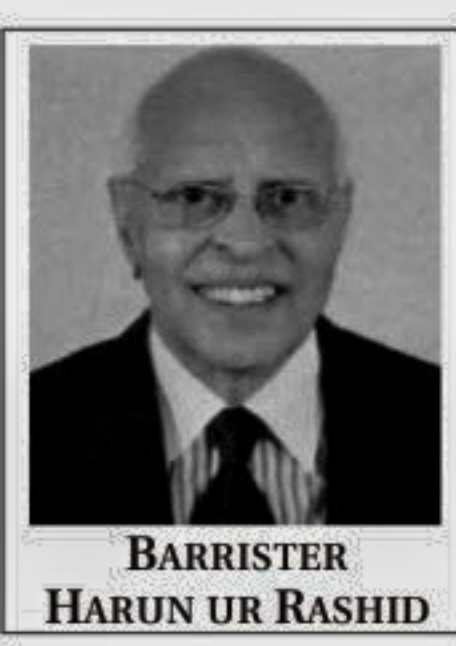


BOTTOM LINE

Prime Minister's Turkey visit



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

P RIME Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled fly to Turkey on April 9 on a four-day official visit at the invitation of her counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The visit is very important and will open up opportunities of cooperation with Turkey, which

is now the sixth largest economy in Europe and sixteenth in the world. Straddling the continents of Europe and Asia, Turkey's strategically important location has given it major influence in the region -- and control over the entrance to the Black Sea. As a large country with more than 78 million people in the midst of Eurasia's vast landmass, it may be defined as a country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character. Turkey cannot be explained geographically or culturally by associating it with one single region. It is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea country. Given this picture, Turkey has made itself into a nation which provides security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighbouring regions. Since 2002, Turkish foreign policy has been "look to the East," and its proactive foreign policy has turned Turkey into been a major player in the region. Given the above context, the visit of the Bangladesh prime minister will help to boost bilateral cooperation, among others, in trade, investment, health, culture and connectivity. Turkey has expertise in the construction of airports, deep-sea ports, communication infrastructure, etc. Bilateral relations are excellent and the people of Bangladesh have deep respect for the founder of modern Turkey Kamal Ataturk, and a main avenue in Dhaka has been named after him and also a school in a rural area in Noakhali. Almost all the heads of Bangladesh government visited Turkey. In the late '80s, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal visited Bangladesh. Bilateral trade is growing and joint ventures are being considered. The two countries have already agreed to raise the bilateral trade volume to at least \$3 billion by 2015 from the current level of

below \$1 billion. Bangladesh is now enjoying trade surplus with Turkey, which has a vantage position as gateway to the East (particularly the oil-rich Middle East) and the West. Turkey has introduced Dhaka-Istanbul direct air flight to achieve the target. Bangladesh-Turkey Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been established to boost bilateral trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. In early June, 2009, the Bangladesh commerce minister visited Turkey and announced that a Turkish Special Economic Zone might be located in Iswardi or Mongla. His Turkish counterpart responded positively to Dhaka's offer. The finance minister visited Turkey in November 2009 to attend the third meeting of the Bangladesh-Turkey Joint Economic Cooperation. The two countries agreed to cooperate in areas of

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agriculture, irrigation systems, contracting services, tourism, telecommunication and infrastructure projects. The two sides explored the possibilities of joint venture in the fields of shipbuilding, heavy machinery industries, electronic appliances, textiles, pharmaceuticals, ready-made garments, jute and jute products and petrochemical products. President Zillur Rahman of Bangladesh visited Istanbul from November 6, 2009, to attend an OIC summit on economic and commercial cooperation in Istanbul to mark the 25th anniversary of the OIC Standing Committee. The president met his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul during the visit. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan visited Bangladesh in 2010, and during both countries discussed issues relating to bilateral coopera-

tion in many areas, including tourism and infrastructure. During the visit of the Bangladesh prime minister, Bangladesh reportedly may urge Turkey to construct 500 community clinics in Bangladesh, give prompt registration of Bangladeshi pharmaceutical products in Turkey, and import vaccines from Bangladesh. According to an agreement signed during the Turkish prime minister's visit to Dhaka in 2010, Ankara would fund \$11.50 million to construct the community clinics. It is reported Dhaka may also ask Ankara to:

