

## Probe into Grameen affair

*It must be transparent, undistracted and revealing of the truth*

**Y**ESTERDAY in this column we urged facts-based discussions on the controversy raging over Norwegian TV documentary centring around purported transfer of funds from Grameen Bank (GB) to a sister concern Grameen Kalyan (GK). Now Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has voiced her government's decision to probe the matter to find out 'if there was any unauthorised fund transfer' by Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus.

Thus, the matter has moved beyond the pale of discussion, which was a matter of focus yesterday, entering into the realm of what the PM terms as 'comprehensive investigation'. Prof Yunus has promptly welcomed the move for a probe into the allegations of 'unauthorised transfer' of funds being levelled against Grameen Bank and him as an individual.

We regard the PM's move and Prof Yunus' responsive reaction to it as a positive development of great import, because it has a bearing on the credibility of Grameen Bank and Prof Yunus, the Nobel Laureate who have become iconic in the microcredit world, let alone the image of the country. Prof Yunus should be naturally keen to clear his name and that of Grameen Bank from any imputation whatsoever while it is important for the government whose representatives were on the board of the Grameen Bank to clear the air of any controversy in national interest.

Now that the investigations are about to get underway, two normative imperatives are compelling to be lived up to and complied with. First, all concerned need to refrain from making any observations, speculative or otherwise, that might tend to prejudice or prejudice the outcome of the investigation. Secondly and equally, if not more importantly, it must be ensured that structurally, terms of reference wise and in the modus operandi, transparency, fairness and neutrality of the processes are scrupulously and unfailingly maintained and upheld.

Here we cannot but take note of, and express shock over, the PM's very acrid remarks to the effect that 'microcredit plan launched by Grameen Bank instead of bringing any change to their lives had been sucking the blood of the poor'. Since she has decided to comprehensively investigate the Grameen affair, such observations, by hindsight, were contrary, if not contradictory, to her decision to go for a probe. We repeat nothing that can prejudice the outcome of the investigation or influence its course should even remotely be done or appear to have been done.

The overarching need is to quickly complete the investigation, bring out the truth and leave the controversy behind for the greater interest of the country.

## Capital caught in gridlock

*Can't anything be done to rid the city of it?*

**I**T seems that Dhaka residents are destined to live with the traffic problem as a fait accompli. One doesn't have to live in Dhaka for any great length of time to see how the problem has aggravated in quick time. It is really beyond our comprehension that while the accretion of the problem is worsening the existence of the city dwellers, very little palpable has been, or is being, done to address this issue, one that has now assumed a crisis proportion.

Added to the already existing aggravating factors of traffic congestion is the phenomenon, known as VIP movement. And, as we are told, last Sunday's situation in particular was worsened by the fact that vehicles movements had to be restricted on certain roads to cater to the movement of so many VIPs attending the parliament. And add to this the fact that at some very sensitive rail crossings in the city that had witnessed serious train-vehicle collisions in the recent past, the gatekeepers took a strange step -- putting the rail gate down well in advance of the due time to prevent vehicles spilling on to the tracks and causing accidents.

Even the management of the problem, it seems, is a case of playing it by ears. Poor management, associated with ad hocism, gives us an impression of reliance on tokenism and helplessness of the police.

We understand that the problem is not alone for the police to solve. But certainly, it is for the police to ensure that rickshaws do not enter roads that are off limits to them. It was quite disconcerting to see a picture in this newspaper, of not two, but three policemen riding a rickshaw on a road on which rickshaws are prohibited from plying. Is it also not for the traffic police to ensure that vehicles without fitness certificate are off the roads, that fake license holders are put away so that they cannot be a menace to other vehicles and the public, that private and public buses stop only at designated points?

There has been too many posturing on the matter and too little substantive work. Medium to long term plans appear to be mired in bureaucratic tangles. We say at the risk of being repetitive, traffic snarls-up are draining the economy at the national level while pulling asunder individual work plan and disrupting one's life severely. Can't something be done to rid the city of this crisis?



