

Not everybody is corrupt

Such a position endorses the real corrupt

We must thank the finance minister for acknowledging the reality that it is the powerful that indulge in corruption, something that is known to all but acknowledged by few. However, we must respectfully take issue with him when he draws the broadest of brushes in painting the entire society as corrupt. And to blame everyone with the collective guilt—for the greed and lust of a few powerful and mighty—is being grossly unfair to the people.

We are sure the finance minister knows very well where the problem lies, and who all are involved in corruption. After all, societal corruption was neither responsible for the thousands of crores of irregular loans given by some public banks, nor for the grossly inflated cost of public constructions, be it roads or buildings.

If people have to cough up money to move even the smallest of files in government offices, or to get the most basic service from a government agency which it is bound to do, it is because they are compelled to do so to get service out of those to whom corruption has become a pathological proclivity. Certainly, corruption has no correlation to how well one is paid, for the position one holds.

He is also aware, we are sure, of the fact that the long-term impact of corruption varies from level to level—the negative impact of corruption at the level of decision and policymakers being the maximum. And that is where the focus should be on.

The issue of corruption is a matter of concern for all, and the prime minister has recently restated her call, this time to the deputy commissioners, to stave it off. Thus we would like to know as to what the finance minister, and indeed the administration, is doing to address the issue, because his statements seem to have presented us with a fait accompli, and something that the finance minister expects us to live with.

Wantonness of some ruling party cadres

Enough should be enough

We are waiting for the day when the actions of the ruling party appendages make the news for the right, rather than the wrong reasons as is frequently the case nowadays. The level of immorality that has now been reached, as was made evident by the most depraved actions of the Bogra town Sramik League convener Tufan Sarkar and his cohorts, demand the immediate attention of the party leaders before such deeds become the norm.

A major problem society faces today is simply the predictable results of turning a blind eye to the misdeeds of those affiliated with powerful quarters over the years, which includes the extreme perversion that such individuals and groups perpetrate with the belief that they can literally get away with just about anything.

That is the only thing that explains the impudence of Sarkar, who abducted a female student from her home, raped her and then asked his party cadres and a woman councillor to make sure everything was hushed up. Shockingly, all his affiliates obliged by picking up the female student and her mother, torturing them for four hours and shaving their heads without a shred of conscience or shame.

The fact that the police have arrested some of the culprits is a positive step towards ensuring justice and we hope that the law is allowed to run its course without any interference. However, it is high time for the ruling party leaders to address the dangerous reality that some of its party members have become a nuisance for society, a torment for the citizenry, and a danger to the party.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Minimising driver fatigue

The Daily Star reported that at least 311 people were killed and 862 were injured on highways during Eid journeys this year. The Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, in a briefing, mentioned poor road conditions, speeding, over-taking and unskilled drivers as the main reasons.

But they missed one crucial cause. Previously, a bus going from Dhaka to Panchagarh would start at 8:30 am and reach Panchagarh by 5 pm. Nowadays, the bus does not reach its destination before midnight due to poor road conditions and traffic congestion. The same driver starts the return journey at 7:30 am without proper rest. He dozes off while driving, causing accidents. Sometimes he asks an inexperienced helper to drive while he catches some sleep.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation has strict rules for minimum rest hours for cockpit and cabin crews. I would say bus and truck drivers have a much more difficult job, so the BRTA should make rules to ensure drivers' rest to minimise highway accidents.

SA Reza Hussain
Former Manager, British Airways

A laudable decision

Pakistan's decision to disqualify their PM is a historic example of a nation upholding order and justice. People of all quarters, regardless of their identity and political affiliation, have appreciated this rare decision of the top court.

Bangladesh's politicians react negatively if an apex court order goes against their will. But we should learn to respect the decisions of the Supreme Court. This culture of justice and equality has to be created by commoners and politicians alike.

Rashidul Hasan
Jagannath University Journalist Association

Innovation in Bangladesh

Nonexistent or flawed?



SHAFINAZ HOSAIN

INNOVATION has been the dominant catchword in the last few decades. It usually happens with the development of a totally novel idea, or around the alteration of existing ones, and is sometimes enough to disrupt the whole system. However, pursuing innovative ideas is about balancing opportunities against risks. There is always a chance that innovation might not work out but there are also ways to address that.

Taiwan, the tenth most innovative economy in the world, is also one of the world's biggest semiconductor suppliers. In the 1950s and 1960s, Taiwan was similar to Bangladesh in a lot of ways—dependent upon foreign aid for development. But that changed pretty quickly when Taiwan decided to pursue a strategy to build wealth through innovation.

