

SUNDAY POUCH

## Resource-strapped returnees

Explore new avenues for them

A very large chunk of the 34,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers who have just returned from Libya by way of camps in Tunisia, Greece, Egypt and Algeria remain in dire financial straits because of the wages they have not received in Libya. That is worrying, for both the returnees as well as the Bangladesh government. With employment a perennial problem for this resource-strapped country, one can surely understand the hurdles before the government where rehabilitating these workers is concerned. It is a situation which gravely taxes the imagination and calls for a clear, well thought out approach to the issue.

A bit of good news here is the apparent readiness of the World Bank to come forward with loans aimed at easing the burden on the returnees. If the WB wishes the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to be involved in the disbursement of the loans to the returnees, we ought not to set up bureaucratic roadblocks through insisting that the money be routed through the Expatriate Welfare Bank. The IOM has done a creditable job by ensuring the safe return of the migrant workers and so has the skill and ability to follow it up by acting as a link between the WB and the workers in providing financial aid to the latter. The imperative now is for those who have returned home empty-handed to be given some economic lifeline.

Mapping that future will be a huge challenge. For the government, this crisis should be a chance for serious thinking on employment generation in the country. It is unfortunate but true that successive governments have not clearly shaped strategies to employ people in the various professions. That attitude must now come to an end. Meanwhile, with such a large number of workers not just from Libya but from elsewhere in Asia and the Middle East coming back home, it is of critical importance that the government explore, from a sense of immediacy, newer avenues of manpower export. It is not merely the welfare of the workers that is important. The matter of remittances in our economy is crucial as well.

## IT education at schools, colleges

Infrastructure direly inadequate

WHEN the government envisages building a Digital Bangladesh, the news that computer studies at secondary and higher secondary levels are conducted without specialized teachers in the state-run educational institutions is indeed appalling. It is unbelievable that governments have not created any permanent post for teachers in this discipline at 570 schools and colleges since introducing the subject fifteen years ago. Classes are conducted by teachers of other subjects that too in make-shift arrangements.

The current situation, if not redressed would jeopardize the progressive plans of the government with regards to spread of IT education.

By contrast, private educational institutions run by government subsidy have permanent posts for this field. They have efficient IT teaching staff enabling students to flourish in computer education.

While the students take keen interest in the subject the government lags behind in making the infrastructure available. Strangely, there's still no recruitment provision of IT teachers in the staffing pattern and there's no sign of efforts to create such posts. Situation is worse in the Upazila levels where teachers seldom use computers for teaching.

Sadly, many institutions have neither computers nor teachers. Education experts and teachers have underscored the need for making computer education, which is now optional, compulsory to help implant IT skills in talented minds which will stand them in good stead in the cyber world.

Here computer is not only a tool for information but also an integral part of the learning process. We should modernize the learning methods at all levels. There's been a huge demand and enthusiasm among all classes of students starting from Upazilas for IT education. Hence the opportunity to rear a strong IT proficient generation for the future. This prospect should not be squandered. Digital Bangladesh is

# Crossing the isthmus of corruption



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

WE have been following some startling corruption scandals faced by India's ruling Congress party in the recent past.

In 2008, a crucial vote of confidence on the Congress government was about to be cast. The whistleblowing WikiLeaks website described how a senior Congress aide showed a US embassy official a "chest of cash" allegedly used to bribe MPs to support the government.

Although the Indian government narrowly survived the vote over the controversial deal between India and the US to massively expand nuclear power capability, the opposition accused the government of buying votes with cash. The Congress party of course has denied the allegations.

The biggest corruption scandal hitting India is the selling of mobile phone frequency licenses for a fraction of their value. According to auditors, India lost nearly \$40 billion in revenue. Telecommunication Minister Andimuthu Raja has been arrested for issuing the licenses on "a first come, first served basis" instead of auctioning them as is the practice.

Another major scandal bedeviling India has been the scam over the role of Ashok Chavan, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, involving homes for war widows. Retired senior army officers and relatives of senior politicians were accused of buying these apartments for themselves in Mumbai. Mr. Chavan has denied any malfeasance.

Of course, the sleaze and corruption over the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi is now well known. The Games Organising Committee chief and senior Congress leader Suresh Kalmadi has been removed from his post. Mr Kalmadi denies any wrongdoing.

Public reaction in India to the scandals has been widespread. A "Better India" campaign has started

all over the country with young people spearheading it. Abroad, as far away as California, expatriate Indians are organising long marches to bring the message home. In Delhi itself anti-graft crusader Anna Hazare is on hunger strike.