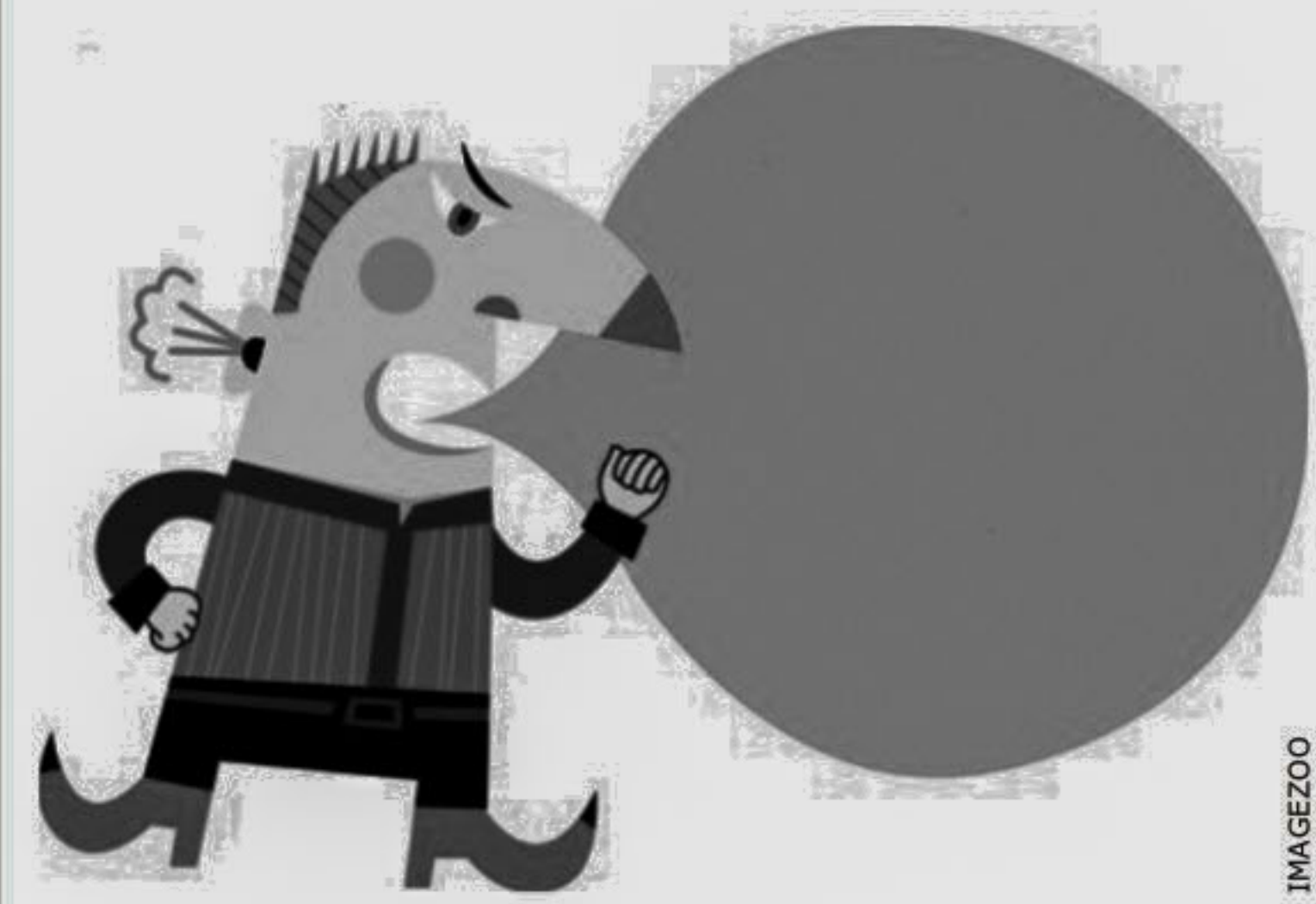
- Provide duty-free market access to its jute and jute goods. Turkey imported jute and jute goods from Bangladesh worth \$ 1.7 million in the 2010-11 fiscal year;
- Lift the safeguard duty on Bangladeshi readymade garments (RMG). This duty made Bangladesh suffer the most as it was a leading RMG exporter to Turkey and had been enjoying duty-free access as an LDC before September last year;
- Establish an international vocational training institute in Bangladesh to ensure smooth supply of skilled manpower for the garments, textiles, design and fashion industries of both the countries, maintained the officials; and
- Provide sports equipment for Bangladesh Krira Shiksha Protisthan (BKSP) and training of professional players and coaches in Turkey.

