

Political will must to sustain anti-graft drive

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the purpose so, I do not think there should be a problem in future," he added.

He said a government that lacks people's trust and ownership breeds corruption and it would take time to get rid of corruption.

Mashhud said he would not take corruption suspects to court without proper evidence given that there is a chance they might allege that their confessions were taken under duress, the ACC is looking to ensure that all relevant documents are collected for foolproof prosecution.

Muzaffar Ahmed, chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Trustee Board, said it is impossible to curb corruption without addressing the basic need and salary issues of public servants. He said a permanent commission should be created or a meticulous examination of the costs of living must be undertaken to resolve the issue.

He also identified the creation of "islands of integrity" where unions (a group of villages) could be turned into models for being corruption free. He said these islands would comprise not only of corruption-free government agencies but also non-government organisations, and businesses.

Muzaffar, also a noted economist, said the steps being taken by the government are good but should be more transparent in their approach. He said the "root causes" of corruption must be eradicated as well as tangible cases.

Former adviser to a caretaker government Akbar Ali Khan proposed the creation of "truth and reconciliation commission" and mass dismissals in the public service as the only way towards cleaning up "the mess".

He said it would be close to impossible to individually try each corruption case and the truth and reconciliation commission could ensure that each corrupt politician could pay a nominal fine and say they would not run for any elections for 10 years. If they do not, then they can be tried in court, he added.

Akbar said, "This society is ready for a revolution. This mess cannot be swept aside by reforms; the mess needs to be burned by the fires of a revolution."

He said the current public service administration is working beyond its capacity and should reduce its workload to ensure efficiency and there needs to be mass dismissals to remove the corrupt public servants otherwise they would continue to plague the system.

The former adviser and cabinet secretary also said the judiciary should be made corruption-free, while administration reforms should ensure internal checks and balances for ministers and top executives.

Public Service Commission Chairman Sadaat Hossain observed that he has noted a significant negative change in tone of the media and the public regarding the government and that the government should pay close attention to it.

He also hoped that problems with prosecution procedures do not hinder the prosecution of "substantive" issues such as large-scale corruption. Minor discrepancies should be ignored in favour of more significant offences. Sadaat also said the ACC should demonstrate that it is an autonomous organisation.

National Board of Revenue (NBR) Chairman Badiur Rahman said if civil servants cannot support their families with their salaries then

corruption would not be curbed, as civil servants would veer towards extra-legal ways to provide for their families.

He said if the minimum demands are met, then corruption would also go down. The salary structures need to be re-examined and improved for the civil servants, he added.

Badiur said the NBR is reducing the chances of tax evasion by simplifying tax return procedures, separating business and individual tax return forms, and making it self-assessed.

He also said that the NBR has started a reward system for its employees by committing 10 percent of above-target revenues to employee bonuses.

Former adviser to a caretaker government and Ain O Shalish Kendra Executive Director Sultana Kamal said the government's survival depends on greater coordination, as the people would not stand for a disorganised and inefficient government.

Outlining the human effects of corruption, ranging from its effects on education and health to broad public service delivery systems, the former adviser said the government must ensure that it remains engaged with the people.

She also expressed her fears saying a number of corruption cases are being trivialised and hoped that the judiciary will be cleaned up in time to prosecute the corrupt people.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the ongoing anti-corruption drive is unprecedented, being high profile and high speed, which involves some risks such as circumventing laws.

He said failure in following due process of law may raise question

among the people and "We cannot make it (anti-corruption drive) successful unless it is owned by the people."

"The government has to make sure that to prevent the abuse of power, they do not abuse it themselves," he said adding the current crackdown and institutional reforms would have a positive effect on Bangladesh's ranking in the corruption perceptions index.

But an improvement in the indexed ranking would depend on the perception of corruption by the Bangladeshi business community, Iftekhar added.

Manzoor Hassan, Director of Brac University's Centre for Governance Studies, said given the extraordinary circumstances, some "established rules have to be broken" as negative fallouts are experienced elsewhere in the world during anti-corruption drives.

Manzoor also mentioned the myths that prevented people from fighting corruption in Bangladesh and said that the events, after the state of emergency declaration on January 11, are debunking them by demonstrating that corruption can be reduced significantly here.

Legal expert and academic Shahdeen Malik said exemplary punishment must be meted out to corrupt judiciary members to ensure greater discipline and efficiency in the judiciary.

Malik also cited the law enforcement agencies' lack of experience in finding evidence for the corruption cases, as they are more accustomed to gun or narcotic-related crimes.

But, he said, given the description of the corruption in the papers, the charges would be very difficult to defend in court.

Dhaka University Public Administration Professor Salauddin M Aminur Rahman said that people have to be made aware of "rights-based" approach to public service delivery.

Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman, who presided over the roundtable, said though the recent arrest of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina has split political opinions, it has proven that no one charged with corruption is above the law in the country.

Prothom Alo Joint Editor Abdul Quaiyum also spoke on the occasion.

Israel rejects Golan pullout before peace talks

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel has rejected a Syrian demand that it withdraw from the Golan Heights it has occupied since 1967 before peace talks can resume between the two countries, public radio reported yesterday.

"When the Syrian president says that Israel must commit to pulling back to the lines of June 4, 1967 he is imposing a prior condition" that is unacceptable, it quoted Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as saying on Friday.

"I cannot accept this before negotiations even begin," the radio quoted Olmert as saying during a visit to northern Israel.

It said he reiterated the Israeli position that any talks with Syria must be direct, which Damascus rejects.

"I want to make peace with all Arab states and I want to do so through direct negotiations, as was the case with Egypt and Jordan," Olmert said.

Kashmir militants call for end to Pak violence

AFP, Srinagar

Hardline separatists in revolt-hit Indian Kashmir appealed yesterday for violence in Pakistan to end while simultaneously attacking the "unwise policies" of President Pervez Musharraf.

The statement came amid a dramatic rise in Islamist violence and political turmoil in Pakistan, where a series of suicide blasts, most directed at the army, since last week's siege and raid on the pro-Taliban Red Mosque.

The week-long siege left more than 100 dead, but the subsequent Islamist backlash has seen more

than 200 killed in less than a week.

"Every Pakistani soldier is an asset to the whole Muslim world and attacks on them sadden us deeply," Syed Ali Geelani, the head of the region's separatist political alliance, said in a statement.

Geelani supports the integration into Pakistan of Indian Kashmir, which has been racked by a near two-decade insurgency against New Delhi's rule.

India has long accused Pakistan of funding and arming the insurgency in Kashmir that has left more than 42,000 dead, according to official figures, but Pakistan refutes the charge.

Photographic assoc AGM held

The 22nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Bangladesh Photographic Association was held at a city hotel on Thursday, says a press release.

Annual report, audit report and proceedings of the last meeting of the association were discussed in the meeting.

Chairman of the election committee Abdur Razzaq announced the results of 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 elections in the meeting.

Following the announcement, newly elected President Akkas Mahmud took office.

Members from different districts of the association also attended the meeting.



Newly elected President of Bangladesh Photographic Association Akkas Mahmud speaks at its 22nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) at a city hotel on Thursday.

