

Capitulation to corruption?

The statements of the anti-corruption chairman and the home adviser regarding the slowing down of anti-corruption cases are cogent proofs that the much-vaunted anti-corruption drive has already lost steam and is about to fizzle out.

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QUDDUSI

ONLY the Almighty knows how many more dramas remain to be unfolded in this land of "nothing is impossible." In fact, more are in the pipeline if the recent happenings in our political scenario are any guide. It is now quite clear that the people who hold the reins of the country seem to take it lightly.

Some, however, term it as adventurism, or rather misadventure, given the apparent capitulation of the current government, which despite starting their campaign with the hackneyed slogan of "anti-corruption," received applause from naive intellectuals as well as all-time gullible masses of the land.

The anti-corruption campaign seems to have been put on hold by the current government. However, the experiment extravaganza remains, creating boredom among the citizenry.

I am more than convinced that the move to bring the two most powerful leaders of the country to the negotiating table is the latest experiment. Though one wishes all the best to this move, we have every reason to be sceptical if we look back to the secretary-level "circus" dialogue between Abdul Mannan and Abdul Jalil.

I do not believe the propaganda that the two women are the crux of the problems facing the country. I rather think that this scenario has been brought to the fore quite intentionally so that people stop asking about the fate of the anti-corruption drive and forget about the more overriding problems such as political reforms, price-spiral, economic depression, law and order situation and so on.

This does not mean that the government has failed miserably in these sectors, but it is a reminder of the fact that it has been half-

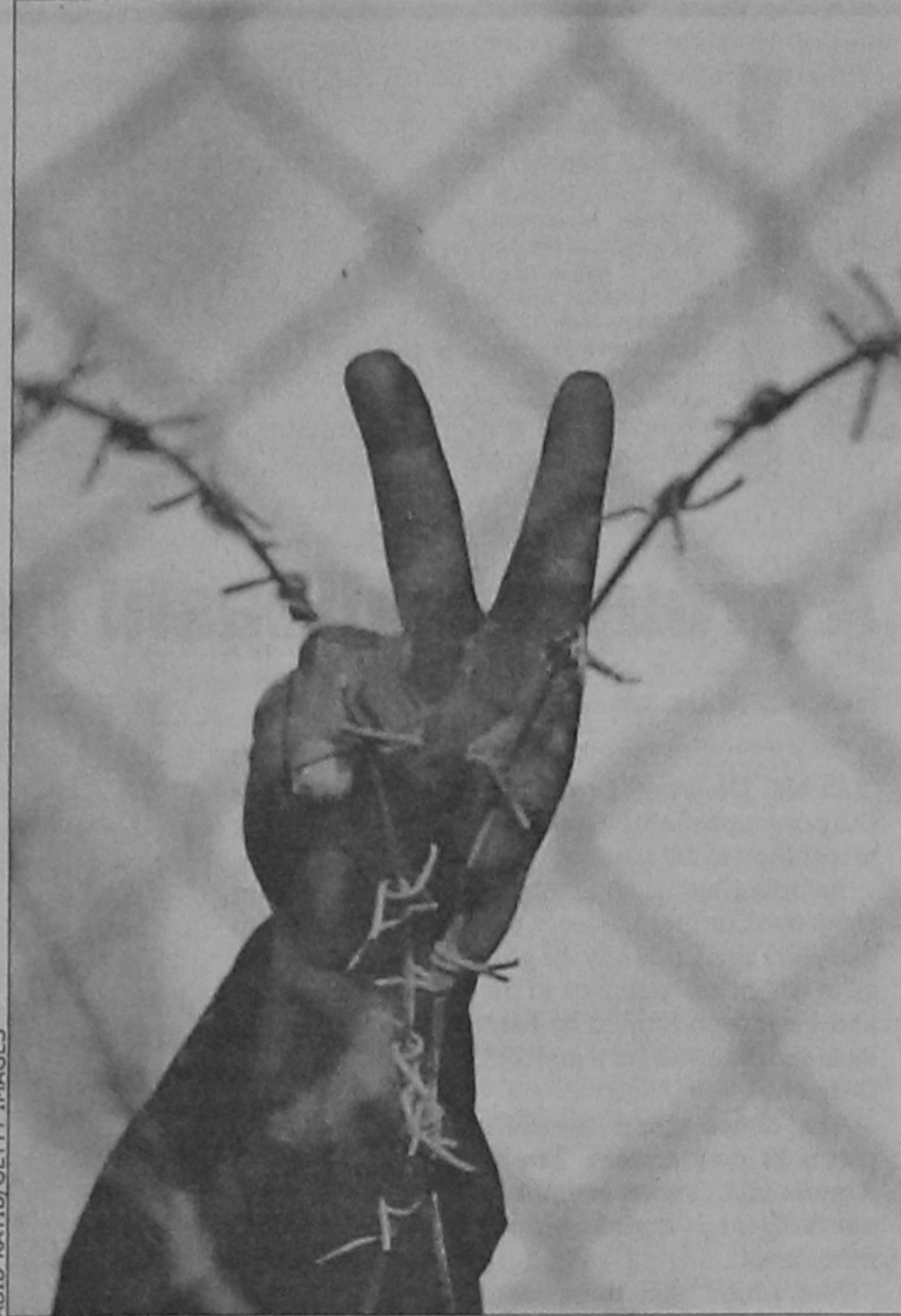
hearted or misdirected in its initiatives for too long. If we look at the anti-corruption drive, it can be stated quite convincingly that the government has just let the prime suspects off the hook after being quite successful in netting them.

