

## Give Parliament a Chance

Yesterday the 12th session of our Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) opened with a ceremonial, and short session. The relative calmness of yesterday's session is the proverbial 'calm before the storm', and by all accounts, it is going to be quite a storm. Traditionally, our political scene gets hot during the cold days of winter. Added to the seasonal cause for the rise of political temperature, there are now some specific ones, which have literally brought a cloud of uncertainty, not only over the JS session, but on the future political scene as a whole.

What started the season on the wrong foot was the Prime Minister's speech on 7th November. In her eagerness to castigate the opposition, especially, the MPs of one single party, she used, to put it kindly, unparliamentary expressions. What she said, amounted to questioning the integrity and veracity of the honourable members. What she did not realise was that, by so doing she was casting aspersions on the performance of the Speaker and, far more importantly, on the Parliament itself, of which she was the leader. The opposition, taking umbrage, has already placed notices with the Speaker for satisfactory explanation.

Having realised the gravity of what can be generously termed as her 'misspeaking', the PM, in a very unusual move gave an hour-long interview to the state-run, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS). In it she urged that her 7th November statement be looked into in its entirety, and not be judged on those comments alone. The very fact that Begum Zia took that unprecedented move, speaks volumes of the damage she has done to her prestige as the Leader of the House. However, in our view, her move would have been far more impactful and soothing in effect, not to speak of exhibiting maturity and growing self confidence — if she just admitted, what was after all, a human mistake. If, instead of going through all the implicit and explicit explanations, she would have only said that she misspoke, or used words that she did not intend to, then instantly the air would have been cleared, and the tension prior to the JS session, would have been, to a large extent, diffused.

On the other hand, Sheikh Hasina, in her speech on Saturday, within a day of her return from China, has further embittered the already tense political situation, by a personal and blatantly unparliamentary attack on the Prime Minister herself. In a vitriolic attack the Leader of the Opposition questioned Begum Zia's ability as a leader and asked BNP cadres to ditch her.

It is in such a season of no-holds-barred attack and counter attack, that the Parliament opened yesterday. The question that we would like to raise is, what purpose is all this attack and bitterness serving? In an attempt at claiming monopoly of patriotism and, in the same vein, trying to depict the opponent as the repository of the vilest of traits, we are only projecting 'truth' as we want to see it, and not as it exists. And our people are far too intelligent to accept anyone's version of 'truth' alone. They are making their own judgement. In the process of this bitterness, we are dividing the nation, breaking whatever little is left of the spirit of unity from anti-autocracy movement, and giving a handle to the forces who do not want our democratic experiment to succeed.

We are totally opposed to the politics of bitterness and acrimony that both the PM and the Leader of the Opposition appear to be leading the nation towards. We urge upon both of them not to further dirty the already muddy waters of our politics and do whatever they can to mend fences and not break them. In a true spirit of parliamentary democracy, let both our leaders take back what they have said — the PM on the 7th, and the leader of the opposition on the 20th — and give a fresh impetus to the Parliament to discharge its affairs.

## Army's Glorious Tradition

The armed forces, which observed their anniversary yesterday, have come through the most turbulent years since its historic beginning 22 years ago. Now in a democratic system of governance, the defenders of the country's territorial integrity should find their rightful place. After the creation of the country, the armed forces did not enjoy — barring a few years — such an atmosphere of political tranquility as they do now. They too have responded quite admirably to this new found political stability in the country. For the second time in the brief history of the country's armed services, it was a most praise-worthy and exemplary instance of restraint they exercised during the tumultuous protests against autocrat Ershad. In fact, theirs was an important role in paving the way for democracy.

Clearly, the defence forces of the country have come a long way and are keeping with the glorious tradition and ideals that the army are expected to follow. Their courage and sacrifice, dedication to duty and patriotism have matched their respect for democracy — a key element in the peaceful governance of a country. That they have come out creditably through such an acid test during the late eighties and early nineties is a most positive development ever to take place in the country's civil and military relationship. We hope this co-operative effort will be further strengthened.

