

Fighting corruption: Effective measures

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CORRUPTION is a pervasive social vice. It is deeply rooted in the society as a "convention," or "tradition," or "psychological need" or "necessity," and is practiced not only in the public sector but also in the corporate sector and private life.

Fighting corruption through appropriate preventive measures has been the top priority of ACC. It's a difficult challenge, but achievable if sustainable political will prevails to wage a long-term battle against corruption from top down. ACC is now pursuing the most aggressive anti-corruption campaign in our history with "minimal tolerance and indiscriminate" approach. The Commission firmly believes that a successful anti-corruption campaign is just the key to unlock and unleash our nation's enormous potentials and keep it moving towards prosperity.

However, over the last 4 decades, rampant corruption in almost all the sectors of the state has deeply infested and affected the nation's and its citizens' interest and dignity. It served individuals' and groups' interest instead of safeguarding public interest. Malpractices, random armed or unarmed muscle power demonstration and, above all, lack of transparency and accountability have taken the corruption menace to such a height that it has almost engulfed good governance and discipline in the country.

The current extent of corruption, its dimension and magnitude, have influenced the Commission to attach the highest priority to prevent corruption by educating people through mass awareness building programmes, so that they learn to resist the corrupt at their respective levels.

Section 17(g) and (k) of the Act direct the Commission to "promote the values of honesty and integrity in order to prevent corruption, and take measures to build up mass awareness against corruption" and "perform any other work considered necessary for the prevention of corruption." In order to put the law into action, the ACC has formed prevention committees at the grassroot level in every district and *upazila* of the country. From its headquarter in Dhaka, 6 divisional and 22 integrated district offices, the ACC has formed a committee known as "Corruption Prevention Committee." In 2011, the ACC spent considerable time in the reconstitution of District Corruption Prevention Committee consisting of 13 members and *upazila* committee of 9 members respectively to institutionalise movement against corruption throughout the country. All such committees were directed to include one-fifth female members preferably.

There are 420 such committees at *thana* level (out of 484 total *thanas*) all over the country. In selecting the members of the committee the major criteria

were that they must be honest, locally reputed and respected, ideologically non-political and without any criminal record. The members were properly trained and equipped in understanding the forms of corruption and skills to mobilise opinion against corruption in their respective areas.

The youth possess the power to challenge corruption. Their active participation and awareness can substantially help reduce corruption and subsequently eradicate it from the society. To achieve that goal, "integrity units" (satata sangha) have been formed at the secondary schools (from class VI to X) to ensure active involvement of the youth. These units work as associated bodies of the Corruption Prevention Committee to create awareness among the young generation and thus promote public

and radio to observe the week.

The Commission observed the International Anti-Corruption Day on December 9, 2011. Rallies were held in the morning and human chains were formed to mark the day both in the capital and across the country.

One of the most effective ways to prevent corruption is to inculcate sense of ethics among the people. In this regard the traditional religious institutions of the society have a leading role to play. Therefore, the Commission brought out a book of religious sermons in April 2011 titled *Dire Consequence of Corruption* for the imams and religious leaders. The booklet contains religious sermons for Friday congregational prayer and consists of statements from the Holy Quran and Hadith that condemn corruption. The

booklets were distributed in mosques and other religious institutions in the country through the integrated district offices and Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh.

In February 2011, a postage stamp was uncovered at the ACC Headquarter that used different anti-corruption slogans.

In addition to mobilisation of people and publication of materials, the ACC undertook some promotional activities as well. It placed advertisements against corruption in the leading national dailies. With the help of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), mobile phone users were sent text messages to refrain from corruption.

A number of billboards sponsored by commercial banks have been placed at a few strategic locations of Dhaka and other major cities to accelerate the fight against corruption. The posters read: "Say no to corruption," "both the bribe-giver and receiver will be burnt in the hell fire," and "prevent corruption to save the country."

Anti-corruption posters were put up in all police stations with the belief that police would inform the citizens of their rights, as well as remind their own officers that they were obliged to render the best service to the citizens and serve the nation better.

Corruption is the biggest impediment to establishment of good governance and effective public order management. Corruption control is the most urgent and imperative task to be accomplished in Bangladesh.