SHAFIQ ISLAM/DRK NEWS

## Politics of climate fund

The climate related assistance being overtaken by business has raised a question about whether the fund pledged to developing countries at Copenhagen, and transfer of technology, will really serve the cause of the climate victims across the world.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

**B**ANGLADESH has called for billions of dollars to be made available quickly for its fight against climate change at the 16th United Nations' Climate Conference, which kicked-off in Cancun, Mexico on November 29, considering its extreme vulnerability to the effects of climate change. The low-lying areas of the country are vulnerable to the catastrophic impact of global warming, with natural disasters killing around 200,000 people in the last 30 years.

The Copenhagen conference agreed to provide \$30 billion between 2010 and 2012 to the world's poor nations severely affected by climate change related impacts. But quibbling over how to channel the fund and how to distribute it among the projects under strategies for adaption and mitigation has delayed disbursement.

Tough negotiations are also in progress for control and management of the global climate investment fund. Although the UN is at the forefront of organising the global conference to address the climate change issues, developed countries are relentlessly at work to give the management of the climate fund to the World Bank, ignoring demands of the developing countries for national ownership and UN supervision over the fund.

The developing countries, however, have placed their preference for using other existing funding channels, such as the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) under the UN Framework convention on climate change or the Adaptation

Fund that was created under the Kyoto Protocol. The LDCF has the longest history of all the adaptation funds, having been created in 2002.

The adaptation fund is a fund to which developing countries have direct access, and need not apply through a third party, such as the UNDP. Senegal was the first country to get access to the fund. Senegal increased its coastal protection to prevent rice cultivation areas from being flooded by rising sea, which had devastated crop yields. It is estimated that the economic cost of rising sea-levels in coastal countries such as Senegal could be up to 14% of GDP.

Bangladesh has not yet received any amount from the fund committed to the developing countries on climate change at Copenhagen. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently asked the visiting UNDP administrator to take the issue seriously as the country remains the worst victim of global warming caused by reckless emission of greenhouse gas by the world's developed nations.

The WB announced on November 11 that Bangladesh, Niger and Tajikistan would be getting \$270 million from its Climate Investment Funds (CIF) to cope with the effects of climate change. The WB has also approved \$110 million for Pilot Programme on Climate Resilience (PPCR) in Bangladesh, of which \$50 million is in the form of grant and \$60 million in the form of credit.

The PPCR was created with \$6.4 billion CIF administered by multilateral lending agencies, such as the WB and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), aiming to help the developing countries pilot low-

emission and climate-resilient development. The total package earmarked for Bangladesh in the PPCR is \$624 million, 92% of which is in the form of loan.

Bangladesh should not accept any loan from the PPCR for building climate-resilient development. The rapid rise in borrowings from abroad and unfavourable currency exchange rates have increased the country's per capital debt liabilities by about \$2.3 a year on an average, over the last six years. At the end of 2008-09, Bangladesh's per capita debt obligation stood at \$ 151.21, up from \$136.92 in 2003-2004.

The number of cyclones, floods, tidal bores and droughts hitting Bangladesh has increased much in recent years, worsening its poverty. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that a one-metre rise in sea level would flood 17% of Bangladesh and about 20 million people might be displaced from coastal belts of the country as a result.

Many poor people living in the coastal and low-lying areas earn their livelihood from the sea. If the situation deteriorates further due to climate change it will be catastrophic for them. So everything necessary should be done to avert such situation. Bangladesh emits a very little amount of carbon in comparison to the developed nations but the country is most vulnerable to ozone layer damage.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called for establishing a Multi-Donor Trust Fund at the earliest and quick disbursement of the fund among the LDCs to enable them to face the devastating impacts of climate change. She made the call at the 66th ministerial session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Escap) in Seoul in May this year.

After the Copenhagen climate conference, the climate issue was raised again by Sheikh Hasina at the Escap session. She has been attaching great importance to the climate change issue as the challenge

from climate change, has become a global concern with the developing nations threatened with a major disaster and grave danger looming large in Bangladesh due to adverse impact of climate change.

The Equity and Justice Working Group, which has been working relentlessly to create awareness on climate change, has raised the ownership issue of CIFs once again, saying that WB is taking over the fund to use it as business conduit for the developed countries. It referred to allocation of \$310 million to the Philippine government from the climate fund in 2009, but the loan statement showed \$250 million of it as WB's loan to the country.

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The Cancun climate summit is considering a so-called Green Fund that would help channel aid to poor countries likely to suffer the worst effects of climate change in the coming decades. Though the expectations from the Cancun summit are not high, all the stakeholders in the summit should strive to reach an accord for quick disbursement of funds pledged to the developing countries at Copenhagen overcoming all the trickeries of the wealthy nations.