The men in the armed services have also left a mark in their service for the distressed humanity, particularly in times of emergency. Whether it is in the aftermath of cyclonic storms, or during devastating floods or any other natural calamities of outside proportion, the highly trained and efficient service of the soldiers proves to be a boon for the victims. The armed forces then have been able to extend their creditable service to far away lands and climes. Today, the Bangladesh army are rubbing their shoulders with military men of almost all the great powers in Somalia, Cambodia and other places. As UN peacekeepers, they have so far an unblemished record. We can hope, the Bangladesh Army will continue to maintain such a high standard of humanitarian service and earn acclaim for their country.

# Integration Does not Point to a Fortress Europe Yet

My wife has a beautiful China clay bowl with elaborate floral designs all over it. Nearly a century-old, it had belonged to her grandmother originally. My wife brings the bowl out on very special occasions. It's her treasured heirloom and she handles it with reverence. Planning to write on European Union, I was scanning newspaper pages anxiously for the correct spelling of the name of the treaty. My wife brought out her prized possession and turned it upside down. There it was, clearly stamped on its bottom, the logo of the manufacturer and the place where the bowl had been made — Maastricht — the Dutch city the Treaty on European Union has been named after.

So the Maastricht Treaty takes its name from the place where the leaders of the 12-nation European Community (EC) sat in December 1991 and agreed on a programme for unification of Europe. Now, after ratification by all the EC member states, the Maastricht Treaty has come into force on November 1 — nearly a year behind schedule. Question is, how far a more integrated Europe will stand after the treaty? Clearly it is not going to be the United States of Europe. Churchill thought of in 1946. Nor a 'Fortress Europe', at least not yet.

At their October summit launching the Maastricht Treaty, EC leaders could not even agree on a new name for the Union. To signal a change in the state of integration, some summit leaders sought to be known as members of the European Union. Others preferred to remain

members of the European Community as they now are. So it's still the European Community. Some leaders have made it quite clear that they are aiming at a simple confederation — not a federal state of Europe.

Even confederation is still a far way off. As of now, EC member countries look as determined as ever to retain their separate national identities. The arguments being advanced to exclude audio-visual services from the ambit of Uruguay Round world trade negotiations by invoking a cultural exception clause, bring this attitude to focus. It is being said that an inundation of European markets with US film and TV wares 'will eat away at Europe's diverse identities and languages, leading to a monochromatic culture. Entry of such products into Europe should, therefore, remain restricted. Granting these arguments are being offered in a different context, the basics hold good for integration of Europe also. So, a Europe divided would still stand united. Against whom is the question outsiders would wonder at.

The agenda for Europe's integration, as outlined in the Maastricht Treaty, includes pursuing a common foreign and security policy and greater cooperation in matters of law, order and immigration, justice and home affairs. For a labour exporting country, a common — presumably more restrictive — policy on immigration, spells trouble ahead in dealing with a united Europe. Not just the Europe of the present 12 members EC. The treaty would seek to expand the membership by in-

cluding, in phases, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Austria and several more countries in Europe. By the turn of the century, there would probably be a united Europe of twenty countries.

The new united Europe would extend to its own people, a privilege of common citizenship. Henceforth, it will be open to a citizen of one EC country living in another, to exercise his franchise there. He can not only cast his vote in the country of residence but can also become a candidate in local elections.

The Maastricht Treaty also seeks to introduce a single currency, establish a common

convergence criteria had led to the collapse of the European exchange-rate mechanism (ERM) grid last September, derailing the monetary union programme. Indications are that, exchange rates would not come to be linked again the way it was under the old ERM until significant progress is made towards reaching economic convergence. The first deadline for adopting a single European currency is in 1997. However, Maastricht Treaty stipulates that this step will be taken then only if a majority of the member countries qualify under the convergence criteria. As of now, such a

