

PAKISTAN

A passion for selling ourselves cheaply

AYAZ AMIR

It is a moot point which crumbled faster: the twin towers of the World Trade Centre or the imposing ramparts of Pakistani pride?

Just a few threatening statements from President Bush and Gen Powell and Pakistan's military government, usually so tough at home, conceded everything the Americans were asking for.

We did not say, as forgivably we might have, that we would look into the US demands. We did not say that we would consult public opinion before formulating our response. To some extraordinary outbursts of arrogance from Washington we succumbed first and only later was a show made of consulting leaders of public opinion.

We buckled under pressure. Alas, no other construction fits our swift capitulation. Perhaps, as General Musharraf has been at pains to explain, we had no other choice. But must we have bent that swiftly? Even if only for form's sake, couldn't we have paused to take breath before agreeing to every last item on America's imperious list of demands?

And, pray, what precisely were we afraid of? That the US in its blind anger would make an example of us, flattening our airfields, destroying our installations, taking out our 'nuclear strategic assets'? These wretched assets were supposed to be our ultimate defence. Now they turn out to be our biggest weakness, useless against the crude blackmail to which we have been subjected.

Sadly, it's all in character. After India's nuclear tests in May 1998, a few threatening statements from that side threw us into a panic and made us carry out our own tests. Restraint would have won us inter-

national kudos and put India in a spot. But out of paranoia we frittered away an historic opportunity. It makes one wonder as to the kind of people we are. Listening to our bombast anyone would take us to be Greeks of the Homeric period. Anyone examining closely our national record would be struck by our pusillanimity. And our ability to shoot ourselves in the foot.

But I bet the Americans who have a fair measure of Pakistan's capacity to withstand stress are not surprised. We have always been eager to serve their interests, often at great cost to ourselves and mostly without getting much in return. Once again we are gearing up for the same role despite bitter experience of having been repeatedly used and repeatedly abandoned.

What handsome revenge for America's debacle in Vietnam was the savaging of the Soviet bear in Afghanistan. A handful of Pakistani generals enriched themselves during that momentous struggle. But what did the country get? Guns, violence, drugs and a sea of refugees. All the glory America's, all the recurring costs Pakistan's. Anyone could be forgiven for thinking that history is being repeated.

Surely, a measure of self-serving calculation is involved in the decision General Musharraf has taken on behalf of the nation: a vision of gratitude dollars pouring in, of our debt burden easing, of India being outsmarted, and of Pakistan being treated as honoured ally instead of a country down on its luck. But what did we get before that we are hoping for the wheel to turn this time?

We don't know what the US eventually decides. Afghanistan is not the easiest of battlefields and sending in ground troops carries enormous risks. But we do know that Pakistani territory and facilities

will be used for any strike on Afghanistan. Such a concession, if at all to be given, should have come at the end of a process of mutual discussion and consultations, not right at the outset as we have done, hoping that the US out of the goodness of its heart will reward us later. We don't even know who'll take care of the refugees pouring into Pakistan. Should we then have pressed the panic button so quickly?

Granted that it was our support for the Taliban which brought us into the focus of American pressure. But who was pushing the support-Taliban policy? The military, the ISI, the national security establishment. The people of Pakistan are now paying the price of this folly.

There was no shortage of voices questioning the wisdom of our Taliban policy: that it was fanning the flames of religious extremism at home and proving a source of disquiet for our friends abroad. The notion of 'strategic depth', so beloved of GHQ, also made no sense because blind support of the Taliban meant not enhanced defence but importing another set of problems into our midst. But the experts remained unfazed. Now under duress we are doing what should have been done long ago: distancing ourselves from the Taliban. At long last the right policy but for the wrong reasons.

We are being told, however, that if we had not acted first India, which was rolling out the red carpet for the US, offering it every last facility, would have stolen a march on us, leaving us out in the cold to face American anger alone.

What nonsense is this? Must we see ourselves in India's mirror always? True, in order to paint Pakistan into a corner, India has tried to pander to American sensibi-

lities (to its chagrin without much success). We had a duty to protect our flanks. But we could have paused for a moment.

From which bases in the Rajasthan desert can a ground assault be mounted on Afghanistan? The key to any land action against Afghanistan is Pakistan and if the Americans are serious about any such action they have perforce to use Pakistani facilities. Had our nerve held we could have played for time in order to see what the US was willing to give in return. Admittedly, Pakistan is not Vietnam or Cuba. Our leaders do not take Ho Chi Minh as their model. Still, must we have caved in so quickly?

