

## Deepening sugar crisis Mismanagement and bungling at their worst

**M**ORE than a week and a half after Ed-ul Fitr, the scandalous sugar situation far from abating has only deepened and ramified with newer features as the root cause of the problem remains wholly unattended to. From bungling with delivery orders, through playing Ping-Pong between mutually recriminating millers and wholesalers, to trading of threats of action by government and shutdown by mill owners and wholesalers, the price of sugar kept soaring beyond the reach of the common consumer.

What is claimed to be in abundant supply despite hoarding and artificial scarcities, and priced at Tk. 39 per kg at mill-gate, is reportedly selling even at Tk. 64. While the government is back-tracking from arrest order against a reported group of eight refiners and wholesalers, apparently under pressure from the business community and the TCB intervention is apologetic, two committees have been formed at long last to 'identify the culprits' in seeming compromise. This is perhaps sought to be explained away as letting the market forces work only after rubbing the issue sour leaving the real manipulators and those who kept them company off the hook.

The entire distribution system being flawed, undefined, loosely-knit and unwieldy, a vast scope is built into it for all sorts of supply and price manipulations. The delivery order (DO) procedure as it gets applied becomes a virtual method of foul play. At every step, as the DO changes hands, and it does many times over, an additional cut would be charged by the ever changing possessor. Naturally, the gap between ex-mill price and the ultimate price-tag has vastly yawned.

It is strange that the millers issue DO in advance of the production schedule to garner income in advance of the delivery. That is the first imbalance created in the supply chain. Then a few banks on the strength of the rather uncertain DO provide loan to dealers which is blocking money really and, in a way fueling inflation.

As an intelligence operator has put it succinctly, "Having DOs in hand but not getting the delivery means the produce is being hoarded". There is an allegation too, that mill owners increase prices off an on. Why must they?

Either the DO system is replaced or it is reworked and reformulated.

We believe the government faces the stiffest test to-date, in fact, a litmus test of its ability to keep the price and availability of a daily essential stable. It would do well to hold the line or loose the grip widely in terms of market prices.

## The girl gang-raped

*The culprits must not go unpunished*

**T**HE incident that follows a similar crime committed by BCL men a few days ago puts the whole nation to shame, not only should the ruling party be. When a schoolgirl is gang-raped by the activists of the ruling party's student wing, people are bound to feel both tormented and insecure.

The BCL activists appear to have gone out of control as reports of their committing all sorts of crime continue to pile up. All the attempts by the AL high-ups to rein the unruly elements in have apparently failed to produce any results. But then gang-raping a young girl and then trying to hush it up is a crime the enormity of which is hard to describe. The criminals, no fewer than 10 in number, committed the mind-boggling crime and then arranged a farcical village arbitration and were let off the hook lightly, as they were asked to pay a fine of only Taka 10,000 each. Now, rape is not the sort of crime that can be settled in a village arbitration dominated by the influential locals who have no legal authority to deal with such matters. In this case the arbitrators themselves committed a crime by allowing the culprits to escape without the punishment that they deserved.

The whole thing smacks of a conspiracy to deny the poor father of the victim the justice that he sought so desperately. The AL leaders of Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali district have failed to handle the matter neutrally as is evident from the arguments put forward by them in defence of the rapists. Perhaps such leaders are as responsible as the criminals themselves for what is happening today across the country.

Justice is clearly eluding the victim and her family. Things are going wrong for them at almost every step. The rapists are reported to have collected the signature of the girl's father on a white paper to make sure that he could not seek legal remedy. This is of course another crime since the poor fellow's right to seek legal protection was violated through it.

So, it is a story of political clout overshadowing everything else. Even the law enforcers appear to be helpless as they released two of the rapists because no case had been filed against them! However, the police should have delved deeper into the matter before releasing the two young men.

The ruling party has to address the issue in order to uphold the right of a poor girl to get justice, and for other girls to feel secure. Such ghastly crimes will surely blur the party's image and expose it to condemnation only unless the culprits are given due punishment.

