

STRAIGHT LINE

Will mere formalin import ban suffice?

Mete out exemplary punishment to adulterators

IT is heartening to learn that the commerce ministry has slapped restrictions on the unregulated import of formalin -- a substance designed for preserving biological specimen in laboratories which also has industrial applications. Sadly, this chemical has become the choice ingredient for unscrupulous traders to preserve foodstuffs in a bid to keep them fresh in wholesale and kitchen markets in the city. Now we are told that importers will have to obtain ministerial permission before importing the chemical.

FBCCI, the apex body of all chambers of commerce in the country has been busy in overseeing that the substance finds no place in some of the larger markets in the city including Shantinagar and now Mohakhali. While the introduction of modern detection machines in these markets is undoubtedly a good move, we are perplexed as to why there is no serious move to introduce legislation to nip in the bud the wholesale practice of adulteration. Again, the offer to hold 'dialogue' with stakeholders will surely grab a lot of headlines, but unfortunately, fall short of attaining its intended objective, i.e. act as a serious deterrent to errant traders.

The horrible side effects of ingesting food treated with formalin are now quite clear to the affected general populace of Dhaka city. The fact that it breaks down blood cells causing a lack of blood in the body and is source to a great many ailments in the human anatomy should be cause enough for the authorities to take decisive action in this regard. Yet, we find ourselves in a situation that smacks of a rotten deal when our public representatives shy away from doing what the public elected them to do -- work for public interest and benefit. Needless to say, food is big business in any city with a population of 1.5 crore. But business must also be responsible in nature and not unbridled *laissez faire*. The citizens of Dhaka are entitled to consuming unadulterated food. Time has surely arrived to introduce laws that will send out a clear message to adulterators that there are serious consequences for playing with peoples' health.

Wasa throwing a helpline

The idea would be absurd as its implementation

TOWARDS increasing service quality, Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has launched helpline 'Wasa Link'. Customers can call in with service-related complaints or for billing or other information any time of day and expect the reported problems to be solved within 24 hours. If this is not possible, they will be informed and the problem solved at the earliest. Action will be taken against officials who fail to heed the complaints. Officials are already being trained towards providing this new service, according to Wasa authorities.

The initiative, no doubt, is a good one. How much difference it will make, however, is a different matter. Communicating service-related difficulties is only a part of the problem, the main issue is service itself. While it is well and good that Wasa has taken such an initiative to formally entertain customer complaints, we hope that it is as well-equipped to address them.

The city is plagued by water related crises such as water shortage, contaminated water, burst pipes and overflowing sewage. While it will be a relief for the suffering citizens to be able to call a direct helpline to report their grievances, the authorities must be prepared to take prompt and effective action to solve their problems. They must be trained appropriately in this regard, not only in receiving customer complaints but in conveying them to the relevant officials and ensuring that proper action is taken and promptly. And for this, the quality of service by Wasa itself needs to be improved, which will depend on its staff, their training, equipment, etc. These must be upgraded in order to fulfil the needs of the customers. The hotline is a means of calling for help -- what help will be offered will depend on how those at the other end respond, and that will depend on more than dialling a



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

ON October 30, a well-circulated Bengali daily has quite interestingly highlighted the predicament of a public servant, the former Chief

Conservator of forest who is now in prison since May 2008, reportedly on charges of possessing unaccounted cash, keeping unusual quantity of jewellery and retaining two passports.

The cash was seized from unlikely places in his residence and the jewellery from the bank locker.

The interesting fact of the dark scenario is the reported loneliness and feelings of dejection of the former public servant, who has had no visitors, and sadly while other prison inmates at times can enjoy food sent by relatives, he has access to prison-cooked food only.

The poor conservator has reportedly lamented that those for whom he has done (!) so much do not even remember him.

One may start with the assumption that corruption in our society is pervasive and uncontrollable. This article does not wish to analyse the phenomenon of corruption or its determinants or impact. The actors in the transaction and the mode of operation are too well known.

Curiously, what we often lose sight of are the problems or inconveniences faced by corrupt public servants at different stages of their active lives and may be ultimately the price they have to pay; as very poignantly evidenced in the lamentation of our poor conservator.

