

KALEIDOSCOPE

Corruption gets a helping

Where is AL's commitment to fight it?

ON the Global Competitiveness Index, 2011, Bangladesh has ranked 108th among 142 countries surveyed by World Economic Forum. Whilst other countries have bettered their previous standings, Bangladesh has slid down the rung. That we are more competitive than 34 countries is little consolation because corruption remains endemic in the country. It dilutes our otherwise investment friendly policies.

Among the three major causes for the down-slide in competitiveness, corruption is identified next to inadequate infrastructure and is followed by bureaucratic inefficiency. In our view, handling corruption is most crucial because it strangles growth of infrastructure and fuels bureaucratic inefficiency.

After more than two and a half years of the AL rule, the original expectation that it would give a welcome break from corruption stands completely belied today. The ruling party does not present an image of giving a strong and relentless fight against corruption. This, it was expected to, in the light of its electoral pledge and the lessons thrown up during 2007-08 caretaker rule which raised public consciousness of corruption to a new height.

What we have seen is an AL government busying itself with dropping cases lodged by the BNP and the caretaker government preceding the AL rule. The blanket fashion it was done in contrast to zealous pursuit of cases in which BNP loyalists were involved could only give indulgence to abuse of power and corruption within the AL. When a partisan approach is taken to combating corruption there is a multiplier effect on corruption in general. This is because moral weight cannot be pulled behind the fight against corruption.

The overarching requirement of fighting corruption is the functioning of a strong, executive-neutral anti-graft institution. Here the shortcoming is pretty glaring. All we have is a weakened Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) thanks to a drastic amendment to the relevant act. The ACC's functional independence has been effectively negated by requiring it to take prior permission from the executive before proceeding with corruption charges against government functionaries and MPs. How does the ACC then differ from the infamous anti-corruption bureau that, as an appendage to the PMO, had been an abysmal failure as an anti-graft body?

The kidney scandal

Tough action must be taken

NEWS reports of the poor being lured into selling their kidneys in return for monetary benefit are a matter of grave concern. While it is understandable that donations of kidneys to save the lives of those whose own kidneys have deteriorated is accepted practice, it is beyond comprehension how organized groups can tempt vulnerable people into selling such an important organ in the body. What makes matters worse is the new discovery that in certain instances, it is not only kidneys that people are divested of but also portions of the liver. Obviously, with little guarantee that these poor who sell these organs will receive proper post-operative care, the question of how the authorities mean to handle the issue comes up.

Our distress is compounded by reports that some reputed hospitals and doctors too have been involved in this macabre trade. As an individual arrested on charges of committing such criminality has made it known, a very well-organised racket, or even rackets, is at work. Of course, it would be wrong to draw any sweeping conclusion about the hospitals and doctors involved. But it would surely be right and ethical to go after those hospitals and medical personnel who have engaged in such a pernicious trade. And it is pernicious because in most instances those who are made to part with their kidneys remain unaware of the damage that may be done to their own health following the operations to remove those organs. It may well be that these 'donors' will be sent home even before they have fully recovered. Worse, once the 'buyers' of the kidneys make off with their booty, it is quite likely that many of their victims will develop infection and may even be left fighting for dear life. That would be an irony. As their kidneys go into saving the lives of others, their own lives become endangered.

Given the sinister nature of the situation, it is for the authorities to launch a thorough investigation into the scandal. Those involved must be hauled in. Additionally, inquiries must be initiated into past instances of such scandalous con-



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

A decade has passed since the World Trade Centre (Twin Tower) collapsed in a suicide plane attack on

September 9, 2001 (9/11). The attack was termed an act of international terrorism. And al-Qaeda, a militant Islamist outfit led by infamous Osama bin Laden was believed to be the destroyer of the Twin Tower.

It was described by the then US President George W. Bush as an act of "evil," an evil that was out to destroy America, a champion of democracy and civilisation. Civilisation because about a decade and a half before the Twin Tower tragedy, the Reagan administration had defined international terrorism as one that is sponsored by a state.

It said, according to the celebrated scholar Noam Chomsky: "State-supported international terrorism a 'plague spread by depraved opponents of civilisation itself' in a 'return to barbarism in the modern age' -- I'm quoting [Secretary of State] George Shultz who was the administration moderate."