## Hilsa diplomacy

It is in this backdrop that the Bangladesh FM paid a three-day visit to India, where several things have been agreed upon. Some have criticised the quid pro quo nature of the agreement. But anyone who thinks that our demands would be conceded without us reciprocating in equal measure suffers from delusion.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

**I**T is not my intention to make light of the visit of the Bangladesh foreign minister to India last month but to highlight the importance of personal rapport between leaders of the countries of the region, that is so very essential to foster better understanding between states. But one must also be careful against depending too much on personal equation when it comes to serving the interest of one's country.

Interestingly, insofar as Bangladesh-India relationship is concerned, special predilection for a particular party in authority at the centre, both in India and Bangladesh, has been the hallmark of the relationship between the two countries. Whether that is the ideal situation is for experts to comment, but I for one feel that states deal with governments and not parties although the psychological disposition of the ruling party in one country towards the party in power in the neighbouring country is a big factor in determining how relationship between the two develops. The peaks and troughs in the level of relationship between Bangladesh

and India since 1991 have varied with the assumption and relinquishment of political power in these two countries.

One would recall the then foreign minister of Bangladesh rushing to New Delhi in 2001 after the BJP was voted back to power, forgetting that it is not the party that is important but the permanent interest of the country and that any political party worth the name, and one which has the best interest of its country at heart, would be motivated by this fact alone.

Interestingly too, there is clear divide of opinion in Bangladesh when it comes to our India policy. While a section of our political leadership is wary of any India-related issue, and is inclined to view with suspicion any suggestion that originates from India, the other segment is criticised for bending over backwards to accommodate India's strategic requirements.

It needs hardly be said that Indo-Bangladesh relationship has suffered due to the mindset of the leadership of the two countries, and to some extent the attitude of the establishments on various issues. There is a feeling among many in Bangladesh that India wants its pound of flesh for its role in our war of liberation;

and they cannot be blamed for it since there are many in India who feel that Bangladesh has not been grateful enough for the sacrifice India had made in 1971.

Very few, if any, would contest the fact that the relationship between the two countries was at very low ebb during the 4-party alliance regime. One cannot recall any bilateral visits at foreign minister-level taking place, not to speak of visit by the head of state or government, during that period.

If that was the time when the Bangladesh-India relations went out of focus, a situation quite unacceptable and unwarranted, the new dispensation in Dhaka has lost no time to redirect the attention to what must be a very important foreign policy priority. However, to some it may appear that it has been at the expense of other areas of equal priority.

It is in this backdrop that the Bangladesh FM paid a three-day visit to India, where several things have been agreed upon. Some have criticised the quid pro quo nature of the agreement. But anyone who thinks that our demands would be conceded without us reciprocating in equal measure suffers from delusion. The question is how far have our strategic concerns been addressed.

The variegated nature of the issues were rightly acknowledged and in stating that the recent elections have provided both countries with a historical opportunity to take India-Bangladesh relations to greater heights acknowledged the special relationship between the Congress and the Awami League.

However, if, as the joint statement stated, both ministers discussed the entire gamut of bilateral relations the joint statement did not reflect that at all. Vital bilateral issues that are of special relevance to Bangladesh were glossed over at best, and that includes trade.

The agreement to immediately commence Joint Hydrological Observations on the river Teesta is a step backwards, since, according to knowledgeable sources, an agreement was all but signed during the last tenure of BNP.

As for the land boundary issues, it is interesting to note that "both sides expressed their intent to resolve outstanding issues relating to Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves and the Tin Bigha Corridor." One wonders what is there for Bangladesh to resolve about the Tin Bigha Corridor or for that matter if there is anything outstanding on the Bangladesh side regarding Dahagram and Angarpota. The onus of action regarding these two issues is fully on India.

The Nepal-Bhutan transit is an outstanding matter and restating it merely shows lack of action on the Indian side to deliver. The trade issue has remained confined to the realm of rhetoric and the killing of Bangladeshis by BSF was not even brought up. And no one knows when we might get the 100MW electricity, given that setting up the required infrastructure to transfer it to our country is time consuming.

