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Corruption *in* politics

In the third world, it is the politics and govt. machinery that are the biggest impediments to development. This is a common reply by the intellectuals of developed countries when they are accused of draining out the resources of poor third world countries. We agree with some reservation.

In our country the standard of political leadership has gone down so low that even die-hard party members are not happy with the leadership. For quite a long time, people with self-respect and conscience generally do not like to join politics, considering their ethical standing.

But things look a bit better now. Not only the rise in share market index, a ray of hope could be seen as far as the country's overall economy is concerned. Hatchery owners are planning to produce more for increased fish production, garment owners are trying to produce more, but only one sector is not performing at all well--politics.

However, the new caretaker government has put a stop on the politicians' flow of illegal earning. If this stoppage can be made permanent the country will be immensely benefited. And if the corrupt politicians are allowed to continue plundering our assets, the fate of the 14 crore people will become uncertain. These days it does not really take much time to achieve economic development of a country. The point will be made clear if we look at countries like Malaysia and Vietnam.

When President Iajuddin finally handed over power to Dr. Fakhuruddin Ahmed, people were happy. Some are considering it a divine blessing for Bangladesh. For an individual or a nation opportunity does not come on a regular basis. So we cannot afford to waste this opportunity. Thirty-five years is too long a time to comprehend how much damage corrupt leadership has done to this nation.

Once our politicians are in power their real face becomes visible for the next five years. They use the state machinery and the country as a whole for their own benefit and never miss any opportunity to make money or strengthen their position in politics through illegal means. They deploy mastans. In fact, the country becomes a private preserve of the ruling party. Now the biggest question is how to get an honest leadership for a potential country like ours.



COURTESY: TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL BANGLADESH

To create a conducive environment, a number of suggestions can be offered.

1. Separate the judiciary from the executive.
2. Constitute a truly independent Anti Corruption Commission.
3. Make sure there is no breathing on the shoulders of local administration by political leadership. (This is a newly introduced undemocratic practice that breeds corruption at the grassroots level).
4. An independent and non-partisan Election Commission with an accurate voter list, ID- card and transparent ballot box must be ensured.

A reader
On e-mail

I take the opportunity to express my thanks and gratitude to the caretaker government under the leadership of Dr. Fakhurddin Ahmed for taking some bold steps to eradicate corruption which has entered into every sphere of our life.

The need of the hour is to have a strong and honest police/security force and a credible /independent Anti Corruption Commission. We are happy that the present government is trying hard to attain this quite difficult target. They have people's support and they will, God willing, succeed. I

wish to put forward the following suggestions for the government to take into account.

1. The police department is known to be one of the most corrupt departments. But we strongly believe that we still have honest people in the department. We need to find them out and a commission in each district can be formed with retired army and civil officials with good service record to monitor the living standard of police personnel/officials and their sources of income. At present most of them live beyond their means.

Service rules should be revised, if necessary, to remove the corrupt personnel and make them face punishment. On the other hand, it must be ensured that the policemen and officers get enough to live a reasonably decent life.

To make sure that police and other intelligence personnel are not involved in corrupt practices, a counter intelligence bureau can be raised to overview the activities of the department.

Nurul Anwar
Chittagong

All this may be bad news for Bangladesh's policymakers and leaders who have yet to deal credibly and comprehensively with corrup-

tion. The Advisors of the caretaker government and the Army chief's frank appraisal of the situation in Bangladesh reflects the mind of the entire nation. They quite aptly felt the pulse of the toiling masses. Newspapers of the country have unearthed tales of corruption, unbridled corruption by most of our politicians holding the reins of power. It has simply sapped the vitals of the nation. Lashing out at dishonest politicians without naming anyone, it is not possible to count by calculator the enormous wealth they have accumulated. Their irresistible lust for wealth led them to gobble up the CI sheets allotted by the government for distribution as relief among the poor.

