

Money forging gangs cash in on Eid

Must be dealt with a stern hand

THE Detective Branch of police recently arrested two forger gangs and seized over 3.5 crore taka and 1.76 lakh Indian rupees in fake currency, along with forged note-making equipment near Dhaka. According to the self-confessed forgers themselves, 'Eid is the best season' for their business and the plan was to spread Tk. 100 crore in fake notes at different markets ahead of the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha. The spread of counterfeit currency across the country, especially preceding Eid, has become a major problem, with unscrupulous dealers profiting in the thousands for every lakh taka of forged notes they can sell.

Meanwhile, for the people and legitimate traders, the joy and celebration of Eid has become tinged with the anxiety of falling victim to such crimes. Last Eid, too, they were warned about forged notes, even those coming out of the various automated bank machines. And, while stores have fake note detecting equipment and now, as promised by the Home Minister, they will also be installed at cattle markets across the country, people's awareness of this crime is not all there is to it. In fact, we would suggest that they must be acquainted with the thumb rules to detect counterfeit notes in order to prevent such deception.

While lauding the law enforcing agencies for apprehending the two gangs, we must point out that their work is far from over. There are probably many more such gangs and clandestine manufacturing units operating in the country. They have adapted to modern technology with the use of laptop computers and other advanced equipment and the law enforcers must tackle them with as much ingenuity. Through strict vigilance, informed intelligence and thorough investigation, they must be unearthed and given exemplary punishment so as to deter others from becoming involved in such crimes in future.

We hope the authorities will take up the matter with urgency and relieve the people as well as traders across the country, who wait all year to do profitable business legitimately during the festive occasion of Eid, from anxiety and financial loss.

UN warning of food crisis

A message for us

THE United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has warned of acute food crisis the world over with a drop in harvests in traditional food-exporting countries. Poor harvests have been triggered mainly by adverse weather, especially heat waves and droughts. Food consumption has exceeded food production, taking reserves to the lowest level this year since 1974.

The FAO warning gives us enough reason to take stock of where Bangladesh stands in this context. The case of Bangladesh stands out on the positive side since it has virtually attained self-sufficiency in rice production due to steady growth in the past few years. Still, we should not lose sight of the fact that import sources have significantly shrunk as a result of the looming food crisis. We have had the luck with weather for a few consecutive years but there is no knowing when a natural calamity will strike us. We should have sufficient stock for the rainy days.

While our production is satisfactory, our capacity for storage is extremely limited. So the focus should now be on the preservation of crops through beefing up scientific storage facility and silo capacity. We are among the highest crop-wasting countries in the world. That is all the more reason why we need to preserve what we grow.

Looking around the global scenario, our attention should be focused on stepped-up food production with diversification of dietary habits and building of storage

Mega-buying based on modest planning



HERE exists a gap between government procurement of medical equipment and planning based on needs assessment. From what has been published in *Prothom Alo* on October 13, certain aspects of this disarray between planning and procurement come to light. Besides a failure to assuage demand of what equipment is required by which health facility nationwide, little thought is given to whether trained technicians are available to operate the machinery being bought.

First some basic facts: There are 422 upazila hospitals in the country. Machineries supplied to these facilities include x-ray, E.C.G., ultrasound, anesthesia equipment, defibrillator, incubator, blood pressure measurement instruments, etc. On top of these 422, there are another 120 district-level, general and specialised hospitals and centers, medical colleges, which require a far greater array of instruments and equipment. Two important studies, i.e. "Bangladesh Health Facility Survey 2009" (BHFS 2009) and the "Bangladesh Medical Equipment Survey - 2008" conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare outline the problems associated with equipment purchase and their lack of proper utilisation.

According to BHFS 2009, nearly 50% of all equipment supplied was inoperable. There is no contention that purchase of medical equipment is necessary investment for the public health sector. However, the proper functioning of such equipment is an essential prerequisite for providing effective and efficient health services. The plight of district hospitals may serve as a key example in that the major thrust of government health sector decision-making has been geared towards procurement.