The informed victims and beneficiaries of corrupt deals by public servant would tell you that the transaction is often operated through agents like in-laws, the wife, personal assistant, or reliable friends. However, in many cases these agents played havoc with the corrupt.

They siphoned off the cream themselves, and paid a paltry sum to the wielders of power. For instance, there

The predicament of the corrupt

was allegedly a case where a member of the Board of Revenue authorised and trusted his wife to fix the rate and collect the money on his behalf, but at the end of the day he found that almost all the money had gone to the in laws. What could the poor fellow do? And, unfortunately, he was soon transferred to an unattractive post.

Similarly, in another case, a high official of the fisheries department managed a loan of crores in the name of his brother-in-law who later refused to reimburse the money. The poor official had to lose his job. Whether he was able to recover the money from his in-laws is not known. Yet, in another case, a Director of a sensitive ministry

supportive network, others have generally lost their hard-earned money in these ventures.

Partnerships in hotels, medium-size industry, and construction companies have also not been successful because the active partners usually take away most of the profit.

Dwelling on another dimension, one may find that jobs which are very lucrative from the point of view of the corrupt are always in great demand. There are always people to outbid the incumbents. So, the corrupt have to always be on alert and master the art of surviving different regimes, with different people, all of whom have different demands and priorities.

Quite often the corrupt rich tend to ignore their children. True, they engage maids and expensive tutors for them, send them to up-scaled private schools, and provide them all the luxuries money can buy, but they cannot spare the time for parental care and attention.

Such children are alienated from their parents, and in many cases this has had an adverse psychological impact on them.

The corrupt are always under pressure from different quarters--bosses, subordinates, politicians, rival groups, even friends and relatives. Whom to please, whom to displease and, whom to avoid, whom to meet, all become questions on which their continued survival depend heavily.

The corrupt have to keep a constant tab on power politics. Who is in, who is out?

There are hazards relating to health which the corrupt have to face. They have to work very hard, both in and outside office, to make and manage money. Each hour, each day, and each week counts.

They are seldom late, work overtime, hardly take any leave, accept more and more work and never grumble. Some of them engage helpers at their own costs to dispose of additional work. An interesting situation arises when they fall ill. Their heart is in their work. Some businesses are incomplete. Some payments have not yet been received.

If they handover charge to somebody else what will happen to these deals?

The main regret of the corrupt is that they could not get more money. With hindsight, they keep on calculating the loss they suffered because they left certain areas untapped or didn't charge the optimum. They are often not able to display their possessions in full.

The cynics say that despite the hazards, harassments and insults many would join the ranks of the corrupt given the lack of accountability and general acceptance of corruption as a way of life.

The writer is a columnist for *The Daily Star*.

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kept on sending money to his father back home. When he wanted to reclaim the money at the end of his tenure, his father refused point blank.

Reliable sources reflect that some of the corrupt invested money in financial companies, housing societies and lately in stock exchanges. Very few people know that in all these ventures billions were lost. We know of officers belonging to development departments, senior professionals and even educationist who invested heavily in these phoney companies and lost their savings.

The pity is that no one sympathises with them. Newspapers write editorials about small investors, print their tales of woe but not a single word has appeared about the losses caused to the corrupt.

For the corrupt petrol pumps, fishing trawlers, transport, import and export business have also been attractive propositions for investment. But apart from some public functionaries who succeed in making money from the transport business, because of

Is it easy? How can one have mental peace working in such a changeable environment?

The phenomenon of sudden transfers creates another problem. On a lucrative post, an officer and his family get used to a certain living standard. This standard is suddenly lowered when made an OSD, awaiting posting orders for months together or get a non-attractive position. No one talks of this lean period and the horrors it brings with it.

The known corrupt have to face the twin menace of blackmailing and physical threats. In a fast track world everyone knows about everyone else. Nowadays, dacoits and cheats are so well-informed that they have all the details of fixed, as well as liquid, assets of the rich; especially the corrupt.

Sometimes, so-called political activists, and even students groups, start blackmailing and intimidating the corrupt. If their demands are not met, they stoop so low as to give both verbal and physical threats; at times also acting upon it.

