

Corruption: No One Can Claim Immunity

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CORRUPTION is the big news once again. In Italy it has been big news for a long time now. A series of investigations and trials have exposed the deep rooted and widespread corruption in the top leadership of that nation. Magistrates in charge of the investigation are relentlessly pursuing all the clues and no one, however exalted his or her position might be, is being spared. Big names such as that of Giulio Andreotti appear to be deeply mired in corruption. In fact the former prime minister is actually accused of association with the criminal underworld. The latest case is that of Bettino Craxi who led the government as prime minister on several occasions. A Milan court has sentenced Mr Craxi and Amalio Forlani, another former prime minister, to jail terms.

Nearer home, the latest case of corruption scandal that has exploded in South Korea has not only shocked the nation but it has become a threat to the political stability of that country. The position of President Kim Young Sam has been exposed to grave suspicion of involvement in the scandal. What has happened in Korea is yet another proof that greed has no limits and that no one, not even those occupying the highest position in the state, can claim immunity. It has been seen time and time again that the propensity to abuse power for personal profit or, in these days of democracy, for the benefit of the ruling party, is a widely shared weakness and unless rigorous and sustained efforts are made to curb the greed and venality of the rulers, they will succumb to the temptation. Of course, dicta-

tors are almost always found to be guilty of corruption but that is because there are no checks on their power. But even democratic leaders, duly elected by the people, can yield to greed and betray the trust reposed in them by the people. Recent history is replete with such examples.

Mr Roh Tae Woo was president of the Republic of South Korea from 1988 to 1993. During the period of his presidency he amassed a sum of US\$ 650 million by collecting illicit contributions from businessmen. In a brief statement on 27 October, 1995, which was broadcast on national television, he confessed his guilt. With tears in his eyes he said, "I feel ashamed and full of remorse for betraying the expectations of the people. I am ready to accept any judgement and any punishment, even stone-throwing." Mr Roh further admitted that he still had US\$ 220 million in slush funds hidden in bank accounts under false names. The rest had been spent on activities of the governing Democratic Liberal Party or had been given to people "who work for the country."

The scale of the corruption has not only stunned the nation but also infuriated them. Korea has become a rich nation in recent decades through rapid industrialization and a phenomenal increase in exports but no one can forget the fact that until recently it was ruled by dictators. In fact, from 1961 until Mr Roh was elected in 1988, Korea was governed by a succession of oppressive military rulers who brutally suppressed dissent and opposi-

tion. The current president Mr Kim Young Sam spent a long time under house arrest in the 1980s for speaking up against former president Chun Doo Hwan who ruled the country with an iron hand from 1979 to 1988.

Gen. Chun, who captured power in a military coup in 1979 was thrown out of office after a popular uprising. A year later he was accused of amassing a fortune by misuse of power and other corrupt means. He confessed his guilt in a television statement and accepted self-exile from his

later won the election as the DLP candidate. He cannot deny that he got strong backing from Mr Roh in his presidential campaign. But did he also receive funds from Mr Roh's illegal secret fund? That is the million dollar question.

President Kim's record up to now is excellent. As the first genuinely civilian president of the republic after 32 years, he has "attempted to reform the insular cold war culture that allowed money politics to thrive. He has tried to open the national spy

agency to outside scrutiny, the borders to foreign trade and investment, even urged ordinary South Koreans to open themselves to the outside world. Above all, Kim has attacked the system of bribes for political favours institutionalized by the long line of generals who preceded him in the presidential mansion."

Over the last couple of years he has had politicians, businessmen and other leaders including military officers investigated for corruption and more than a thousand of these people have been jailed. Now President Kim is under pressure to move against Roh. There is a throng of demonstrators outside Roh's house in a fashionable suburb of Seoul chanting "Jail for Roh." Predictably, opposition legisla-

will certainly tarnish the image of President Kim. The political fall-out may be very grave. In fact it is incalculable at this time. Any attempt on his part to shield Mr Roh will confirm the people's suspicion that he was a beneficiary of the slush fund. The days ahead are going to be very tough for him.

