

And now the Ijtema land for grabs

A costly 'mistake'

IT is difficult to visualise how large chunks of prime government land could be leased out to private parties by 'mistake.' That is exactly what happened when 12 acres of Biswa Ijtema land were leased out by RAJUK to private parties, all by mistake.

Are we to understand that all those involved in the process of approving this land sale, that involved a lengthy bureaucratic procedure and went through the scrutinising eyes of several responsible officers of high standing, were oblivious of the error that was being committed?

How could this occur? This is a suspected case of collusion of government or Rajuk officials with private parties in lading out public land at a price. In this case this happens to be land on a riverbank that has the potential of further encroachments of the already moribund Turag.

From time to time we have been exposing cases of illegal encroachments of riverbanks that have harmful effects on the environment. The Turag basin has been eyed by many as a lucrative piece of real estate. But this area also happens to be a major catchment area of the capital and its surrounding. Much of the unnatural water logging of the city in the recent past has been due in part to the filling up of the catchment area. Similarly, land poachers are threatening the course of the Sitalakkhya and other rivers with choking.

There is a task force set up by the government to address the issue of river encroachments, and it has also taken steps to free some area of illegal occupation. But more often these happen to be in prominent areas under popular gaze. We wonder whether the committee is active in remote areas that are under illegal occupation? Government agencies are found to cry hoarse about this matter from time to time but that has remained merely a lip service so far.

We demand that the 'mistaken' allotment be done away with and the land restored to the original owners, because, not only does the matter smell rats but there are also the wider questions of river protection and wetland conservation involved here.

Some corrective action against those involved in the omission or commission would be in order.

Damage control in Berlin

A good idea but three years too late

AFTER belittling the organisation for the past three years and pouring scorn on its methodology and motives, it seems as though the finance minister has finally decided to go to Berlin to ask them -- face to face -- as to why and how Bangladesh gets stigmatised as the most corrupt country in the world. It is a good move and long overdue. But this government should have thought of sitting down with TI three years ago.

It seems as though the sense of loss occasioned by Bangladesh's missing out on \$300 million from the US President's Millennium Development Fund was what prompted the finance minister to abandon his TI bashing stance and go deep into the issue. Engagement with TI as to the make-up of its Corruption Perception Index and what steps must be taken by Bangladesh to combat corruption is the statesmanlike and mature thing to do.

Bangladesh first topped the CPI in the last year of the Awami League rule. We have since repeated this ignominious distinction each year of the current government's tenure. The question for the finance minister is why has it taken so long for the current administration to do anything about corruption.

It can fairly be asked what exactly the government has done these last three years to lower corruption. Not one government functionary, politician, or people known to be corrupt has been brought to book. Pledges such as the creation of an office of ombudsman and the separation of the judiciary from the executive -- measures that would have helped bring down corruption -- have languished unimplemented. Not only TI, but the media, civil society, and even parliamentary standing committees that have raised the issue of corruption have either been ridiculed or contemptuously ignored.

In fact, the government has done nothing except to bash the media and others -- such as TI -- who have had the temerity to raise the issue. And make no mistake, the government's intemperate responses to reports of corruption and subsequent foot-dragging have harmed the country's image far more than the reports ever did.

The government needs to take responsibility both for the corruption that has continued unabated during its tenure as well as for its imprudent responses which have only served to exacerbate the problem of the country's image.

AZMARINA TANZIR

THE definition of corruption generally involves improper acts or omissions, improper use of influence or position, or the improper use of information. The essential elements of a corrupt act are therefore: receiving a benefit (financial, goods, services, information), giving a benefit, and damage to the organisation or society generally. Corruption assumes different shapes and forms in different countries. Bangladesh is a developing country, however people in different quarters believe that Bangladesh has been unable to achieve its expected level of development. There are many reasons behind this, corruption, which has spread on a large scale, being the major one. Many reports have been published both domestically and internationally about the high level of corruption in the country, tarnishing its image.

