even "sedition." Their reports, however, have led the UN Special Rapporteurs to initiate enquiries with the government. National human rights defenders have campaigned for a Human Rights Commission with indepen-dent powers of investigating abuses, taking deterrent or punitive action against violators, and providing protection for victims. The Paris Principles endorsed by the General Assembly in 1993 set guidelines for the establishment of effective national machineries that emphasised the importance of their having a broad constitutional mandate, of having financial and administrative independence, with adequate resources to perform their functions.

The institution was to examine national laws with a view to recommend amendments in conformity with international standards, publish reports on the situation of human rights, monitor, investigate and document violations, take deterrent action against violators, and create awareness of rights. Implementing this mandate would depend upon the institution's financial and administrative independence, a neutral and credible selection process, accountability and transparency.

Past attempts at setting a human rights commission had not, however, been very encouraging. In 1996, under a UNDP funded human rights project, an office was set up under the Ministry of Law, and discussions held to identify common forms of violations; consultations were held with leading human rights defenders to formulate a draft legislation. But when it came to the final stage, the Human Rights Bill was never submitted to Parliament, neither by the Awami League government between 1996 and 2001 nor by the BNP government after 2001. The elected governments failed to realise the importance of such an institution for a democratic system. Nor were the bureaucrats tasked with drafting the legislation keen to expose themselves to a human rights scrutiny.

The 2007 ordinance itself may not inspire confidence in the efficacy, independence, or transparency of the institution. The reasons are to be found in formation of the selection committee, the size of the commission, in restraints on its investigative powers, and limited mandate to try perpetrators.

First, the selection committee includes a judge, but the majority is constituted by bureaucrats from the ministries of Home and Law, the Attorney General's Office, the Auditor General's Office; it includes no representation from political parties in Parliament, professional organisations such as the Bar Associations, or from



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