

Wheat scandal continues

Clarify, hold the responsible to account

IN a surprise turn of events, the Brazilian wheat imported under certification by the ministry of food to be safe for human consumption has hit a snag. The ministry's approval is called into question by subsequent tests carried out by the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR). This comes in the backdrop of a writ filed with the High Court questioning the legality of the import and its subsequent distribution. It is appalling to think that such substandard cereal has been imported and cleared by the ministry of food and payment for which has all but practically been made. What we would like to know from the concerned ministry is how could it have given clearance to the import of wheat, found to have had "shrunken and damaged kernels" above 8 percent, according to BCSIR. The two foreign contractors have supplied over 150,000 tonnes of wheat which will be used for distribution on the government's different social safety net programmes and to law enforcement agencies. The flour made from such wheat is thought to be deficient in protein content. Although tests were made on eight parameters, the question that now looms large is why toxicity test has not been carried out. Such test would have confirmed whether or not the wheat is actually fit for human consumption.

The entire matter smacks of an attempted cover up, something that needs to be unraveled by the authorities. An authentic clarification is called for, followed up by action to hold those responsible for the scam accountable.

Improvised vehicles on the rise

Keep roads and highways free of them

IT is extremely disturbing to see ramshackle, odd-looking contraptions namely Nosimon-Korimon and Bhotbhoti gleefully plying on the country's roads. According to a report in this newspaper last year, the High Court ordered the government to withdraw them from highways in 10 districts.

These makeshift vehicles are unsafe and deadly. They do not have any certificate of fitness issued by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority nor are they registered under Section 32 of the Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1983. No wonder a number of people die or are injured in accidents involving these illegal vehicles.

Why has not the BRTA acted on the HC order? It should have exercised its remit against such illegally operated vehicles before the matter became unwieldy. The owners and drivers of these unauthorised vehicles evidently take advantage of lack of required number of public transports. They may be exploiting a local demand but that cannot be an excuse for allowing these accident-prone jalopies to drive on roads and highways unregulated. Did the government issue any orders or directives to solve this problem? The traffic personnel are no less to be blamed for allowing these apologies of vehicles to swarm the roads and highways unchecked.

With Eid al-Fitr just days away and a large number of people preparing to go home, the government must act fast to either ban these vehicles right away or start phasing them out on the basis of the degree of their fragility to ensure safe journey for the commuters.

COMMENTS

"Catch the perverts!"
(June 29, 2015)

▼

Allien Martin
Arrest and punish those sick men immediately.

▼

Rakib Raju
Nasir Hossain is not the only victim. There are lots of offensive comments in the Facebook pages of Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim Iqbal as well.

"Disaster tackling disastrous"
(June 28, 2015)

▼

Flexible Aminul
It's a shame for us. There has to be a better way.

▼

Zaman Khan
These poor people probably can't even have one square meal a day. They are risking their lives to collect furnace oil from the river. The government encourages these poor people by buying it from them, instead of warning them about its hazardous effects.

"Riding on the wrong way"
(June 28, 2015)

▼

Mohammed Mohiuddin
Their children studied at Harvard or Yale and work at Goldman Sachs; we studied at the local degree college and work as labourers in the RMG sector; they struggle for amassing wealth in the Swiss Bank and we struggle for getting a minimum wage job; they have the establishment to save them; we have nothing in this cruel world. They have big SUVs and we just have two legs; so they have every right to break the law!

▼

Richard Clayton
What right do they have to make laws if they do not obey them?

▼

Abu Taleb
The VIPs think that they are above law and superior to others.

A note on the forbidden

KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

violence associated with drugs in that country. Within 2006 and 2009, 18 Mexican mayors were killed while in 2010 alone, the number of murdered mayors was a shocking 13.

Once upon a time, trading drugs was the business of only the other world. Today it happens to be ours. At a time, when one out of every 27 people take drugs, when neighbouring countries pass yaba with the perfect ease of conscience, at a time when smuggling of that particular drug has gone up by 177 times in the last seven years, 107 barrels of sunflower oil consignment with liquid cocaine exported by a Bolivian company from Montevideo port in Uruguay and about to be shipped to a third country, were seized in our very own Chittagong port. Good news, indeed. The age old saying: "Water and oil don't mix" may be true, but in this case, oil and liquid cocaine surely have blended well, specially because Bangladesh does not have the equipment to separate oil from liquid cocaine. But the great, happy reality is

that 185 kilograms of liquid cocaine has been seized, and is probably the second largest recovery after the 310 kilograms of liquid cocaine seized by the Canadian Customs a few months ago. Thanks to the UK intelligence team and the Special Branch of Bangladesh.