All political parties in Bangladesh talk about combating corruption. In reality, nothing is done. In the lead-up to the eighth parliamentary election, all parties pledged their commitment to combating corruption. However, none of them discussed how to achieve that goal. The two leading political parties of the country have included the creation of an independent Anti-Corruption Commission in their manifestos. From the statements of the political parties it can be easily deduced that corruption has been identified as a

prime national concern and that the existing institutions have failed to address this problem.

In a seminar organised by the Bangladesh Economic Association, in a paper by Prof. Abul Barkat, it was said that during the last three decades only 25 per cent of the total aid flow actually reached those deserving it, while 75 per cent was misappropriated in different ways, (25 per cent by foreigners, 30 per cent by bureaucrats of the country, politicians, commission agents, consultants, and contractors, and 20 per cent by the urban and village elites). The World Bank in its research titled *Corruption in Bangladesh: Costs and Cures* stated that Bangladesh could attain additional 2-3 per cent GDP growth and *per capita* income would double if corruption could be controlled. Moreover various donors and international agencies have cited Bangladesh as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Poor governance is the underlying problem. It creates an environment in which corruption will flourish. Prevention must concentrate on eliminating the problem and not dealing with the symptoms. Consequently a corruption prevention strategy is inextricably woven into the issue of good governance. The benefits of a good governance strategy will include the reduction of fraud, inefficiencies, and inequities, as well as corruption.

Prevention is better than cure and so most developed countries

Palestinian struggle for statehood

Bracing for its post-Arafat phase



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

HE might have been able to throw dust in the eye of Mossad, out to cut short his life, and survived fairly long but being mortal Arafat had to finally embrace death. Even if slowly and painfully, the Palestinians willy nilly accepted the inevitability with their tearful farewell to the hero with his burial at Ramallah last Friday. What, however, remains difficult for the Palestinians is to come to terms with post-Arafat vacuum which is frighteningly devouring because it is intricately connected with the question of their identity which is now on the verge of being diluted. In many ways Arafat himself symbolised that identity.

Ever since the creation of Israel the Palestinians in diaspora were virtually subsumed in a notoriously divisive Arab politics and had been little more than pawn in intra-Arab feuds. The feuding Arab leaders used them only to advance their political interests and their attitude towards these stateless people had not always been charitable. Arafat, for the first time, gave them the

identity of their own and tirelessly promoted their cause. Henceforth the Palestinians were looked upon as a separate national entity. During his life time Arafat occupied the centre stage of Palestinian affairs and his was the last word in making decision affecting his people although he did it through consensus by virtue of his unique personal chemistry. With his permanent departure from the scene now, that Palestinian identity

US-Israeli axis will surely repeat the efforts. The sinister shadow of their renewed alacrity is starkly visible as Bush-Blair duo, apparently happy at the permanent removal of the only obstacle to peace, broached the idea of yet another peace process culminating in an independent Palestinian state while the Palestinians are still mourning their leader's demise.

Peace is however a cherished objective of every people. For the

strategic hub of the world at any cost. This is while offering the Palestinians a disconnected line of Israel encircled ghettos in the name of peace and a sovereign Palestinian state without addressing the key questions of such statehood: the Jewish settlements, return of refugees, Jerusalem and soon.

A long arduous way has already been traversed in the name of peace process but peace eluded both the Palestinians and Israelis because of

born revolutionary, that peace is never on the platter and it has to be bargained from a position of strength, but as a visionary he always favoured giving peace a chance. It was misunderstood by Israel and her Western patrons who wanted to exploit Arafat's stature among the Palestinians during his weakest time. They pitchforked him from far-off Tunis where he was licking his wounds after the PLO's ouster from its sanctuaries in Arab

position -- no matter who puts on the mantle of Arafat. It may be possible to hoodwink the leaders by dangling carrots and stick but the Palestinians baptised by Arafat's way can hardly be deflected from their cause and conviction. If the history of Palestinian struggle is any guide an independent Palestinian state is a certainty even if distant. Arafat taught them with his life how to generate strength from nothing to bargain peace with a sly enemy Arafat, the stateless head of the state had been instinctively treated at par with most powerful of the world both in life and death. Those who ignored him only trivialised themselves.

