

If I could be the chairman of Anti-corruption Commission



MUHAMMAD YUNUS

I was extremely happy along with the citizens of the country at the formation of Anti-corruption Commission. And I was so very jealous of Justice Sultan Hossain Khan when his name was announced as the chairman. Because he got the most easy job in Bangladesh! How lucky he was! I thought to myself -- if I had got the job, it would have been so much of fun. I hope everyone will agree with me that it is the most easy job.

In a country that tops the list of corrupt countries in the world, it's so easy to catch the perpetrators of corruption. All that the commission needs to do is to lie with its mouth wide open, and all the corrupt would drop in that mouth one by one.

I am jealous for another reason. Just as it is very easy to be successful in this mission, the appreciation by the people for a little bit of success is also hundred percent certain. One can become a personality to be remembered with minimum success rate. I just cannot imagine the unlimited magnitude of gratefulness by the people with big success. Whoever gets this easy task done, will find a permanent place in the history of Bangladesh.

I would have immediately got down to crush corruption

I was thinking with my eyes closed -- what would I have done as the chairman of the commission? The first thing that came to my mind was getting down to quell corruption straightaway. It's not a corruption trial commission, not a corruption post mortem commission, not a corruption analysis commission, not even an archive of corruption documents or a corruption research commission. It's a commission to crush corruption. I would have asked everyday after coming back from the office -- how much did I do today? My sole aim would be to crush corruption. The result should be there for all to see. People must be able to feel it.

I would have assumed that I was not short of manpower. All the citizens of the country are my human resources. I would have assumed that I had all the power I needed to do my job, and that is to crush corruption at any cost. My power is my ethics and the total support of all those behind my job.

I would have made the 'present' department the most important

I was thinking of dividing the commission into three departments in

the beginning: Present, Future and Past. The most important department would be the 'Present'. I would have employed fifty percent of the total manpower, other resources to this department. The main task of this department would be to ensure that corruption does not take place at present.

The second most important department would be the 'future'. I would have spent thirty percent of the commission's time and money for this. And the last department in the priority order would have been the 'past' where twenty percent of the resources would have been used.

The big challenge would be to keep the commission corruption free

I would have taken this task as a personal challenge. Anti-corruption Commission must be kept free of all kinds of corruption at any cost. This commission would be zero tolerance zone. Then I would put my attention to those areas which are known to be safari parks of corruption. I would terrorise those areas so ferociously that people would have to think twice before getting engaged in corruption.

Corruption has reached such a public level in Bangladesh that it's not talked about in whispers any more. Now it is a big market of corruption. No one feels least bit shy or cautious while bargaining in this market. Officers accept bundles of currency bills in front of their colleagues as if a shop owner is taking money from his customer. I would select only a few spots since I know it would be difficult to achieve success in all of them at the same time. I would ensure success in all my targets of attack. I would inform the journalists beforehand about the spots I plan to attack. I would ask them to provide me with information whether my mission is proving to be successful or not. I would seek the opinion of those who used to pay bribes in the past. I would encourage the sufferers to form a 'Sufferers Association'. They would come to me with evidence. We would do an immediate survey with the officials concerned. I know they will deny everything but they will also realise that things are not smooth any longer. My big job will be creating fear in the minds of the corrupt people, not for the time being but permanently.

I would select places, like Chittagong port, tax department, airport, where most of the bribery take place, where an international bidding is conducted, where a construction contract is being handed over etc. I would have made an announcement before a particular transaction takes place that Anti-corruption Commission has taken full responsibility.

The biggest strength is the people of the country

All the people of Bangladesh sincerely support Anti-corruption Commission. I would have accommodated them in the scheme of the commission, especially the sufferers.

I would have built a special relationship with the journalists. I would have encouraged them to keep a hawk's eye on the recent cases of corruption and publish investigative reports on them. At the same time, I would have cautioned them about yellow journalism so that no one can make false allegations of corruption against anybody. I would have arranged special training for the journalists.

During the training I would have described the famous story of 'Tahelka.com' in detail. How did a journalist pretending to be an arms dealer video recorded the bribe giving to the president of the ruling BJP of India and disseminate the pictures to the world through internet. Though the accused could not be punished thanks to legal loopholes, in fact the journalist himself was harassed, but the politics of India was in turbulence because of the revelation.

There is no way one can hide any information, any news any more. Here the intention is the main thing. We all definitely have the intention, but there was no way for pressing the button to make it operative. The Anti-Corruption Commission has brought that button closer to us. Now its time to activate the intention to press that button.

