

The end of corruption?

Rehman Sobhan the ultimate success of the current anti-corruption drive depends entirely on the make-up of the next parliament, argues



Ill need a level playing field where the power of money and muscle will have been neutralized. It is here that the agenda of the CTG to attack corruption will become congruent with the interests of those parties and candidates who need to neutralize the power of money in the next election. It will not be enough for such a candidate to contest a one-off election where money power is not to be a variable. If elected to office such parties will have to build a political consensus derived from an electoral victory, to strike at the roots of corruption. It is only through securing such a democratic mandate that we may expect that black money will no longer be a lubricant for the electoral process and will cease to serve as a primary motivation for participation in politics.

The CTG should undoubtedly persist with their drive to make corrupt accountable for their misdeeds. However they should recognize that striking at the sources of corruption will be a longer term affair involving structural reforms which will require more time and a strong political mandate. CTGs do not have such a mandate nor would they have their interest to oversee their welcome.

A more realistic goal for the CTG should therefore be to ensure that in the forthcoming election those with a record of corruption would be disbarred from contesting the election and the power of money and muscle will not be a factor in influencing the outcome of the election. Hopefully such a strategy, if sincerely and effectively carried out by the CTG and implemented by the Election Commission, will ensure the election of "clean" candidates to the next parliament.

Such a new generation of parliamentarians may be expected to invest their support behind a regime which can set about eradicating corruption and transforming Bangladesh from one of the most corrupt to one of the less corrupt countries in the global community.

The ultimate challenge to end corruption will thus become intimately linked to the outcome of the next election. Unless the election can bring to power, new or regenerated political parties committed to honouring their promises to the electorate for sustaining democracy, revolutionizing the governance of the country, and sharing the fruits of development, the events leading up to 1/11 may yet again be repeated this time with more fatal consequences for our democratic process.

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The third decade of Saarc

SRIDHAR K. KHATRI

LET me just cite a number of examples to support this argument. First is the case of poverty in South Asia. Looking at the two different periods, 1981 and 2001, there has been a marked improvement where the proportion of the extreme poor has gone down from 52 percent to 31 percent. Although this is not as significant as it was in East Asia, where the proportion plummeted from 58 percent to 15 percent, it is nevertheless a significant achievement for the region.



The second case is that of economic growth, which has been exemplified by India since it began its liberalization programs in the 1990s. India is now the world's fourth largest economic power, and many expect it to surpass Japan to become the third largest very soon. The entrepreneurs, especially in the IT sector, are the catalyst in India's economic miracle, and have managed to fuel growth through the service sector and

domestic consumption. India has managed to maintain an average of 7.5 percent growth rate for the past five years, despite archaic labour laws and "bureaucratic high modernism."

The contribution of India (and one can add also China) as an engine of growth for South Asia will be substantial, since it accounts for (in 2005) about 80 percent of South Asia's GDP, trade, and regional growth. In South Asia, India's development into a regional hub would attract more foreign direct investments into India, and from India to other South Asian countries, which would boost economic growth in the whole region. As the latest ADB report states: "India is not only crucial for the success of regional trade cooperation in South Asia; it could also transform the development and growth pattern of

the entire region." The latest report by the World Bank, entitled *Global Economic Prospects: Managing the Next Wave of Globalization*, is even more upbeat. It predicts that in the next 25 years the growth in the global economy will be powered by the developing countries, whose share in global output will increase from about one-fifth of the global economy to nearly one-third. It means that some of the key drivers in the global economy will be China and some of the countries from South Asia. There are today six developing countries which have populations greater than 100 million and GDP of more than \$100 billion. By 2030, there will be 10 countries that would have reached the twin 100s threshold, and four of them will be from the vicinity of South Asia. In addition to India and China, who have already reached that level, Pakistan and Bangladesh are also likely to be part of this dynamic group.

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American Mamlukes

M. Shahid Alam draws a fascinating parallel between the Islamic empires of old and the US of today

IT is a fact little known in the West, outside the circle of historians of Islamicate societies, that Islamicate states often employed soldiers and bureaucrats who were "slaves" of the king or emperor.

Commonly, these "slaves" were recruited as young boys: they were taken from the ranks of the ruler's Christian subjects or bought as "slaves" from areas outside the Islamicate world. They were converted to Islam, tested, sorted by aptitude, and given an education that prepared them for employment in the service of the sovereign. The smartest "slaves" could become generals or rise to the highest ranks in the civilian bureaucracy.