This is best exemplified when one takes a look at the scenario existing in district hospitals of Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur. Shaheed Ziaur Rahman medical college, Bogra has new equipment worth Tk.13 crore that remain unused due to lack of operators. List of supplied equipment include x-ray, mammography, insulator, E.T.T., anesthesia machinery, etc. all essential machinery required for proper treatment. A similar situation exists in Rangpur and Dinajpur medical colleges. Tk. 23 crore and Tk. 10 crore worth of medical equipment

were purchased for Dinajpur and Rangpur Medical Colleges respectively. Again, most of the purchased items remain packed or unused since no provision or financial allocation has been made for the hiring of trained technicians.

It remains a mystery as to why the ministry of health remains first and foremost committed to procurement despite being armed with facts and figures about unused equipment. As stated in the "Bangladesh Medical Equipment Survey 2008" there is a general lack of "needs assessment." In this current study it transpired that the documents that underlay the procurement requests from the different Line Directors (LD) of the Directorate General

request that is submitted by CS is based on a proper needs assessment in the district. The probability of performing such needs assessment is reportedly small indeed, partly because of the absence of a tool to make such an assessment and partly because of the absence of a Tables of Equipment (TOE) for each level of health services. Also the relative high turnover of CSs and the subsequent lack of continuity and opportunity for substantial involvement in the district and its upazilas must be taken into account. The high turnover of senior officers at the upazila level itself is another contributing factor here. Entering into any sort of procurement regime without first identifying requirements is a suicidal plan of action,

one that appears to be very much in vogue in Bangladesh. Indeed, lack of proper planning exists in practically all stages of the medical equipment life cycle, from needs assessment, procurement, installation and commissioning to operating.

While it is impossible to touch upon every facet of the lifecycle of medical equipment, it is possible to touch upon the critical subject of shortage of manpower. Due to lack of latest data on the training of technicians, we can refer back to Bangladesh Medical Equipment Survey 2008' which stated: "During the medical equipment survey it became apparent that virtually no training has been carried out on the equipment. Partly, this can be attributed to the fact that no training requirements have been formulated in the tender documents. This is however changing; in the current tender documents under HNPSP training requirements are included more often. On the other hand as shown in this study, it takes on average 2.5 years before equipment arrives at the hospital department. At that time suppliers are not interested anymore to carry out training nor do the terms of the contracts

oblige them to do so." From the examples stated above, it would appear that not much has improved in this area over the last four years.

Procurement running into hundreds of crores of taka per annum is literally going to waste. Thanks to a combination of inadequate planning on what is needed and the failure to develop human resources to properly operate complex pieces of machinery. Unless a fundamental rethinking occurs along these lines, the national exchequer will continue to be bled and the general populace be deprived of public health services they are entitled to.

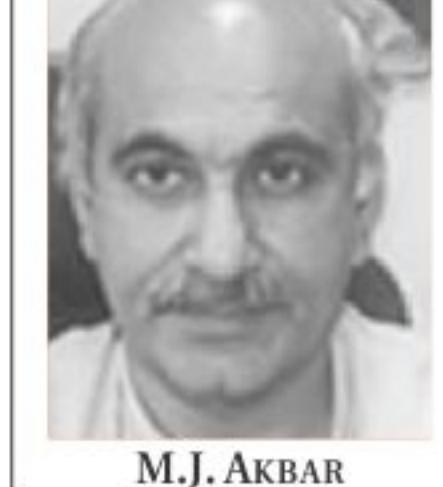
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Health Services (DGHS) to the Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) do not represent references to needs assessments that might motivate these requests. By needs assessment, the Consultant refers to the process by which the need for medical equipment in terms of type and quantity is established and updated based on an ongoing inventory of the established list of equipment for each tier of the health services. Rather it seems, and this was confirmed in this study during interviews at the CMSD and with LDs of the DGHS, that the procurement requests are essentially based on the needs as expressed by the Civil Surgeon (CS) in response to an annual circular by the DGHS. At the DGHS it is not known whether a

BYLINE



In the beginning, says the Bible, was the word. If you need evidence that we are now far closer to Judgement Day, with much of humanity destined alas for a spell in hell, note the manner in which we have corrupted the word in the service of subterfuge. It would be wrong to condemn a whole industry for the sins of its pirates, but the public relations crowd has much to answer for in the continuing degradation of language. Their purpose is no longer to convey a fact or an opinion, but to mislead.

