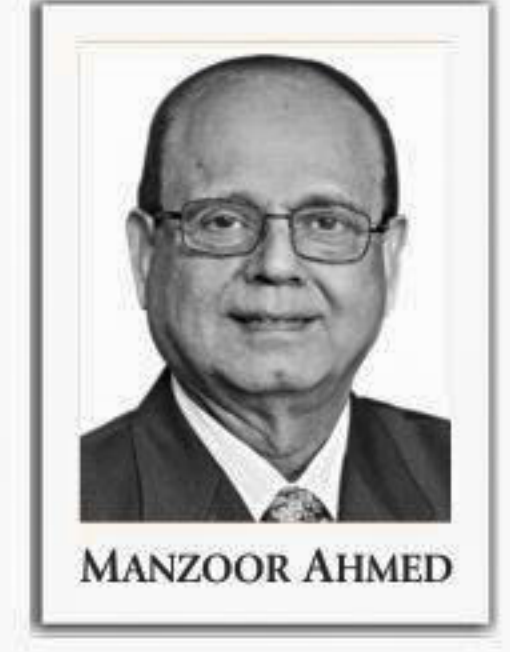


CPI 2018: Zero tolerance to criticism is not the answer



MANZOOR AHMED

FIRST launched in 1995, by the Berlin-based organisation Transparency International (TI), the annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has put the issue of corruption on the global agenda. The TI has recently released its 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index, which drew defensive reaction from the head of Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission and the minister of information, which sounded more like zero tolerance to any criticism of the state of governance in Bangladesh than a reaffirmation of the zero-tolerance policy against corruption announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

However, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud claimed that the TI report was "motivated and faulty." He said, "The method the TIB [Transparency International's Bangladesh chapter] followed in preparing the graft index was faulty... If there's any specific allegation... TIB [should] inform the government and the Anti-Corruption Commission." He also said, "When Bangladesh is being praised globally and by the World Bank for curbing corruption, the TIB has published a faulty report to defame the country's people." (*The Daily Star*, January 31).

TI report on graft will not be accepted unless the causes of rising corruption in Bangladesh are addressed. (*The Daily Star*, January 29).

A problem, but not a justification of the official reaction, may be the media attention focused on the league table of countries in the TI report and relative position of a country compared to others on different aspects of corruption. This is known as a "naming and shaming" strategy to raise public awareness and prompt policy action.

The scores on CPI represent measures of perception based on sample opinion surveys in countries on different indicators. On the score card, Bangladesh's position has slipped somewhat compared to the previous year.

Bangladesh was in the lowest position for several years during 2001-2005 and has moved up somewhat since then, which is good news. But it has remained stuck in recent years just above the bottom quartile of countries.

Incidentally, with a score of 71, the US lost four points over 2017 and dropped out of the top 20 nations for the first time since 2011.

"A four-point drop in the CPI score is a red flag and comes at a time when the US is experiencing threats to its system of checks and balance, as well as an erosion of ethical norms at the highest levels of power," the TI noted.

Most significantly, the TI pointed to a firm link between corruption and the health of democracy from its cross-

A despicable injustice Rape victim, not the perpetrator, jailed

A recent report by Prothom Alo describing how a raped woman in Sitakunda was framed in a false case of Yaba possession by unscrupulous police officials should shock even the most insensate mind.

On August 29, the husband of the victim took her to a local police station and filed a complaint alleging that she was being threatened by his sons from another marriage with framing her in Yaba cases. The police didn't investigate their allegations. Instead, their worst fears came true the next day.

She was first raped by her husband's sons from the previous marriage, who were aided by her former husband. She was then abducted and taken to a secluded place far from her house. Then, having colluded with her abductors, a group of police officials arrived at the scene to arrest her on the charge of possessing Yaba pills, which were kept there by her abductors. The most senior officer then forced one of her female sub-ordinates to file a case against the victim. She had to stay three months behind bars.

The surreal details of the case emerged only after the court asked two different investigative branches of the police to investigate the case upon receiving a complaint from the victim's husband.

There are a number of takeaways from the case. It shows how the drug cases can be exploited. This case also calls for an increased accountability of police officials who work on the ground. The police's internal investigation departments should be empowered and given more resources to investigate allegations against its own officials.

The extent of injustice caused to the woman is unfathomable. It is unthinkable that those very people in uniform who were supposed to bring the victim's rapists to justice conspired with them and implicated her in another case. We wonder whether these officials deserve to wear uniform and claim to be protector of the people.