How would the Lion of Damascus, Hafez Al-Assad, have played his cards in such a crisis? He would have spoken no unnecessary word, would have guarded his silence like the Sphinx and made the paladins of the State Department and the Pentagon come to Islamabad, refusing only to meet the American official (was it Armitage?) who said it was for Pakistan to decide whether it wanted to live in the 21st century or the Stone Age. Credible threats Assad would have weighed carefully. Arrogance he would have treated with contempt. Above all, he would not have displayed his hand prematurely.

This is not a summons to arms or any misplaced arrogance of our own. The winds blowing across our country may be too strong for us to deflect. But there is no reason for us to sully national honour by behaving in too supine a manner. In any case we are confusing two separate issues: support for the Taliban and bowing before American demands. Our Taliban policy was a prescription for folly. Even if we have friendly

feelings for the people of Afghanistan, Pakistan cannot be sacrificed for the sake of any other country. But this is one thing, offering Pakistani territory for use against Afghanistan quite another. Have we carefully pondered the consequences of this move? How will our people take it? And what will be the cost to our already battered pride as a nation?

We are being told to be wise. Wisdom does not lie in acting cravenly. What good is our half-a-million man army and our famous nuclear deterrent if in every crisis we are to crack under the first strain? This does not mean we take on the Americans.

There is no need to tempt the gods or please our enemies by doing that. It only means that we let the Americans know, politely but firmly, that while we are only too ready to do the right thing, preferably under United Nations auspices, we are not willing to be pushed around or sell ourselves cheaply.

Was it a sense of opportunity lost which made General Musharraf look so tense when he addressed the nation? It was not one of his best performances and certainly was a far cry from his conquest of Agra. He asked the nation to trust him. The nation has no choice: he is the captain on deck and it is he who must take the ship of state into safer waters.

It would help, however, if even at this stage he opens the shut portals of his regime a bit to let in some fresh air so that decisions affecting the country's future are taken in a setting slightly broader than the cloistered world of the corps commanders.

This piece first appeared in the Dawn of Pakistan..

TRIBUTE

Neelan Tiruchelvam: not a moderate politician

ASHIS NANDY

ONE person who I had hoped would write my obituary was Neelan Tiruchelvam, the gifted Sri Lankan public intellectual, institution-builder and practical idealist. He was a few years younger than me and

certainly looked more energetic and fitter. I often used to brag that, after my death, my enemies would have to confront a more formidable phalanx of like-minded intellectual-activities. Neelan was one of the persons I had in mind. Time and reality have a way of subverting our dreams. Today, I have to write his obituary. It reminds me of the old Roman-or is it Greek?-definition of the tragedy of war. War, it says, reverses the normal order of things; instead of the young burying the old, the old bury the young. Perhaps, we in South Asia will have to get used to the idea of living in a state of perpetual war in the new century.

Neelan and I met for the first time in late 1960s at Chicago. He was then still a student and I a young, unsure researcher. We almost immediately struck a friendship that lasted more than thirty years until, two years ago, his life was cut short by a suicide bomber in the quiet, smiling streets of Colombo. Appropriately enough, he was killed by someone from his own community. The killer and those who remote-controlled him evidently believed-like Nathuram Vinayak Godse and James Eral Ray, the assassins of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, respectively-that the ideas and their political forces their victim represented could be thus banished from public life. Fanatic never recognise that ideas cannot be assassinated; violence only further empowers them.

Neelan's contribution to my intellectual life was deep. Some of my works, such as he cultural psychological profile of Cochin, were entirely due to his prompting, support and encouragement. And the framework of my book, The Tao of Cricket, which I personally believe is my best, began to take shape when he invited me to deliver the Punnettian Tiruchelvam Lecture in 1986. Indeed, for nearly two decades, Neelan was involved in almost everything I did on South Asian scale. This was not surprising. He was one of those who had virtually thought South Asian intellectual community into existence. (Iftekhhar Zaman's powerful message, written soon after Neelan's death and circulated through the web, captures this part of his intellectual life beautifully.) It is an indicator of the mutual trust and intellectual concerns that bound us together that, around 1990, I took permission from him and Tariq Banuri, then at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, to include their names without prior intimation in any new research I planned or any grant application I made. In 1997, two years before his death, he and Sithi came all the way from Colombo to attend our only daughter's marriage. My wife, Uma, and other family members were deeply moved.