Truly, like other suspects, Tarique Rahman, too, had the right to proper treatment for his illness. Though the government claims to have released Tarique on humanitarian grounds, Begum Khaleda Zia's statement regarding his long overseas stay sends the signal that the government has little interest even in pursuing the cases against him. The irony is, however, that Tarique's release is being termed as a victory of an uncompromising mother.

To be candid, however, this is a defeat for the true spirit of the anti-corruption campaign in the country. After the much talked-about Tarique release, of course, most other suspects are also coming out. The statements of the anti-corruption chairman and the home adviser regarding the slowing down of anti-corruption cases are cogent proofs that the much-vaunted anti-corruption drive has already lost steam and is about to fizzle out.

What conclusion, then, can the people draw? Are not some influential people indeed beyond the law of the land? Are laws in this country and cries for good governance not just for coaxing the people and for fishing for compliments on occasions? Though the anti-corruption drive has already been dealt a blow, the people in the government seem to be unaware of this.

The social costs of this anti-corruption fiasco might, however, be all the more awful. The fear is, then, not at all unfounded that an impression might become deep-rooted in the citizenry that none in the country is interested in reining-in the



Victory for corruption?

wayward horse of corruption.

The anti-corruption slogan sounds like a platitude only to dupe the common people, thereby creating a craving for corrupt practices even among the people who have so far opted to remain aloof from corruption despite facing hardships.

Was not the so-called *jihad* against corruption a disservice to the nation? Will the current anti-corruption failure not accentuate the feeling that corruption is quite rampant in the country, and that to get rid of all sorts of corruption charges one just needs to use guiles and political pressure on the ones who are still bent on fighting against this ill?

Apparently, there is no escape from the iron cage of bureaucracy for running the affairs of a country. To many, thus, bureaucracy is a necessary evil. Does our current apparent anti-corruption fiasco, then, confirm the apprehension

that corruption too has become a necessary evil in Bangladesh?

Whatever might be the outcome of the current anti-corruption drive, the majority of the people have the guts to say no to corruption. The paradox is, however, that whoever took up the anti-corruption rein in the country failed, and, in doing so, augmented the social cost of corruption every time.

Despite the existing disappointment among the citizenry, I believe that the toiling masses of the country will succeed in pressing home the fact that corruption is not a necessary evil in Bangladesh, and that they will not remain hostage to corrupt cartels forever because this very malady is not theirs; rather it belongs to the rulers.

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A centuries old friendship

Some new potential areas and possible Chinese support also came up this time. These include the construction of Friendship bridges on Meghna and Meghna-Gomuti, collaboration on nuclear power technology with a view to implementing the Roopur Nuclear Power Plant, and the production of hybrid seeds for expanding agricultural production.

MD. MASUM BILLAH

CHIEF Adviser Dr. Fakraddin Ahmed paid a four day official visit to China with a view to further strengthening the existing friendly relations between the two countries and to find new ways and means for cooperation in the fields of politics, trade, economic cooperation, investment, agricultural and education. He held talks with President Hu Junatao, Vice-President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao.

The discussions underscored the fact that Bangladesh-China relations were "time tested" and "all-weather," and that they symbolised a comprehensive partnership for cooperation. Some new potential areas and possible Chinese support also came up this time. These include the construction of Friendship bridges on Meghna and Meghna-Gomuti, collaboration on nuclear power technology with a view to implementing the Roopur Nuclear Power Plant, and the production of hybrid seeds for expanding agricultural production.

Another important subject discussed was a road link between Bangladesh and China through Myanmar. It was agreed that both sides would take it up with Myanmar. Both sides underscored the need and importance of establishing road communication through Myanmar. It will definitely play a significant role in the field of commerce and communication, for the benefit of all.

The Chinese side doubled the number of scholarships offered to Bangladesh from 50 to 100. In the present global perspective, China is gaining ground and establishing itself as a significant world player, not only in the arena of world power and industry but also in the

field of education. China is getting exposed to the world now far better than before. Learning and teaching English has also gained much popularity in China. They started this process in 2005 to hold the 29th Summer Olympic Games. They hosted it very successfully.