I would take all parties on board. Common people, the sufferers, the officials/officers of those organisations/offices where corruption is taking place, the chief of those offices -- I would consider all of them as a supportive strength of the commission. I would first meet with the office chief. I would ask him to prepare a corruption index of his office. I would ask him to determine to what level he is willing to bring down corruption in his office. The commission would give him assistance, in return he would assist the commission. The commission would be very happy if he asks for a joint action with the commission.

The commission would work with the different offices and their chiefs. It won't consider the offices as opponent. The aim is to crush corruption, not to undermine anyone. I think I would get spontaneous support of many offices and their chiefs.

I would have created 'assisting groups' everywhere.

I would have created an assistance group with those who could not be part of the sufferers association. I would have made arrangements to ensure that professors, students, politicians, businessmen, teachers, journalists, service holders, labourers, lawyers, NGOs, cultural activists -- none are excluded from this mission.

I would hold talks with the political parties with the same mission. I would ask them to adopt programmes to eliminate corruption from their own activists and set a timetable, monitor the progress. I would have requested them to inform both people and commission regularly about the success of their programmes.

I would also hold meetings with

the parliamentary parties for their advice. So that I could find out how and where they can play a role in crushing corruption.

I would have declared big prizes

I would have declared big prizes as part of the 'present' department's activities. 'Attractive prizes for catching the criminals with evidence' -- the newspaper would flash such announcements. The announcement would say 'the reporter will receive the same amount that he reveals about the corruption with evidence'. In this way, the commission will not spend a single taka, but the news of all the big corruption taking points would have reached us. At the same time, suspicion would have crept into the minds of both the bribe giver and the bribe receiver. The colleagues of those bribe receiver would become jealous and give information about

Just like Transparency International prepares and releases corruption index for many countries in the world, I would have done the same on the behalf of the commission. Every year I would have informed the people about this index prepared on various ministries and government organisations. It would have benefited us in two ways. First, to understand which ministry or organisation is placed below or above which. Secondly distributing comparative data on level, upwards or downwards, of corruption in the ministries or organisations. Needless to say, I would have prepared a similar index for the Anti-Corruption Commission as well.

When would I resign

My effort would have been to continuously assess whether I have been able to make a positive impact. I would have taken two decisions in advance. If Bangladesh's position

"Why? Couldn't he find a better job?"

"Sir, it requires a lot of money to get good job. I am poor, how can I arrange for so much money?"

That means educational qualification is not the criteria, any job can be bought with money. If you have more money, then the prospect is better.

I always hear about how much it costs for what kind of job. I have made a list of rates based on hearsay. I am assuming that these are not applicable for all. This is just a sample. A real list of market rates would require many pages extra like they do with Wall Street Journal: Tk 50,000 to Tk 200,000 for appointment of a primary teacher; Tk 200,000/300,000 for appointment of an officer in universities; Tk 500,000 to Tk 800,000 for appointment of a sub-inspector of police; Tk 100,000 for appointment of a peon; Tk 50,000 to Tk 80,000 for appointment

example: Organisation for open corruption, organisation for controlled corruption, organisation for almost corruption-free, and lastly organisation for no corruption. These will make them to try and better themselves the next time. Because the officers would have to explain to their children, families, neighbours why they are so high in corruption, just like people of Bangladesh have to explain why their country is on top of the corruption list.

Anti-corruption Commission is not just an office for its officers. This is a place which can lead the people in freeing themselves from the curse of corruption. The commission has to learn to be a strong leader, not just an office where files are taken from one desk to another. Because corruption will only increase if the commission remains busy with files.

Let me briefly talk about the other two departments.

'Future' department

As I said my second priority would be the 'future' department. This department would continue with its preparation on when the death bell will toll for corruption -- in five years, or ten years. Taking the past and present experiences into account, the department would march forward for a better future.

I would encourage research organisations to carry out more researches on corruption, on action against. I would build close relationship with international research and advocacy organisations. I would collect information on what they are doing in various countries to eliminate corruption, what are the positive outcomes etc.

I would fix a long term target for the commission and continuously monitor whether we are being able to go forward in that direction.

'Past' department

I would spend the least amount of time and money for this department. Because if and once I fall into the big cave of corruption, the whole commission will be sucked into it. In the meantime, the normal routine of corruption would continue to flourish showing us their big thumb.

