

Impunity in Rajuk

Deal with corruption sternly

THERE are a few organisations in the country whose name is synonymous with corruption. Our capital development authority is one such. And the report carried in this paper yesterday explains why that is so.

Not only is there any attempt to root out corruption which is manifestly pervasive in the organisation, it seems that there are deliberate efforts to breed it also. Otherwise how does one explain the fact that a person under inquiry for forging of signatures of his superiors and getting the plans for a high rise building approved fraudulently can be selected for a tour when he should have been suspended for his action? How does one explain the fact that the probe has taken 10 months to be completed when it was supposed to be done in 15 days? And even then the head of the organisation has been sitting on it for two weeks when it should have been sent for administrative action within three days of its receipt. The dilly-dallying is inexplicable.

This particular case is fairly representative of the kind of corruption that pervades Rajuk. While, admittedly, corruption may be difficult to eradicate from the society altogether, what is debilitating for the nation is that senior members of organisations and persons in authority abet such crimes and in fact encourage corruption by not taking action as per law.

The government should take cognizance of such corrupt practices and take stringent measures against those that commit and those that abet corruption in order to cleanse these organisations.

Rise in money laundering cases

No result yet from pursuing them

THERE has been more than 25 percent increase in money laundering cases lodged with the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) year-on-year in 2014. Accordingly, ACC conducted 226 inquiries last year, compared with 180 in 2013 but steeply up from 39 in 2012. The anti-graft body's chairman M Badiuzzaman links the spate of inquiries to what he claims as efforts by the ACC in dealing with money laundering cases. While welcoming the ACC's hands-on approach in taking up cases and proceeding on them we do not see any commensurate results from their efforts. In recovering the siphoned off money no headway could be made.

Illicit outflows amounting to 1.1 percent of its GDP, 12.7 percent of its tax revenue and \$1.31 billion a year between 2003 and 2012 are a stupendous draining of resources from a developing country like Bangladesh which it can ill-afford.

Our anti-money laundering laws are strict on paper but not in application. Where actual capital flight has taken place attempts of recovery predictably hit snag at two levels. On the one hand, coordination is chronically lacking between the domestic agencies concerned, and on the other there is a serious deficit of cooperation from external quarters. Apparently, there is no answer against misinvoicing of exports and imports.

The ACC, via the attorney general's office, had sent 34 mutual legal assistance requests (MLARs) to different countries but feedback on even half of the MLARs has not been received. Energetic efforts should be made through different channels to secure cooperation in this vital area.

COMMENTS

“Man killed as tiger statue falls on him” (August 22, 2015)

▼

Marjanul Fattah Aziz

It's the result of poor construction and negligent engineering.

▼

Lita

The statue was built in 2011 but it remained neglected for long. And now we have seen the result.

“Rethinking the roots of Dhaka's traffic congestion” (August 22, 2015)

▼

Md Mostafizur Rahman

Really subjective analysis. But it's time we implemented the traffic laws. And we also need to think about alternative ways of containing this traffic jam without building more and more flyovers. This is because flyovers will collapse after a certain period of time.

“REMEMBERING YASMIN” (August 22, 2015)

▼

Lolita

Justice always gets delayed in our country because a lot of the time protectors act like perpetrators.

“BNP had no link to Aug 21 attack: Says Nazrul” (August 22, 2015)

▼

Syed Najmul Hussain

If that is so, then why did BNP shamelessly try to distort the gruesome incident by creating a 'Joi Mia' drama? Don't try to befool the public.

MACRO MIRROR
FAHMIDA KHATUN

Singapore, the UK and the USA are common destinations for check-ups and treatment. On account of cost and geographical distance, India stands at the top not only for Bangladesh, but also for other South Asian neighbours in regards to medical and wellness tourism.

The shortage of medical facilities in these countries has led to such cross-border trade in health services in the region. But healthcare tourism is only one component of trade in health services. Telemedicine, cross border investment in health infrastructure and movement of health personnel are the other areas where collaboration amongst the South Asian countries can be strengthened.