Modern China is only six decades old. Its economic growth has been truly astounding. Hundreds of millions of Chinese have been lifted out of poverty. Indeed, Chinese economic growth must be acknowledged as one of history's great achievements in poverty reduction. China is not simply wealthier; it is also far more open place politically than it was during the Mao era. More than 300,000 NGOs work there now. Official statistics show that more than 85,000 public protests occurred in 2005 over issues such as corruption, public health, environment, land use etc. Beijing has 1.1% of the Chinese popula-

tion and 2.5% of China's GDP.

While Chinese leaders care what the rest of the world thinks of China, they ultimately care more about what 1.3 billion Chinese think of themselves. Their ability to stage a successful Olympic builds a sense of national unity and purpose and shows the Chinese people that their leaders can deliver. China has further consolidated its position in the global field through holding this 29th Summer Olympic. Bangladesh should evaluate China's present status and re-range her foreign policy accordingly.

Three agreements were signed between Bangladesh and China during the chief adviser's visit. They include economic and technical cooperation, exchange of hydrological information on the Brahmaputra, and scientific cooperation in the field of agriculture. The chief adviser addressed gatherings of Chinese business houses and investors, apprising them of the advantages of commerce and investments. Chinese investors were told that a Special Economic Zone would be established for them so that Chinese technology and Bangladeshi workers could form a special economic cooperation. China will provide special preferential treatment for access of some Bangladeshi products to its mar-

ket to reduce the prevailing trade imbalance between the two countries, and cooperate in implementation of the Roopur nuclear power plant.

It was hoped at the official talks that trade volume between the two countries would reach \$5 billion by 2010. China showed interest, saying that top Chinese companies will invest in Bangladesh. China will extend cooperation in setting up North-West Fertiliser Company in Bangladesh. The chief adviser said that Chinese technical know-how and Bangladeshi workers and cheap labour force could make up

a "win-win situation for trade and investment for both countries." Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury rightly said: "I have every confidence that all governments to follow will bear this in mind that closes ties with China will be an eternal pillar of Bangladesh's foreign policy. I know the Chinese side also shares these sentiments." China is important for Bangladesh, as Bangladesh is for China. Our leaders and the government coming through public mandate must not forget the truth. They must formulate our foreign policy attaching tremendous importance to Chinese issues.

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Dr. Fakraddin being greeted at Beijing Capital Airport.

Islamabad in flames

In what is termed as an unprecedented act of terror in Pakistan's history, a truck bomb rammed into the heavily-guarded hotel located in the most secured area that housed President and Prime Minister Houses, Parliament building, Secretariat, Supreme Court and many other important state structures.

MAQSOOD TIRMIZI AND IRFAN
BUKHARI

A huge explosion rocked the capital on Saturday evening at around 8 pm when an explosive-laden vehicle rammed into a five-star hotel building killing at least 60, including foreigners, and leaving 260 injured with mangled limbs and fear gripping the whole city.

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housed President and Prime Minister Houses, Parliament building, Secretariat, Supreme Court and many other important state structures.

The massive explosion shook the Marriott Hotel, located in high-security zone of the capital, turning the grand structure into mere rubble and sparked mammoth flames of fire. Immediately after the massive blast, the hotel building caught fire and scores of guests were trapped in the premises and some of them were seen waiving their hands at the top roof of the building for help.



Marriott Hotel following the suicide bomb blast.

Minutes after the explosion there were dozens of people seen dead on the road with wretched vehicles on either side of the lane. Vehicles parked in the parking lot of the hotel were also severely damaged by the shock of the blast. Ambulances rushed to the scene within minutes along fire engines of CDA. Intelligence agencies personnel reached there to collect evidences from crime scene and the area was cordoned off.

The explosion left a 30-foot deep crater in front of the hotel building engulfed by the fire with flames pouring from the windows. The rescue workers were seen brining out bloodied bodies from the gutted building but large number of people were trapped inside the burning building.

The explosion shattered the windows even in buildings hundreds of feet away from the targeted hotel. The adjacent buildings of the hotel felt severe impact of the blast. The window glass as well as

doors of Balochistan House, PTV, Evacuee Trust Building and Gulshan-e-Jinnah broke with the huge waves of blast. The blast also caused damage to Privatization Commission and building of National Art Council.

"The truck asked to stop by the security guards hit the main gate and after that it was a huge explosion that rocked the hotel where hundreds of people were having their dinner," said a hotel employee Muhammad Sultan. A security guard, Nasir Khan said that truck caught fire on its front before suddenly exploding. "I heard a big bang and after that I was unconscious," he added.