I would utilise the corruption of past years for research and training, pick some exemplary incidents to make the commission more efficient, to create a history of success in the commission, to caution the corrupt officials, to make the nation confident about law enforcement. I would build relationship with some law firms so that they can provide the maximum legal assistance. If necessary I will seek assistance from international organisations as well.

Corruption is born in the womb of policies

Policies are made in such a way that the fate of a citizen depends on the whims and fancies of an official or an officer. The bosses turn a blind eye to it.

To reduce corruption, the rules and regulations have to be prepared afresh. In this case, I would have

held regular meetings with different ministries to reform them. There should be legal provisions for a citizen to take actions if a bureaucrat tries to extract money from him by taking advantage of the situation. An officer doesn't sign an order if not bribed, a typist doesn't type a memo if he is not given money, a despatcher does not give a despatch number, a peon doesn't take the file to the officer, a certified copy of a verdict cannot be procured if not given money -- the whole system has become inoperative. And it's being kept operative only by giving loads and loads of money. The government officials are not officials any more, they are businessmen. They are involved in the trade of power market. They are buying power with money, they are buying promotions with money, they are buying postings with money, they are selling the power in exchange of money. Rules, regulations, laws are the ingredients of that trade. Though they had been created for the welfare of the people, they are now being utilised in the favour of the officers and against the people. It is the duty of the Anti-corruption Commission to reclaim this rules and laws in its own compound.

The government reacts like an innocent child

Unless a serious effort is made to reclaim them, the government will continue to operate in the present way. It will continue to talk about laws, policies, principles, but also continue to do all the wrong things at a faster speed. Why cannot the government see what the common people can always see so clearly? It is a mystery! I have not been able to solve. Has the government been cursed that its eye sight is reduced when in power? If one tries to vividly point out something to the government, it reacts like an innocent child -- really? It couldn't have happened. You must have seen it wrong. It is definitely an anti-govt propaganda by someone!

The more I think about it, the more surprised I become that how easy it is to quell corruption. In the age of information technology, however difficult it was yesterday, it's not today. It will be even easier tomorrow. E-governance can bring all the sectors of the government under a bright light that is visible by all. There is no way one can hide any information, any news any more. Here the intention is the main thing. We all definitely have the intention, but there was no way for pressing the button to make it operative. The Anti-Corruption Commission has brought that button closer to us. Now its time to activate the intention to press that button.

I have seen the issues to press the button in my own way. Some might see them in a different way based on their experiences and methods. But there is no doubt our aim is the same. However easy it is, someone has to take the initiative.

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The exploited: Fallout of corruption

their corrupt colleague for the prize money.

I would have given another prize. This is for a competition on giving advice on how to stop taking bribes during transfers or appointments; on how to stop corruption from taking place forever in tax department; on how to stop corruption in tender bidding; on how to stop corruption in purchases.

Common citizens who have benefited in life by taking bribes and who have suffered at the hands of them -- I think both the groups would take part in the competition.

I would have released corruption index every year

does not move from the top spot in the Transparency list in two years after I join, I would resign immediately. Secondly, I would consider my stint in the commission as successful only if I am able to make Bangladesh one of the last three countries with least corruption in the Saarc region.

The Market rate of corruption

I would have done another thing for the 'present' department. I would have collected market rate of corruption. I often hear poor parents telling me, "Sir, my son has done really well in his studies. But cannot find a suitable job for him. At least now he is working as peon."

of a sweeper/wardboy; Tk 200,000 for appointment of a nurse; Tk 80,000 to Tk 200,000 for appointment of a surveyor; Tk 200,000 to Tk 500,000 for promotion of an AGM to DGM of a bank; Tk 1,000,000 to Tk 2,000,000 for a promotion to GM position of a bank etc etc.

I would have arranged to publish the market rates of corruption every month through the sufferers committee and research organisations. I would have tried to understand the relation between the activities of the commission and fluctuation of market rates.

I would give specific names for specific ranges of the corruption index for easy understanding. For

Bangladesh and northeastern Indian states



HARUN UR RASHID

IN Bangladesh foreign policy, "India factor" looms large, simply because Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by India. That means largely what Bangladesh proposes to do or does not do in domestic or foreign affairs is likely to have impact on bordering states. The same principle applies to India as well. This is nothing new among neighbouring countries that share land borders. They must be mindful of the impact of its policies or actions on the other country.