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## Listen to the assertive new Indian woman

The happiness of life, the joy of individual liberty, will define the politics of India in the foreseeable future. Those politicians who do not recognise this are condemned to irrelevance. Who understands life better than a woman? Women give life. Men take it.

M.J. AKBAR

**S**IR Harcourt Butler was a great civil servant of the British empire, an icon who understood India, befriended Indians like the Raja of Mahmudabad and advocated causes like the Aligarh Muslim University. As a former governor of United Provinces (today's Uttar Pradesh), he offered a word of advice for the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, in a letter sent from Rangoon on January 16, 1916. The most powerful influences in India, said Sir Harcourt, were priests and women. As long as any political organisation was unable to mobilise both, the government had little to fear.

Mahatma Gandhi, who had no shortage of priests alongside, jolted the British during the non-cooperation movement in 1920 and 1921 precisely because he brought women out of their ancient closet, promising Hindu women the end of Ravanraj (British rule) in six months if they wore homespun and spurned luxury just as Sita had rejected Ravana's temptations.

There was a similar contemporary

upsurge among Muslims. Maulana Muhammad Ali's redoubtable mother Bi Amman was the first Muslim woman to address the Muslim League without a veil, and the wives of Hakim Ajmal Khan and M.A. Ansari set up the Women's Khilafat Committee in 1921.

Nine decades later, priests and women remain the most powerful engines of political mobility, with one huge twist in a long tale. The influence of women now far outweighs that of priests. Social development is not even. There are sharp differences both between communities and within communities. But the dominant voice of the next decade will be an assertive new woman with a modern spine.

The Muslim vote remains powered by the exhortations of the ulema, but the queues of women in ballot order, even if in hijab or burqa, are evidence of a new dynamic. They have understood the power of the secret vote and exult in exercising it. The Congress, a principal beneficiary in the last general elections, may want to check why it lost a safe, minority-dominant seat in a Delhi by-election. Did veiled women register a protest against

rising costs in the kitchen, or rediscover questions about the Batla House deaths last year?

One reason why the BJP's Ram temple campaign succeeded in the late 1980s and the early 1990s was because it energised women, and made them stakeholders in the proposed temple by asking them to contribute a brick each. But that model has dated, or is in the process of becoming passe. A girl born in 1989 would have voted in 2009.

The BJP's stagnation, or slide, can be partly explained by its disconnect with the changing profile of Hindu women.

This is not limited to metropolitan India. The very presence of imitation brands in small towns is proof of the spread of aspiration. This is not a passing fad or fashion; it is rooted in a new mindset. The most powerful weapon in the armoury of the modern woman is choice. Choice is liberating at both the individual and collective level.

Imposition, disguised as obedience, stability and security, is yesterday's story. Today's woman wants the final say, whether in dress, marriage, lifestyle or the vote; she does not want to be told that she cannot wear jeans or enjoy Valentine's Day, or go to a pub of an evening if she so chooses. Indian women can see the suffocation of fundamentalism in the neighbourhood. That is the last thing they want in India.

Much is being made, in Delhi, of the fact that the Kashmir valley celebrated one of

the most peaceful, happiest Eids in memory. Don't overdo the celebrations. This may have less to do with India than with Pakistan.

Even a cursory look at Pakistan tells the Kashmiri young -- and particularly young women -- that whatever its faults, India just might be the better option. How many young men would want to live within gunshot distance of the Taliban? How many young women would seek a future in a land where the clergy insists on twisted gender laws? As they might put it, India is "less worse."

Pakistan's favourite Kashmiri leader, Jamaat-e-Islami's Syed Ali Shah Geelani, pleaded with every Kashmiri Muslim to suik along with him on Eid; he was ignored. Geelani was a teenager in 1947. The teenager of 2009 does not recognise the teenager of 1947. There are no jobs in conflict, unless of course you want early retirement from the burdens of existence. The young want life; old warmongers offer death.

The happiness of life, the joy of individual liberty, will define the politics of India in the foreseeable future. Those politicians who do not recognise this are condemned to irrelevance. Who understands life better than a woman? Women give life. Men take it.