All the newspapers in India and abroad that I saw after the assassination described Neelan as a moderate Tamil politician. This is conventionality pushed to absurdity. Neelan was not a moderate politician, gingerly espousing a sectarian cause. He was much more radical in his vision, ideology and intellectual framework than those who killed him in the name of an ideology precariously perched on nineteenth-century concepts of nation-state, nationalism and revolutionary violence. The federal, decentralised polity that he fought for in Sri Lanka was part of a larger vision that encompassed the whole of South Asia, still ruled by a culture of politics that was essentially a creation of the first generation of post-independence leaders, inspired by their exposure to and admiration for-European imperial states. This culture of politics depended heavily upon bureaucracies that were illegitimate progenies of colonialism and he wog imperium it left behind. In such a culture, a centralised, all-powerful nation-state, modelled on colonial regimes, was one of the axioms of public life. To question it was to question sanity and reason, apart from patriotism. Not merely many of his friends, but even his assassins must have loathed that part of Neelan's vision.

Neelan was also one of the few scholars in South Asia who worked in the critical area of law and society and established it during the 1970s and 1980s as a crucial area of social knowledge in the region. Legal scholars and activists may not be aware of it today, but most reforms in areas such as human rights, public interest litigation, genocides and torture in South Asia can be indirectly traced to the changes in the concept of law-in-society that took place during those two decades. The idea of law has changed irrevocably in the region so has the idea of relevant and creative social knowledge. The region had seen during the previous one hundred and fifty years, brilliant legal practitioners and jurists. Some of them had worked creatively on the relationship



between law and society, but the emergence of a discipline that studied law as part of social sciences was the creation of a handful of scholars in the second half of the twentieth century. Neelan was one of them. He was a practising lawyer in addition to being a practising social scientist and politician. Indeed, his vision of law in practice and constitutional mediated between his intellectual and his public life. They were means of establishing a dialogue between visions, institutions and scholarship.

I sometimes suspect that it was his exposure to politics that gave the touch of generosity and tolerance to Neelan's endeavour. Many, who talk of his moderation have in mind actually his inclusiveness and his capacity to work with immense diversities. Yet, paradoxically, both these traits transcended his politics. They had something to do with his ethical self. Among the dozens of obituaries of Neelan I have read, one of the few that have moved me deeply is by Veena Das. In it she recognises that his compassion would have even included in its scope the young suicide-bomber who took his life, fired by ideologies of violence, hatred and self-destruction that were designed to give meaning to an otherwise empty life. He would have sensed that the killer did not have much control over his own life and actions in any case.

Neelan Tiruchelvam was one of the great South Asians it has been my privilege to know. His post-nationalist universality had deep roots in Sri Lankan politics and culture and reflected his capacity to embody that embattled, threatened species: the Sri Lankan Tamil, proudly Sri Lankan and proudly Tamil. For a long while, the Tamils had come to define Sri Lanka somewhat in the manner in which the German Jews had come to define Germany by the end of the nineteenth century. Germany was incomplete without them and contemporary German culture was partly their creation. However, for that very reason, the Jews in Germany provoked deep anxieties, fears and hatred in many nationalist Germans. The attempts to get rid of them or cleanse the German culture of their presence became for these Germans a form of exorcism. That exorcism in turn was an attempt to protect oneself from the fear of losing one's 'pristine' self and a defensive manoeuvre meant to purify oneself by excising unacceptable selves. Unable to deny any longer that Germany itself had become a pluricultural entity, the Germans were willing to destroy the Jews - and themselves - rather than allow that edifice of denial to collapse. German racism, expressed in violence against the Jews, was an admission of defeat. For only through psychopathic violence could the Germans deny that Germany could no longer be defined only by its biologically 'pure' inhabitants.

However, unlike the Jews of Germany, the Sri Lankan Tamils have their myths of territoriality centring on Sri Lanka. They cannot give up their memories of homeland easily and become a wondering community. Some of them, therefore, have gone out of their way to prove what we should have learnt long ago that victims often make excellent killers. This has prepared the ground for a second tragedy. The homicidal rage of a section of Sri Lankan Tamils has turned against not only their enemies but also their own self with uncontrollable venom. Seduced by the vision of a Wagnerian gotterdammerung, they have killed off almost an entire generation of creative public figures, dissenting thinkers and activists. Of those thus sacrificed at the altar of chauvinism and blood thirst, Neelan was one of the most irreplaceable. He had to be killed, probably because he could so confidently and gracefully cross the barriers of state, cultures, religious and nationalists, both within Sri Lanka and outside. His life itself must have looked like a protest against forms of chauvinism and ethno-religious nationalism. By being himself, he could be, as I have already pointed out, a formidable enemy.