The corruption scandals have tainted the image of Prime Minister Manmohan, who has a "clean" image. Interestingly, the scandals will have little impact on the upcoming elections in five states including West Bengal. However, the prime minister himself is optimistic that the scandals could help his government to mobilise opinion of all the parties to seek deeper economic reforms in India.

While we are quite graphic about detailing corruption in neighbouring

India we cannot absolve Bangladesh of corruption. To many of us it is quite clearly "a way of life." Recent surveys have even identified offices and departments that are responsible for much of the corruption.

Dubious deals, underhand agreements and blatantly corrupt acts by an unholy section of government and non-government actors have enriched the narrative on corruption. Sceptics have come to the conclusion that we have to live through this as no better alternatives are immediately in sight.

As those who know will have us believe, corruption is the norm and not the exception in most countries. In some it is more than others. It depends on how much of it comes before the public eye.

In today's world, corruption is taking new forms and adopting new methods.

To begin, bribery is pervasive in many countries. But bribes are difficult to detect. Big companies hire

local agents to give bribes. The agents get a "success fee" for procuring a bribe laden deal. The companies which give such bribes sometimes attest it as a legitimate business cost, and are also known to have claimed tax deductions.

Many big businesses in a country obtain major licenses by allegedly using bribes, omissions and favours. When licenses are given not through public auctions but are sold through negotiations corruption takes place, as the Indian telecommunication licensing has shown.

When the World Bank or IMF advocates policies relating to structural adjustment in a country, it inadvertently encourages corruption. Thus policies such as removal of entry

barriers to industry, privatising of state companies or lowering of controls on foreign trade are put in place, corrupt persons take advantage of non-transparency in the rules. They manipulate and get undue monetary benefit from the opacity of the system.

Even the United Nations has faced criticism for indulging in corruption. The recent UN oil for food scandal in Iraq has caused much agony. About \$2 billion was given away to unknown benefactors to support the illegal deals.

Controlling corruption is a major objective of all governments. They do it in several ways.

First, governments are increasing their transparency in dealing with the public. Even in Bangladesh we have started the use of the internet for public procurement. Processes for giving loans and grants are made clear through advertising in the media. Any "conditionalities" in foreign or local funding are being

increasingly challenged by governments.

Secondly, governments fulfill minimum standards in governance, transparency and adherence to basic human rights before approving any concession on mineral rights.

Governments are taking these steps in their effort to curb corruption. Governments all over the world are realising that tying conditions to policy making leaves them little space to maneuver. They, therefore, seek maximum space before accepting policies from donors or international loan givers.

One of the major sources of corruption in many countries is the national budget. When a budget is not made transparent before the public, there remains great scope for wasteful expenditure.

Pork barrel projects when approved will only line the pockets of individuals who had put such projects on the anvil, backed by adequate funds from the national exchequer. Therefore, governments are insisting on greater transparency and closer monitoring of national budget expenditure.

Educating the public on line items of expenditure through discussions and seminars and TV talk shows are now the norm in many countries

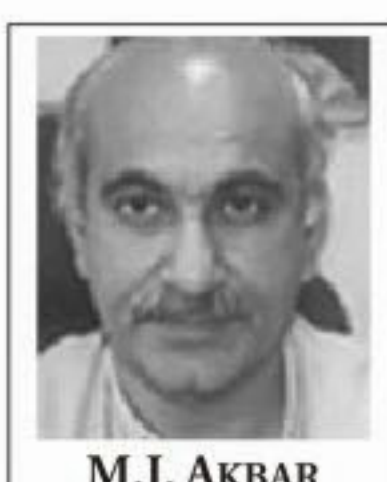
It is not enough to just contain corruption through greater transparency. It is important to use state power unabashedly to stop corruption in any sector. By tolerating corruption and remaining ignorant about what is going on, state leaders could equally be made as liable as those who indulge in corruption. Prime Minister Manmohan is now being asked why he kept his eyes shut when corruption was swirling around him.

With firmness, determination and vision this isthmus of corruption in any country can be crossed. Leadership is all about steering development funding away from the clutches of the corrupt. Singapore may be a role model in our region.

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BYLINE

## A fast unto life



M.J. AKBAR

GANDHI flagellated himself with 17 fasts. They were not all fasts unto the death; they could be time-specific. This did

not reduce the risk to his life, for 21 days without any nourishment or medical intervention could drag a frail man with an average weight of some 110 pounds to death's door.