So, international terrorism was an evil force, something that opposed civilisation and wanted to take the modern world back to "barbarism."

A decade later, it was again an international terrorism, which was, of course, not a state-sponsored one, as the identified perpetrator of the Twin Tower destruction, al-Qaeda, did not represent a state.

A war without end

Since this kind of international terrorism had no state, the "war" against it could not have any particular state as its front. It can be anywhere on earth. That, in other words, is a war without front.

The implication was clear and simple. As the US was spearheading this war, it had the right to attack any state or place on earth if it was found that it was harbouring such force of international terrorism.

And the war being against an evil that is hell-bent on destroying human civilisation, it could not be but just another war, rather it must be a just and sacred war. Now that the US was leading the war, it could claim a universal support for such a just cause.

So, it became the bounden duty of any nation that believed in peace, democracy and as such willing to protect civilisation, to be with the US in the war against terrorism.

To extend the argument, anyone, who was not with the US in this war, was against the cause. And anyone against the cause, anyone not with the US, was by definition against US. A very simple, cogent and convenient logic.

And following the 9/11, the war began first at the end of 2001 in Afghanistan, where the supposed perpetrator of the Twin Tower tragedy was hiding. The US sent bomb-

ers, missiles from US fleet in the Persian Gulf and special CIA forces to ferret out the culprit headquartered at Tora Bora. Even with intensive bombing of Tora Bora, a complex of caves in the so-called Safed Koh Mountains, which in English stands for "White Mountains," nothing could be attained.

Though the US forces, along with British commandos assisted by local tribals, were not able to capture Tora Bora, neither a large depot of arms

and ammunitions, nor big training centres of the Laden forces could be traced. And Laden vanished as if into thin air.

Since Laden could not be found, the war continued and the blood of the Afghan people was spilled in profusion. The search for Laden and as such the war endured.

The war spread into Pakistan from where the Afghan Taleban, another force against civilisation, (ironically, though, it was created by the US itself to drive the Russians out of Afghanistan), were giving support to Laden's al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile as the war had been raging in Afghanistan, another front was opened in the first quarter of 2003, in Iraq, though under a different excuse. It was that the then Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein had amassed weapons of mass destruc-

tion (WMD) and that it was a threat against America, the protector of modern civilisation. The war had already cost US around US\$900 billion and more than 4,400 body bags. About Iraqi casualties, though there is no exact figure, yet according to a London-based independent polling agency, Opinion Research Survey Business (ORB) survey disclosed in 2007, the number was more than one million.

So, by 2011, the figure must have risen further, say, to another half a million, since the nature of the engagement is not as intensive as it was in the beginning.

Similarly the Afghan war cost has reached over US\$ 117 billion and casualty figure of Afghans at over one million, while those of the coalition forces over 2,700 including 1,700 US servicemen.

But what has been achieved by these wars? Is the world securer now than it was before the collapse of Twin Tower? Now that the most hunted lynchpin of terrorism Bin Laden had been tracked down in Pakistan by the CIA on May 2 this year and was killed, has international terrorism subsided?

Quite to the contrary. It has widened its sphere further. Pakistan is in the grip of worst kind of terrorism and virtually an extended front of the Afghan war. World is now more divided and xenophobic.

War begets, if anything, only war and not peace. And that is the lesson of history.

The writer is Editor, Science & Life, The Daily Star.

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Troubled India



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

IN 1962, India was humiliated by China when the Chinese advanced unimpeded into Indian territory.

Ever since, a process of internal political deterioration was set in motion in that country.

When the Chinese advanced, there was a temporary resurgence of patriotic fervor in India. But the Indian rout in Bomdila was the loss of national confidence. Any dynamism which was nurtured by the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru in the early days of India, was decimated when she was unable to strike back against China. Since then the elite of India had settled to a less than confident nation state.

Nehru had in his day crafted a foreign policy for India taking the legacy of national self-doubt into account. His greatest fear was that once he was gone India would return to the age old "nightmare of Balkanisation and internal strife" which was typical of India before the Mogul and British rule.

Nehru therefore took up the theme of a neutralist foreign policy and saw it as the symbol of a resurgent national pride. The heterogeneous Indian people were therefore made to discover a collective identity in international dealings. By thrusting New Delhi onto the world stage as an independent entity seeking out its national interest, Nehru thought that the Marathas, the Bengalis, the Tamils and the Punjabis would perceive themselves now as just Indians.