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

A second chance on human rights

ERIC L. LEWIS

PRESIDENT Obama has been re-elected. He must now decide how to balance his commitment to human rights against the political risks of appearing "soft on terrorism."

The president's critics on the left must accept that he has fundamentally altered the George W. Bush-era human rights landscape: He ended torture and released the torture memos. He closed the CIA's secret prisons. He has constrained his own authority, accepting the binding effect of international law and rejecting his predecessor's overly broad theory of executive power. And he tried to close the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay and move trials from military tribunals into civilian courts.

Yet when it comes to human rights and security, Obama has become trapped by his instinctive distaste for political combat. He backed off, under pressure, from his pledge to close Guantanamo. He allowed Congress to obstruct his plans to move detainees to the United States, even when their innocence was beyond doubt. He reversed himself on trying terror suspects in civilian courts. He embraced the principle of indefinite detention without trial, albeit with enhanced procedural safeguards. And he expanded the use of drone strikes, including the targeted killing of American citizens, without accountability or oversight.

This is not "Bush Lite," but nor is it consistent with the ideals that inspired so much idealism in 2008. If Obama is serious about demonstrating that "the

choice between our safety and our ideals" is a false one, as he declared in his 2009 inaugural address, he needs to move forcefully in four critical areas.

First, he must release certain Guantanamo detainees, who have never been charged or tried. Of the 166 detainees still incarcerated there, 86 have been cleared for release because they clearly pose no threat to America. Congress has passed laws to stop the admission of Guantanamo detainees to the United States. But the executive

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branch has the power to admit individuals to the country and to transfer suspects for trial. And the Department of Justice controls sufficient portions of its own budget that could be used if Congress refused to pay for transfers. It's time for Obama to stare down the fearmongers and release these people into the United States or other countries that will accept them.

Second, the United States should try the remaining Guantanamo detainees in civilian courts. There are undoubtedly some bad people at Guantanamo, and we should marshal all legally obtained evidence and put them on trial. The Bush administration fouled its own legal nest through torture, but there is admissible evidence in most

cases, and civilian courts have ample experience and tested procedures in prosecuting terrorists. The panic and pandering that caused Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. to reverse his decision to try Khalid Shaikh Mohammed in New York should not be tolerated in Obama's second term.

Third, the United States should end indefinite detention without trial. Under the laws of war, the right to detain enemy combatants ends when the war ends. The Iraq war ended last

isn't that he can't be trusted to make careful decisions. By all accounts, he conducts painstaking reviews to ensure that the targets pose genuine threats and the risks of collateral damage are low.

But it is unacceptable that these decisions are made without public accountability or oversight and that American citizens, like the Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, have been deprived of their lives without being afforded due process.

The president should apply for authority to a secure U.S. District Court for a warrant before undertaking any attacks on American citizens, articulate clear criteria for ordering drone strikes that can be debated and challenged by Congress or courts, and disclose strikes after they occur (while protecting key national security sources).

On January 20, 2017, Obama will leave office. Will there still be men at Guantanamo detained without charge, or will that stain on our democracy have been lifted? Will terrorism prosecutions be conducted in federal courts before life-tenured judges or in an untested system staffed by military officers? Will American citizens know what military operations are being conducted in their name, or will drone strikes remain shrouded in unaccountable secrecy?

Obama now has the power and the ability to keep this country safe without fundamentally threatening the rule of law. He must demonstrate that he also has the political will to do so.

The writer is a partner at the law firm Lewis Baach. © New York Times. Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 10

1659
Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Maratha King kills Afzal Khan, Adilshahi in the battle popularly known as Battle of Pratapgarh. This is also recognised as the first defence of Swarajya.

1871
Henry Morton Stanley locates missing explorer and missionary, Dr. David Livingstone in Ujiji, near Lake Tanganyika, famously greeting him with the words, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

1942
World War II: Germany invades Vichy France following French Admiral François Darlan's agreement to an armistice with the Allies in North Africa.

1951
Direct-dial coast-to-coast telephone service begins in the United States.

1975
United Nations Resolution 3379: United Nations General Assembly approves a resolution equating Zionism with racism (the resolution is repealed in December 1991 by Resolution 4686).