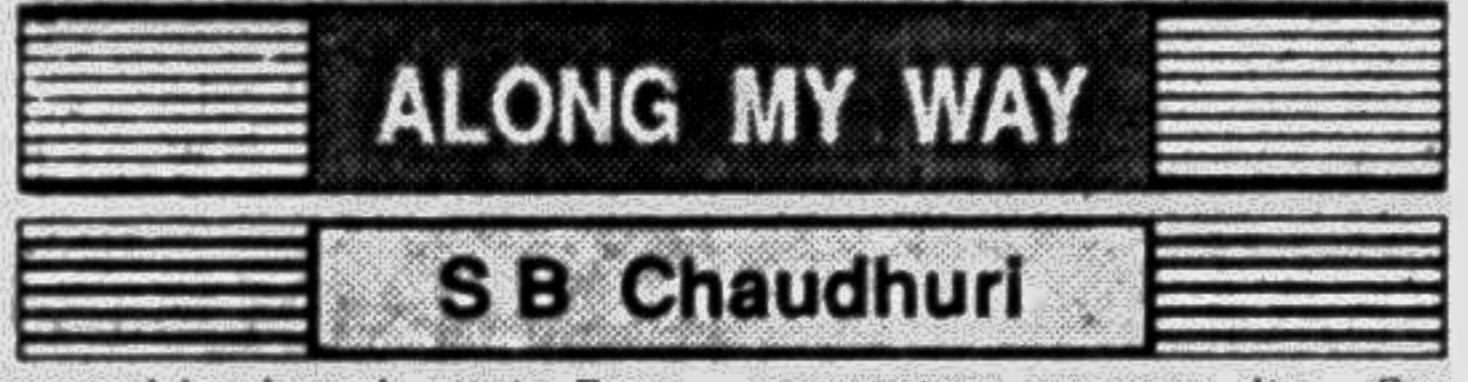
Meanwhile, the EC Commission at Brussels is drawing up plans for stimulating economies of the member countries. The Commission in its latest estimated say that the EC economy contracted by 0.4 per cent in 1992. The recovery plan being debated now, postulates an economic growth rate of three per cent a year in the medium-term. This requires raising EC's investment rate from 19 per cent of GDP to 24 per cent. Convergence of opinions on how to do it is not yet in sight. Proponents of free market and supply side economics in the EC want further deregulation and lowering of social security costs. They also advocate a successful conclusion of Uruguay Round of world trade negotiations by December 15. They argue that increased trade generated by the global accord would provide the urgently needed economic momentum. The other, and perhaps the more dominant, view favours avoiding cuts in social welfare benefits. They prefer a new energy tax to finance social welfare programmes. They also want the governments to borrow more by issuing bonds and raise around \$ 150 billion to spend on infrastructure projects. The debate rages on.

The immediate objective of the economic stimulus programme is to create new jobs to reduce unemployment. The EC Commission has forecast the average unemployment rate in the member countries this year at 10.6 per cent. The aim is to bring it down to 6-7 per cent, roughly the present US unemployment rate. There is wide divergence of views on ways of

doing it. Some would prefer to pare down labour costs, ease burdensome rules on employers and deregulate the labour market. Others would rather have a four-day week to save jobs.

SUCH talks as a four-day week, made happenings in Europe appear all the more remote to us. Yet events taking shape there do hold implications for us. The EC market provides the main outlet for our exports. We also look upon the EC as a donor agency. Besides, most of the member countries extend aid on a bilateral basis. There are people from this country who live and work in the EC member states. All in all, the way Europe does its business is important to us too.

Meanwhile, the EC-Bangladesh Sub-Commission held its 16th session earlier this month in Dhaka. The ongoing programme for cooperation between the two sides, particularly the progress in the implementation of EC-funded projects, comes to be reviewed in such meetings. Future action plans are also considered. This time, the EC is reported to have come up with a multi-annual framework for funding projects, said to be the first of its kind for the Community. In all probability, this new initiative does not have anything to do with the programme for Europe's unification. However, as it happens, this is the first meeting between the two sides after the Maastricht Treaty was formally launched.



central bank and, attain European Monetary Union (EMU) latest by 1999. What might seem like a rather faltering start for the treaty, Britain and Denmark have opted out of the single currency provision at the very outset. However, the Maastricht Treaty has been launched with an agreement to establish a common European Monetary Institute (EMI) to be located in Germany. Due to become functional on January 1, 1994, EMI is seen as a forerunner to a common central bank.

