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Our police

"Never get tangled with police!" When growing up in rural Bangladesh, we often listened to this wise advice. We eyed the khaki-clad, from a distance, with awe. This unfortunate relationship is a continuation of the colonial mindset, developed during the centuries of Union Jack, where police was akin to an extension of the white flagellum (GURA CHABUK). For long, the white is erased, but the flagellum remains, still bent to tame the people. A remnant of colonial mindset, this adversarial relationship needs to be mended, if one desires to make the police effective and accepted.

Apart from this unfortunate mindset of adversarial relationship, there are other issues. Police is generally portrayed to be corrupt and ruthless. Our police having fallen in such a precarious pit of disgrace, a humongous rescue mission is in order.

This heavy lifting needs a political will and commitment of resources on the part of the government. And this has to be a multi-pronged approach addressing three primary issues:

a) Building a bridge of good will between the police and the populace:

This can only be achieved through education and re-orientation of the police, as to the noble mission of policing.

b) Uplifting the police morale by a fair pay structure:

Nothing is more important than a fair pay scale that can provide a decent living for all members of the police force. They should be able to afford modest housing, education for their children and an optimal status commensurate with their education, experience and expertise. With the current pay structure, blaming police for being greedy

is rather immoral on the part of high-talking politicians.

c) Non-interference from politics at large: This issue needs no explanation. This has a lot to do with police inertia in apprehending the bad guys. What is the point of apprehending a criminal only to see him getting back to the street through the backdoor? Without the benefit of an effective and honest judiciary, effective policing is doomed to degenerate into a fool's utopia.

The overall milieu is perfect to launch the process. To begin with, I urge the IGP of police to undertake the same approach (of reaching out to general people) already championed by the ACC Chairman.

Mohammad Aktaruzzaman, On e-mail

The government should address the issue with a view to improving IT education in the country.
Md. Sohrab Hossain
On e-mail

Changed circumstances

I am a computer engineer, presently an Australian immigrant. I have been following all the political proceedings in Bangladesh with keen interest. I must say, all of my support and respect goes to every individual who is supporting our revolution in politics. It's a massive turnaround and most importantly a big step forward in the right direction. I am sure with dedication, honesty and a genuine interest to build a better future for Bangladesh the government can attain its objectives.

I understand the complexity involved in running a country which has so many problems, and to make the job even harder the corrupt politicians & key departments/personnel won't cooperate with the government. But we are proud of the government's tremendous achievement in such a short time. We are right behind you.

Anyway, to keep my emotions in check and a long letter short, I would like to pass on two recommendations for the government's kind consideration:

1. Prevent politicians from becoming the prime minister for more than two terms. I strongly believe that this will strengthen democracy in our country.
2. Any individual speaking to the foreign or local media against the interest of the country shouldn't be allowed to take part in the election.

Khaleque Shah
On e-mail

Top Two

The way the former prime ministers of the country are being treated is a matter of grave concern, especially if this is an indication of things to come. I cannot accept that a former prime minister and a citizen of the country will be barred from entering her own homeland.

If there has been wrong-doing, it must be treated under the laws of the land.

Akash
New York, USA

"How many times can one be prime minister?"

I found the post-editorial "How many times can one be prime minister?" by Syed Badrul Ahsan to be lacking in giving a thorough review of the idea of term limits. While Mr. Ahsan had every right to hold and support the position he expresses, he also had an obligation to serve his reader with the rationale for supporting term limita-

tions so that we could consider both perspectives. Mr. Ahsan brought up comparisons with the UK, Malaysia, Spain and Turkey, but he left out investigating why limitations on the number of terms served by a leader exists at all, and goes on practised in the United States. Were those reasons expressed, I am sure even he knows many of the readers would feel that Bangladesh would be an ideal candidate for such limitations.

