

## Eradicating petty corruption

*A social movement needed*

HERE is general agreement that the anti-corruption drive launched by the caretaker government has convinced people that no one is above the law. While that is a big stride we are nonetheless confronted with the problem of petty corruption that affects our life on a daily basis. This is the type of corruption that citizens encounter in their dealings with police stations, land registration offices, education department and Union Parishad personnel. There are also the very regrettable instances of aged, superannuated government employees having to gratify petty officials in their efforts to have their pensions settled and drawn. The list can be endless.

It takes two hands to clap i.e. those who take bribe and give bribe make for incidence of bribery and are therefore equally to blame. We had grown a certain tolerance for bribe that must now be rolled back at the societal level to zero tolerance. Now occasionally people who are approached for graft seek law enforcers' help to catch the dishonest. This is a good sign that needs to be built upon.

Some social awareness against corruption has grown due to ongoing efforts of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). That needs to be taken forward to set in motion a social crusade against all forms of corruption. It is time for an anti-corruption movement that will involve the participation of people at the various professional, individual and social levels. It is a job that can be greatly assisted by the media, both electronic and print. At educational institutions and government and social organisations, the message of corruption being a vice must be hammered into the consciousness.

In the past, people looked with revulsion on the corrupt and would not have their children marry into families with questionable reputations. The corrupt need to be socially ostracised again. To eradicate corruption, it is a whole mindset that calls for change. What also needs to change is something basic: people who commit petty corruption are those who are poorly paid, which is of course no excuse for their behaviour. But perhaps the time has come for the government, for all of us, to study pay structures, the meagre and even miserable salaries which breed corruption and then deal with the problem.

## Passing away of Sir Edmund Hillary

*He was an icon of grit and perseverance*

WE mourn with the rest of the world the passing way of a man who, during his lifetime, came to be the personification of courage, determination and firm resolve. Sir Edmund, who passed away recently at the age of 88, emerged on the world scene as the conqueror of the highest mountain peak in the world, when on 29 May 1953, he and his Sherpa companion Tenzing Norgay, set foot where others had failed and perished in their efforts previously.

He was one of the greatest adventurers of his time who proved that leadership and team effort can help scale any heights. He caught the imagination of the people of his time by his many adventure missions. Sir Edmund lived the philosophy he professed, which was, "Adventuring can be for the ordinary person with ordinary qualities, such as I regard myself."

Sir Edmund refused to rest on his laurels or bask in his glories, and, as his upbringing had taught him, neither exploited those for his self-advancement. Instead, he dedicated his life to service to others. Alongside his love for adventure and tough expeditions like to the South Pole or the search for the yeti, not to speak of the several more Himalayan expeditions he undertook after his conquest of the Everest, he devoted himself to humanitarian works to ameliorate the conditions of the Sherpa people whom he had met during his Himalayan sojourns. His name has come to be associated with many schools, clinics and museums and touched the lives of thousands of people in Nepal.

He was a person who shunned publicity. This was demonstrated by his declining of the Queen's offer to join the 50th Anniversary of his feat, which also coincided with the golden jubilee of the Queen's coronation, preferring to be with his Sherpa friends with whom he was so deeply attached.

Sir Edmund was modest almost to a fault. He had said once that in some ways he believed that he epitomized the average New Zealander: he had modest abilities, which he combined with a good deal of determination, and he rather liked to succeed.

He succeeded, and much more. He not only left his footprint on the face of the world's highest peak, he, by his grit and determination, has also left an indelible imprint in the hearts of all the adventure-loving people of the world.

# The globe's most important relationship

**Relations among the three powers, with some perturbations -- e.g., the current fracas over US military vessels visiting Hong Kong -- have improved in recent years. Whatever political problems arising from trade, substantial Sino-American cooperation has emerged on key issues with productive dialogue underway. US-Japanese ties intensified during the Koizumi era, but have some current hiccups raised by the Liberal Democratic Party's diminishing clout.**

MORTON ABRAMOWITZ

TOGETHER China, Japan and the US are today's most important trilateral relationship. Regional and global economic integration -- along with increasing openness, mobility and democratisation -- is currently shaping US-Chinese-Japanese relations. Only domestic politics or virulent nationalism could disrupt what promises to be a positive new decade for great-power relations in East Asia.