The long oppressed and dispossessed people of an occupied Palestine have already been through series of trials and tribulations. And surprisingly they always refused to succumb to them -- thanks to Arafat's inspiring leadership. True, with Arafat gone they are again plunged into the choppy dark water of Middle East politics while facing diabolic opponents. But fired with Arafat's legacy they will, as before, fight for just peace and not an imposed one from outside. For they know they have nowhere to fall back upon. In the meantime, those who are crowing that a new opportunity has arrived for peace with Arafat's death would soon realise that the golden opportunity for peace has already been missed because none else could be better equipped than Arafat to deliver it.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

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may somewhat erode and the consensus making tradition of Arafat suffer a setback.

With Arafat gone it is only apt that the sly and superior enemies of the Palestinians would exploit the weakness and infuse a divisiveness within the ranks of PLO leadership as well as the power structure of Palestinian authority. Only months before they propped up an alternative leadership with which they could do business by sidelining Arafat -- "the only obstacle to peace". They failed and a virtually captive Arafat had sprung back to centre stage. It is axiomatic that the

Palestinians it is inescapable first step for their statehood. It is equally an imperative for the conflict-weary Israelis. There has never been any dispute about peace but there is dispute about what that peace would be like. Arafat created 'problems' for the peace makers -- but why? 'Arafat was the only obstacle to peace' -- the peace to be established on Washington-Tel Aviv's term only to put in place their Middle-East game plan with a view to ensuring 'greater Israel' envisioned by paranoid Likudists and securing Israel -- the US' strategic outpost in the equally

the peace-brokers' carefully concealed chicanery right from the beginning. Arafat knew them to their backbone and could zealously guard the Palestinians' interests against all odds. He refused to yield to American pressure to sign on the dotted lines. The second Camp David in the summer of 2000 was the breaking point when Arafat earned the ire of Bill Clinton who apparently laid a trap for Arafat in Camp David but failed. The Camp David broke down and Arafat returned to his people with second *intifada* erupting in full fury.

None knew better than Arafat, a

heartland. Arafat was virtually abandoned by the Arabs by then and lost the Soviet support with its disintegration after the cold war. Yet the peace brokers catapulted him to Clinton's White House -- the centrestage of Oslo peace process -- only to discover what mettle he was made of. To their disappointment they found Arafat unbending and uncompromising on the question of Palestinian cause.

That's what is the legacy of Arafat which he left for his people. Indoctrinated by Arafat's mantra the Palestinians are highly unlikely to be dislodged from their long held

Parivar at war with itself

BJP in long-term decline?



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

EVEN the worst critics of the BJP couldn't have imagined that the party would prove so totally incapable of dealing with its recent election defeat. It finds itself in hopeless and utter disarray.

Last month, Mr L.K. Advani had to take over as its president amidst the washing of dirty linen in public -- because no second-rung leader would have survived in the job. But now, even his authority stands undermined.

At the November 10 party office-bearers' meeting, Ms Uma Bharati staged a major political tamasha. She did something that no Jana Sangh/BJP leader has ever done: challenge party bosses in the full glare of cameras while abusing Messrs M. Venkaiah Naidu, Pramod Mahajan, and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi. She openly defied Mr Advani to take disciplinary action against her.

This episode caps numerous acts

of protest and defiance by Ms Bharati, especially centred on her *Tiranga Yatra*, which tried to wrap the National Flag around communalism. The so-called *sanyasins* cannot forgive the BJP for having considered her unfit to rule Madhya Pradesh. True to type, she took her revenge in a loutish and strident way.