So what are the arguable benefits of having a limit to the number of terms a prime minister can serve? First of all, it creates the sense throughout the established parties that they need to keep an eye on their direction and ideals independently from their now-temporary chairpersons. Knowing that a leader is only a leader for so long forces the party to consider where the party should be headed after that leader is gone. Where the party may have been a disappointment to the people throughout the tenure of one leader, such limits give people a definite horizon from where they can route a new message. Thus term limit forces political parties to assume a more fluid and dynamic position, and it forces them to seek out new characters and minds to replace established leaders. The example of England and Margaret Thatcher was used by Mr. Ahsan to suggest such a change can naturally occur even without term limits. Well, this isn't England. This is Bangladesh, where leaders feel no shame in using coercion and bribery to maintain their power. That problem brings us to the second argued rationale for term limits. Term limits effectively disable the ability of party leaders to use their position at the top to maintain their hold by exerting their power and influence. We all know the feelings of despair at seeing our political leaders bow their heads to the royalty that is their chairperson, and neglect the demands of their voters. Yes, royalty is the only correct term to describe both the families of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. They came to power based on the leaders they were related to, and they intend to leave power with their children. Term limits would change that though. Knowing the leader in power will inevitably be replaced gives us reason to believe a time will come when one of the two parties will see being answerable to the people as a legitimate alternative to their current practices of servility to the established royalty. Without such limits, within the party infrastructure, to any single professional member of that party, the influence of the people pales in strength when compared to the influence of the party chairperson and her devout lackeys. Periodically, dethroning them forces the parties and their memberships to consider being answerable to us.

What we are left with are parties responsible to their supporters amongst the people, and not the established leadership.

Omar Siddiquee, New York

Writing from abroad

It is easier to write to a English language newspapers, because many of us don't have Bangla font. Dual citizens can put more input to reconstruct a new nation because of their multi-layered exposure and experience. Anyhow we think The Daily Star may represent Bangladesh to us. We should not be abandoned from the mainstream. Sometimes we expatriates feel lonely because of lack of integration to our roots.

It is very sad that 10 to 12 thousand people are killed every year in Bangladesh in road accidents. It's not a rocket science to decrease the number. Still nobody wears seatbelt in cars or trucks. Speed limit should be strictly brought down to 40-50 km per hour because our road conditions are very bad.

Our communications network could be upgraded effectively by the CTG. Withdrawal of rickshaw is not impossible if a long term plan is implemented. Only demolishing slums or shops may not serve the purpose.

Millions of dollars of black and white money is being invested in foreign enterprises. If our economic adviser takes a pragmatic view and act materially rather than emotionally, the money can be brought back to Bangladesh.

The motive behind dealing with the top political leaders was definitely good but not by force or undemocratically. Because that will make them more important, which they don't deserve.

Finally, we need to contain yellow journalism. Journalists should be answerable to people and civil society
Dr Mohammad A Karim
General practitioner, Australia

Minus-Two theory

The recent drive against corruption by our military-backed Interim government has been supported by different segments of our society. We are pleased as citizens that those who were once considered "untouchables" are now in jail like ordinary criminals. Moreover, it is also a matter of great satisfaction that the present interim government

Consigning monga to the museum!



Monga is still a very serious problem which is affecting an alarmingly high number of people mainly living in greater Rangpur every year. Serious interventions to specifically address monga were very rare. Coordination of activities by the Focal Area Forum in northwest Bangladesh has improved the efforts to combat monga. In the past few years various actors came up with new innovative projects. Promoting lacquer cultivation is a brilliant idea, since it can provide reasonable income for local farmers during monga. The establishment of paddy banks is an important alternative to relief and a milestone in combating exploitative money lending practices.

Agriculture is the only relevant income source for most of the people in the monga affected regions. The optimisation of agricultural production bearing monga in mind is therefore the right path. In his article Dr. Shamsul Bari describes the currently most important initiative in this field. The harvest time of aman rice will be shifted into the monga period by introducing a fast growing rice variety and the drum seeding technology. Besides generating employment for the people during the problematic months of Aswin and kartik, the projects will have additional positive side effects like the possibility to cultivate an additional crop after harvest.

Prior to the monga period they suffer from an additional seasonal shock, which is created by the floods. A project aiming on the high and medium lands can therefore only be a contribution to alleviating monga, rather than the breakthrough to end it, because the most affected regions cannot be covered by the project.

The major actors of this project BRRI, RDRS and RIB have proven their capacity, expertise and commitment to fight poverty by developing and implementing this project. If they come up with an agricultural project, which improves the income of people living on the low lands, they would consign monga to the museum hopefully in the near future.

Sebastian Zug
Student of Bochum University, Germany

Whither Saarc?