Strict economic convergence criteria are to be fulfilled for attaining the monetary union. Convergence benchmarks include limits on budget deficits and inflation. Failure or unwillingness to meet economic con-

possibility appears dim. For instance, few, if any, will probably be able to bring down budget deficits to three per cent of GDP by 1997 from over six per cent now and keep it at that level, as required by the treaty. It is unlikely that the newly established EMI will, by itself, enforce that kind of monetary discipline. At least, no sign of revival of the process of currency unification through exchange rate alignment — practiced under the old ERM — has surfaced yet.

Talking of convergence, the EC member countries are yet to agree on a programme for tackling recession. The October summit postponed consideration of the thorny issue till the next meeting in December.

IN 1915 the United States invaded Haiti to re-establish order and democracy" and remained in the Caribbean country until 1934. Now, 59 years later, US troops returned to Haiti as part of a United Nations mission but the ruling military elite impeded their landing.

The US ship Harlan County carried an advance party of military engineers and instructors of the 1,600-strong UN force designed to supervise the restoration of democracy in Haiti.

The significance of the ship's ignominious retreat from Port du Prince goes far beyond the incident itself for three reasons: Firstly, it questions once again the effectiveness of the UN in trying to resolve international crises. Secondly, it demonstrates the increasing problems faced by US actions in regional conflicts. Finally, it shows the intrinsically anti-democratic mentality of the Haitian army.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Salesian priest and theologian, was elected in December 1990 as the first democratic president in Haiti's history. With 70 per cent of the popular vote, he incarnated the dreams and hopes of millions of poor Haitians striving for a better life.

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Americas with 80 per cent of its people living below the poverty line. Most earn a meagre living out of the country's subsistence economy.

Unemployment stands at 70 per cent and so does the national illiteracy rate. It was the poor who supported Aristide's efforts to carry out structural changes, put an end to endemic state corruption and bring to justice those responsible for decades of violations of human rights.

This was too much for the mere one per cent of the population that takes away over 45 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product. Only seven months after his election, Aristide was overthrown in a bloody coup d'etat led by army general Raoul Cedras.

It signalled the end of democracy in the island and the beginning of Aristide's attempts to obtain the support of the international community for his eventual return. Not a single nation recognised the de facto government except, paradoxically, the Vatican.

The Organisation of American States imposed a trade embargo that proved utterly ineffective. Not until July this year, after the UN had imposed an oil, military and financial embargo on Haiti, did UN special mediator Dante Caputo's efforts finally pay off. The military were forced to negotiate and on Governor's Island, New York, they

## Dangerous Precedent Set Over Aristide

Luis Tricot writes from Santiago

Two years after being overthrown by the army, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has failed to return to Haiti. The UN imposed an economic embargo on the Caribbean country and forced the military to negotiate. In July, Aristide and General Raoul Cedras signed an accord that paved the way for the restoration of democracy. However, reports Gemini News Service, the army has stepped up repression against opponents and derailed the democratic process.



JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE  
Exile extended

signed an accord paving the way for the restoration of democracy in the country and the return of Aristide on October 30.

UN sanctions were "suspended" in late August after the spurious Haitian parliament had ratified Robert Malval — appointed by Aristide — as provisional prime minister.

The New York accord also contemplates measures to reform the country's public administration system, the judiciary and the army, the creation of a new police force and the early retirement of Gen Cedras and of Police Chief Michel Francois.

The whole process would be under UN supervision. Thus the rejection of the Harlan County is, in a way, a rejection of the most important stage of the UN plan, because without the physical presence of international supervisors, UN sources argue, the plan is simply unattainable.

In an effort to guarantee the success of the accord, the UN Security Council has reimposed sanctions against Haiti. It is noteworthy that the US has been the most active party in the whole affair. It promoted the Security Council's embargo resolution and got other countries, namely Canada, France and Venezuela, to support its position.

Many Latin American countries were reluctant to pass any resolution that may be seen as open intervention in the internal affairs of a member nation, fearful that it might set a

"dangerous precedent."

However, the US managed to impose its will, arguing that the "continuation of the Haitian crisis threatens peace and international security in the region."

Whatever the US authorities say, the Haitian government is not a danger to anyone but its own inhabitants. For decades, different US administrations supported and financed dictatorial regimes in Haiti, including the bloody years of the Duvalier dynasty.