Among the most urgent needs to face the adverse impact of climate change is to provide adequate funds without delay for the vulnerable nations, including Bangladesh. This must be done immediately. Addressing climate change requires urgent actions by all people, rich and poor, and all countries, developed and developing, as all of them will have to live on this earth.

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## Under the weather in Milan

I am constantly told during my brief visit that I should never walk without headwear. But the only hat I have packed is a high, Kashmiri wool cap. The choice, therefore, is between looking like a Turkish immigrant who has not quite squared up the authorities, and dying of cold. No-brainer. Obviously I choose death over the police.

M.J. AKBAR

**S**NOW is a sheet on the ground, talcum on the trees, a patched overcoat on the Alps and an electric blue at Zurich airport. I have to catch a connection to Milan within 50 minutes but there is no hint of hurry when I check with the ground staff. Swiss calm about process and punctuality is eerie. Clockwork is in the DNA.

I go through unruffled immigration police, board a transit train, grab a vital necessity from duty free and still reach my next flight with time to dawdle. The train welcomes visitors with the music of the moo, while a yodel drifts in the background. Forget the infamous cuckoo; the cow is symbol, pride and sustenance of Switzerland. Milk is the national diet, chocolate the people's pastime.

The snow had turned Italian in Milan, intense and disorderly. The driver who welcomed me, however, was sunny in a

puzzled sort of way. "Plane on time, eh?" he said in half-awe, half-regret. Swiss airline, I pointed out, not Italian. He beamed with great pride, switched the subject and wondered what snow was doing in Italy in November. Some of it had descended on me when the passenger bus stopped a little short of the terminal. Snow on a bald head can be a nuanced experience.

The limbs of Milan are commerce; the heart of Milan is worship. The city was born for trade but grew up around a cathedral, the Duomo, a magnificent tribute to the soaring power of the Italian imagination when touched by the miracle of faith. Inside the cathedral the eye is sated by an excess of inspiration as it wanders from painting to sculpture to stained glass. The skeletal saint-scholar standing against a curve in the walls, lit by the rays of a sun deflected by brilliant glass panes, is an utter marvel.

The house of God carries the weight of

human genius lightly, but cannot quite eliminate the pride of the artist, determined to reinvent the divine in his own image. And so, in a scene from the crucifixion on the stained glass, Jesus Christ is white but the thieves on either side are brown.

The Duomo is the perfect opening conversational gambit with a polite Milanese fellow-guest at our India-Italy conference in an 18th century palace. He surprised me with his readily-expressed irritation at the fact that Moroccan immigrants refused to visit the cathedral, calling it "haraam." This gentleman was a communist for 364 days and became right-wing at the ballot box thanks to illegal immigration, the great blight that dare not speak its name except in hushed whispers. I thought all he needed to do was wait out a generation. The children would integrate.

The latest moll, after all, on Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's endless list of "bunga bunga" partners in his swimming pool is a 19-year-old Libyan immigrant whose father probably thought she had gone to the big city to study physics. There is too much hypocrisy about illegal immigration. Immigrants brave the arduous of dispersal only because there are local jobs available. As Italy ages, there is great demand for young women who can nurse the old in their dotage. Demand will always fetch

supply.

The most fashionably dressed tourists are Chinese, instantly recognisable by their complete indifference to their host environment. They travel to enjoy their own company, which is good enough reason. You can never tell whether their designer bags are fake, but who cares if they don't care? Lunch at a café with bad food and high prices can be an education in international relations. The Chinese man keeps patting his lips with a chapstick; his stoic partner has enough lipstick already.

The British couple at the adjoining table is armed with multiple chips on both shoulders, and seem irritated by the fact that no one is interested in the peculiarities of their accent. A French family is lost in inter-generational disputes as parents look at the price and son concentrates on the food. Travel convinces me that waitresses smile mainly because they know they will never see you again.

I am constantly told during my brief visit that I should never walk without headwear. But the only hat I have packed is a high, Kashmiri wool cap. The choice, therefore, is between looking like a Turkish immigrant who has not quite squared up the authorities, and dying of cold. No-brainer. Obviously I choose death over the police.

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