Saarc is two decades old. But its evolution shows neither statesmanship nor political craftsmanship. Rather, the hollowness of its goal, commitment and sincerity evokes childish bewilderment. The real culprits are bureaucracy and political legacy that are prevailing among three of its member countries-- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Other members are reluctant witness to fun-play of these three members. The contrast between reality and nice-sounding 30-point charter adopted in New Delhi can well be understood from the following three events. Situation one A 70-year old Indian journalist applied for a tourist visa in Bangladesh Deputy High commission in Kolkata. In the application form for profession column he wrote 'retired journalist'. This was sufficient for his plan to visit Bangladesh to be rejected. Situation two--A Bangladeshi traveler to Pakistan was picked up by police simply to be questioned why he had visited India so many times? Situation three 20 Pakistani doctors were invited by an Indian professional organisation to participate in a scientific seminar. One day before the seminar started all the Pakistani doctors were denied visa by the Indian govt.

So, lofty speeches alone won't work!
Dr. Q.M. Ohidul Alam
Chittagong

Library

I want a library. I want people to read books. I want my next generation to understand the differences between right and wrong. I want to watch a little kid laughing and wondering reading a magical story. I want to know how to live a life without being pissed off all the time. I want to learn how to feel and see the beauty of this world. I want to know the means to fight my loneliness. I want to steal ideas from every line that was ever written in this world. I want to read books to know how to fight against my desperations and sorrows and learn how to enjoy them. I want to know why I'm afraid of reality and why I hate it so much.

I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of a library. Properly, we should read for power. The book should be a ball of light in one's hand. What counts in the long run isn't what you read; it is what you sift through your own mind; it is the ideas and impressions that are aroused in you by your reading. A library is an arsenal of liberty. Libraries keep the records on behalf of humanity. Books set the spirits free. A new library is like finding a \$100 bill on the sidewalk.

So donate some books or good movies. If you've decided to give a book, then sign your name and address on it. Any help will be appreciated.

Hasan Musfikus Salam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Tide of truth

Being a proud Bangladeshi who is

based in the USA for over quarter of a century, I have been monitoring news from afar on our home front via the internet and other available media. It is absolutely clear to me that the "tide of truth" is finally here.

What I mean by this is the stand of the present CTG, along with active and honest support from the armed forces. The law enforcement agencies have embarked upon no less than a socio-economic-political "cleansing" process of historical proportions. This indeed is a watershed event for our nation backed by the will of the masses.

It goes beyond saying that never in our history have we pursued corruption with such focused intensity and vigour. A shining example indeed to show that we, the people, truly desire to shed our image as "the most corrupt nation".

One, however, cannot but ponder whether the present CTG will pursue only members of the immediate past administration e.g., BNP? What about corruption during the AL regime? True, the AL was in power for one term only, but the people had experienced a marked deterioration of law and order as well as corruption during that term. Let's not ignore our immediate past.

What about the times during the military regime? Can Ershad, who single-handedly ruled our country, claim that no corruption took place during his tenure?

I can appreciate and understand that presently the CTG has its hands full, not every nook and cranny of our society can be searched for elimination of corruption. The government has more than one sector, including an immediate election to focus their attention on and thereby bring about the necessary changes. We, however, can adopt this sea-change as an operating philosophy of sorts for our future elected governments. After all, true power lies in the hands of the masses.

Let this be the golden opportunity for our impoverished and developing nation to welcome this tide with open arms ensuring our future generations their rightful place in the 21st century.

Shiblee Ahmed
Texas, USA

Press notes

I would like to share my opinion with you. Do you think that the recent political developments and the CTG's press notes on Sheikh Hasina are an attempt to create public awareness regarding politics?

Ahmaduzzaman Choudhury
On e-mail

The govt. must succeed

Our present caretaker government must not fail in any way. They have started a crusade against all sorts of corruptions that have engulfed our nation. We do not find any place corruption-free. Our politicians, bureaucrats, teachers, doctors, police, engineers, businessmen

are found to be corrupt in most cases.

If the present government succeeds in resolving some of the cases we will feel safe.

There is no alternative to free and fair election in the country. We call upon the government to do the jobs assigned to it.

Shafiqul Islam
On e-mail

Role of Jamaat

The caretaker government is on the right track. The steps that are being taken by the CTG are really important and supported by the people of Bangladesh. The evil forces are now trying to escape through the backdoor. The corrupt members of the two big political parties are being chased and nabbed by the law enforcers. But yet there is something wrong. The CTG seems to be overlooking the Jamaat. Who doesn't know about the evil deeds of this party? This party has been active since 1971. It is the party of war criminals who finally succeeded in capturing power with the help of the BNP. Hence, I, as a citizen of Bangladesh, urge to the CTG to bring this anti-liberation force to justice.

