that question will be put to test, when the Indian external affairs minister comes to town.

Rewind history by roughly a month. In the week after the December election, talkshow guests argued on television, probably more inexorably than any other week before, that improvement of our relationship with India was a national imperative. While it should be common sense to anyone who wants to think, having it heard so many times within such a short time had an odious ring of irony to it. Some people, it seemed, were going pedal to the metal to push that point in a hurry.

I say it because in that very week this nation had come through a rude awaken-

ing. We had a national election in which people overwhelmingly showed their outrage. They scoffed at a particular brand of politicians, some of whom were perhaps more responsible than others, for fanning the paranoia of Indian hegemony. The question is why should those talkshow guests radiate ripples of arguments to convince us of what we were already convinced?

If I would like to believe that it was not an expression of comprador interest, I would also like to believe that people in this country fully appreciate that India is a strong neighbour and we must learn to respect it. Haven't we all faced that reality growing up as children? Big brothers are bullies. If you mess with them, your face gets bloodied.

So, how do we deal with India? What do we tell the Indian minister next week? Of course, a great deal of it depends on what he likes to tell us. Will he tell about trade imbalance and tariff barriers? Is he going to talk about border delimitation and transit? Will he ask for our help to fight terrorism? Will he reiterate his government's earlier claims that illegal Bangladeshis are living in India?

No matter what, we are going to have to take a position of our own. Now, what will that position be? Will it be a weak position, or will it be a strong one? Do we need to worry because we are a weak nation, or get overly concerned because India is strong? In the end, lasting relationships are built



What will the Indian foreign minister bring to the table?

on mutual respect. It may be humility to admit that one is weak, but it's humiliating when that admission is forced by fear of the strong.

In his inaugural address in 1961, John F. Kennedy laid down the ground rules for how his country should behave with rest of the world. "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate," he said. Kennedy spoke on behalf of the strongest nation in the world.

This is where those who wish to spread the scare of India are equally as bad as those who wish to spread hatred against it. One side wants us to negotiate out of fear. Another wants us to fear to negotiate. The reality is that we should do neither. We shouldn't underestimate India for the same reason India shouldn't overestimate us.

In his book, *From Wealth to Power*, Fareed Zakaria argues that if rich nations were to routinely become great powers, then why didn't the United States try to

extend its political influence abroad in the late nineteenth century? The answer is that it wanted to do it whenever it experienced an increase in its economic power. But it was restricted by the lack of a strong central government that could harness that economic power for the purposes of foreign policy. America was an unusual power, a strong nation with a weak state.

We are also an unusual power of a kind, a weak country with fluid politics and fledgling economy. India achieved a strong government first, economic success followed afterwards. Do we always have to think either of fighting, or sucking up to, India? Not really. What we need is our rightful place, and we are going to have to earn it. Neither for hatred nor out of fear, if anything we should negotiate for dignity.

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## Ignoring a point of view

KULDIP NAYAR

IN a way, what has happened to the LTTE in Sri Lanka is similar to what has happened to the Hurriyat in Kashmir. Both of them have ceased to be relevant in their respective places. It does not mean that the alienation of people they represent has ended. But it does mean that the fight to project their stance has not met with success.

In any case, the violence is practically over, more so in Kashmir than in Sri Lanka. This is the only conclusion which can be drawn. Anything beyond that may be wishful thinking on the part of the LTTE and the Hurriyat on one hand and the governments in Sri Lanka and India on the other. What we see is a military victory. Moral victory is still distant.

I do not want to belittle the two struggles. The LTTE and the Hurriyat have fought for independence for some 23 years, sacrificing thousands of their adherents. Yet, they did not realise that the gun would never give them victory. They pitted themselves against states which had more guns. Even general opinion was against them. In the long run, the governments were bound to get the better of the "freedom fighters."

Neither the LTTE nor the Hurriyat has ever faced the fact that no nation will allow any part of its territory to break away. Had the two asked for a status within their respective countries, the sky

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would have been the limit. Some countries like China are unfortunate examples. The Dalai Lama has said more than once that he was prepared to accept an autonomous state within China, leaving defence and foreign affairs to Beijing. India would give its right arm if the Kashmiris were to accept that.

Maybe the solution of Kashmir lies in a formula whereby people of the state enjoy power over all matters except foreign affairs and defence. Islamabad could do likewise in Azad Kashmir. Both New Delhi and Islamabad can give the Kashmiris a sense of integrity by making the border between Kashmir and the Azad Kashmir soft. Pakistan has already said that it would agree to the arrangement, which the Kashmiris accept.

Jammu will still need to be tackled. If it is assured of its identity, it would rather stay with the valley than jump into the welter of India, where linguistic chauvinism is taking over the centuries old coherent tradition. Much depends on the people living in the valley -- how far they are willing to accommodate

Jammu.

In the same way, it depends on the Sinhalese how far they are willing to go to win over the northern part of Sri Lanka where the Tamils abound and where the LTTE has been most active. Absorption of Tamils or those who harbour the dream of Eelam depends on the government. A federal structure instead of the unitary system the country follows, or the devolution of power to the different parts, may provide a way out. But then the authoritarianism of the ruling party will have to be curbed.