The space for South Asia as an intellectual, political and cultural entity has shrunk with Neelan Tiruchelvam's senseless death. I feel old and tired.

BHUTAN

Tourism : pushed or led ?

It was a symbolic and appropriate week to discuss tourism in Bhutan. The fall season is just starting, with the usual excitement and dilemmas: the festivals have begun but the rain persists, disrupting the Druk Air flight schedule and, therefore, some meticulously planned tour programmes.

Tourism authorities, representatives of the 91 tour operators, as well as related organisations like the foreign and home ministries and the national airline, all agreed that a meeting held on September 19 was much needed. This high profile industry which grosses US \$ 10.5 million and employs over 1,200 people needs a revamp.

Some see Bhutanese tourism as sitting, today, "at a cross-road". It probably means that the industry is at a stage when it needs coherent direction, new innovations, and professionalism.

In the past, the industry has been surviving on good fortune rather than design. Tourists have been attracted by the kingdom as a naturally exclusive and exotic destination, not by clever marketing. Tourists pay to visit a unique land, not for the physical amenities they receive. While promoters talk of nature and ecology Bhutan, with its pristine environment, is itself a rich park. The kingdom offers a natural version of eco tourism, today's tourism buzz word.

The tourism department has now drawn up a five-year tourism development plan. Expertise through the Austrian government and World Wildlife Fund has injected some training as well as nature and culture-sensitive concepts. The range of proposals and plans, although still in an initial stage, has raised some hope among those involved in the industry.

The tourism policy which is being developed does not really reflect new ideas. The concept of involving local communities has been discussed now for several years. The need for quality services in this form of tourism was recognised from the start. The government has always accepted its role to provide infrastructures and to

assume the basic responsibility for the industry's growth. Even the "high value low impact theme" is not new.

But it does push some new trends. For instance, there is the proposal that the government should take advantage of the experience - or "smart thinking" - gained by the industry. While it has been recognised that the tourism industry must involve a wide cross section of officialdom and of society it is accepted that this range of directly and indirectly related services need better coordination. And it is also significant that the government has approved two joint ventures with well established foreign companies.

So, nearly three decades after its introduction, we have the makings of a tourism policy. If today's professed enthusiasm is an accurate indication we should have a good policy. But, then, what next?

As the country opens up, we are likely to see a growing spectrum of tourists, from the Indians of the flatlands who are in search of a safer alternative to old summer getaways like Kashmir and Darjeeling to the new up market resorts with their US \$ 1000-a-day clients.

And this is why we cannot forget the basic principles of tourism in Bhutan. New innovations, yes, but not at the cost of old values. How do we enjoy the "high value" and ensure the "low impact" ? New jobs will be welcome, especially today, with many youths seeking employment. And the revenue could be substantial, provided Bhutanese officials and operators negotiate the right proportions with their partners.

For us, common citizens, we would like to see the industry thrive but not change the priorities where agriculture, for example, will still be the kingdom's mainstay. And to know that our festivals, institutions, and crafts, our songs and dances, are meant largely for the people and not for tourists.

This piece first appeared in the Kuensel of Bhutan.

INDIA

Will Jayalalitha issue discourage corruption?

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE RESIGNATION OF SOUTHERN INDIAN state of Tamil Nadu's chief minister Jayaram Jayalalitha in the wake of the supreme court verdict invalidating her occupation of high office in the state because corruption should come as an eye-opener to the politicians in South Asia and elsewhere.

All eyes were fixed at the court verdict and once the apex court of India disapproved the chief ministership by a person who could not contest elections due to criminal conviction, confusion and debate were set at rest on whether a corrupt politician can hold high public office even after being convicted on moral turpitude.

The landmark judgement would hopefully discourage politicians indulging in corruption taking advantage of people confidence not only in India but all South Asian nations where morality in public life is a suspect and many politicians are seen as immoral while the few honest are greatly admired. Ms. Jayalalitha, a popular politician and former chief minister of the important Tamil Nadu state, could not contest the recent state assembly elections as her nomination papers were rejected for being convicted in corruption cases.