Golam Rosul Maruf
Physics Department
University of Dhaka

E-governance

I would like to appreciate the government's crash programme against corruption. Along with other approaches E-governance should help a lot to establish a sustainable, transparent and accountable system.

E-governance is the public sector's use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizens' participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective.

First of all, we have to develop a nation wide database. National identity card and identification number will become the anchor point of the database.

All bank accounts should be computerized and incorporated in a system so that a monitoring system can be developed which will create an opportunity to supervise banking transactions. In addition, when the clients come to deposit huge amounts of money, the bank should also ask for proper documents to verify the sources.

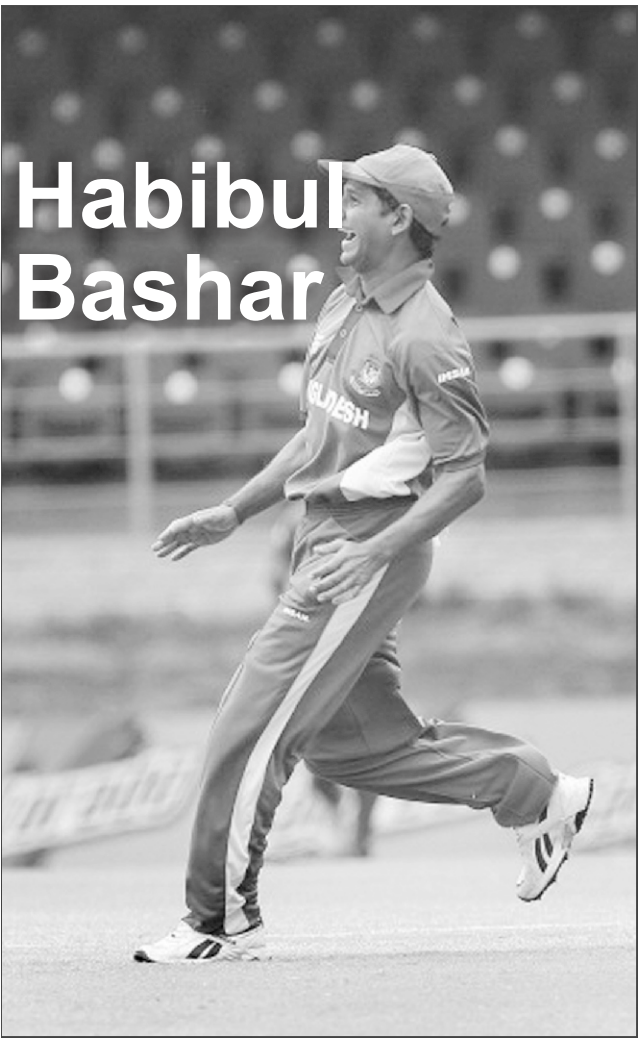
The taxation department should have access to the bank information system to verify their clients' income expenditure statements. If someone becomes a loan defaulter it should be recorded in that system. It will help other banks to take precaution to prevent bad loans.

A nationwide database should also be developed on criminal records and it should be available to the agencies concerned such as banks, insurance companies, PSC, and the ACC.

Although corruption is ubiquitous in the world, its magnitude is not the same everywhere. The role of e-governance is tremendous in the developed world in establishing transparency and accountability. Hope the government will introduce this modern technology.
Ezajul Hoque Chowdhury
Toronto, Canada

IT in Bangladesh

What have we achieved in the IT sector? We are more than 50 years behind the developed countries. One of the most important reasons of backwardness is our poor education system.



This is very simple. After the Bangladesh vs. England match in the World Cup Supereights, the Bangladesh cricket team captain Habibul Bashar remarked to the media that he was happy and proud of the performance of the team. Hay, guess what, you might be happy but we, the Bangladeshis and fans of Bangladesh cricket team all over the world, are not happy with your performance. It's time for you to get lost! Our team simply cannot afford to have someone who can do nothing (can't bat, can't bowl, can't catch, or can't even run). After the Bangladesh vs. India match, when the Indian captain Rahul Dravid said if they could manage to score some more runs, they could have saved the match, our captain Habibul Bashar told the media that anyone could say this after losing a match. Before the match with Australia Habibul Bashar wanted to know where were all the tall talks of the Australians when they lost three matches to New Zealand before the World Cup.

Why do you say all these things when you are holding the number 9 position?

Helal Ahmed
Kentucky, USA