But, it's difficult when morality itself fails to make it to the shore and agencies entrusted with protecting the laws of the land are the ones who break them. A recent report suggests that a few policemen are involved in the trading of yaba. And while the dealers come out of bushes, supply through most unsuspecting channels, offer door to door service and deliver what is on demand: drugs, many law enforcing officers themselves choose to be blinded by greed.

Apparently, one out of five drug users is a woman. This is most likely to begin in school or college. One may just have the misfortune to watch an only child get drugged by a glass of drink that he or she ordered at a party. Unfortunately, drugs have become a routine for many and worst of all, centers offering care and cure are ripping guardians off their purse.

Many years ago, straight out of college, your columnist used to present short features for a television programme hosted by the legend, Fazle Lohani. In one of the episodes, the subject chosen was drugs. Starting from the slums of Hatirpool down to a party scene in Dhanmandi, she interviewed many drug users and blurred their faces on screen. In one of the over-the-shoulder shots, the profile of the interviewee was partially and most unfortunately compromised and that

created havoc in the campus, as he was an exceptionally brilliant student and could not afford to be recognised. There lies the irony. Even though they are brilliant, for the most part of their lives, they live in blurred shadows, unable to surface in the sunlight, and often attempt to struggle and fail in absence of a defined route map that promises freedom from their drug induced lives. And most unfortunately, the scene hasn't changed much.

Right outside my gate, I watch young scavengers sniffing cut plastic bottles with a deep sense of satisfaction. It's as if they live to inhale that smell. Right within many of our circles of acceptability, there are many who take yaba for slimming; many can't live to see another day without a puff; many also happily claim labels of being a "social drinker." But how many of us actually perceive the bigger picture? How many of us grapple with grim statistics of WHO that reveals that around six million drug users in Bangladesh spend over Tk 700 million every day on illegal narcotics, and most users are young, aged between 18 and 30 years? How many of us feel responsible about the reported 79.4 percent of the users being male and 20.6 percent being female? While 64.8 percent of the drug users in the country are unmarried, 56.1 percent are either students or unemployed.

Maximum users are smokers; many remain under the influence of friends and many are addicted to various codeine-containing cough syrups. As for the distribution network, it is often invincible and very few people or agencies have been able to crack their

network. More than 100,000 people deal with illegal drug trading in our land and apparently more than six million people are addicted to drugs here, who at an average spend \$1.9 - \$3.1 on drugs every day, which amounts to \$707 - \$1,135 a month. And hence, yaba, the fashion drug, phensidyl, the cheap magic cure and heroin, the deadliest have flooded our cities. The signs are everywhere. Addiction is out in the open. While we watch at least one or more addicts selling flowers at traffic signals, there are rickshaw pullers who are "high", there are also children selling drugs, as they are the best carriers and the most unsuspected. And every year, almost 10,000 people get arrested in connection with drug related violence and crime.

What happens at the end? Counselling? Confinement in rehabilitation centers? An endless drainage of resources? What at the end restores peace in a family? What ends the curse? While commendable movements and initiatives take place in this land, while many declare to be out of drugs in the public domain, the reality is that no one knows who or what will trigger the next phase of addiction in the same people.

The course to end the drug curse must be set by the government in collaboration with all agencies and the civil society. Starting from sneaky bends on little lanes and dark alleys down to party scenes... all must be cracked. And for many who even occasionally raise glasses to toast, will you too please put your glasses down, for the sake of all the children?

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Europe's attack on Greek democracy

BUSINESS & FINANCE



JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

THE rising crescendo of bickering and acrimony within Europe might seem to outsiders to be the inevitable result of the bitter endgame playing out between Greece and its creditors. In fact, European leaders are finally beginning to reveal the true nature of the ongoing debt dispute, and the answer is not pleasant: it is about power and demorac, much more than money and economics.

Of course, the economics behind the program that the "troika" (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) foisted on Greece five years ago has been abysmal, resulting in a 25 percent decline in the country's GDP. I can think of no depression, ever, that has been so deliberate and had such catastrophic consequences: Greece's rate of youth unemployment, for example, now exceeds 60 percent.

It is startling that the troika has refused to accept responsibility for any of this or admit how bad its forecasts and models have been. But what is even more surprising is that Europe's leaders have not even learned. The troika is still demanding that Greece achieve a primary budget surplus (excluding interest payments) of 3.5 percent of GDP by 2018.