They never cared for the millions who lived in utter misery and in constant fear of the murderous Tontons-Macouttes. On the contrary, they organised, financed and trained special repressive units. Gen Cedras led the "Leopards" counter-insurgency battalion, trained by the US.

The Haitian military has always been a close ally of the US, so the Americans, rather than "eliminating" the military, are trying to eliminate the danger of social upheaval. After all, the 70 per cent of Haitians who voted for Aristide are a force to be reckoned.

The army has made it clear that "the time when the civilian authority could impose its will on the military is gone." Gen Cedras said a few days before the expected return to Haiti of the exiled president.

Aristide did not want to sign the Governors' Island accord unless Cedras stepped down from his post as commander-in-chief of the army, otherwise, he stated "whoever I may appoint

as prime minister will be nothing but a stooge."

Later events have proved him right, but he did sign. Pressure was brought on him by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Cedras also signed the agreement, but soon afterwards the army, police and death squad embarked on a wave of violence that has cost many lives among Aristide supporters, social and human rights organisations.

A UN report indicates that over 3,000 people have been murdered since the coup in September 1991, large number of these in the past two months. Even so, the accord contemplates an amnesty for all those involved in the coup.

The rightwing Front for Haiti's Advancement and

Progress has said that "US troops will find another Somalia in Haiti." No wonder President Bill Clinton ordered the withdrawal of the Harlan County from Port du Prince at the first signs of trouble. Washington may be backing away from its earlier commitment to Aristide's return. A recent CIA report, costing doubts on Aristide's mental stability, has been used by the exiled leader's critics for a smear campaign against him.

Most Latin Americans want Aristide back in power, but the UN-US intervention sets a dangerous precedent. Also, it institutionalises double standards in international politics: Why did the UN-US not intervene in Russia after Yeltsin's self-staged coup? Not only did they not condemn it they openly supported it.

Nearly 70,000 Haitians have left the country as refugees since the coup two years ago. Aristide was one of them. When and if he comes back the Haiti he left will be completely different from the one he returns to. The type of democracy he dreamt of will be limited by the negotiated nature of his return.

— Gemini News  
Luis Tricot is a freelance Chilean journalist who writes and broadcasts on Latin American affairs.

## OPINION

### "Foreign Policy . . ."

This is in reference to the article written by Mr Shah A M S Kibria and published in your esteemed newspaper on 10th October last, under the caption "Foreign Policy: Are we Drifting in Uncharted Seas?" The analysis is objective and unbiased. I am specially impressed by his observation made with reference to our Prime Minister's statement in the 48th Session of UN General Assembly on Farakka issue: "Presumably the purpose was to get an increased flow of water for us." My question is also the same: Has the Prime Minister's statement improved the chance of "getting our fair share of the water?" "Unless we get our due share of the water in the coming lean months, will not her statement in New York have further complicated the prospects of a successful bilateral negotiation to resolve the problem?" "By going to the UN has not the Prime Minister fished the prospect of success of her bilateral efforts?" India may indeed be unfair in this matter in being slow to act in pursuance of the assurances given by the Indian Prime Minister during the Seventh SAARC Summit held in Dhaka in April last. And during the discussion in May, 1992 in the Indian capital New Delhi, the two Prime Ministers had also agreed that efforts would be made for achieving an acceptable settlement, including an interim arrangement for sharing the Ganges water in the dry season." So, the matter has already been discussed on bilateral basis. India has also stated that she stands committed to the said assurances.

keeps its promise it will greatly contribute towards further increasing our mutual confidence. "We think it is still possible". So, it appears that our Prime Minister in her statement did not intend to make a complaint at UN General Assembly but expressed her worries in this matter. Her full address in the General Assembly is a nice one maybe except the portion referring to Farakka, which though true, shows lack of prudence but not the intention to embarrass India in international forum. As chairperson of the SAARC, the Prime Minister may be well advised in the language of Dr Kamal Hossain to solve "the country's bilateral issues including the water-sharing problem with India through diplomatic negotiation in the perspective of regional co-operation".