Women have listened to priests in every age of recorded history. It is time for priests to listen to women.

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## Cyber crime

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**I**N today's interconnected world, the use of computers and other hi-tech equipment have paved the way for a new type of crime -- cyber crime. Electronic fraud in banks, hacking, identity theft, interferences with national security, child pornography and data interference are examples of cyber crimes.

Advances in the use of internet have increased the potential for illegal activities, and cyberspace is being used by individuals or groups to threaten governments as well as terrorise people.

A cyber terrorist is someone who intimidates a government or an organisation to advance his or her political or social objectives by launching computer-based attacks against computer networks and the information stored in them.

Recognising the need for cooperation among the states in combating cyber crimes and to protect legitimate interest in the use of information technology, member states of the Council of Europe and G-8 met at a convention on cyber crime in 2001 in Budapest.

The convention decided to pursue a common criminal policy aimed at the protection of society against cyber crime by

adopting appropriate legislation and fostering international cooperation. The US Senate ratified the cyber crime treaty in 2004, and the FBI trained its foreign counterparts to make them more effective partners in the fight against international cyber crime.

The Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS) of the Criminal Division of the US Department of Justice recently indicted a 28-year old Miami man for the largest credit and debit card theft ever prosecuted in the US, with data from more than 130 million stolen credit and debit cards.

US computer networks, including those at the Pentagon and other federal agencies, are under persistent attack, ranging from nuisance hacking to more nefarious assaults. With warnings that the US is ill-prepared against a cyber attack, the White House recently conducted a study to protect its computer networks against emerging threats from hackers, cyber criminals or other nations looking for its security secrets.

Developed countries, which have transferred their utilities, including health, education and public safety into digital technologies, have already enacted appropriate laws and evolved systems for cyber security.

As the agencies fighting cyber crimes in the developed countries have become more efficient in combating such crimes, cyber criminals have chosen to shift their operations to countries, which lack the technical prowess. So the threat of cyber crime looms large in Bangladesh with its fast growing internet banking and transmission of valuable data through the worldwide web.

Cyber crime is gaining ground in Bangladesh. The website of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) was hacked by four students of a private technology institute in the city a year back. The hackers said that they hacked Rab's website just for adventure, while the Rab termed it a criminal act.

An e-mail was sent to Prothom Alo on August 23, 2004, issuing a life threat to Sheikh Hasina, the then opposition leader. Another e-mail was sent to the police headquarters on August 25, threatening the then prime minister Khaleda Zia and her eldest son.

Rab recently arrested JMB's IT chief Rajib, who confessed that he had downloaded information on explosives from the internet, translated them into Bengali and sent them to Mizan, who made explosives on the basis of this information.

Police headquarters recently requested the home ministry to close down 84 websites, which have thousands of porno pictures on display and are provoking sexual crimes and violence.

A Daily Star report on September 28 said that a student leader at Pirojpur lured a class X student to a love trap, raped her and

recorded it in a cell phone. The video footage reached local youths through cell phones, flash drives and CDs, which are now on sale in video stores. This is the second such incident after a gang in Faridpur raped a school girl and recorded the scene and released the footage.

Cyber crime is a distinct type of crime, and law enforcers must be well-equipped to tackle it. The police department trained some officers in 2007 to combat such hi-tech crimes, but no improvement is noticeable. The cyber crime investigation cell of the Mumbai police has been fighting strongly against all sorts of cyber crimes since its inception on December 18, 2000.

The government also lacks laws to combat cyber crimes. The Information Technology Act-2006 is not effective enough to address the problem. Therefore, some stringent laws should be enacted to combat hi-tech crimes. A strong regulatory framework is also necessary to determine which acts will be identified as criminal offences and what sort of punishment will be imposed.

Cyber crime is now a global issue as it is not bounded by borders. It is an abiding threat, which is more dangerous than is typically understood. Lack of technological prowess makes the country more vulnerable to such threats. Therefore, Bangladesh needs to be ready to face such threats, as everyone is aware of the harm that computer viruses and hackers can cause.

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