At the time of blast that occurred around 8 pm, dozens of Pakistani lawmakers were attending a dinner at Prime Minister House hosted by Speaker National Assembly in honour of the parliamentarians hours after the new President Asif Ali Zardari's maiden speech to the parliament in which he had said that Pakistan would not tolerate violations of its sovereignty in the name of fight against terrorism.

Mohammad Farid from F & D Department of Marriott said that he saw a loaded truck bumping into the main entrance of the Marriott that wreaked havoc. Zulfikar Abassi, elder brother of Mansoor Abassi a waiter at Marriott's Marquee hall, said at PIMS that his brother was arranging for a function that was to be held at Marriott in the evening. "He was holding a tray full of glasses when the blast occurred. He lost his senses immediately and is unconscious since then," he added. The Nation tried to talk to Mansoor Abassi but he could not regain his nerves.

Mohammad Sultan, a hotel employee said that he was in the lobby when an explosion knocked him down. "I don't understand what it was but it was like the world is finished," he said.

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Better health for all

To concretise the concept of good health as the source of all happiness, there are continuous initiatives to improve the health sector round the world. Bangladesh, with limited resources, is not lagging behind in taking initiatives and bringing changes to improve the health status of its citizens and ensure health care for the needy in particular.

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

HEALTH is wealth is an old adage with eternal implications. The maxim of good health is realised more ardently at the time of serious sickness.

The lack of awareness about health and hygiene, absence of appropriate medical care, and lack of food are major reasons for ill health. A person with ill health obviously has no drive or energy to work and is, thus, considered as unwanted in the society and the family itself. More precisely, such a person is looked upon as a liability, not a resource, for the nation.

To concretise the concept of good health as the source of all happiness, there are continuous initiatives to improve the health sector round the world. Bangladesh, with limited resources, is not lagging behind in taking initiatives and bringing changes to improve the health status of its citizens and ensure health care for the needy in particular.

The Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 15(a) and Article 18(1), has provided top priority to public health and nutrition as a state policy of governance. To implement the obligation of the constitution and expectation of the people at large, governments had taken initiatives in the past to prepare a pragmatic health policy for the nation. Accordingly, there were attempts to formulate an acceptable health policy in 1990, 2000, and 2006 to ensure quality medical care and services to citizens.

To maintain consistency with

the dramatic improvements in medical science, particularly in treatment and diagnosis, changes in global and environmental health, requirements of addressing

occupation health and climatic health hazards, it was wisely felt essential to update the health policy. The need for adjustments was also felt with significant changes in epidemiological, demographic and socio-economic changes, and new challenges of re-emerging and non-communicable diseases, urban health care and access of the poor, and gender divide.

The caretaker government has decided to update the health policy and has prepared a draft and put it on the web site, eliciting views of the stakeholders on the policy issues.

The draft health policy defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and merely not an absence of disease or infirmity. Health has been regarded as the index of human development, and is a fundamental right of the population.

The draft contains objectives, principles, and strategies of the policy, besides areas of interventions like good governance issues, human resource and supply management, infrastructure maintenance, health financing, improvement of nutrition status, stewardship role of the government, harmonisation of development partners' support etc.

The current programs and projects are basically primary health care, health education, capability building of the manpower, private and public participation, decentralisation of authority, maternal and child health care, breast feeding campaign, reproductive health care, survey and research etc.

Some of the on-going activities are generating intensive activities for providing client-centered, equitable, accessible and quality health care for all citizens, with special focus on the poor, distressed women and the disadvantaged. Besides, proposals also emphasised the improvement of the nutrition status, reformation in the operation of private clinics, diversification of the referral system, and more investments in building nursing and paramedics' professionals.

There are also proposals for

strengthening the upazilla health complexes, union health and family welfare centres, community clinics, etc., to ensure the participation of local level government. This is felt necessary in view of the upazilla system being reintroduced where health services would be treated as the transferred subject.

The new elements in the proposed policy are program activities for medical waste management, addressing climate change related diseases, ensuring food safety and quality, strengthening urban health services, etc. Besides, there should be more initiatives to provide services to hard to reach areas, chars, and coastal belt localities.

The proposal stresses the critical role of timely procurement and supply by introducing new institutions for procurement management and setting up a separate MIS system for logistics. Another important feature is the suggestion for publication of a report on the health status annually and updating the health policy periodically.

It is true that the policy indicates the strategy, but there should be projects and programs to translate the same into reality. There should be good governance in health administration, both in the private and the public sector, for which political commitment should be transparent and all allocations should be demand based and balanced ones. There should be participation of health watch groups with regular inflow of information.

There could be arrangements where civil society organisations and human right agencies can interact to ensure accountability and transparency in procurement, supply and providing of services. There are suggestions from civil society organisations to establish permanent committees or create a post of ombudsman for regular health watch.

The expectation is that the National Health Policy shall be meaningful for good health and good governance in the health sector in coming days.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath is a former joint secretary.