The risk of an economic downturn was reduced with the privatisation of government organisations which made the system more efficient, and emphasis was put on education with a special focus on engineering and innovation. They also realised that being stagnant was never a choice as other countries would soon catch up and rival them with cheaper prices.

Bangladesh has yet to pursue a similar policy shift and remains stuck with a much smaller and sluggish economy. We lack understanding of what innovation means. Most of us consider it to be something in the line of a very sophisticated product that is unattainable. We do not think along the lines of a new market segment, value added services, or find a new way to an old business model. We simply do not want to cross boundaries.

This is partially because it is easier and cheaper to imitate. People innovate when they see that innovation will give them a competitive edge, and they will put in their resources only when they see that they will get a premium price for it.

Bangladesh with its 160 million people should have been a lucrative market for any investor. This sheer number of people represents a huge market, where people are interested in producing, buying and consuming innovative products. It calls for frugal, scalable, trustworthy and user-friendly innovation which clearly the manufacturers are unable to tap into.

Our market works best when we come together, when interactions between multiple stakeholders happen. Having a shorter innovation cycle, especially in agriculture, clearly requires multidimensional involvement from all the patrons in this effort. However, despite the advantages of a holistic approach, the firms still continue to shy away from interaction and we are left with a low level of innovation despite Bangladesh's huge human capital resources.

Where we are at the moment is not the worst place to be nor do we need any revolution to turn things around. What we need is to look at the challenges that stop us from moving forward and find a way out. We only need a



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few of the firms to move away from the old, traditional practices and think about ways that will eventually put enough pressure on their competitors and the overall market will evolve to be more innovative.

One of the challenges faced by the private sector is their inability to make a marketable product. The reason behind this weakness is a lack of understanding of customer preferences due to little or no market research. Also, they do not have internal systems to track sales trends, engage customers through hotline numbers or e-brochures, test new promotional tactics, etc.—which are crucial to develop a good understanding of the ever-changing customer needs.

The private sector often misunderstands the very concept of innovation, believing that for an innovation to be successful, it needs to be dramatically different from other products in the market. Whereas, innovation simply is the added feature(s) that make a product different. At this point, private-sector firms need to shift their focus to creating an environment that nurtures innovation. So, efforts are also required to bring about changes to the strategic, managerial and resource related issues.

The inefficient innovation cycle cannot only be explained by the inactive participation of private sector; government research bodies play a role in stifling innovation as well. Despite having an allocated fund, research bodies inadequately address the problem mainly due to a lack of communication with the private sector. The solutions that they come up with don't do much problem-solving for the customers as they do not coordinate with private

sector before conducting research on a new product. So, the final product is not appropriate for commercial sale and thus that one prototype never sees the light of the day.

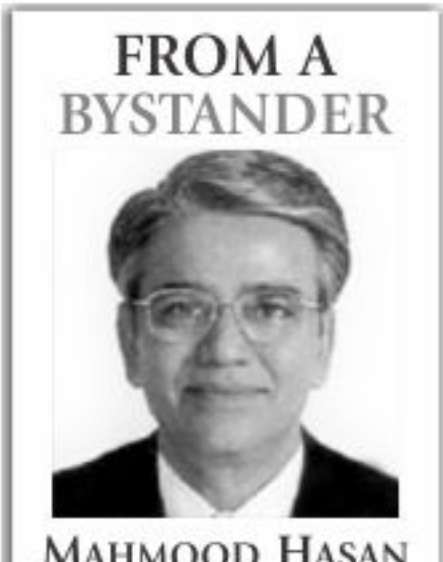
Some of our policies do not even support innovation; the heavy taxation on machinery components and spare parts import is one big challenge for agro machinery manufacturers. On the other hand, the duty on agro technology from India or China is much less; home-grown machineries thus cost way more than the imported ones. New companies do not want to enter the scene because of the difficulties of doing business in Bangladesh.

Academia also needs to come into the innovation cycle and work alongside the private sector in order to build trust among the target customers when it comes to local agro innovation. Instead of putting funds into their own research, the private sector can perhaps commit a bit of their time and money to the academia and counsel them on the market need. The academia in turn can take in as much market information as possible to come up with relevant technology.

With the academia, public and private sectors working together, the task of attaining a shorter innovation cycle will be much easier. For this to happen, communication needs to be given the highest emphasis at this point. When it comes to making a technology work, communication is the key for business success.

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Panamagate takes Nawaz Sharif down



MAHMOOD HASAN

FROM A BYSTANDER

PAKISTAN Supreme Court ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from office on July 28, 2017. This is not the first time the court threw a sitting prime minister out of office. In 2012 Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani met a similar fate. Besides, Pakistan's presidents have on several occasions in the past dismissed incumbent prime ministers.