Economists around the world have condemned that target as punitive, because aiming for it will inevitably result in a deeper downturn. Indeed, even if Greece's debt is restructured beyond anything imaginable, the country will remain in depression if voters there commit to the troika's target in the snap referendum to be held this weekend.

In terms of transforming a large primary deficit into a surplus, few countries have accomplished anything like what the Greeks have achieved in the last five years. And, though the cost in terms of human suffering has been extremely high, the Greek government's recent proposals went a long way toward meeting its creditors' demands.

We should be clear: almost none of the huge amount of money loaned to Greece has actually gone there. It has gone to pay out private-sector creditors – including German and French banks. Greece has gotten but a pittance, but it has paid a high price to preserve these countries' banking systems. The IMF and the other "official" creditors do not need the money that is being demanded. Under a business-as-usual scenario, the money received would most likely just be lent out again to Greece.

But, again, it's not about the money. It's about using "deadlines" to force Greece to knuckle under, and to accept the unacceptable – not only austerity measures, but other regressive and punitive policies.

But why would Europe do this? Why are European Union leaders resisting the referendum and refusing



Protesters against the latest offer of a bailout deal chant slogans in front of the Greek parliament in central Athens.

PHOTO: AFP

even to extend by a few days the June 30 deadline for Greece's next payment to the IMF? Isn't Europe all about democracy?

In January, Greece's citizens voted for a government committed to ending austerity. If the government were simply fulfilling its campaign promises, it would already have rejected the proposal. But it wanted to give Greeks a chance to weigh in on this issue, so critical for their country's future wellbeing.

That concern for popular legitimacy is incompatible with the politics of the eurozone, which was never a very democratic project. Most of its members' governments did not seek their people's approval to turn over their monetary sovereignty to the ECB. When Sweden's did, Swedes said no. They understood that unemployment would rise if the country's monetary policy were set by a central bank that focused single-mindedly on inflation (and also that there would be insufficient attention to financial stability). The economy would suffer, because the economic model underlying the eurozone was predicated on power relationships that disadvantaged workers.

And, sure enough, what we are seeing now, 16 years after the eurozone institutionalised those relationships, is the antithesis of democracy. Many European leaders want to see the end of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's leftist government. After all, it is extremely inconvenient to have in Greece a government that is so opposed to the types of policies that have done so much to increase inequality in so many advanced countries, and that is so committed to curbing the

unbridled power of wealth. They seem to believe that they can eventually bring down the Greek government by bullying it into accepting an agreement that contravenes its mandate.

It is hard to advise Greeks how to vote on July 5. Neither alternative – approval or rejection of the troika's terms – will be easy, and both carry huge risks. A yes vote would mean depression almost without end. Perhaps a depleted country – one that has sold off all of its assets, and whose bright young people have emigrated – might finally get debt forgiveness; perhaps, having shrivelled into a middle income economy, Greece might finally be able to get assistance from the World Bank. All of this might happen in the next decade, or perhaps in the decade after that.

By contrast, a no vote would at least open the possibility that Greece, with its strong democratic tradition, might grasp its destiny in its own hands. Greeks might gain the opportunity to shape a future that, though perhaps not as prosperous as the past, is far more hopeful than the unconscionable torture of the present.

I know how I would vote.

The writer, a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University. His most recent book, co-authored with Bruce Greenwald, is *Creating a Learning Society: A New Approach to Growth, Development, and Social Progress*.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Potholed roads

As the monsoon rain has begun to pour in torrents, holes have developed on the surface of roads and highways. In Chittagong, it has been raining for six days. The potholes have made it risky for the vehicles to move along the roads. The construction of the roads must be faulty as holes appear just after a few days of rainfall. The contractors should be asked as to why potholes develop on the roads. The potholes should be repaired before Eid vacation begins when thousands travel by buses on their way home.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

The historic ODI series win of Bangladesh

The historic ODI series win of Bangladesh is a matter of immense pride and joy for all Bangalis of the world. This victory over the mighty India not only acts as a slap on the face of the 'pundits' who find immense pleasure in belittling Bangladesh cricket, it also ensures the team's qualification for competing in the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy. Also the victory has forced the chauvinistic lobby to eat their own words who dare to project that Bangalis "can't play cricket"! No amount of praise is enough for Mustafizur Rahman for emerging as the second bowler in ODI cricket history to bag 5 or more wickets in the first two matches of his career and for ripping through the legendary 'deep' batting line of India.

The Bangladesh team should carry on the brilliant performance and keep aloft the flag of Bangladesh in the



PHOTO: STAR

international scene.
Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata-114, India