Both US and Canada or US and Mexico are aware of this fact. For example, the fumes of sulphur dioxide, emitted from the smelter in Trail of British Columbia, Canada, caused damage to the state of Washington. The US claimed damages from Canada. They went to arbitration. The arbitrator decided in 1941 that no state had a right to use or permit the use of territory for emission of toxic fumes causing damage to the neighbouring state. On that score the US won the case. Again, the US and Mexico disputed sharing waters of Rio Grande and concluded in 1944 an agreement that provides sharing of fixed quantity of waters by both countries.

Since Bangladesh is an almost "India-locked" country (if I am permitted to use the expression), whatever occurs in north-eastern Indian states has a direct and visible impact on Bangladesh. If there exists non-supportive relationship with India, it can be difficult for Bangladesh to address adequately the issues arising out of it.

question is: how do the events in northeastern states have impact on Bangladesh and its effect on India? This question has often agitated the minds of people in Bangladesh. A tentative discussion follows in the paragraphs below:

Unnatural border

During the rule of the British, the border between "old" Assam province and Bengal was demarcated for administrative purposes of the British, ignoring the common language or ethnicity of people between the two provinces. In fact richly endowed with natural resources Assam constituted a hinterland and market of Bengal partly because it was landlocked. So the new north-eastern seven states, carved out of old Assam after independence, suddenly found themselves almost cut-off from the rest of India, except through the land (neck) of West Bengal.

The Radcliffe Award after the partition of the British India in 1947 was drawn haphazardly because Lord Radcliffe was not given enough time by the British government to examine all the factors in laying down the boundary between India and Pakistan. In many sections of his boundary, his writings and the line drawn on the map do not match. For example he describes a river that forms the boundary but actually no river exists on the ground. This inconsistency led India and Pakistan to dispute over the land boundary.

The 1974 Mujib-Indira land border agreement

After emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, Bangladesh inherited the problem. Both Bangladesh and India wisely concluded the 1974 Mujib-Indira Agreement on Demarcation of Bangladesh-India Land Boundary. In the preamble of the Agreement, it states that the purpose of the agreement is "to define more accurately at certain points and to complete the demarcation of the land boundary between Bangladesh and India".

The Agreement is not only to

define precisely the disputed areas but also to undertake demarcation of the land boundary so that no confusion or uncertainty exists on the border. Regrettably for more than 30 years, India has failed to ratify the Agreement (for whatever reasons) and as a result a section of 6.5 kilometer-long boundary on the east involving one of the northeastern states remains un-demarcated.

Security concern and misunderstanding

The insurgency in northeastern Indian states has been there for decades and often it turns into violent forms. It is a matter of great concern for Bangladesh because of its spill over effects on the bordering areas of Bangladesh. Furthermore there are many tribes who straddle across the borders and often they become involved because of the common affinity and sympathy for members of the same tribe. This implies that an insurgency in northeastern states has destabilising impact on the tribal belt of Bangladesh.

One fact that merits attention is to what extent Bangladesh authorities can ward off illegal entry of insurgents into Bangladesh, given the fact that borders are porous and artificial? Insurgents can easily walk across and hide in dense forests for days together or with common tribal communities in Bangladesh.

It has been the experience that insurgency in the Indian states has led to serious misunderstanding between the two countries. India suspects that its armed militants are hiding in Bangladesh and that

Bangladesh is not doing enough either to expel or prevent them entering into Bangladesh.

The repeated Indian allegations of presence of insurgents or militant groups in Bangladesh territory have caused mistrust between the two countries and brought their relations to their possible lowest ebb in recent times. Bangladesh denies the allegations but India is not impressed over the denial. The misunderstanding has affected

adversely the overall bilateral relationship. Furthermore, India has added another complication by insisting and constructing border fence along the no-man's land that, according to Bangladesh authorities, is not permissible under the Bangladesh-India Border Guidelines. India does not agree to the Bangladesh's interpretation of the word "defence structure" of the Guidelines.

Whatever may be the correct interpretation of the Border Guidelines, the fact is that construction of border fence is deeply offensive to people of Bangladesh. Why? It is because unilateral fencing the border is based on suspicion and mistrust and that is not conducive to friendly relations. One reality is that political and economic relations are intertwined and cannot be separated. And as a result people of both countries suffer from such stand off.

Economic globalisation

define economic compulsion or requirements or consumer trends. In global economy, the meaning of national products has disappeared. No single country produces many of the products that we get in the market. The finished product is a combined effort of many countries. Transnational corporations have established manufacturing outlets in various countries to become cost effective.