As chief minister a few years ago, she was well known for her lavish life and often used to be called as "Imelda Marcos of the East", an euphemism of corruption

and high-flying lifestyle of former first lady of the Philippines.

When president Ferdinand Marcos was forced to quit power and leave the country facing a pro-democracy movement led by Corazon Aquino, an appalling picture of the wealth of the fallen president and his family came to the fore. But what was more gruelling information the personal belongings of the first which covered several hundred pairs of costly shoes along with similar kind of luxury items including very expensive rings. Obviously, all these were procured at the state expenditures or ill-gotten money.

As chief minister Jayalalitha too was known for her luxurious life. The number of guests and cost of a marriage festival of her adopted son was a matter of talks in India in those days since it was simply unbelievably enormous. She is also easily identifiable for her penchant for costly sarees and other form of luxury. This was one of the factors for the defeat of her party in the elections that followed more than five years ago when rival DMK won. But the DMK and its leader chief minister Karunanidhi over the last five years lost popularity giving way to revival of Jayalalitha's AIDMK party which made a clear sweep in the state polls that took place a few months ago. But the party supremo could not contest the elections because of earlier conviction in the corruption cases. Nevertheless, Jayalalitha did not hesitate to take up the position of the chief minister as the constitution permits a non-

legislator to head the government provided he or she becomes a member of legislature within six months of taking up the position.

But Jayalalitha had little scope to become a member of assembly since her very candidature in any by-election, which could have given her the opportunity to become a legislator, would be unacceptable. The matter went to courts and finally the Supreme Court ruled that she cannot continue as the chief minister without being a member of the state assembly and with the conviction in corruption cases.

Indeed, this had been a momentous judgement which made many politicians in India sit-up. While becoming chief minister, Jayalalitha had argued that people had given a massive mandate in favour of the party which she leads and this should be seen as verdict of the people against the conviction that the court had handed down.

This argument finally could not convince the court which found no rationale in the position that a win in the elections or popularity can upset or obviate the conviction on moral ground. Jayalalitha resigned immediately after the verdict. Many eyes brows were raised when was sworn in as the chief minister despite the conviction as it was almost clear that she could not have continued in the position for long. Her own willingness to head the state government was seen by many as something irresistible greed for power. Because of her total ascendancy in the organisation, none really ques-

tioned her plans at that time.

The decision of the then governor of the state Fatema Bibi to appoint her as the chief minister was also not without controversy. But eventually, Jayalalitha had to go and this was expected. Probity in public life particularly in the democracies is an issue which the politicians should honour and abide by.

Unfortunately, many politicians give a damn to this noble principle in politics. The lust and sheer greed for wealth have landed many notable political figures into trouble. The youthful slain former prime minister of India Rajiv Gandhi, once known as "Mr. Clean", was tainted by allegations of corruption in the Bofors arms purchase scandal. Many other Indian politicians, otherwise known for their popularity and success in politics, could not escape punishment because of involvement in massive corruption.

South Asian nations are notoriously known for corruption in the higher echelons including top politicians when they are in power. Only recently, Nepalese Prime Minister G.P. Koirala had to quit because of his alleged links in the financial irregularity involving an aircraft for country's national airlines. Former Pakistan prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif, both were accused of corruption and people believed their family members made big fortunes when they were in power. In our Bangladesh, the issue is often discussed. A former president could not be a candidate in the October 1

national elections because of his conviction in corruption cases. Allegations of corruption are there against both the former prime ministers, who are nation's leading politicians, involving purchase of Boeing aircraft, MIG combat planes, frigate etc. Their family members, near and dear ones are also accused to have been benefited financially when they were in power. Many other politicians like former key ministers are not immune of this allegation. Such corruptions are also galore in the Southeast Asian countries. The verdict by the Indian supreme court forcing Jayalalitha Jayaram to quit should dampen the keenness for corruption and immorality in public life although it can be safely concluded that the lust for money and wealth is such that very few people can really check this temptation while having the opportunities. We have politicians in the region whose integrity has set high standard of honesty in politics but their number is very small. It is irony that the corrupt politicians shed tears for the "people" but often enrich their own pockets in the name of these hapless people. A section of officials and others are not excluded from this menace. Hopefully, Jayalalitha's case would serve a notice on the need for corruption-free politics and administration.