The episode reveals that the BJP's leadership crisis has deepened. Leave alone the "second-generation" even its "first-generation" leaders

three ways. First, sustained attacks by Ashok Singhal and Co on a BJP "hardliner," Mr Advani. Second, Ms Bharati was greatly encouraged by the *sangh* -- in particular, Mr K.N. Govindacharya, who was sacked by the BJP for berating Mr Vajpayee. (The RSS never disowned him.)

Third, the RSS has reprimanded Mr Advani for holding the office-bearers' meeting in public.

RSS organ "Organiser" has attacked him for allowing "full-blast

RSS's behest. This will further damage Mr Advani's authority and strengthen the RSS vis-à-vis the BJP.

The BJP faces an acute crisis. It has failed to comprehend, accept, or reconcile itself to its Lok Sabha election defeat. From outright denial, it has graduated to citing "internal" causes: we lost our ideological moorings; our campaign peaked too soon; "India-Shining" was pitched too high...

This denies outright that the

In 1984, the BJP was still an untested, "novel" entity. It has since been tried, tested, and rejected. Earlier, the BJP was a rising force in the Gangetic heartland. Today, it's in dire shape in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Earlier, it could exploit the Congress's historic decline. Now, the Centre-Lok space is expanding and the Congress growing.

Earlier, there was strong synergy between the BJP, RSS and VHP. The VHP mobilised numbers -- through

downturn or long-term decline? Will the BJP split -- into a hardline fringe like the Jana Sangh, plus a relatively "moderate" party? Does *Hindutva* have a future?

The BJP has probably entered a phase of long decline. Given present trends, it's hard to see how it can bounce back. No likely electoral victories are in sight. And the sectarian party will continue to play a highly negative and obstructionist role, eroding its credibility.

Of course, its opponents could get discredited if they follow right-wing conservative policies. But the UPA hasn't quite embraced these.

The BJP could split if a succession struggle breaks out after Messrs Vajpayee and Advani fade out. New contenders could emerge for succession -- Narendra Modi, with VHP-RSS backing, might join hands with Ms Bharati. In this case, less hardline leaders, allied to industrial houses, might split.

However, a constituency for *Hindutva* will remain. It was always there -- even at the high noon of the Freedom Movement, and during the anti-RSS wave after Gandhi's assassination. But this will be a marginal, fringe constituency, driven by an anti-Islamic mindset, and rejection of a plural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious India. That hardly spells a bright future for the BJP.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

Three questions arise. Fifteen years after its meteoric rise, the BJP is shrinking. Is this a temporary downturn or long-term decline? Will the BJP split -- into a hardline fringe like the Jana Sangh, plus a relatively "moderate" party? Does *Hindutva* have a future? The BJP has probably entered a phase of long decline. Given present trends, it's hard to see how it can bounce back. No likely electoral victories are in sight. And the sectarian party will continue to play a highly negative and obstructionist role, eroding its credibility.

don't count. The greatest loser is none other than Mr Advani.

Equally important are the growing rifts between the BJP and the RSS, and the BJP and the VHP loonie Right -- despite Mr Advani's attempts to placate them. For instance, his very first pronouncements as party president mouthed classic *Hindutva* slogans -- Ram temple, "foreign origins," Muslim demographic "invasion." And his first trip outside Delhi was to the RSS's Nagpur headquarters.

The *parivar's* fissures are visible in

televising' of Ms Bharati's remarks and permitting the media "to play a major role in BJP affairs... It is one thing to be media-savvy, another to be captivated."

The article only mildly rebuked Ms Bharati for being "impulsive." Otherwise, it praised her as a "very effective campaigner; a mass mobiliser for the Hindu cause" and "a very dynamic leader... committed to high ideals," who will always "remain part of the *sangh* movement."

The BJP is making conciliatory gestures towards Ms Bharati at the

party's appeal and its social base have shrunk and that it offers no vision to the people. It peddles a bankrupt mix of communalism, neoliberalism, and chauvinist nationalism.