The three countries are not in an expansive mood:

- China still grows rapidly, deriving significant clout and thereby assuming a new world role. Despite a recent leadership transition, Chinese leaders remain preoccupied with mitigating massive distortions of growth, ensuring a successful Olympics and preventing regime change. Its military modernisation arouses American angst and some

- regional hedging, and its international engagement has moved beyond the Asian platform. Yet China continues to be out of step with the political morality of leading countries and shows increasing heartburn with international badgering. China has a long way to go in exercising international leadership.

- The next US president, scheduled to take office early 2009, will probably inherit at least two wars, both continuing to drain high-level attention and resources, contributing to polarisation and declining government capabilities. Restoring American attention to the region, particularly Southeast Asia, could be difficult. Both Republican and Democrat candidates and their foreign-policy gurus maintain 20th-century rhetoric, enamored with US global leadership. Not recognising the profundity of change, the US obsesses on China's rise,

- oblivious to American impact on others. Its present economic downturn adds new complexity to America's influence and global role.

- Japan remains a major world economic player, but its economy lacks dynamism. Slow to define a comfortable global role for itself, Japan wants to be a "normal" nation without its postwar defense limitations. But it has not achieved that status. Japan remains fearful of China's competition even as both economies become more entwined. Japan and China have one major concrete dispute -- maritime claims. The US and Japan each value their alliance, but generally the US takes Japan for granted. The US would like to see greater Japanese influence in Southeast Asia -- the absence of which was clear when most East Asian nations did not support Japan's efforts to win a permanent UN Security Council

- seat. Relations among the three powers, with some perturbations -- e.g., the current fracas over US military vessels visiting Hong Kong -- have improved in recent years. Whatever political problems arising from trade, substantial Sino-American cooperation has emerged on key issues with productive dialogue underway. US-Japanese ties intensified during the Koizumi era, but have some current hiccups raised by the Liberal Democratic Party's diminishing clout. Most important, Sino-Japanese tensions have diminished, trade grows rapidly, high-level visits have resumed and both countries recognise the need to check nationalist forces despite territorial differences. Still, China and Japan lack serious dialogue.

- In the much-heralded Six Party Talks on the North Korean nuclear issue, China provided useful leadership, and the Bush administration did an about-face, resurrecting Clinton's pragmatic policy of bribery. Yet, the verdict on these talks is not in -- and depends on verification of North Korea's holdings of nuclear material.

- Washington largely views East Asia through a strategic and military lens. The US remains a central pillar in Northeast Asia security, and the major focus of the People's Asian countries welcome its presence as a balancing factor. From a

- policy standpoint, continuing US preoccupation with China's growth and modernisation obscures China's rapid integration with East Asia, the rise of more independent powers with growing confidence and the notion of an East Asian ethos.

- Despite the US central role in the region, particularly in Northeast Asia, any US policy must start with the recognition that its influence has declined -- a positive consequence of the rise of Asian economies. Asian nations are not only economic competitors, but also the home of American multinationals. So relations naturally are more balanced. Diffusion of power requires the US to focus on its competitive prowess while dealing with Asia in a give-and-take way on issues like energy and East Asia's economic integration.

- North Korea and China, two ongoing security problems on which the US military structure in East Asia is based, are also changing, both on a trajectory toward some better resolution:

- In the final days of Chen Shui-Bian's premiership, we may witness the last big stirrings of Taiwanese assertiveness. However, despite increasing military buildup, with Taiwan the major focus of the People's Liberation Army, the threat of a unilateral declaration of inde-

- pendence has diminished along with the threat of war. Cool heads on both sides of the strait increasingly recognise the necessity to manage the conflict through negotiations and normal economic workings, not confrontation. The potential destabilising element is domestic politics, in the US, China or Taiwan, as leadership changes. Despite domestic political rumblings, strategic clarity dominates US policy toward Taiwan -- keep it frozen until Beijing and Taipei sort the matter out themselves.

- Predictions about North Korea, with its opaqueness and uncertain leadership transition, require more caution. Recognising that its survival depends on change, North Korea is slowly becoming addicted to South Korean largesse, Chinese trade and investment, and more contact with the world. The immediate uncertainty is North Korea's denuclearisation; if that ends badly, the climate will again change, but not necessarily toward hostilities.