Both the sides have reportedly finalised the signing of an agreement to facilitate foreign direct investment and have been working on securing another deal, under which Turkey will increase its annual credit limit to Bangladesh from \$100 million to \$250 million.

Turkey and Bangladesh are members of the D-8 Commission. The D-8 Commission has recently identified cooperation in industrialisation and micro-credit, human resource development, industrial and technological data bank work, and designing and production of agriculture aircraft prototypes.

Bangladesh's relations with Turkey are mutually beneficial and Bangladesh may look forward to some real benefits through this visit. Both countries should see cooperative efforts as catalyst to harness the potential of resources of Bangladesh and Turkey.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.



Fame and shame in politics

MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

O UT of the last four decades since independence, two female leaders elected through popular votes ruled for almost half the period. Let us talk today about women in politics. Nowhere in the world, except Bangladesh, have a female prime minister and a female opposition leader ruled successively for two decades.

The story of female leadership in politics does not end here. We have been blessed with numerous female ministers, MPs and advisors since 1991. Not to mention the unelected female MPs drafted into the parliament on a proportional basis during each term. In politics, it seems, balancing the gender cause has been working well in Bangladesh. Over the last three decades, we have also been repeatedly hearing from our NGO friends how female NGO leaders have been dedicating their lives to fighting for the rights, privileges and empowerment of women.

Having said all this, the time has come to take account of the performance of the women in politics as they are accountable to the people. When one hears about the increased cases of rapes, discrimination, and *fatwabaji* against women in recent years, the empowerment claim sounds misplaced. Of course, Bangladesh is no longer in the dark ages, particularly rural areas. Every village has UP members (including elected female members), NGOs are present of in some shape or form, and at least one-quarter of villagers have mobile phones.

We know that rural Bangladesh has been going through rapid socio-economic changes. However, these changes have also been bringing with them several by-products. For instance, physical abuse, sexual harassment and rape are common occurrences nowadays. While economic vulnerabilities of rural women are being overcome slowly, social vulnerabilities are increasing at an alarming rate (this writer recently concluded a survey of coastal region for professional purposes, and found some evidence of social vulnerability overtaking economic ones).

It appears that the improvement in the economic situation has been achieved due to the introduction of several pro-poor innovative rural income schemes, such as old age pension, food for works, food rationing for ultra poor, allowances for freedom

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fighters and so on. Unfortunately, it appears that the governments, past and present, have been failing in protecting the rural women from extrajudicial actions of some self-styled arbitrators, even though there are clear directions set out by the highest court of law in this regard. For example, an HC bench delivered a verdict on July 8, 2010, declared illegal all kinds of extrajudicial punishment, including those in the name of *fatwa*, under local arbitrations. More importantly, "the bench also ordered the information ministry to run a media campaign to create awareness among people against extrajudicial punishment."

Has the minister for information and his departmental secretary taken any step to follow this directive given by the nation's highest court? The writer has not seen any campaign towards this end yet. It is time now the government high-ups checks this with the relevant ministry and seek evidence since it is almost two years now since the verdict was pronounced. The ministers for home and religious affairs are equally responsible for such a failure.

One wonders why our female MPs are staying silent in this regard? Why has there been no discussion by female MPs on the floor of the parliament? Instead, what one has been hearing in recent days and weeks is a disgrace and brings shame to some female MPs, to say the least. Even after repeated calls from the chair (speaker) for calm, no one to be seemed to be bothered to comply.