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NEPAL

Corruption index

Those who rail against graft need to be a little more empathetic

PUSKAR BHUSAL in Kathmandu

AFTER complaining for years about how corruption has struck deep roots in the country, Nepalis have suddenly realised how they are contributing to the rot. A recent study by a team of local and foreign experts found that 42 percent of Nepalis who deviate from rectitude insist that they are forced to do so by the respect society bestows on the slightest tint of shadiness. (Nepal Samacharpatra, 7 September, 2001).

For today's much-maligned political aristocracy in particular, the study is the best thing that has happened since the collapse of the panchayat edifice in 1990. Some people have finally put the human turpitude index in its true perspective. The experts ranked development workers and politicians a classification that itself must be highly comforting to our unfairly bemisrched leaders sixth on its list of seven most corrupt categories of officialdom. Revenue officers, CDOs and LDOs, ministry secretaries and departmental heads, police, and licence-granting officials appear to be far more proficient in and preoccupied with diverse pursuits of perversion. Moreover, politicians are just one percentage point ahead of members of judicial

service, who enjoy the protection of endless variations of the attorney-client privilege and eerie interpretations of contempt clauses. Take into account the three-percent margin of error customary in such surveys and you will realise that politicians actually might be the least corrupt Nepalis in public service today.

Incredible as this discovery may sound, it does force us to ponder for a while and reset our ethical compass. By deciding to enter the public domain, politicians have willingly ceded much of their privacy. Nevertheless, a couple of questions are in order. Does the fact that politicians are directly accountable to the people mean they should be judged by a higher standard of integrity? Should the model year of their Prados and the up-to-the-minute value of their property come under greater public scrutiny than, say, those of prime ministerial hangers-on? Moreover, why have our custodians of transparency put a 1990 cut-off date on political probity, as if the age of partylessness was sparkingly stainless? And let's not ignore the other side of the coin. For every unprincipled politician we catch, there are others who are noted for their hard graft in their constituencies.

If people don't like the way their representatives make money and

flaunt it, they have the right to register their displeasure in the next election. (That would be a double whammy for graft-stricken politicians, since much of their ill-gotten resources is invested in getting re-elected, a certifiably high-risk venture during these precarious times.) Given the popularity of public interest litigation in the country today, we may soon see a spurt of class-action suits for breach of trust against our leaders. But what remedies do the people have in dealing with those reeking on the higher rungs of crookedness, apart from corruption cases the defendants go on to win on appeal nine times out of 10 anyway?

This leads us to the next myth that needs to be urgently demolished: the supremacy of the elected politician over the appointed administrator. When former prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala was forced to choose between his water resources minister and the new secretary he despatched to the ministry without bothering to inform his cabinet colleague a couple of months ago, Koirala didn't take too long to decide who was expendable. If there ever was a case for holding politicians primarily responsible for corrupting the system, the revelation that there are five worse offenders out there running a parallel

economy with greased palms should suffice to revise the parameters of the discussions.

The study, conducted under an Asian Development Bank-funded administrative reform programme, has been submitted to the Commission of Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) ostensibly to sensitise the watchdog to the cultural dynamics of the decadence. The report should be enough to electrify our commissioners, who have demonstrated the intensity of their abhorrence of corruption by demanding Rs 50 million each in deposits at the oddest of hours from two senior RNAC officials in the Lauda Air case, to show where the nuck stops. Another set of findings, however, may inspire the CIAA to offer graft suspects a fairer hearing in the future. A third of those questioned for the study said they indulged in corrupt activities to make ends meet, while 16 percent said they dirtied their hands to get rich quick. Nine percent said they engaged in under-the-table dealings to fund their children's education.

Now, aren't these perfectly noble motives? How fair would it be to expect public servants to serve society on a digestive system that grows with hunger every few hours? All those living in our free-

market system and watching satellite television have the right to want to become crorepatitis, don't they? Wouldn't it be utterly callous to ask Nepali parents, already confounded by seven-day school shutdowns over fee structures and the syllabus, to quit hoping for the best education money can buy?

In an economy where traditional safety nets are being systematically ripped apart by politically driven combatants and subsidy-slashing conditionalities attached to macro-economic stabilisation programmes, personal initiative must step into the space vacated by the state. Under any ends-justify-the-means standard, revulsion for our flourishing tribe of bribe-seekers would instantly transform into an outpouring of public commiseration. However, our failure to see in our public officials a reflection of our stained social and cultural standards, stands in the way of an upsurge of unadulterated compassion. It's perhaps because of this absence of empathy that the louder we rail against corruption, the more entrenched it becomes.

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