But the prospect for higher volume of trade in health services is constrained by several factors. These relate to infrastructural, regulatory, perception-related, logistical, and cultural problems. Among various e-health tools, telemedicine is showing significant results in developed countries. Of course, implementation of these services requires high initial cost for the necessary infrastructure to be in place. Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of patient information through a legal framework is also an issue. There may be resistance from local healthcare providers for telemedicine due to apprehension of increased competition from medical professionals abroad through telemedicine.

Visa and airline connectivity problems restrict the mobility of patients to a large extent. Due to complications with visas, many patients travel on tourist visas. As a

result, actual patient movement within the region is underestimated. More importantly, patients could also face complications with regard to financing and obtaining approval for treatment. Medical tourism has to be facilitated also for the movement of health personnel, physicians and specialists from one country to another. Strict policies and complicated systems for granting visas restrict mobility of health professionals in the region, limiting their attendance in seminars and conferences.

Easy regional payment arrangements and hassle free settlement of financial

matters are pre-conditions for encouraging medical tourism. There must be a common health insurance product in the region. A framework for the portability of health insurance needs to be developed so that patients can use an insurance policy for treatment anywhere in the region. The other issue is the modality of bill payment. For the convenience of patients, rates for different treatments and procedures at various hospitals in the region should be fixed. The possibility of reimbursing bills through hospitals, banks and insurance

companies in the region may be explored. Promotion of medical tourism also requires the availability of related services, such as accommodation and transportation, at an affordable price. Commercial presence through building of establishments such as hospitals, clinics, diagnostics and treatment centres, and nursing homes is another area for collaboration in health services. There are, of course, risks attached to such initiatives. Domestic healthcare providers fear that FDI inflow in the health sector could stifle demand for their services and lead to capital flight

private sector, should be minimised through measures by respective governments. The poor should be provided with basic healthcare services at free or low cost by governments to reduce the inequality.

For improved health services, investment is also required on capacity building of health professionals. Regional cooperation and skills transfer issues such as visa and harmonisation of professional standards are needed for capacity building. Understandably, there is political sensitivity in making SAARC a visa free region. But visa requirements for travelling patients can, at least, be minimised. The reputation of health services in the region can be improved by harmonisation of professional standards and recognition of qualifications as well as accreditation of hospitals and other medical establishments. This could potentially increase health tourism in the region from other countries as well.

In the end, it is of course dependent on how the leaders of the South Asian countries envision the health sector of the region as a whole. First and foremost, countries have to commit to liberalise their health sectors under the General Agreement of Trade in Services of the WTO. Only India, Nepal and Pakistan have made commitments in a few sub-sectors of health services. The SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services, adopted during the 16th SAARC Summit, is a leap forward towards progressive liberalisation of trade in services.

The world, by 2030, wants to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. South Asia, which scores poorly in case of Human Development Index, with high infant mortality and low average life expectancy, should gear up its efforts towards achieving this ambitious objective under Sustainable Development Goals through increased regional integration in the health sector.

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An anxious swivel-point in India-Pak ties

BYLINE
M.J. AKBAR

THE India-Pakistan dialogue has been comatose ever since it suffered a severe stroke at Agra in 2001; will it sink into deeper relapse in 2015? The diagnosis has not changed. Agra collapsed because Pakistan would not accept terrorism as a central problem, largely because to do so would be self-incriminating. Its equivocation is evident in the threat that always accompanies any dispute over the agenda: talk about Kashmir, or else!

Sometimes it seems as if the language hasn't changed in 15 years: Sartaj Aziz told a press conference in Pakistan that if India did not discuss Kashmir it would soon realise what the consequences would be. In other words, the tap of violence is controlled by Islamabad, and it can be turned on or off at its command. But the situation has changed. Neither India nor Pakistan is where they were 15 years ago. There are possibilities in the air.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's problem is a familiar trope of his country's hydra-headed approach towards India. The analogy bears attention. Hydra, in Greek mythology, was a water serpent with a unique propensity. Each time you cut its head off, two more appeared. Hercules found the solution. The hero burnt the serpent's neck after cutting the head. There is no Hercules around capable of such a feat because the serpent sips milk supplied by powerful sections of Pakistan's army and sleeps in the sanctuary offered by the

vast infrastructure of terrorist groups that conduct war by other means against India. When Nawaz Sharif - in an earlier incarnation - sought, sincerely, to improve relations through the Lahore summit with Atal Behari Vajpayee, Kargil followed. Today, the far less dramatic understanding at Ufa provoked the same lobby into stepping up cross-border terrorism and ceasefire violations.