Gandhi was a visionary, but not one ever trapped by illusion. He did not believe that a fast would persuade the British to pack up and leave the most lucrative part of their far-flung empire, the jewel of their crown, just because one obstinate, half-clad, toothless native had decided to stop drinking goat's milk for a few days.

The British establishment always treated Gandhi with contempt (exceptions like Lord Irwin apart); and as defeat loomed in the 1940s this evolved into unmitigated loathing, not least because an extraordinary arsenal of non-violence, moral momentum, and an unprecedented national awakening had driven history's mightiest empire into limp impotence. When Gandhi started his liberation movement, the ranking Indian within the establishment, Lord Sinha, confidently averred that the British Raj would last for four hundred years.

Thirty years later, the last Viceroy with any authority Lord Wavell (Mountbatten was a mere midwife, and left the motherland bleeding) had this to say in his diary on

September 26, 1946: "The more I see of that old man (Gandhi) the more I regard him as an unscrupulous old hypocrite; he would shrink from no violence or bloodletting to achieve his ends... he is an exceeding to achieve his ends... he is an exceedingly shrewd, obstinate, domineering, double-tongued, single-minded politician." You have to hate someone with unbelievable intensity to stitch together such a farrago of lies. Wavell wrote this just after his beloved British Raj had killed some four million Bengalis through another man-made famine.

Paradoxically, many of the British

*Anna Hazare has asked just one question: do you, fellow Indians, have a conscience? If the answer is yes, then rise and save your nation from the death-grip of corruption. This is a fast for India's life.*

on the second rung admired the man who had made it his life's work to destroy their empire. They understood that if they had been born Indian they would have been with Gandhi. On January 11, 1924, the superintendent of Pune jail, where Gandhi was interned, rushed the Mahatma to Sassoon hospital for an emergency appendicitis operation. The electricity went off when Colonel Maddock, the surgeon-general, was operating on the night of January 12, with the help of a British nurse; he completed his duty with torchlight. Gandhi thanked them for saving his life, and they were proud to do so.

for no Indian, Hindu or Muslim, wanted the sin of a Mahatma's death on his head. It was in 1924, the same year as his appendicitis, that Gandhi went on a 21-day fast after the Kohat riots. Very deliberately, he chose to fast at the home of the great leader of the Khilafat movement, Maulana Mohammad Ali, in Delhi. By the time he sipped some orange juice on October 8, the fever of violence had passed, at least for the moment.

The instinctive reaction of governments to any such fast is cynicism. A government might be, in fact, as weak as a terminal patient in cancer ward, but will delude itself, till its dying

breath, that to surrender before a man ready to sacrifice his life will make future governance impossible. The Congress, which had wept through Gandhi's fasts, refused to compromise when a Gandhian went on a fast unto death to demand the creation of Andhra Pradesh in 1950. The Gandhian died, and Andhra was born.

The Akali Sants put fasts to effective public use during their movement for a Sikh-majority Punjab. The Marxists laughed about Mamata Banerjee's weight when she went on a fast in Calcutta to protest against their land policy; on May 13, when the Assembly election results are out, Mamata will have the last laugh.

A fast succeeds not because it bends a government to its will, but because it is the yeast that foment the rise of a populace. Anna Hazare's fast in Delhi is not meant to bring down a government, its solitary purpose is, or should be, to resurrect an India that had become so supine that it slept indolently while the wealth of this nation was being looted by a handful of politicians and their acolytes. Anna Hazare is not waiting to see how many corrupt, hypocritical ministers come to his side; he wants to know how many Anna Hazares have emulated him on a street corner in front of their homes. He has asked just one question: do you, fellow Indians, have a conscience? If the answer is yes, then rise and save your nation from the death-grip of corruption. This is a fast for India's life.

The writer is Editor, The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and International Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 10

**1912** The Titanic leaves port in Southampton, England for her first and only voyage

**1957** The Suez Canal is reopened for all shipping after being closed for three months.

**1971** Ping Pong Diplomacy: In an attempt to thaw relations with the United States, the People's Republic of China hosts the U.S. table tennis team for a weeklong visit.

**1971** The proclamation of Independence was prepared by the Bangladesh government. This proclamation would be read out on April 17 when the Bangladesh government officially is inaugurated in Mujibnagar.

**1972** Vietnam War: For the first time since November 1967, American B-52 bombers reportedly begin bombing North Vietnam.

**1992** The Maraghar Massacre, killing of ethnic Armenian civil population of the village Maraghar by Azerbaijani troops during the Nagorno-Karabakh War.

**1998** Northern Ireland peace deal reached. The Northern Ireland peace talks have ended with an historic agreement called the Good Friday Agreement.