In the fight against corruption, as indeed in all other matters, each country's experience is unique but the latest Korean corruption scandal seems to have a special relevance to the situation in Bangladesh. Mr Roh collected the huge fortune in the name of his political party though he must have himself pocketed a part of it. Political parties everywhere raise funds for election campaigns and other activities and ostensibly there is nothing terribly wrong about it but when the governing party, with its control over the government and its vast power of patronage, goes into the collection business, the scale and magnitude of this activity can get out of control. We in Bangladesh have a long way to go before we can claim that a serious effort is being made to counter political corruption. It is vital that we make this effort. Successive regimes enthusiastically have used the anti-corruption machinery to deal with the previous regimes' excesses. One sign that these efforts reflect a serious desire to deal with the problem will be the investigation and indictment of politicians while they are in office holding positions of power. Until this happens we will be left with the sorry spectacle of regime after regime desperately trying to cling to power to postpone the inevitable public reckoning of their actions.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



home and spent two years in a Buddhist monastery to atone his sins. Curiously, there is a political link between Gen. Chun, Mr Roh and the present president Mr Kim Young Sam. It is this link which is so mystifying.

Mr Roh was a top adviser to Gen. Choon Doo Hwan when the street agitation against the dictator started. At that critical time Mr Roh is believed to have acted in favour of a liberal democratic political system and brought the situation under control. Later he was elected president as a reward for reversing the dictatorial tradition in Korean politics. President Kim Young Sam also owes a deep debt of gratitude to Mr Roh because in 1990 he joined Mr. Roh's ruling Democratic Liberal Party and

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One may wonder why Mr Roh resorted to such massive corruption. Did he not see the plight of his predecessor Gen. Chun Doo Hwan? His television statement suggests that he followed an old tradition of South Korean politics — raising what is called "governing funds" from the business community. He claimed that he used the funds to finance political campaigns and "social welfare programmes" though he admitted that it was wrong on his part to take the money. There is a lurking suspicion that at least a part of the money was actually the "war chest" of the Democratic Liberal Party and that the DLP candidate Mr Kim Young Sam may have received some of these funds for his election campaign. If this is proved, it

Why Bosnia Matters to America

by Bill Clinton

Making peace in Bosnia will help build a peaceful, undivided Europe. A united Europe will be America's best partner in security and trade.



But how...? Slaughter, preventing the war from spreading, and building a Europe at peace. The war in Bosnia has been waged chiefly against innocent civilians, who have suffered mass executions, ethnic cleansing, terror, and systematic rape. Murder in the markets and the playgrounds of Sarajevo has outraged our nation and our conscience — for the violence done to the Bosnian people does violence to the principles on which America stands. The only way to stop

the killing for good is to make peace. Peace would also prevent the war from spreading. Bosnia lies amidst some of America's NATO allies and many of Europe's fragile new democracies. If war reignites in Bosnia, it could spark a much wider conflagration. In 1914, a gunshot in Sarajevo launched the first of two world wars. We must not let the century close with gunfire in Sarajevo.

Making peace in Bosnia will help build a peaceful, undivided Europe. A united Europe will be America's best partner in security and trade. But Europe will not come together with a brutal conflict raging at its heart. Europe will not come together if the forces of intolerance triumph.

To seize this opportunity for peace, America must continue to lead. Already, American mediators have helped the parties agree to a cease-fire and to the basic

principles of a settlement. Bosnia will remain a single state, with an equitable distribution of territory, free elections, and democratic government. But many difficult obstacles remain to be overcome in Dayton before a comprehensive settlement is reached. There is no guarantee the parties will succeed.

If peace is achieved, NATO must help secure it — and as NATO's leader, America must take part. Only NATO — proven, strong, effective — can give the Bosnian people the breathing space they need to begin to reconcile and rebuild. If the US does not do its part in a NATO mission, our partners may turn their backs on Bosnia as well. The hard-won peace could be lost. We would also weaken NATO — the anchor of America's and Europe's common security — and jeopardize US leadership in Europe.

As President, I have no responsibility more grave than

putting American soldiers in harms way. I will not deploy US troops to Bosnia unless the parties commit to a solid peace agreement. I will insist on NATO command and control that protects our troops and ensures the effectiveness of the operation. Our troops will take their orders from the American general who commands NATO forces — no one else. They will have clear rules of engagement, a carefully defined mission, and an exit strategy. As the peace process moves forward, I will continue to consult closely with Congress. If an agreement is reached, I will request an expression of Congressional support for American participation in a NATO implementation force.