In view of the previous agreements between the two countries and the assurances given by India, one should be slow to impute any mala fide intention to India, which played a vital role in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. In this premises one may not find enough reason to justify the profuse praise showered for that particular portion of her statement concerning Farakka. The speakers at the seminar on Farakka Barrage held on 16th October last in the city have rightly suggested for immediate construction of two barrages in Bangladesh to off-set the disastrous impact of Farakka Barrage — one on the Ganges below the Hardinge Bridge and the other on the Brahmaputra at Bahadurabad.

Both Bangladesh and India must remember that their common 54 rivers are the gifts of nature and the natural flow of their waters should not be intercepted by unnatural/artificial barrages to the prejudice of the people for whom the Divine dispensation provided the rivers in question.

Meanwhile, Gano Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain in his public meeting at Munshiganj on October 14 last has correctly pointed out that "the Prime Minister, as chairperson of SAARC, can easily raise all the bilateral problems which are hampering regional co-operation among the countries in the forum. It is a unique chance for the country". Indeed, our Prime Minister herself in her address at UN General Assembly also said that if India

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## To the Editor...

### 'Enterprise for wage earner'

Sir, The above captioned letter, written by Motiur Samad Chowdhury, (12th Nov) shows a potential for our independence from economic slavery. Allow me to refer to a recent advertisement by the BCIC (tender for the Shah Jalal fertilizer project) and a news about a sugar mill project from Pakistan.

The BCIC has several urea/ammonia plants and there are more than a hundred engineers/technologists who have intimate knowledge of this technology. It can easily develop from its own resources — a team of experts to design, fabricate, select imported components, install and start a fertilizer project. Most plant components can be fabricated or obtained here, only some proprietary items are to be imported.

The urea/ammonia project (under proper professional management) will be profitable, if the project cost is 'free from add-ups, which are unavoidable when foreign fund is obtained with the help of middlemen. If BCIC starts to think in this line and prepares a project-brief (showing the expected profit), the capital for the project will be available from the wage earners, as we learn from Mr Chowdhury's letter. A fertilizer plant will be a better investment than a motor assembly plant (the example cited by Chowdhury).

Similarly, there being so

many sugar mills in the country for so long, it is a shame to look for outside help. The sugar making technology is comparatively more basic than fertilizer. And our technology base is not inferior to that of Pakistan. Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory, the Dry Dock, BITAC and the Shipyard are some of the places where many capital equipment can be manufactured, provided there is enough will.

If we cannot setup a sugar mill on our own then we should eat molasses.

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### Foreign exchange reserve

Sir, It is heartening to hear that the country's foreign exchange reserve is lying at a comfortable position. Retention of foreign exchange at the account for a long period will not yield good results.

We are not aware of our balance of payment position with different countries where we are making international trade. If the position is not favourable then we can start payment from the reserve now lying unutilized. Even, we can arrange payment of foreign debts from the reserve amount. We want to know the balance of payment to our country with other countries. This will help us to ascertain our position.

### Traffic Mismanagement

Sir, I fully endorse the views expressed by Mr. M A Haq and Mr O H Kabir about the traffic mismanagements recently published in your esteemed daily. Mr. Haq quite rightly points out the uselessness of the traffic constables who seem not trained at all to do jobs. Mr. Kabir's suggestion for constructing a few underground tunnels for the safe crossing of Road by the pedestrians is also commendable.

Both the readers' comments and suggestions are noteworthy. I ventilated quite a few times in the past through the various newspapers that the main reason for so frequent and fatal traffic accidents in Bangladesh is the lack of knowledge of traffic rules both in case of the drivers and the traffic constables. The unending traffic jams in the city is again due to the same reason. The suggestion for constructing underground tunnels should be seriously considered by the concerned

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### Audit objections

Sir, We understand that audit objections of serious magnitude involving misappropriation, defalcation and misuse of public funds in crores of Taka have been lying outstanding for years due to brief longevity of democratic institutions like the Committees of Public Accounts and Undertakings.

As the audit objections deal with public funds, it is logical that these should be brought to public notice through newspapers, so that the people could be aware of the delinquents, for whose misdeeds the country has been facing financial disaster.

It is, therefore, suggested that all audit reports placed before Public Accounts and Public Undertaking committees be published in newspapers for information of the deceived people and serious irregularities should be brought to the notice of the Prime Minister as and when they come to the notice of audit or anti-corruption people.

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