I was shouted down when I told a gathering of students at the Srinagar University that their movement would have made far more impact if it had been non-violent. Similarly, when I met a few LTTE leaders some years ago, they were violent even in their tone. They are as much in the wrong as the Hurriyat leaders if they believe that a principle can only be stoutly defended by the language of violence or by condemning those who do not accept their point of view.

For both of them, those who are not

with them are against them. This is the old approach of the bigoted. This approach is wholly unscientific, unreasonable, and uncivilised, whether it is applied to the realm of politics, religion, or economic theory.

Whatever Colombo and New Delhi may think about their respective strategies, we have arrived at a stage in the world where an attempt to forcibly impose a policy or idea is ultimately bound to fail. I wish the two governments would realise this. They have to win them over and make them feel that their stake in peace is no less than that of the government.

If the LTTE and the Hurriyat continue to defy reason they would be living in a make-believe world. But there can be no victory for Sri Lanka and India either. And the status quo is a defeat for everyone. Both Colombo and New Delhi have to accept that the desire for identity is strong and it cannot be suppressed.

The ground is ready for Sri Lanka to have a settlement with the Tamils. In the same way, the government at Delhi has to sort out things with the Kashmiris. In fact, people in all the countries in South Asia want to rule themselves without government interference. They are sick and tired of violence and would like to settle down to a stable, secure future.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## Fear and loathing in Davos

DANIEL GROSS

CNBC's James Cramer likes to say that there's always a bull market somewhere. When one sector or region is down, the theory goes, another always seems to be up. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, however, the only bull market was in pessimism.

It was the 39th such gathering. But by the sound of things, it may well be the last. Davos Man is an optimist by nature and profession. Ordinarily, self-assurance is so thick in the resort town you can cut it with a Swiss Army knife. But the only place I saw people laughing in the face of danger was on the sparsely populated ski slopes.

I mounted a 72-hour effort to locate an optimistic, self-assured CEO. But many CEOs bore the harrowed looks of survivors of the Donner party. Once they trickled in, many having endured the indignity of flying commercial for the first time in years, they were treated to an avalanche of doomsaying. Voices from hedge-fund manager George Soros to historian Niall Ferguson spun elaborate tales of catastrophe. Ferguson boldly concluded that the U.S. was destined for a decade of extremely lame growth. Economists were universally downbeat, which isn't totally surprising.

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But this year, those who had successfully predicted the debacle, like Nouriel Roubini, New York University's Dr. Doom, were elevated to prime speaking slots. Hot trends tend to suck up a lot of the oxygen in the thin air of the Alps. Last year, the chic topics were sustainability and decoupling -- the notion that developed markets could boom even if the US stalled. This year, failure and depression were smoking.

CEOs were easy to spot by their casual dress. In one of the strange anthropological twists of Davos, the more you make the more you dress down. Journalists and intellectuals, thinking they're going to be around a lot of CEOs and money managers, wear suits and ties. CEOs and money managers, thinking they're going to be rubbing tweed-patched elbows with journalists and intellectuals, dress down. But the encounters I had with CEOs made me feel as if I were an undergraduate reading "Waiting for Godot" again: lots of non-sequiturs, uncomfortable silence and existential angst.

At a dinner for CEOs in the mobility

industry -- airlines, autos, logistics -- participants joked about passing hemlock around the table instead of butter. Best Buy CEO Brad Anderson, whose biggest competitor, Circuit City, is in the process of liquidating, put on a brave face. "You know, I'm a congenital optimist," he said. "But in the short term?"

I asked one private-equity titan if he knew any optimistic CEOs. "Steve Schwarzman is pretty upbeat," he said, which was likely intended as a dig at a rival. Stephen Schwarzman, CEO of the Blackstone Group, has seen his company's stock fall about 75 percent in the past year. When I found Schwarzman, I asked him and a colleague if they knew any optimistic CEOs. The response: Turkish manufacturers seemed to be holding up, and maybe Indonesia. "Look for an Indonesian," Schwarzman recommended.

I didn't find any upbeat Indonesian CEOs. But the CEO of an Indian manufacturer said the financial crisis was bringing down the costs of his supplies.

Reid Hoffman, CEO of LinkedIn, a networking site for professionals, said he expects revenues and employment to rise in 2009. "Networking is cycle-resistant," Hoffman said. "It was interesting to see all the people from Lehman Brothers join" after the company went bankrupt in September.

Ditlev Engel, CEO of the Danish wind-turbine maker Vestas, was likewise cautiously optimistic. The US market, already the largest for wind energy in the world, may be poised to get bigger with the prospect of more mandates and incentives for alternative energy. Vestas is opening plants in Colorado, and plans to boost employment in the U.S. from 1,300 today to 4,000 by the end of 2010. "I could bring a lot of subsuppliers from Europe to China to support our investments there."

In a gathering marked by the absence of US political leaders, few summiteers had the audacity to hope. The overwhelming consensus was things are really bad and getting worse. But that, in and of itself, may provide a glint of optimism. At one session, one of India's wealthiest men noted: "Whatever the consensus at Davos has been over the last many years, is never right."

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