In the initial days of non-alignment, India therefore played its role as a go-between in the company of the then superpowers. Indians thought that as a nation

they had already arrived on the world stage. Nehru was pleased as it held back divisive stresses. Under his stewardship India strutted with colourful feathers in the world stage.

But when China clashed with India, the country was unprepared and with no self-recognition it faltered. So India decided to then stride the world stage as if nothing had happened.

Thus the border dispute between India and China remains unresolved till today. More worrying is the fact that India was not yet able to apply a top quality adhesive that could glue the varied peoples and cul-

ture. Hence we see the various insurgencies and temporary volatilities.

Of late, rapid economic growth as well as strides in technology has made Indians proud. The success of the Indian diaspora has also given much boost to the psychology of the ordinary Indians. But India remains an entity where centrifugal tendencies often work at tangent with the policy of the union government in Delhi.

There is a wise saying: "Half of the failures in life come from pulling one's horse when he is leaping." Prime Minister Manmohan, an academic turned accidental politician, will appreciate this and advise Mamata accordingly. Both India and Bangladesh seem to have spurred their horses who are now leaping over the hurdles in mid-air.

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So this time, after almost forty years, when the government of India was trying to elevate her ties with Bangladesh, Prime Minister Manmohan suddenly came face to face with this primeval force.

There is a requirement in India that no international agreement can

be signed by the central government without the explicit consent of the relevant state. It was therefore correct for the Indian prime minister to approach the government of Paschimbanga on the matter of sharing the water of the trans-border Teesta river with Bangladesh.

The Indian prime minister, in no uncertain terms, has said that he had consulted Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of Paschimbanga about sharing the waters of the Teesta. Not only was she consulted, but Prime Minister Manmohan had also sent his personal emissary, National Security Advisor Shiv Shanker Menon, to talk to her. The

fair and equitable sharing of the waters of the Teesta was a substantive component that would have taken the bilateral relations between the two countries to a higher plane. In spite of this, as events unfolded, it became clear that Mamata was in no mood to bow to the urgings of the central government in Delhi. In an un-Bengali way, she refused to accompany her prime minister to Dhaka. She also added that her government in no way would be a party to the Teesta agreement. But this position of Mamata was conveyed to him so late that he opted not to sign the agreement. The prime minister felt more consultation was necessary. In a curious way, Mamata allied

herself briefly with forces that Prime Minister Nehru had tried to bury once and for all and had strived to deliver telling blows to such forces of obscurantism.

Mamata is a lady with history. She also has big political ambitions. She has been elected as chief minister of our neighbouring state of Paschimbanga at a sensitive time when India and Bangladesh relations are being changed for the better.

A self-confident Bangladesh with a democratic set up is trying to unleash new and dramatic forces together with India, which can bring prosperity to this corner of this world.

The four chief ministers from the remaining states neighbouring Bangladesh in north east India, who accompanied the Indian prime minister, must have been almost asphyxiated with the political antics of Mamata. Losing so much in terms of trade and transit to getting so little benefit from the waters of the Teesta seemed to be self-defeating.

Let India, which is fast becoming a regional power, assert her national will and bring her satraps to terms with her national objectives.

There is a wise saying: "Half of the failures in life come from pulling one's horse when he is leaping."

Prime Minister Manmohan, an academic turned accidental politician, will appreciate this and advise Mamata accordingly. Both India and Bangladesh seem to have spurred their horses who are now leaping over the hurdles in mid-air.

Teesta and the other bilateral agreements are between two states and are not between or among politicians.

So in essence there can be no mistakes, save one: The failure to learn from a mistake.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 12

- 1848** Switzerland becomes a Federal state.
- 1919** Adolf Hitler joins the German Workers Party.
- 1948** Invasion of the State of Hyderabad by the Indian Army on the day after the Pakistani leader Jinnah's death.
- 1970** Hijacked jets destroyed by guerrillas. Palestinian militants blow up the three planes they have been holding at an airfield in the Jordanian desert.
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- 2001** US declares war on terror. The President of the United States describes the destruction caused in New York and Washington as an act of war against all freedom-loving people.