The nation today is plagued by rampant corruption, mired in the dominance of individual and group interests over the national interest, beset by unscrupulous competition for power, wealth and influence, stuck ever deeper in the cult of personality, and preyed upon by the indiscriminate use of black money and muscle power to achieve narrow interests. Despite repeated calls for caution from the honest and sincere segments of our society, their message has not been heeded. My personal appeal to the caretaker gov-

ernment, please consider the following recommendations:

The Anti-Corruption Commission must be made fully operational, independent and effective.

The Commission should develop its anti-corruption strategy and take specific exemplary measures to bring the corrupt to justice. The Commission should also monitor the newspaper reports on corruption and take appropriate legal action against the accused.

The government must attach due importance to the reports of corruption brought out by the media, and develop effective deterrence system without which the menace of corruption can never be controlled.

Each government ministry and department should open special units to monitor the newspaper reports and take appropriate policies and actions. There should also be a central corruption-monitoring unit at the office of the prime minister, to ensure that the individual ministerial/departmental monitoring units function effectively.

The ruling as well as opposition political parties must strictly realise their electoral commitments to prevent corruption. The most important prerequisite in this regard is to stop protecting and promoting the corrupt in respective party ranks.

Comprehensive and enforceable reforms are required for reducing corruption involving public officials and administration. The corrupt persons irrespective of their status, identity and political affiliation must be brought to justice.

Independence of the judiciary is sine qua non for enforcing effective anti-corruption policies and measures, with provisions for separate courts for the trial of corruption cases, so that they could be disposed of speedily.

Equally important is the enactment and enforcement of Freedom of Information Law with provisions for whistleblower protection.

Hence the time has now come when we must work together to pursue the goal of establishing a solid foundation for our country. For our efforts to succeed, it is essential for us to unite as a nation and work together with a common sense of patriotism.

Gopal Sengupta
Canada

Amaryta Sen's philosophy

Last December, Nobel laureate and noted economist Professor Amartya Sen visited Bangladesh. While inaugurating the Manikganj Festival 2006 at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka, Prof. Sen observed that intolerance is a major bar to uplift. He said, "We have to overcome this intolerance as quickly as possible. Otherwise, we will not be able to make progress and peace will not come. Tolerance is imperative for peace."

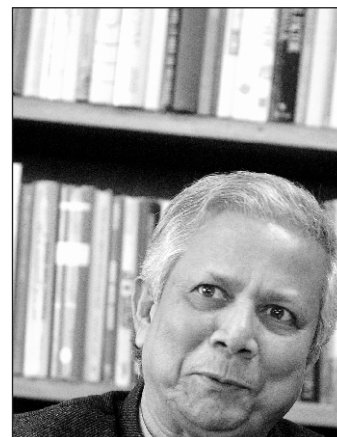
Well, when Prof. Amartya Sen was preaching his philosophy in Dhaka, a very painful incident took place at the same time in India. The incident was reported by Reuters and published in "The Hindustan Times" which read "A hungry 10-year-old girl from India's lowest Hindu Caste had all the fingers of her right hand chopped by an upper-caste landowner for taking a few spinach leaves from his field." The incident occurred in Bihar.

Would Prof. Sen please extend his goodwill to dissolve intolerance prevailing between the higher and lower caste Hindus in India?

Professor M. Zahidul Haque
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka



To Dr. Yunus...



But politics is not JUST ONLY about honest people... it's mainly about ideology. Had it not been so, we would have preferred some religious party to the AL or the BNP, for they may be less corrupt financially than the two major parties. But we don't. And many people think the same about the communists.

We are not sure about your political ideology-- honesty, corruption-free society, improvement of Chittagong port etc cannot be the ideology of any political party, rather these are the goals that could be set by a party.

So, please declare your political ideology & party constitution before you seek public opinion.