DNCC's plan to renovate playgrounds commendable Reclaim the lost ones too

THE Dhaka North City Corporation's plan to refurbish 26 parks and playgrounds in its jurisdiction and include different facilities for children as well as the general public therein is praiseworthy. The city woefully lacks open spaces where people of all ages can go and spend some quality time. The few that are there have either become derelict and unfit for use or are under illegal control of local musclemen, becoming virtually out of bounds for the public and, in some cases, a den of dubious activities. What is very admirable is that the corporation is taking into account the suggestions of the local people, including the young, while constructing the facilities.

The same goes for the gradual reduction in the number of playgrounds. Many of the existing ones are either being used to park trucks and buses or have been taken over for construction of markets or building flats. That has deprived the younger lot of the scope for outdoor activity which was a favourite after-school-hours pastime not many years ago. It is not for nothing that the younger generation of today get drawn to other activities, including addiction to drugs and computers, that ultimately brings harm to many of them.

Thus, alongside redoing the existing facilities, the city corporation should also undertake plans to free the parks and playgrounds that are under illegal occupation and also create more such facilities, particularly playgrounds, given that most schools do not have facilities for outdoor activities within their premises.

We feel the Dhaka South City Corporation should also take up similar ventures, since the situation there is even worse. Our earnest call to the authorities would be to ensure that these facilities are maintained regularly and that they remain outside the clutch of the local *mastuans* and are not used for fairs or as cattle markets as we see happen presently.

The TI's ranking of 180 countries and territories by the perceived levels of public-sector corruption is based on up to 13 independent data sources or opinion surveys of experts and businesspeople in the surveyed countries. The index uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 indicates highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

No country is free of corruption with a perfect score. More than two-thirds of the countries scored below 50 on the latest CPI, with an average score of 43. Bangladesh's score is 26, two notches below its 2017 score.

Zero tolerance of corruption is an election pledge of the recently elected ruling regime. Responding to the question "When will Bangladesh be free from corruption?"—posed by a young man in a public dialogue before the election—Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had said, "It's one of my targets... a 'zero tolerance' policy against corruption will be implemented." While visiting the home ministry at the secretariat on January 20, the prime minister urged officials to work to uproot corruption, drug and militancy. "Corruption, drug and militancy gripped the whole society like deadly diseases as the military dictators ruled the country for a long time," she said, adding that militancy should be under control and corruption must be stamped out. (*The Daily Star*, January 21)

There is no room for disagreement with the TI's position that "corruption corrodes the social fabric of society. It undermines people's trust in the political system, in its institutions and its leadership." The TI adds that the annual CPI reveals that "the continued failure of most countries to significantly control corruption is contributing to a crisis in democracy around the world... the data shows that despite some progress, most countries are failing to make serious



SOURCE: WWW.UNITEDVOICE.COM

affiliate TIB. The methodology of surveys of perceptions that was followed has been explained in the report and is well-known in social science research, including its value and limitations.

It is not the job of the TI or TIB to inform the government or the Anti-Corruption Commission about specific incidences of corruption. Bangladesh has been praised internationally for its development performance, not for "curbing corruption." It is beyond logic why the TI or TIB would publish a report to "defame the country's people."

It was surprising and disappointing that the head of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Iqbal Mahmud, also responded defensively, calling the report sweeping and unacceptable. He said the

These numbers reflect a degree of subjectivity and statistical margins of error, difficult to calculate reliably when a composite index is constructed by adding up the results of a number of various sample surveys.

The scores and the relative position of countries are meaningful as a rough indication rather than a precise number. It is meaningful and disturbing that Bangladesh stands towards the low end of the ranking among the 180 countries (149th); and the same among the seven South Asian countries (last but one) and the 31 Asia-Pacific countries (last but four). It is the pattern, rather than a few notches up or down from the previous year, that is significant.

The pattern also shows that

analysis of the corruption data and global democracy survey data.

Delia Ferreira Rubio, the head of the TI, observed, "Corruption is much more likely to flourish where democratic foundations are weak and, as we have seen in many countries, where undemocratic and populist politicians can use it to their advantage."

If we expect to move up further on the index of perceptions of corruption or reduce real incidence of corruption and help implement the zero-tolerance pledge of the prime minister, a stance of defensiveness and denial will not get us there.

Manzoor Ahmed is Professor Emeritus at BRAC University.