We call these members of the emperor's household "slaves" because they were the property of the emperor: in Arabic, mamlukes. But how appropriate is this description? Aside from the manner in which they were recruited, however, these mamlukes had little in common with the slaves who worked the plantations in the Americas. More appropriately, they were life-time employees in the service of the emperor. Ernest Gellner has drawn attention to the parallels between these "slaves" and today's wage workers.

These "slave" soldiers were first employed by the Abbasids, but with time their use spread to other states. In Egypt, these "slaves" captured power in 1250, but continued their reliance on other mamlukes. This institution was put to its best use by the Ottomans, the longest enduring



empire in Islamic history.

How did the institution of mamlukes come to form the mainstay of several states in Islamic history?

tory?

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Bad girls and middle-class morality

Rubaiyat Hossain shines a spot-light on the disturbing constructions of Bangladeshi womanhood to be found in the novels of Humayun Ahmed

IN almost every Humayun Ahmed novel, the girls and women weep because of their guilt for experiencing some remote sexual desire like touching the man's face, holding his hand in the dark, coming into a room with him and turning the lights off, etc. This act causes them to feel pain and they label themselves as kharap meye.

The line that is drawn here is one of acceptable societal norms, which I believe also plays a big role in making Humayun Ahmed novels appeal to a larger audience. Sexuality in his book is expressed in a diction of male fantasy, which is then sugar-coated with Bengali middle-class morality, that even parents do not hesitate to buy Humayun Ahmed books for their children.

Humayun Ahmed's trick is to hint towards sexuality, but then immediately cover it up under the hypocrisy of Bengali moral codes. This hypocrisy lies in the social morality around us which forces us to pretend like no one in Bangladesh actually has sex. Sex is made invisible from the public sphere and repressed to a degree that it can only peep out in novels, however, it is condemned to be explored.

I remember in the year 2001, Humayun Azad spoke at a book fair in

New York where he complained: "Parents let their children read



Humayun Ahmed because in his books the characters only go as far as holding hands with each other." Humayun Azad, a man who has written extensively on sexuality never managed to become as popular as Humayun Ahmed simply because Azad did not

comply with the Bengali moral hypocrisy when it came to writing about matters of sexuality.

The average Humayun Ahmed female character is between the age of fifteen and twenty-five. Most of them are fair-skinned beauties. They are all very talented, but this talent is only channeled towards getting married to the man of their choice. This is how far the limits of Humayun Ahmed's female characters' agency stretch out to: managing to getting married!

It must be mentioned that a large number of Humayun Ahmed females come from very affluent families, and most of them somehow or the other fall in love with a man from a low-income social group. I am sure marrying a young, fair, timid Bengali girl with a lot of money is the fantasy a lot of struggling house tutors might have. When this fantasy is topped with the woman's secret habit of laying in bed naked or dancing in the rain naked (reference of Omega Point), sure it becomes a very delicious recipe for the sexually repressed Bengali middle-class man, struggling to make it big in the material world of money and success.

Washington Irving and Islam

Syed Ashraf Ali recalls the forgotten story of the great riter who first introduced Islam to the American public

IN May 1829, Irving reached Granada, the last seat of Muslim power in Spain and the most romantic city in the country. The luxurious "Naga" and snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountains in the freshness of spring enthralled the young genius. It was here that his imagination was given full reign and sway. Three of his world-renowned works were to see the light of day -- priceless and inimitable gifts not only to Spain, but also to Islam and to the world.

At the invitation of the governor, Irving was permitted to live within the palace of Alhambra, reduced almost to ruins through centuries of

neglect, malice, and hatred. But even this dilapidated ruin fascinated the great historian to such an extent that he admitted: "Never in my life have I had so delicious an abode and never can I expect to meet such another."

The *Tales of Alhambra*, at once a biography, a history, a treatise on archaeology and a romance, portrays in true perspective the Muslim civilization of Spain. In Irving own words: "As I sat watching the effect of the declining daylight upon this Moorish pile, I was led into a consideration of the light, elegant and voluptuous character prevalent throughout its internal architecture, and to contrast

Columbus had taken him to Seville. The Alhambra, teeming with a thousand dreams and memories, led him to two other classic creations entitled *Legends of the Conquest of Spain* and *The Conquest of Granada*, the very first Western books to portray in true perspective the Muslim civilizations of the Iberian peninsula.