Fuad
A citizen

Weekly holiday

The fact that some Muslim countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey Pakistan etc have Sunday as their weekly holiday is no good example to be followed. It is rather better that these and other Muslim countries which observe Sunday as weekly holiday revert to Friday as weekly holiday. This will help to consolidate the unity of Muslims all over the world. The Christians have Sunday and the Jews, Saturday as their weekly holidays.

We believe there is no reason to change the weekly holiday, that is Friday.

Abu Imran
Azimpur, Dhaka

Chittagong University

The faculties and halls of the university are on the hills. The natural sight of this university can attract the visitors. It is full of natural beauty.

When a visitor comes to this varsity, he or she comes through a hill called 'Kata Pahar', you start to see the beauty of this varsity from there. In this way, at first you can see BBA & social science faculties. And you can see the Shahid Minar beside this road. There are gardens in front of both the faculties. There is also a garden of tamarind trees in front of the social science faculty, which enhances the beauty of this area. The foods of the canteens are very delicious and popular.

Then you can see the Register's building, faculties of arts, science and the beautiful IT building. Moreover, you can see the central library which is situated opposite the arts faculty. There is a great collection of books in this library and there is also a museum in the library building.

So, I, as a student of the English dept. of this university, eagerly and hospitably invite all

visitors to our campus.
Mehezanul Ferdows Lubna
English Department, Chittagong University

Sigh of relief

The people of Bangladesh have endured military rule and imperfect democracy for more than three decades. Just as it is now, an interim caretaker government has brought a sigh of relief to them. I have noticed a sudden change all over the country after the new government of Dr. Fakhurddin Ahmed took charge of the statecraft. This has been a 'welcome change' to all well-meaning people. Dr. Yunus has spoken the truth about politicians. The whole country is now full of corrupt people at all levels and in all departments, incredible though it may sound.

My suggestion is that the government take a bold step to get rid of corruption and recover public funds emptied by corrupt politicians. It has to launch a crusade against crime and make sure that before contesting election politicians and parties are thoroughly screened by anti-corruption personnel. All government employees, police, army, and civil servants should be asked to serve the people and keep themselves away from party politics. Allow freedom of the press so that it can serve the nation. The top criminals should get exemplary punishment.

May I also suggest that the newspapers arrange opinion poll from time to time on the performance of the caretaker government.

Dr. M Motahar
Uttara, Dhaka

Nepal scene

The Maoist rebels, who have been fighting since 1996 for a communist order and abolition of monarchy, have announced that they will join mainstream politics. In November last year, they signed a UN brokered peace deal. According to the

deal, they will have major share in the interim govt. and the constituent assembly. They will also participate in the forthcoming election.

The King of Nepal last year took absolute powers into his hands. After that Nepal was turbulent and street protests took place. The Maoists (Nepal Communist Party) also joined hands with the six pro-democracy parties and waged mass upsurge and finally the King was forced to restore democracy. After the restoration of democracy in Nepal, the Nepali prime minister and the rebel head had several meetings on possible ways of bringing back peace.

Nepal has been bleeding as core political issues remain unresolved. We hope the latest peace move will bear fruit and

the country will become a stable democracy.

Md. Zonaed Emran
Dhaka University

Chase them all!

I read almost every day the online version of DS. We are getting interesting reports on the anti-crime drive launched by the government.

Many of the top political leaders are facing charges of corruption and some of them have already been arrested. But it seems to me that many more politicians deserve the same treatment for the damage they have done to the country.

The law enforcers should relentlessly chase the criminals in the garb of politicians.

Razzaque
United Kingdom

Separation of judiciary

Generally, the constitution of the state reveals the appropriate allocation of powers to the institutions. Accountability of the government depends on the separation of its executive powers from the judiciary. Indeed, it is imperative for any democratic government to exercise its powers through the check & balance mechanism. After the liberation war of 1971 we got an independent and sovereign country-- Bangladesh. Since 1971, no government, neither democratic nor totalitarian, took any sincere steps to separate the judiciary from the executive. Thus it has caused various bottlenecks in the functioning of the democratic institutions in Bangladesh. Power remained in the hands of the government which was mercilessly used to gain political benefits. As a logical consequence to this irrational practice, the judiciary became a political playground for the government. The recent corruption cases against the two major political parties' leaders shows how corrupt society has become.