I was proud to see that when the Balkan leaders arrived in Dayton, they were

welcomed by hundreds of Americans of diverse faiths and backgrounds, demonstrating how deeply our nation hopes for peace. Standing together, they reflected the foundation of America's strength: E Pluribus Unum — from many, we are one. The war of ethnic and religious hatred in Bosnia strikes at the heart of the American ideal. But there was a time when Bosnia, too, found unity in its diversity. Now is the time for Bosnia to find that unity in peace — for the orphans of Sarajevo; for the untold victims of Srebrenica; for the countless men and women from every ethnic community, driven from their homes and divided from their families. And now is the time for the United States to stand by our principles and stand up for our interests. We must be leaders for peace. That is our responsibility as Americans.

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Teachers' Training

Whether teachers are born or made is a hotly debated issue. Both innate qualities and acquired skills must be given recognition in the shaping of a good teacher. Although it is impossible to turn a donkey into a horse, a horse nonetheless needs careful grooming and training to become a race winner. The same applies to teachers. A sound academic background when complemented with teaching orientation, brings the best out of a teacher. The country's teachers leave much to be desired on both counts. No wonder, the poor quality classroom instructions have been greatly responsible for a sharp decline in our educational quality.

It is against this background that the government, with help from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has embarked on a Tk 245.18-crore teachers' training programme. Let it be noted that the programme has little to do with the existing training courses as offered by the teachers' training colleges. The attempt here is to give the teachers an orientation to the modified curricula for schools, colleges and madrasahs. They are required to undergo a sort of crash programme for the sake of smooth transition to the new system from January 1, 1996.

How far the programme meant for the junior, secondary and higher secondary level teachers will benefit the education process as a whole is the most important question. How will the new curriculum at the secondary level relate to those at the primary and tertiary levels? We hope it has been tailor-made to suit both ends. As for the poor quality of teaching, we believe, shortage of teachers, low salary etc stand in the way of a desirable improvement in the area. Bright, committed young men with a high calibre will have to be drawn to the profession by offering adequate financial and other incentives to them.

Lesson Unlearned

Something is brewing in the urea kettle that had better be stopped before the genie of the last year's shattering fertiliser crisis is let out. At that time the scarcity situation originated in impudent exports and then snowballed through a flawed distribution policy. This time around, the second part of mismanagement, namely, maldistribution, has come into play. It has started negating what should have been assured benefits from steady production and stock of urea at the factories.

It is not the authorised dealers but push-over middlemen who are now jostling before the mill-gates. This could not have happened without the blessings of factory officials and influential people being showered on them. The monopoly hold of unauthorised people on the urea trade has pushed up its price by Tk 54-90 per 50 kg bag from the government-fixed price of Tk 186.25 only. The government commandeered transports are charging Tk 40 to 45 per bag whereas the freight rate would have been Tk 18 to 20 if it were handled by the dealers themselves.

The winter crop is bound to be affected by a destabilised fertiliser market. We suggest that wholesale fertiliser trade be freed from monopoly and the price fixed realistically to ward off manipulation by seasonal traders.

OVER the last four years the world has witnessed images we thought had been banished from Europe forever: sunken-eyed prisoners; defenseless men shot down into mass graves. Bosnia-Herzegovina, once a symbol of multiethnic tolerance, has been Europe's bloodiest battleground since World War II.

But now, in Dayton, Ohio — where the Presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia are beginning negotiations aimed at ending the brutality — horror is giving way to hope. America has led the way to the best chance for peace since the war began. American pilots and their NATO colleagues waged a bombing campaign that halted Bosnian Serb attacks on the safe areas. America's determined diplomacy brought the parties to the peace table. And in Dayton, America's negotiating team — together with our European and Russian partners — is working with them to make a lasting peace.

Peace in Bosnia matters to America — to our values and our interests. We have an urgent stake in stopping the

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Foreign consumer goods

Sir, It is not clear to us why certain consumer commodities, such as, toilet soap, detergent, toothpaste etc. are being imported in this country when the country has quite large facilities for manufacturing these commodities?

We are frequently watching advertisements of foreign products on our national media. Would the relevant authority please examine the issue?

M Zahidul Haque
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"Domestic Politics and Sovereignty"

Sir, It is really regretting for us that our country is in a serious political crisis now. Both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are unbending in their points of view. They do not think of the colossal loss of the country. If they deliberate over the common people's weal and woe, they would not be obstinate. The frequent recurrence of hartal disrupts the normal life of the common people. But the political parties are quite indifferent to people's manifold problems. They are running after

power only. They are pushing the country towards a chaotic situation.