The discipline and resolve shown by the ministry of foreign affairs through winning landmark verdict at the International Tribunal for Law of the Sea in Germany over Myanmar's claim of part of the Bay of Bengal is certainly re-assuring. The female foreign minister, Dr. Dipu Moni, and her staff deserve credit for making the nation proud. The honourable minister is also hopeful about winning the case against India on outstanding maritime matters, which is scheduled for hearing in 2014.

It is time now that the female MPs of both sides learn from their senior colleagues who have been creating examples in their public life and climbing up further in political ladder, together with gaining trust of the people and their respective leaders.

The writer is visitor at the South Asia Institute at the University of Heidelberg, Germany.

Corruption: Who to blame?

MASHFIQUE IBNE AKBAR

C ORRUPTION has become a way of life for the citizens of Bangladesh, irrespective of their socio-economic background. Bangladesh, being one of the LDCs in the world, has been plagued with corruption since we gained independence. It is ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world by Transparency International. This should not come as a surprise to us, but the fact that corruption is multi-dimensional and should be resolved with a unified and national effort needs to be a priori comprehended.

With a per capita GDP of approximately \$675 and more than 50 million people living below the national poverty line, perpetuated by rising levels of inequality, the state needs to play a critically important role in controlling the level of corruption. It would have to take into account the sociological and psychological sentiments of the citizens for establishing the fact that "the rich are getting richer and the poor getting poorer."

In order to play this vital role, the government has to take initiatives to improve the public provisions, which seek to provide basic necessities, through shifting from a supply-managed policy to demand-oriented, rights-based social protection schemes. Denying the common man basic necessities may tempt him to engage in activities that go against social norms. Some positive lessons can be drawn from India, where they have now implemented social programmes through establishing right to education, work and food.

While some have given up efforts to fight corruption, there is an optimistic group that believes that this is only a transition period. The latter assume that there is an inverted-U relationship which exists between corruption and the level of development of a nation. Thus, the assumption that corruption level will decline after a nation reaches a certain stage of development can only be confirmed in the days that we are yet to see.

What are the causes of corruption? Can corruption be eradicated or kept to a minimum? These two interrelated questions are always asked but seldom accurately answered. The causal relationship between democracy and corruption has been discussed extensively by different scholars and different conclusions have been reached. However, what has been

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established is that democracy and corruption are mutually exclusive.

It is widely known that corruption is endemic in the public sector. But does corruption only have a supply-side aspect? Rent-seeking and bribery have cropped up as a result of the prevailing low remuneration structure. The remuneration structure has not been up to international standards because of certain institutional shortcomings. Surely, we may go on to prove Say's law that supply has created its own demand. However, this is not entirely correct.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), in a study carried out in 2008, undertook a perception survey to assess the citizens' expectation from elected representatives. The TIB survey reported that more than 80% of the respondents wanted MPs involvement in bringing developmental "goodies" to the constituency and, more pertinently, sought personal access to the MPs for a variety of reasons from attending to personal needs to requests for dispute settlement. This clearly implies that there is a demand-side to corruption as well! In other words, demand has perhaps created its own supply.

An example can be drawn in the case of the USA to depict the multi-faceted side of corruption when the government was having some success in controlling the corruption level in the late 1990s. Crime level was escalating throughout 1960s and 1970s despite the fact that the number of law enforcing agencies was

being dramatically increased. Eminent economists predicted that the level of corruption was going to augment further but it turned out that the crime level dropped significantly starting from early 1990s. Everyone credited the police force for it, but the actual reason was the legalisation of abortion in some states.

It might appear strange to relate abortion legalisation and the level of corruption; but certainly, there is a key link. It is common sense that new generation of criminals would come from families with a destitute background. The new abortion law enabled pregnant women from these families to not give birth if they desired, thus, reducing the number of potential gangsters and thieves.

To conclude, it is more important to eliminate the source of corruption, and not the corrupt. Everyone has to assume individual responsibility with a patriotic mindset, and think about public welfare as a whole over their personal benefits. Only then would the country be able to liberate itself from the firm grip of corruption. As a member of the young generation who got to exercise his democratic right for the first time to vote in the last general election, I am inclined to conclude that, in Bangladesh, corruption is carried out for the people, by the people's representatives who are, of course, of the people.

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