The BJP's crisis today -- despite being in power in six states -- is far grimmer than in 1984, when it was reduced to two Lok Sabha seats. Then, the party was buoyed up dramatically by the anti-Babri movement. This catapulted it to 89 seats. Today, there is no such social movement. The Ayodhya "movement" is a spent force.

hatred. The RSS provided ideological cement and organisational muscle. And the BJP handled the parliamentary, "respectable" side of this division of labour.

All that has broken down. The VHP's in revolt. And the RSS is administering "shock treatment" to Mr Advani to remind him of his promise that the BJP "will return to *Hindutva*." The BJP has become a virtual RSS prisoner.

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OPINION

Preventing corruption

AZMARINA TANZIR

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All political parties in Bangladesh talk about combating corruption. In reality, nothing is done. In the lead-up to the eighth parliamentary election, all parties pledged their commitment to combating corruption. However, none of them discussed how to achieve that goal. The two leading political parties of the country have included the creation of an independent Anti-Corruption Commission in their manifestos. From the statements of the political parties it can be easily deduced that corruption has been identified as a

prime national concern and that the existing institutions have failed to address this problem.

In a seminar organised by the Bangladesh Economic Association, in a paper by Prof. Abul Barkat, it was said that during the last three decades only 25 per cent of the total aid flow actually reached those deserving it, while 75 per cent was misappropriated in different ways, (25 per cent by foreigners, 30 per cent by bureaucrats of the country, politicians, commission agents, consultants, and contractors, and 20 per cent by the urban and village elites). The World Bank in its research titled *Corruption in Bangladesh: Costs and Cures* stated that Bangladesh could attain additional 2-3 per cent GDP growth and *per capita* income would double if corruption could be controlled. Moreover various donors and international agencies have cited Bangladesh as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Poor governance is the underlying problem. It creates an environment in which corruption will flourish. Prevention must concentrate on eliminating the problem and not dealing with the symptoms. Consequently a corruption prevention strategy is inextricably woven into the issue of good governance. The benefits of a good governance strategy will include the reduction of fraud, inefficiencies, and inequities, as well as corruption.

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concentrate efforts on prevention. However, in Bangladesh there is a clear case of having too many rules and regulations with too little enforcement -- rules are used or abused to further personal interests.

Political interference is a major hindrance in the prevention of corruption in Bangladesh. It should be noticed that no charges are usually brought against any person affiliated with the ruling party. The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) is the foremost among the agencies engaged in combating corruption in Bangladesh. But the Bureau cannot take independent action on charges brought against members of the ruling party. This is because prior permission has to be obtained from the Prime Minister's office. Since the year 1991, BAC has filed cases against prominent people including ministers, MPs, former secretaries, and a few senior officials of the autonomous bodies. After completing enquiries, charge-sheets for the filed cases had been submitted to the concerned courts, however, most of the cases have not yet completed trial. Because important accused persons have filed writ/revision in the Honourable High Court and as a result the investigation/trial of the particular case has been stopped. It is worth noticing that as a new party assumes office charges are brought against ministers/MPs of the previous government and the cases filed against their own ministers/MPs previously are withdrawn. So, it is

clear that political interference holds back BAC from running smoothly.

Legal complications and long bureaucratic processes delay the enquiry and investigation process. Beside this, lack of proper planning at the enquiry/investigation, disruptive transfer of officials involved in investigation, stay or suspension order of the court, renowned lawyer presenting the defendant, submission of weak charge-sheet, irresponsibility of the PPs and their weak conduct of cases, lack of witnesses, incapability of the enquiry/investigation officials, and interference from various quarters prolong the settlement of cases. So, the condition of BAC can be described as having to swim with its hands tied. Even then, 50 per cent of the general corruption cases ended in conviction, which shows that BAC can work successfully if it is given more freedom to work independently. To make BAC an effective organisation to combat corruption, the Anti-Corruption Act of 1957 needs to be applied properly.