Besides, we have been watching for a few months that the foreigners are meddling in our politics. Meanwhile, a year ago Sir Ninian Stephen, the special envoy of Commonwealth Secretary-General left for home ending his 40-day abortive mission of mediating a negotiated solution to the political crisis in Bangladesh. The President of Mali paid a state visit. During the visit, he expressed his concern over the existing political crisis. He suggested the Prime Minister to bury the hatchet with the opposition. Recently, A H Rafsanjani, the President of Iran, paid a 4-day state visit. He discussed our political situation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Have they any right to do so? Under which provision did they do it? Were they invited to visit Bangladesh for that purpose? Not to speak of presidents of Mali and Iran, the ambassadors or high commissioners of the USA and UK discuss openly the politics of this country without restraint.

Seeing all these it goes without saying that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition seem to be

pleased to talk to them over the said problems. Can we assume a Bangladeshi ambassador to the USA or UK ever be allowed to talk about their domestic politics with the top-ranking leaders of those countries? Certainly not. Let alone the ambassadors, our Prime Minister herself may not dare do so.

I think our leaders are wise enough to come out from the barrier of political impasse without any foreign interference. Be generous, please. Respond to the initiatives of the intellectual group. Do not lose the hard earned democracy. You are not supposed to push our beloved country towards the abyss of despair again.

Saful Islam
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Banani, Dhaka

BTV dubbing

Sir, English is the most widely-spoken language. Almost every literate person endeavours to learn this language, no matter whether his or her mother tongue maybe. This is the prime language through which people of different nations communicate with each other.

Unfortunately we fail to realise the importance of English. The standard of English language in our schools is very poor and the most disappointing fact is that nothing is being done to improve the standard of teaching this language in the educational institutions. In our Bangla-speaking society, one of the ways to improve

our English is through watching English movies. These films increase one's vocabulary as well as understanding and pronunciation of words.

Recently BTV has started dubbing English films to increase its popularity. This initiative is totally a foolish one.

There is a solution to this. BTV can take initiatives to broadcast the Bangla version in the FM band. Those who are interested can tune their radio to the particular frequency while reducing the volume of their TVs. This way every viewer would be satisfied. In developed countries this is the accepted alternative to dubbing.

I hope BTV would come to its senses very soon and in the future, act more intelligently.

Tamzid Farhat
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Has the island of peace vanished?

Sir, Before a decade or so we heard a lot about and came across varieties of news and photographs of an "island of peace" to be established somewhere in Chittagong. A good number of government and non-governmental organisations were associated with this noble project. Has the thought of that "island of peace" disappeared, gone with the wind or vanished under the sea?

Would some reader kindly throw light on the matter?
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Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Why We are in Vietnam

I recently read that there is a big effort in the United States to do business in Vietnam. American manufacturers consider the country a major customer in Southeast Asia and one we cannot afford to lose.

Therefore, I am revising a column I wrote more than 20 years ago, which was called "Why We Are in Vietnam."

Here are some of the reasons we're there now. Vietnam is a hot market for American automobiles and one we must take seriously before the Japanese flood the country with their Hondas and Toyotas.

In order to sell cars, it is vital that we pave the Ho Chi Minh Trail, so that the warranty on our cars will hold up even when the vehicles endure terribly punishment from generations of shell holes. This is a job for the US Army Corps of Engineers, whose fathers served there before them.

Vietnam is also one of the great consumer markets for cigarettes. Everyone in the country smokes and, had we been able to hold out for another four years, we would have won the war because all the Vietnamese would now be dead from inhaling nicotine. The tobacco companies consider the country a hot prospect for their products and are prepared to cover their billboards with Joe Camel ads which will attract teen-age Vietnamese.

We are in Vietnam because that's where McDonald's wants to be. The Vietnamese have developed a taste for french-fried potatoes and Kentucky Fried Chicken and all the things they fought against in the war.

The reason we are in Vietnam is that they have oceans of crude oil offshore and our petroleum people need this source very badly. We were ready to drill for it 25 years ago but Hanoi would never let us.

Another reason is that we also have Planet Hollywood discos that everyone in Saigon would kill to get into. We are in Vietnam because Wall street says it's a good place to invest American money. All our banks are planning to open branches there. Tourist travel will pick up as soon as the Vietnamese build large gambling casinos in the rice paddies and construct golf courses along the Mekong Delta.

Why are we now in Vietnam? Because even when you lose a war, you still have to trade with your former enemies. You must grab every market you can get and, like it or not, Vietnam will become a household name.

So everyone reserve a seat on Hanoi Airlines. We're going to have one holluva party. It was a lousy war — but now business is great.
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