ACC is pledge-bound to communicate to people the evils of corruption and make them aware of its negative impact on and consequences for the people and the country. According to this spirit, ACC has also drawn various programmes on prevention and awareness building to be implemented in 2012.

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awareness to resist corruption in educational, religious and training institutions. In total 11,740 integrity units were formed in 2011.

Steps are taken to infuse enthusiasm among the members of the Integrity Unit (IU). All IU's were provided with the anti-corruption theme song CD, which would play an inspirational role and encourage the students to generate prevention awareness.

Members of the integrity units have been provided with learning materials like rulers inscribed with "honesty is the best policy" and "we shall not involve in corruption, neither tolerate it nor accept it." The ACC distributed 35,000 such rulers among the members of integrity units last year. With the assistance of the prevention committee, it has organised seminars, discussions, dramas, debates and essay competitions participated by students in different districts and towns.

The Commission declared March 26 to April 1 as Anti-Corruption Week to be observed in Bangladesh every year. "Fighting together, we shall build a corruption-free Bangladesh" is the theme for the week. The week was observed with festivity for the first time in 2011.

A week-long exhibition of cartoons and posters was organised by ACC in Dhaka. Subsequently, a human chain and rally was organised and a workshop on "Working together in Preventing Corruption" was held on March 31, 2011, which was participated by government officials, members of civil society and media personnel. Various programmes were broadcasted in electronic media

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Autistic children: Gifts of God

SHEGUFTA YASMIN

THE fifth annual World Autism Awareness Day was observed on April 2, 2012. Every year, autism organisations around the world celebrate the day with awareness-raising events. Autism is a life-long developmental disability that manifests itself during the first three years of life. The rate of autism in all regions of the world is high and it has a tremendous impact on children, their families, communities and societies.

"Autism is not limited to a single region or a country; it is a worldwide challenge that requires global action," said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Throughout its history, the United

Nations family has promoted the rights and well-being of the disabled, including children with developmental disabilities.

In 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force, reaffirming the fundamental principle of universal human rights for all.

The United Nations General Assembly

unanimously declared April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day to highlight the

need to help improve the lives of children and adults who suffer from the disorder so they can lead full and meaningful lives. Autism can bring significant economic hardships to families, given the lack of health resources often found in developing countries. The

stigmatisation and discrimination associated with these illnesses also remain substantial obstacles to diagnosis and treatment. The absence of autism spectrum disorders and other mental disorders among children from lists of the leading causes of death has contributed to their long-term neglect by both public

policy-makers in developing countries, as well as donors.

Autism is a developmental disability that remains with a person for his or her whole life. This condition affects the brain's functions. The first signs usually appear before a child is three years old. People with autism often find social interaction difficult, have problems with verbal and non-verbal communication; demonstrate restrictive and repetitive behavior; have a limited set of interests and activities.

Autism affects girls and boys of all races and in all

geographic regions and has a large impact on children, their families, communities and societies. The prevalence is currently rising in many countries around the world. Caring for and educating children and young people with this condition places challenges on health care, education and training programmes. The government is going to count the number of autistic children in Bangladesh, Social Welfare Minister Enamul Haque Mostafa Shaheed said.

A two-day international conference on "Autism spectrum disorders and developmental disabilities in Bangladesh and South Asia" was held in Dhaka on July 25-26, 2011 to raise awareness on the neuro-

diagnosis of autistic children. Due to lack of understanding of autism, people are negligent about treating autistic children until it is too late. Bangladesh needs to train community healthcare providers on how to understand signs and symptoms of autism. Many parents don't want to face the reality that their children are autistic. They often feel shame to disclose it to others in the early stages. But this does harm to the affected children. They feel uneasy about bringing their autistic children to social gatherings, thinking that it might be disturbing for others. Relatives and family members should show respect to the suffering of such parents.

In Bangladesh, treatment and schooling for autistic

children are expensive, which is a burden for a family that has to take care of other children. If our government can take initiatives for a cost-effective programme for autistic children, thousands of families will be grateful.

Sometimes autistic girls are in more vulnerable situation than boys. We find that they are often physically abused.

Nothing is going to happen overnight.