- The security focus should be reducing Sino-American and particularly Sino-Japanese tensions and searching for frameworks of continued cooperation. Continued globalisation of trade, finance and culture help, but also produces discontents and economic nationalism. Thus leadership, as the Bush administration has provided against congressional protectionism, is key. Additional steps that might contribute to better trilateral relationships include:

- The US and Japan should not pursue an "alliance of values" with Australia and India, largely an amorphous anti-Chinese move that does little to deter China or improve regional security.

- On the other side, Japan deserves to be a permanent member of the Security Council, and China should end its opposition. Such a Chinese move -- unfortunately unlikely in the near future -- could change the climate in East Asia and the world.

- East Asia can benefit from consultative forums, including a trilateral one, formal or informal. This idea, long favored by non-governmental organisations, is rejected by China because of the US-Japan alliance, with possible complaints from other countries and skepticism from all as to its worth. But with relations sufficiently developed, such a forum could, for example, be an offshoot of the G-8 meeting, of which China should soon be a regular member. China, Japan and the US have plenty to talk about besides North Korea.

- Efforts toward deeper, more formal East Asia economic and political integration have lagged due to the complexity and Sino-Japanese rivalry on how to organise the region. Unless these powers -- like Germany and France in Europe -- find an accommodation, the project will stumble along. The US, largely absent from this debate, is apparently still addicted to Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, which is becoming, but doesn't have to be, a vehicle for diluting East Asian cooperation. Movement toward an East Asian economic community, not a Pacific one, offers the best vehicle for peaceful security structure in East Asia.

- The last part of the 20th century was dominated by dualities like the Cold War. The 21st century is shaping up with multiple power-centers, calling for multilateral policy approaches.

- China, Japan, US -- and throw India and Russia into the mix. Asia quickly becomes ground-zero for great power relations in the decades to come. Let's hope consultation and integration win the day.

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## Treading the trodden path



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ONE may wonder if there are variants of democracy in developing and developed parts of the world. Barack Obama, winning the caucus at Iowa and placing second in the New Hampshire primary, may create history if he is elected as the first African-American president of the US, while his father's birthplace -- Kenya -- is smouldering after the presidential election, the results of which the opposition refuses to accept. In Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili has got the endorsement from OSCE, though many in his country consider the election as flawed.

One can argue that the Americans have been practicing democracy for hundreds of years while Kenya and Georgia are recent entrants in the field of democracy and, hence, are yet to attain the patience and discipline displayed by Al Gore in the 2000 US presidential elections when the US Supreme Court declared George Bush as the winner.

One can equally argue that in Kenya the votes were given along tribal lines, and in Georgia a sizeable part's loyalty to the Russian Federation plays an important role in

the elections. In Georgia, a constituent part of the former USSR, political liberty is important to the people, while in Kenya, like in Bangladesh, economic advancement remains a mirage even after decades of being independent. Can one then assume that time should be allowed for democracy to grow roots? Or should one insist that the preconditions set by Francis Fukuyama -- the level of economic condition existing in a country, neighbourhood effect, desire of the people to have democracy, and cultural heritage conducive to the sustainability of democracy -- have to be there for successful democratic practice?

Empirical studies have, however, proved that once a country reaches the stage where it is called a developed country it has never gone back to authoritarianism. Examples abound of countries, like Spain, Portugal and Greece, that did not allow authoritarianism to return once they achieved developed country status and joined the European Union.

If we add Japan and Singapore to the list of practicing democracies, then we can ignore Bernard Lewis's snide remark that democracy is

peculiarly a Western way of conducting public affairs, that may or may not be suitable for others. But proving Lewis wrong does not detract from the fact that high level of economic development is an essential prerequisite for sustainable democracy.

India somehow has proved to be an exception. Perhaps because of India being a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. The founding leaders were wise to make India a federation, devolving powers to states to write their own destiny within the federation of India and giving enough political space to different shades of ideology so that they could cohabit with one another.

Had India tried to impose Punjabi like domination that Pakistan tried unsuccessfully, resulting in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation and continuing irredentism in Baluchistan, NWFP and Sind, as was the case in the ethnic conflict between Serbs and Croats in Croatia, amongst Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, things could have been different.