Interestingly, since independence none of the 18 civilian prime ministers of Pakistan has been able to complete full term.

Nawaz's detractors have been celebrating the court verdict. But is it really a triumph for the people of Pakistan? There are completely opposing viewpoints with some calling it independent judiciary in a democracy while others trashing judicial activism describing it as the death knell of democracy.

It was a sad day for the powerful Nawaz Sharif and

businesses are registered, away from the eyes of law enforcers, e.g. British Virgin Islands, Panama, Bahamas, Seychelles, etc. The ICIJ revealed 11.5 million secret documents from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca containing confidential attorney-client information of several thousand offshore entities. The documents showed how Mossack Fonseca clients were able to launder money, dodge sanctions, and avoid taxes. Eight offshore companies were reported to have links with the Sharif family.

Panama Papers revealed that Sharif's three children owned offshore companies and assets, which were used to acquire luxury apartments in London. Sharif did not declare income from these companies. Allegations of corruption have been haunting the Sharif family since 1993. Sharif's sons and daughter vehemently denied the allegations saying the leaks were a "distortion of information." Two days after the revelations Sharif announced that he was ready to form a judicial commission to probe his family's finances. He, however, did not form any commission.



A man reads a newspaper with news about the disqualification of Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by the Supreme Court, at a news stand in Peshawar, Pakistan, July 29, 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FAYAZ AZIZ

his family. Pakistan Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from office over undisclosed assets held outside Pakistan by his scions. The court also ordered criminal probe as the family could not account for its vast wealth.

It all began on April 3, 2016, when the infamous "Panama Papers" were leaked to the press. The papers were brought to light by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). To recall, there are some tax havens around the world where thousands of shady offshore companies dealing with murky

Imran Khan's Tehreek-i-insaf (PTI) has doggedly led the Sharif-ouster campaign from the forefront organising street agitations and attempts to blockade the capital. After PTI's repeated pleas to the Supreme Court, the chief justice finally agreed in November 2016 to hear the case of allegations of Sharif's financial impropriety.

On February 23, 2017 the court concluded the hearing without passing any judgment. On April 20, 2017 the Supreme Court ordered formation of a six-man Joint Investigation Team (JIT) to probe whether

Sharif and his family members had amassed wealth beyond their known sources of income. The JIT formed on May 5, 2017 was to complete the investigation and submit the final report to the special bench of the court within 60 days. The JIT included members from ISI, Military Intelligence (MI), National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), and State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). On July 10, JIT submitted a 275-page report to the Supreme Court. The court then resumed hearing on July 17. Finally, after lots of drama, the court on July 28 came up with a verdict disqualifying Nawaz Sharif from holding public office. The court also ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan to de-notify Nawaz Sharif from his National Assembly seat.

Parliament is unlikely to be dissolved as the next election is scheduled for 2018. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, who held the portfolio of Petroleum and Natural Resources, has been made interim prime minister for the next 45 days. Abbasi shall have no difficulty in getting the vote of confidence as Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) has 209 seats in the 342-seat Parliament. Sharif actually wants his younger brother Shahbaz Sharif to succeed him. But Shahbaz, who is currently Chief Minister of Punjab, has to become member of parliament before he can become prime minister.

However, it would be naïve to politically write off Nawaz Sharif after this episode. He has been a political phoenix—every time rising from oblivion. He first became prime minister in 1990, but was dismissed by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan clearing the way for the then opposition leader Benazir Bhutto to become prime minister. Then when he became prime minister for the second time in 1997, his tenure was cut short by General Pervez Musharraf's bloodless coup in 1999. After spending seven years in exile in Saudi Arabia he returned to Lahore in November 2007. Sorting out the embargoes imposed by the court, Sharif again became prime minister for the third time in June 2013. This tenure also met a similar fate.

Many believe that the powerful military was behind Sharif's ouster. However, the military is unlikely to take over as it enjoys immense powers from behind the democratic façade, controlling nuclear-armed Pakistan's foreign policy and above all Pakistan's relations with arch-rival India and Afghanistan. Nawaz Sharif was perceived to be willing to slowly normalise relations with Delhi, but because of ISI he could not move ahead. To that extent Delhi will be watching closely how the situation develops in Islamabad.

Sharif's ouster is seen by many as a moral victory for Imran Khan's relentless campaign against corruption. "Pakistan has won today," Khan said while congratulating the nation and thanking the Supreme Court. With PML(N) on the back foot a new political realignment will now be getting underway for the next election in 2018. Whether Imran Khan can cash in on Sharif's predicament will be clear in the next election.

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