It is a fact that when the political parties formulate their election manifesto they always pledge to separate the judiciary.

Nevertheless, whenever they grab power they always forget what they had promised.

Debor Jhaiti Ghosh

London College of Legal Studies



Failed parties

Did the BNP, JP or AL deliver? The BNP, JP and AL ruled the country for 20, 9 and 7 years respectively. How did they do? Can they deliver in future? I doubt it very much.

The AL and the BNP should let the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and great freedom fighter late president Ziaur Rahman rest in peace! We all respect them and may God bless them both. Now, let's talk about the future generations and the people (living) of Bangladesh. I am sure both of our great leaders would be DREAMING of that, if they were alive.

Can Dr. Yunus deliver in

politics as he did for Grameen and give us a "Sonar Bangla" ? Can he give us the "Poverty Museum"? It's too early to say anything. However, I trust Dr. Yunus. I was dead against his joining politics, initially. Now, I am 100% behind his decision of forming a political party. Our other options are: the BNP, AL or JP and worse still, the Jamaat. I don't want to see the same democracy that we have witnessed in the last 15 years.

I think we do need a change and Dr. Yunus is the man to accomplish that mission!

Miro Jangi
Maryland, US

Why these nondescript names?

Steps taken by the present caretaker government are being highly appreciated by all sections of people. I would suggest that the authorities remove the names of nondescript individuals from the installations which were set up with public money. There must be some laid down rules on what grounds a nameplate can be placed. To gain or highlight an individual's name and fame through spending public money is totally unacceptable and never practiced in any civilised society. If all such nameplates' total cost is accounted, we could possibly make an important bridge on a river.

We appreciate to see places or roads named as Nazrul Academy, Sir Salimullah Road, Sheikh Mujib Road, Suhrawardy Uddayan, Rabindra Sadan etc in order to uphold history and contributions that an individual made to the nation. A donor who contributed land and full cost of constructing a building for a school, hospital from his personal source of income will have legitimate grounds for having it named after him. But the rules should be clear.

Newaz Noor-ul Wahab
Sylhet

Harsh action

The news (1500 shanties on railway land removed) and the corresponding painful picture of old women, children etc. of the demolished shanties published in the DS on 25.01.2007 is in reference. Perhaps there is wide difference between the land grabbers and the poor occupying unauthorised lands. The former does the illegal work for lust and money while the latter do so for bare survival. The activities of both, it's true are not justifiable. And, so when the authorities cracked down on the illegal land grabbers, the general people hailed the action but in my humble opinion when the

authorities resorted to evicting the poor, the same people could not help registering their protest. This is because the act is harsh and in contrast to the earlier acts of generosity like distribution of blankets and warm clothes among the poor. The desired thing before eviction was to arrange alternate accommodation or at least, defer the action until the warm summer sets in. After all, when the authorities could ignore the illegal occupation of land by the poor for decades, perhaps there was no harm in waiting for another COUPLE of months. The poor are also the citizens of this country and duly deserve some humane treatment.

M. Abdullah
Gulshan, Dhaka

Commentary

We have gone through your commentary on the situation prevailing in the country. We expect this type of commentary from you and those who are working in the media.

We appreciate your opinion which you expressed through this commentary.

Advocate Saidur Rahman
Odhikar

Restrictions on the media?

It may be necessary to restrict all political activities, direct or indirect, and the govt. is perhaps right in restricting the same. But the same is not applicable to the media. We need to see an end to resurgence of politics of chaos, anarchy, loot & plunder. But in my view it would be counterproductive to put restrictions on the media. The present caretaker government is the product of the wishes of the people. It derives its legality and strength from popular support. It is very much necessary to keep the communication channels between the government and