Perhaps it was a sign of naivety that my jaw dropped upon reading a statement issued by Prakash Mirpuri, a spokesman of Kingfisher airlines, in the middle of the strike by pilots and engineers who, instead of being paid for their work, have been fed a stream of lies about when their salary cheque will arrive. The text was from a dictionary published by Alice in Wonderland, where words are slaves of their employer. The exact paragraph needs to be repeated: "We regret that the illegal strike has still not been withdrawn and normalcy has not been restored in the company, thereby continuing to cripple and paralyse the working of the entire airline." It was deception delivered with pathos. Mirpuri deserves an immediate increment, even if there is no money for pilots.

Only in the rarefied clouds where Kingfisher management resides, is it absolutely legitimate to deny staff salaries for work done, and demand that they be punished for breaking the law if they protest. Some bright spark on the Kingfisher board must have thought jail to be a perfectly reasonable option; after all meals are free in jail, reducing the cost of living. The salaries of big bosses never stops, incidentally; cheques in their name neither bounce nor get lost en route.

And what precisely is the new definition of normalcy in Kingfisher? That an airline which set off to conquer the world has been driven towards bankruptcy by psychotic ownership? That every minute a staggering debt load becomes heavier? That some of this debt was obtained by rigging the value of company shares? That those who leased aircraft to the company are picking up their property from the terminal in a desperate bit to cut their losses? That Airports Authority of India will not let the airline fly until it clears Rs. 273 crores in dues, since cheques of the value of Rs. 107 crores have bounced, and

There is one set of pilots and engineers in the entire fleet that has no reason for complaint or rancour. They are the crew that ferries Vijay Mallya around the world in eighty days, or less if there is a Formula One party going on somewhere. Kingfisher has become one passenger's airline.

owner Vijay Mallya has pleaded with the courts for exemption from personal appearance in the subsequent criminal case? That this sum represents only an infinitesimal level of its collective debt of around Rs. 8,500 crores?

And yet the spokesman has the temerity to suggest that it is pilots and engineers who are "continuing to cripple" the airline. Were pilots taking boardroom decisions? Did pilots order berserk expansion and spending designed to feed an owner's ego rather than a rational business plan? Pilots were in their cockpit, not in chairman's cabin

or the chief executive's chair. Note the subtle suggestion inherent in the use of "continuing": pilots are being blamed not only for the present strike but also for what has happened in the past. Just in case "cripple" did not pack sufficient punch, they threw in "paralyse" as well. A cripple can still move; paralysed is immobility. Mirpuri should issue a follow up statement: "How dare these pilots and engineers demand back pay! They should instead pawn their family jewels so that they can send appropriate donations to the Vijay Mallya Rehabilitation Fund (only personal cheques, please)."

Note also the spokesman's charge that pilots and engineers have destroyed the "entire" airline, not just its wing or nose-tip or fuselage. Entire is a juicy, comprehensive word: we talk of an entire nation, stretching from east to west and lengthening from north to south. It would probably take an entire newspaper to convey the entirety of pain on the executive floor of Kingfisher airlines.

It is not employees who have virtually retired an entire airline; Kingfisher was barely able to patch together the minimum number of flights required by its licence when the strike began as a final attempt to glean something from a failed proposition. I have no idea who the passengers on these scratch flights were, but they should get gold medals for optimism and courage.

There is one set of pilots and engineers in the entire fleet that has no reason for complaint or rancour. They get paid on the dot. They fly with a smile, if not a song in their hearts. They probably get lots of overtime, since punctuality is not a priority in their operations. They are the crew that ferries Vijay Mallya around the world in eighty days, or less if there is a Formula One party going on somewhere. Kingfisher has become one passenger's airline.

The writer is Editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today and Headlines Today*.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 16

1905

The Partition of Bengal in India takes place.

1934

Chinese Communists begin the Long March; it ended a year and four days later, by which time Mao Zedong had regained his title as party chairman.

1945

The Food and Agriculture Organization is founded in Quebec City, Canada.

1946

Nuremberg Trials: Execution of the convicted Nazi leaders of the Main Trial.

1951

The first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, is assassinated in Rawalpindi.

1964

Soviet leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin are inaugurated as General Secretary of the CPSU and Premier, respectively and the collective leadership is established.

1998

Former Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet is arrested in London on a warrant from Spain requesting his extradition on murder charges.