The importance of neighbour-

hood effect was demonstrated by the insistence by the Western powers that the former constituent parts of USSR and Yugoslavia must follow the principles of self determination, respect for borders, support of democracy, safeguarding of human rights, respect for international law, respect for the provisions of the UN Charter, and guarantees for the ethnic and national groups and minorities etc to be eligible for recognition as independent states. Some of these requirements went far beyond the traditional requirements of statehood as provided in the Montevideo Convention, listing only four qualifications for statehood.

The very fact that many of these countries have been made members of Nato and the European Union will act as a guarantee that they must remain democratic at all times. It has been suggested that the primary reason behind the quick transformation of these erstwhile communist and authoritarian countries into the Western mould is that the communist period to them was an aberration, and the Western capitalist democracy was their original home. It must also be recognised that almost all of these countries had per capita income and GDP far more

than developing and least developed countries of the East.

It is well and good that Bangladeshis will get the opportunity to choose their representatives this year, who, hopefully, will not lead the country to a repeat of the 2001-2006 alliance government's kleptocratic rule. But since we do not have the Californian system of recalling non-performing members of parliament nor the legal immunity from prosecution were we to follow Henry David Thoreau's refusal to give up all his rights to the elected representatives, the fear of being betrayed once again by our political leaders remains.

The optimists among us would term this kind of fear as masochism or self-flagellation as the reformed institutions that are expected to support democracy would not allow such a thing to come to pass. But then, the fundamental question remains that whether the change of guards at the top level of institutions can necessarily be termed as institutional reforms?

It is disheartening to note that in the present, highly competitive world our Public Service Commission, for example, has decided to keep quotas in different categories where meritocracy should have prevailed. An efficient bureaucracy is an essential component of a successful democracy, and the sacrifice of meritocracy at the altar of political expediency cannot bear fruit. But then, good education in Bangladesh has become so expensive that parents of the students from poor, lower and middle class simply cannot afford to send their children to good schools and tutorial homes.

Besides, the children of well-off families have the opportunity to go abroad for higher education and, at some point of time, if they choose to come home they can join multinational companies with financial benefits, which their home educated colleagues can only dream about. This asymmetrical treatment can be explained by the principle that the great majority of the people in a society must live in disadvantaged position for the other people to live in splendour, and by the assumption that those coming back are more economically productive in an increasingly globalised market place.

The fact that some of the under-performing members of the caretaker government had to leave the government is a good sign to the next elected government. Not only ministers but also bureaucrats should be judged on the basis of performance. We must always remind ourselves of the conception of radical democrats as opposed to participatory democrats, and that the domain of politics is not confined to formal political institutions like parliament but also includes informal public spaces in civil society.

As political self-government is a constituent element of personal freedom it is necessary for the people to be a part and parcel of the political community where they and they alone will determine the priorities that will govern their future. Should there be any significant departure from the collective will of the people a mechanism should exist so that the people do not have to wait for another five years to change their lot.

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## Brain gain



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE first ever non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) conference ended on December 29 with a call to help the country become a middle-income state by 2021 with long-term contribution by the NRBs in the different fields of development. Around 1,400 Bangladeshi scholars, professionals and investors living across the world congregated in the city for a three-day conference to harness their skill and expertise in the country's development.

The NRB representatives said that a good number of Bangladeshi scholars and professionals are living in many developed countries and contributing extraordinary expertise to the development of those countries. Many of these scholars and professional want to enrich their homeland by contributing their expertise through direct or indirect involvement.

They urged the government to formulate a proper policy framework to identify the massive challenges and opportunities in the country,

## BY THE NUMBERS

**Brain drain has aggravated the bad situation, as many of the best people have left the country for higher pay and a better life. Certainly, it is the quality of human resources that decides the destiny of a nation. Unfortunately, our young generation is not adequately enough educated to shoulder that much responsibility. It is, therefore, the need of the hour for us to have a "brain gain" to reverse the brain drain. India, Malaysia and China are now in the midst of a brain gain.**

and to define a strategic vision and a roadmap to act accordingly. The NRB representatives also urged the government to take initiative for bringing back the scholars and professionals to the country for contributing towards its development, as has been done by India and Malaysia.