These children may improve and live a close to normal life if appropriate intervention and proper training are imparted in time. Though we have many organisations in Bangladesh working with various fields of disability, there is hardly any quality institute developed exclusively for the autistic children.

The problem further is aggravated with the unavailability of centres to train trainers or teachers to work with autistic children. Similarly, there is no facility available for the training or motivation of parents or caregivers of autistic children.

Parents, relatives and teachers of autistic children should be more patient in raising such special child. We have to develop a strong programme through government and NGO collaboration to ensure a useful methodology to help these autistic children and their families.

If they are properly trained, they can substantially contribute, instead of becoming a burden, to others. They are gifts of God.

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War crimes trial

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MARCH 25, 2010, was a dawn of hope when the government formed the International Crimes Tribunal, an investigation agency and prosecution panel to try and punish those who committed crimes against humanity during the country's liberation war in 1971.

Two years on, hope for a successful completion of the trial is up against some uncertainty owing to various reasons.

Trial of any of the single cases has neither been completed nor reached a stage near to disposal till date. Charges were framed only against one war crimes suspect and hearing was going on for framing the charges against some others detained on charges of war crimes. (This was the very brief status of cases till March 24, the day of the completion of two years of the beginning of the trial process.)

Weakness in investigation and prosecution has been blamed for the unwarranted slow pace in the trial process. Both the panels were on several occasions rebuked by the International Crimes Tribunal for various reasons, including their failure to properly discharge their functions.

In spite of such facts, the government unfortunately still remains indifferent to the growing demand for taking necessary measures to strengthen the investigation and prosecution panels by injecting new blood into the two bodies.

Therefore, the recent formation of a second International Crimes Tribunal to bring 7/8 more war crimes suspects to book and to expedite the trial could not dispel people's growing feelings of uncertainty over the way things have been moving ahead.

The fast developing political environment centering on the trial of war criminals moreover appears as another major threat to the successful completion of the trial. The way the ruling Awami League and the BNP have been taking positions on the war crimes trial issue in their partisan interests has led to many political analysts fearing that the situation may deteriorate in the coming days.

In its efforts to weaken the BNP-led opposition parties' agitation programs to realise their demands, including the crucial one relating to a restoration of the caretaker government system, the government and the ruling AL almost always keep portraying the agitation as an attempt to stop trial of the war criminals.

The BNP too keeps questioning the fairness of the trial process in a gesture of sympathy to its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami, whose top leaders have been detained and are facing war crimes charges.

The prevailing political situation has also led to a perception that the ruling AL might have opted for a strategy to seek people's verdict at the next parliamentary polls to retain power in order for the trial to be completed. It is certain that things will not go in that direction if the BNP-Jamaat-led four party alliance wins the 2014 parliamentary polls and forms the government.

It is true that the trial of war criminals would not have begun had the AL not formed the government following the parliamentary polls of December 29, 2009.

Successive governments since the August 15, 1975 bloody changeover have not merely refrained from holding a trial of the war criminals, they have in a planned manner also rehabilitated the war criminals in national politics.

Even the previous AL-led government (1996-2001) did not move to hold the trial.

The present AL-led government that took the historic step to hold the trial of war criminals in line with its polls pledge in the beginning could not, however, demonstrate its utmost sincerity in fulfilling its electoral commitment to the nation.

The Sheikh Hasina government took over a year after assuming office in January 6, 2009 to begin the process for the war crimes trial. It also made a blunder at the beginning by appointing Abdul Matin chief of the investigation agency. His appointment triggered widespread outcry and criticism for his alleged affiliation with

Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of the anti-liberation Jamaat-e-Islami. The government was relieved when Matin resigned on May 5, after over a month into his appointment.

Not only that, the government had also appointed two AL MPs as members of the prosecution panel, which also drew criticism, as the inclusion of ruling party men appeared as a threat to the fairness of the trial. Both MPs subsequently quit.

The AL-led government has already completed around 38 out of 60 months of its tenure. This means the remainder of its term is no more than 22 months. Shouldn't the government take all necessary steps right now to strengthen the investigation and prosecution panels to ensure that the process of justice runs its full, unfettered course in respect of the trial of the war criminals?

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