In his attempts to appease Hydra, Sartaj Aziz, Nawaz Sharif's NSA, slipped into distortion when he asserted that Kashmir was mentioned on the agenda drawn up at Ufa for his discussions with India's NSA Ajit Doval. There is no mention of Kashmir in the text of the Ufa joint statement. Pakistan now says that if all issues connected to terrorism are on the table then Kashmir is implicitly there. Statements are not formulated to cover the implicit; every word is used, and fought over, because it has an explicit connotation. If Kashmir is not mentioned then it is not there.

There is some confusion over the precise meaning of “talks” in the context of India and Pakistan. Both sides are committed to what is known as a “composite” dialogue, and this indeed covers all issues, including Kashmir. The Narendra Modi government has never shied away from this commitment. But the Ajit Doval-Sartaj Aziz meeting is not part of a composite dialogue, but a by-product of a conversation between Modi and Sharif on the sidelines of an international conference, with a specific subject of high concern, terrorism. Delhi holds that Kashmir is a dispute between India and Pakistan, without reference to any third party, whether the third party be a foreign country or elements that do not consider themselves Indian.

The meeting between the NSAs is designed to try and clear hurdles that block resumption of the composite dialogue. If Pakistan is honest about confronting terrorism, then it surely cannot send a signal of support to secessionists who promote or condone terrorism. An in-your-face policy is deliberately inflammatory, and hardly conducive to preparing public opinion for larger tasks ahead. Would Pakistan applaud if the Indian NSA or foreign secretary insisted on meeting Baloch separatists prior to talks in

This is an anxious swivel-point in relations between India and Pakistan. We have lost sight of an important fact: at Ufa, Sharif invited Narendra Modi to visit Pakistan for the Saarc conference next year, and our Prime Minister accepted. If that visit does take place, it could mark a very high point in the history of Saarc. The meeting between the NSAs is the first step on that difficult ladder. Each rung will have to be negotiated with care. India will provide hard evidence on terrorists nurtured within Pakistan, including the

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Islamabad? At the moment of writing, doors have been banged, loudly, but not fully shut. Talking to Pakistan is always like walking on glass; you never know when it is going to crack. It is safer to hope for the best and expect the worst; and don't place any bets. Perhaps this may not be the best time to mention an inconvenient truth but Islamabad has accepted this position of the Narendra Modi government before — on the day the Prime Minister took his oath of office.

kingpin Dawood Ibrahim. If Pakistan acts it will assuage not only India's concerns, but also those of the United States, which has been the Pakistan army's most consistent fund manager.

There will be many ways to slip between now and 2016, but to fall off the first rung is equivalent to sending a gilt-edged invitation to misfortune.

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.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Remove 7.5 percent VAT

The finance minister recently categorically rejected the demand of private university students of removing 7.5 percent VAT imposed on their tuition fees. He also added that the VAT is just a nominal amount. But the fact remains that our guardians face huge difficulties to pay the already existing amount of tuition fees. Imposing a 7.5 percent VAT would burden them more. We urge the minister to remove this VAT from our education system. Education is our right; it is not a commodity.

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Operation Protective Edge

Jewish and Palestinian women are holding a hunger strike outside Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem to call for a renewal of peace negotiations. Members of the group Women Wage Peace have been fasting for the past month in alternating shifts, sitting in an open-air tent and inviting passers-by to discuss how best to wage peace. The group has dubbed their mission "Operation Protective Fast," a twist on "Operation Protective Edge" — Israel's military operation that left 2,200 Palestinians, including 550 children, dead last

summer. On the Israeli side, 73 people were killed; all but six of them were soldiers. The attack destroyed 12,000 homes in Gaza. Another 100,000 were damaged. None of the destroyed homes have been rebuilt so far, due in part to the ongoing Israeli blockade.

Israel has acted on the assumption that there is no occupation; there may be disputes about how much land Israel has the right to annex to the state of Israel in the West Bank, but Palestinians do not have any particular right. Such is the situation in the Middle East today where the Palestinians suffer at the hands of the Israelis.

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