That means that it is increasingly

difficult to tell the nationality of a product. The recent gigantic Airbus 380 manufactured by Eurospace has vital parts built by more than half a dozen countries outside Europe and even Australia has been involved in making certain components for the Airbus. The Airbus is a global product. Another example of global economy is the product of Reebok sneaker. It has an African name, is made by an American company in South Korea and displays Union Jack (British) as a label.

Economic sub-regionalism with north-eastern states

Let us now examine from another perspective the contiguous location of Bangladesh next to north-eastern states and see whether they can turn into a great advantage to both countries instead of current cause of misunderstanding.

One fact is to be admitted that in South Asia, there is no regionalism in the traditional sense of the term. SAARC has failed to provide the basics of regional cooperation during the last two decades. There

is a strong view that sub-regionalism is the pragmatic way to move forward.

Sub-regional cooperation seems to be the order of the day because sub-regional cooperation is based on proximity of geographical areas and common economic interests. The proposed "Kunming" initiative among China, Myanmar and Bangladesh is rooted in sub-regionalism of economic cooperation.

In the days of economic

globalisation and stiff competition, almost all researchers working on India-Bangladesh cooperation have indicated that a closer cooperation or integration of Bangladesh's economy with that of north-eastern states will turn the eastern region into a "hub" of economic activities. The neglected eastern region has the potential to become an engine of economic growth that may eventually draw in the fold China, Myanmar and Thailand.

Both Bangladesh and northeastern states possess vast energy resources including gas, coal, forests and potential hydropower. The region's persistent energy shortages have been a major factor in its low rate of economic growth. If economic integration or cooperation between Bangladesh and north-eastern states is evolved, both Bangladesh and India will reap immense benefits.

Win-win situation

Many economists believe that for Bangladesh, the following benefits may accrue, among others: (i) bigger market for Bangladesh goods, (ii) access to energy from

northeastern states, (iii) joint enterprise utilising natural gas of Bangladesh, (iv) minerals from north-eastern states for production of cement and other products in Bangladesh and (v) earning substantial revenues by allowing Indian goods through Bangladesh territory or Chittagong port to north-eastern states from rest of India.

On the other hand, India will receive ample benefits such as (a) increased economic growth in the region will eradicate poverty and unrest in north-eastern states and insurgents will have no leg to stand on to advance their rebellion, in the event of prosperity and employment in the states, (b) Indian industrialists could set up industries in Bangladesh, using its natural gas, for export of products to northeastern states and (c) India will save millions of dollars in sending goods to north-eastern states through Bangladesh.

Both Bangladesh and India are gradually integrating into global economy and there is no escape from it for economic growth and development. The eastern region needs to arise from lethargic stupor and break the shackles of poverty of people of the region through intensification of economic cooperation. Private sectors of both countries may pursue the goal vigorously.

What are the difficulties?

It seems that both countries are imprisoned in their old mind-set of so-called "sovereignty" of territories and of unnecessary concerns of security. At the time of robust transnational economic cooperation all over the world, sovereignty of national boundaries is of little relevance. Even during the Cold War, Communist countries in Eastern Europe have cooperated with Western Europe and used transit facilities.

Security concerns seem to have been overlapped by both countries to their disadvantage. If goods from India worth more than US\$1 billion are annually smuggled into Bangladesh, why does security concern arise when economic cooperation

including transit rights is accorded to each other?

Possible strategy

One of the strategies is confidence building measures between Bangladesh and northeastern states. New Delhi may encourage more people-to-people contact between the territories. Bangladesh may consider inviting leaders from north-eastern states to attend national social or cultural events in Bangladesh.

Another idea is to consider by Bangladesh authorities to award a few scholarships to students from north-eastern states at academic institutions in Bangladesh as they have earmarked reserve seats for Nepalese students. The purpose of these steps is to build trust between peoples of Bangladesh and north-eastern states that in turn will eventually be reflected at the level of the two governments.

Conclusion

The effects of economic cooperation will have multiplier outcomes. The people of north-eastern regions will not be insular and become prosperous and happy. The roots of insurgency will eventually disappear. The unstable region bordering Bangladesh will become secure. Economic cooperation will usher in robust economic growth in Bangladesh and will certainly provide political and economic dividends to India. Both countries will be in a "win-win" situation.

There is no adequate reason why relations between Bangladesh and India are mired in tension, mistrust and suspicion. The existing climate of misgivings needs to be transformed into a constructive relationship for the sake of people of both countries. Mutually supportive relationship may hopefully become the centrepiece of economic diplomacy of both Bangladesh and India.

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