The *Tales of Alhambra*, through which the timeless monument once again became a living abode, rendered a yeoman's services. This unique work attracted the attention of the Western world and evoked much-needed sympathy from them, which led to the restoration

and renovation of the

Alhambra, and it soon

spread to other

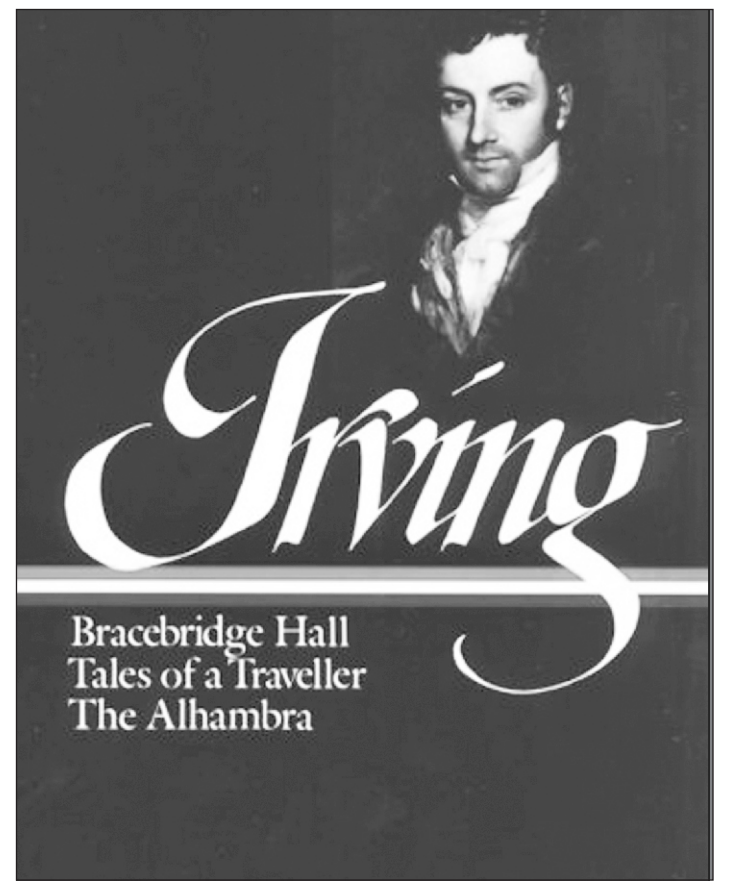
important relics such

as Alcazars of Seville

and Toledo and the

Great Mosque of

Cordova.



Ensuring the people's right to know

Sadrul Hasan Mazumder makes the case for ending the state's media monopoly

THE commission finalized its report on June 30, 1997. The findings of the commission included both administrative and non-structural measures, and means of handling satellite and terrestrial measures, and FM radio bands. The recommendations of the commission included formation of a National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) independent of the government, and accountable only to a parliamentary committee on information.

The NBC would administer both Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television, including approval of their budgets, which would function and operate from their own income. A code of conduct would be signed between NBC and the private operators. A standard committee would be formed by NBC to monitor satellite and terrestrial programs, and take action against violation of the guidelines. In the area of news coverage, protocol value would replace news



value. The commission, headed by former civil servant M. Asafuddoula, suggested that the president should appoint one chairman and six members of the National Broadcasting Commission.

Status of implementation
Instead of formation of a National

Broadcasting Commission as recommended by the autonomy commission, the Awami League government formed two separate authorities, and the government itself would appoint members of those bodies. Each authority would have a chairman with some members to assist in running the affairs of the

two public broadcasting agencies. Under the two draft laws approved by the cabinet -- Bangladesh Betar Authority Act, 2001 and Bangladesh Television Authority Act, 2001 -- the government could sack the chairman of both the authorities without giving any reason. Some members of the commission regretted that laws passed deviated significantly from the commission's recommendations.

Political commitments
During the October 1, 2001 general election, Awami League, in its election manifesto said: "The law enacted by us to make Radio and Bangladesh Television autonomous institutions free from party influences, will be made effective. The freedom of newspapers will be protected." BNP, however, did not pledge anything especially in its election manifesto, but criticized Awami League for using the state owned media for the party interest. During the June 12, 1996, general

election, Bangladesh Awami League promised "Autonomy to radio, TV and government-controlled news media. Privatisation of newspapers now owned by the government," while Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) promised that the policy for free flow of information would continue.

End notes
Frustratingly, both the major parties were in power during the last one and half decades, but have not fulfilled their commitment relating to autonomy of Bangladesh Radio and Bangladesh Television. Rather, we have observed that a government cancelled the previous government's rules and policies taken in this regard. It is our demand to the present government led by Dr. Fakhruddin that they take positive steps to fulfill the nation's desire of getting autonomy of radio and television in the real sense.