In these circumstances, establishing an independent Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is a must to prevent and check corruption in Bangladesh. The ACC should be a modern, high-performing, independent government agency working with other bodies to fight corruption in Bangladesh. Its function should be to investigate and prosecute offenders, prevent corruption, and educate the people of

Bangladesh about fighting, reducing and preventing corruption. The ACC should be given the freedom, power and resources it needs to do the job. It should function in accordance with the rule of law and should act in an impartial, transparent and fair manner.

The public sector organisations within Bangladesh also need to develop an effective corruption prevention strategy. Corruption in Bangladesh is deeply entrenched and systemic. Social and economic systems are heavily inter-related and inter-dependent, and consequently a corruption prevention strategy for a particular organisation cannot ignore the external factors that affect the organisation's ability to deliver its objectives, and this is a particular constraint on organisations operating within Bangladesh. The success of an organisation's fraud and corruption prevention plan will therefore depend upon the existence of a national institutional framework, which minimises the potential corruption, and promotes cooperation and coordination between agencies.

Having determined that fraud and corruption are significant potential risks, the organisation can then develop a specific anti-corruption strategy, establish a mechanism to oversee the strategy and identify detailed anti-corruption techniques. The steps required to develop an effective corruption prevention strategy for a public sector organisation

are thus: develop a National Integrity Strategy, institute adequate internal control systems, develop a fraud and corruption control strategy, enhance fraud and corruption prevention and investigation skills, and increase awareness and education.

A national integrity strategy is an umbrella approach, which will identify systemic weaknesses across all the institutions, which make up the social and economic infrastructure of the country. The strategy will include thorough plans to reduce or eliminate these weaknesses, through structural changes, legislation, procedures, enforcement, and prevention measures. Internal control is a management tool used to provide reasonable assurance that management's objectives are being achieved. The head of each government organisation must ensure that a proper internal control structure is instituted, reviewed, and updated to maintain its effectiveness.

The organisation should develop a fraud and corruption prevention strategy as a clearly identifiable instrument at the policy level. It should be comprehensive and cover all areas of operations. The strategy must be tailored to the internal and external operating environment of the organisation, the nature of its business and the types of fraud and corruption it is exposed to. All staff should be involved in the development of the strategy. It should be

regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. Moreover, the organisation must demonstrate that it will not tolerate fraud or corruption, and maintains the highest standards of ethical behavior.

This attitude must be clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders, including staff, clients, suppliers and the general public in the form of a statement of ethical standards. Staff, customers and suppliers must contribute to the fraud and corruption strategy and feedback must be encouraged in order to identify improvements in operational practices. Staffs should be given reasonable salary and other facilities so that they don't engage themselves in corruption or bribery. For example, police department in Bangladesh are said to be one of the most corrupt sectors. It is because the staffs are not given adequate salary and facilities. So civil service salaries should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are adequate.

Besides this public awareness is very important to prevent corruption. Individuals should be aware of the bad effects of corruption. Hypocrisy and selfishness should be rooted out from our national characteristics. People should raise their voice against corruption and come out of the box to fight it.

In Bangladesh there is no system of witness protection. Most witness will not come forward if they are afraid of retaliation from criminal elements.

Bangladeshi criminal procedure permits confidentiality for informants. This does not help informants whose identity is easily ascertainable or whose testimony is required. So, a witness protection system is necessary to prevent corruption.

There is widespread disappointment with the pace of development in Bangladesh since independence and while there are many constraints on economic growth, corruption is undoubtedly a major factor. The image of Bangladesh has suffered somewhat as a result of the publication of a number of reports regarding corruption. However, the good news is political leaders have shown increasing awareness of the need to curb corruption, recognising a mandate in the growing public calls for action. There is now a clear public need and demand for the establishment of an independent agency to combat corruption and to provide it with the teeth it needs to be effective. In the end it can be said that the commitment of political leaders to fight corruption, appropriate application of the Anti-Corruption Act 1957, an efficient agency that is effective in investigating the corrupt, and finally, the support of general people from all walks of life are the measures to prevent corruption in Bangladesh.

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