The conference, organised by the Scholars Bangladesh, brought together expatriate Bangladeshi scholars, professionals and community representatives engaged in specialised jobs in science and technology, IT, health, and education to find out ways and means to contribute to Bangladesh in trade, academic and technical expertise.

The organisers really deserve our heartfelt thanks for such an excellent patriotic work; better late than never. India organised its third NRI conference in 2005 and got enormous positive response from their NRIs.

It is, indeed, heartening that the NRBs, who have earned great eminence for their talents and scholastic pursuits abroad, have decided to help build a better Bangladesh. The country has experienced its most

sweeping wave of "brain drain" in the past decades, as an inevitable outcome of the changing dynamics in the world. As a result, it is currently facing a serious dearth of talent in every field -- be it in the government or outside.

The developed countries are now selectively attracting the talented and skilled individuals of the developing countries, offering them lucrative salaries and legal status. In fact, the developed countries are snatching away more and more brains from the developing countries in order to satisfy their need of the technically skilled persons. They developing countries have to invest \$50,000, on an average, in every university graduate, only to see the talented ones migrate to richer countries for fabulous jobs.

According to an Unctad study, when an Indian doctor migrated to US in 1970, his country lost \$40,000, but the doctor contributed around \$600,000 to the US economy. The study also revealed that 11,236 doctors and scientists who migrated to US from other countries in the 1970s,

contributed \$3.5 billion to the US economy. India alone loses two billion dollars a year because of migration of IT experts to US.

The developed countries are conducting their research with the help of technically skilled people from the developing countries, which helps them to retain their standing as global leaders, evolving new systems and technology. On the other hand, developing countries are facing lower productivity in every sector because of decreased level of technical skill.

One may argue that the negative effects of brain drain are partially offset by the benefits of remittances that the expatriate Bangladeshis send home to their families. No doubt, such remittances contribute much to poverty reduction and, thereby, stimulate economic growth.

But there is more the tenable argument that the people who work in mid and lower level jobs abroad remit the earnings to their families living in Bangladesh, while the scholars and skilled individuals, who usually settle in the developed coun-

tries with their family, never feel any need to remit money to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has emerged as one of the top ten remittance receiving countries in the world, as the expatriates remitted \$5.48 billion last year. A substantial amount of the remittances was from our labourers working in Malaysia and Middle-East countries rather than from the scholars and professionals.

We cannot, however, advocate for regulating the outflow of talent to developed countries because we cannot provide them with adequate working amenities and research facilities. But this is only one side of the story. Apart from these constraints, the fragile political condition of the country has also contributed much to the brain drain.

Politically motivated and dishonest recruitments have tainted the image of the bureaucracy as an institution. The 27th BCS examination was a glaring example. The government, however, cancelled the viva voce of the 27th BCS examination.

Political nepotism in recruiting and promoting unfit teachers, ignoring the brilliant ones, happens too often in the public universities. And that impels the frustrated young talented people to go abroad.

It is quite unreasonable to expect that the scholars and professionals engaged in fabulous jobs abroad will return home to serve their homeland, because of deep sense of patriotism, unless abundant endowments are offered. If they do not return, they can transfer the special-

ised skill achieved abroad in a bid to enlighten the next generation in Bangladesh, at least to repay the debt they owe to the poor country for grooming them with the basic education at the cost of public funds.

Brain drain has aggravated the bad situation, as many of the best people have left the country for higher pay and a better life. Certainly, it is the quality of human resources that decides the destiny of a nation. Unfortunately, our young generation is not adequately enough educated to shoulder that much responsibility. It is, therefore, the need of the hour for us to have a "brain gain" to reverse the brain drain.

India, Malaysia and China are now in the midst of a brain gain. Their non-resident scholars and professionals are now returning home in increasing numbers, and getting so many incentives and endowments. These countries have even set up special economic zones for investment by the expatriate experts. Why do we not follow them, as we have a full-fledged expatriate welfare ministry to look after the expatriate investments?

The second important task is to make the return of the NRBs less cumbersome by removing all bureaucratic obstacles and maintaining close ties with the diaspora. We really need to do these things, as we badly need the helps of the NRBs who can play a pivotal role in the transfer of technology, especially in the IT sector.

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