Conserve haor to combat climate change impacts



SHEKH FARID

EACH year, the second day of February is commemorated worldwide as the World Wetlands Day, marking the day when the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International

of climate change and increased risk of disaster, conservation of the wetlands is no less important for us than achieving the goals of Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

But, alarmingly, the wetlands of Bangladesh are also at risk of disappearing as the ecology of our wetlands is under constant threat. They are also severely impacted by climate change and global warming. The Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP) 2100 identified the haor region as vulnerable to climate change impacts. Flash flood hits the region almost every two or three years and damages its Boro crops—the only means of livelihood for

aquatic plants, and the water-retaining capacity of the haor region have all been affected significantly, while the occurrence of sudden floods, storm, drought and human viral diseases increased extensively.

The wetlands-based ecosystem is also being affected by pesticides used in paddy fields, over-exploitation of fish resources, increased settlement in the areas, and lack of awareness among the local people of the preservation and conservation of haor resources.

However, climate is not the only issue for them. Since their livelihoods are

importance of the preservation and sensible use of the haor bodies.

Since the livelihoods of people living in these haor areas are vulnerable to, and affected by, the climate change impacts, climate adaptive livelihood options are also required. Under no circumstances should we alter the natural ecosystem of the areas. Livelihood diversification and creation of alternative livelihood options may reduce the pressure on haor resources. These wetlands should not be drained, for when burned or drained, the most effective carbon sinks may turn into carbon sources.

Another issue important for the haor community is data shortage. All available data, except the data available in the Master Plan of Haor Area, from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), provide district-wise information that do not necessarily reflect the situation of the haor community. For instance, a number of haors are located in Sylhet district, but the poverty rate for the district does not reveal the exact rate of poverty for haor dwellers. The BBS can undertake a new project to regularly collect and publish data related only to haor areas that will also help the government monitor the progress of the master plan. The data should include all relevant issues—climate, environmental, economic and social.

We all should work together to restore and protect the amazing ecosystem of our haors/wetlands and thus brace for the climate change impacts. To that end, effective and enhanced partnership among the key stakeholders is needed. The government, affected individuals and communities, and development organisations have a stake in this regard. We should keep in mind that if our development takes precedence over haor ecology, the environmental effects are bound to be devastating. On the other hand, leaving the hard-to-reach community behind in terms of development can never bring the optimum result. Our commitment to protecting our haor together with ensuring the holistic development of the haor community can bring a sustainable solution to the problem.



Fishing in the haor.

PHOTO: BALARAM MAHALDER/FICKR

most of the people living there.

A recent study published in Theoretical and Applied Climatology journal projected that there is a possibility of rise in the amount of total rainfall and frequent occurrence of flash floods with high volumes around the haor basin of Bangladesh. While conducting the study, researchers analysed various aspects of future rainfall projection and temperature extremes. Another study published in Global Social Welfare journal also observed that fish availability, fish diversity, presence of migratory birds,

frequently disrupted by natural hazards and the majority of areas are out of road network, they suffer from abject poverty. The region performs poorly in all social indicators—ranging from education and health to sanitation and hygiene. Given the context, any development effort meant for these people should focus on their holistic development, from economic to social to environment. Development projects should take the ecosystem, environmental issues and special requirements of the region into account. The local community should also be made aware of the

Shekh Farid is Statistical Officer at Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). Email: fariddu100@gmail.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Myanmar must implement Annan Commission recommendations

The Kofi Annan Commission, led by the late former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, was created by Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in 2016, to devise long-term solutions to the ethnic and religious divisions in the state of Rakhine. However, surprisingly, the very government of Suu Kyi is ignoring and discrediting the recommendations made by the commission.

It's very curious that a day after the panel issued its report in August 2017, Myanmar authorities suddenly claimed that Rohingya insurgents attacked their security posts. In the name of controlling the situation, the authorities launched a military crackdown, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Rohingya people and displacement of hundreds of thousands. Rights groups are in consensus that the campaign was a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" with genocidal intent.

In the days that followed, as the situation worsened, the recommendations made by the commission became almost irrelevant. If, instead of launching the brutal crackdown, the government of Myanmar had paid heed to the recommendations, the situation would have been completely different.

We still hope that Myanmar's authorities will come to their senses and redeem themselves by taking back the Rohingya refugees with all their rights guaranteed.

Mobarak Ali, Gopibagh, Dhaka

CORRIGENDUM
On February 2, 2019, the letter published under the "Letters to the Editor" section on Page 6 was erroneously titled "Killing rape victims unlawfully is not justice." The title should have read "Killing rape suspects unlawfully is not justice." We regret the error.