

## CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2020

## A disappointing performance once again

The political processes in Bangladesh must be insulated from the influences of money and criminality



ON January 28, 2021, Transparency International released its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2020. In the index, Bangladesh has scored 26 out of 100, the same as in 2019.

Counting from the bottom, Bangladesh has been ranked 12th, two steps lower than the 14th in 2019. The ranking counted from the top remains the same as in 2019—at 146th out of 180 countries included in the index. The result is disappointing as not only have we failed to improve our score, but we have also been placed two steps lower when counted from below compared to 2019. Moreover, we have once again been ranked the second lowest in South Asia, better than only Afghanistan. We remain the 4th lowest among 31 countries of the Asia-Pacific region, and our score continues to be well below the global average of 43.

No country has scored the full marks, however, so no one is free from corruption. As many as 131 countries (73 percent) have scored below 50, and 105 countries (58 percent) have scored less than the global average. Compared to 2019, scores have declined in 48 (27 percent) countries, increased in 62 (34 percent), and remained the same in 70 (39 percent) including Bangladesh.

Denmark and New Zealand have jointly topped the list having scored 88, while other countries leading the list with more than 70 percent score are Finland (85), Singapore (85), Sweden (85), Switzerland (85), Norway (84), Netherlands (82), Germany (80), Luxembourg (80), Australia (77), Canada (77), UK (77), Hong Kong (77), Austria (76), Belgium (76), Iceland (75), Estonia (75), Japan (74), Ireland (72), UAE (71), and Uruguay (71).

Notable poor performers among the so-called developed countries are France (69), USA

(67), Russia (42) and China (32). Somalia and South Sudan are jointly at the very bottom with a score of 12. Other lowest performers ranked nearest to the bottom are war-torn or failed states like Syria, Yemen, Venezuela, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, North Korea, Haiti, DR Congo and Turkmenistan.

Among South Asian countries, Bhutan continues to be the best performer with a score of 68, ranked 24th from the top. The Maldives has done amazingly well, having scored 43 and been placed at 75, a record gain of 24 points and 55 steps higher placement compared to 2019. This has been attributed to a very high rating in terms of democratic progression, especially some unprecedented legal reforms introduced to promote freedom of speech, right to dissension and association and access to information.

Overcoming the agonies of being the lowest scorer for five successive years during 2001-2005, Bangladesh has somewhat improved in recent years, although the score remains stagnant in the 20s. In view of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's pledge of zero tolerance against corruption pronounced repeatedly during the period covered by the surveys contributing to this year's index (September 2018-October 2020), and specifically reiterated in the context of the coronavirus, it was expected that Bangladesh would perform better. What has happened is just the opposite. Belying the pledge of the prime minister, corruption has rather flourished, particularly through 2020 when a section of unscrupulous people often linked with power have taken the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to abuse power and accumulate illegal money and wealth.

At the local level, apart from a section of public officials, the politically influential people including public representatives indulged in various forms of abuse of power in distribution of relief goods meant for the worst victims of the crisis. Even the cash support programme for the ultra-poor was not spared. At the higher level, the floodgate of collusive corruption was



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opened in procurements and supplies involving unscrupulous vendors together with a section of public officials and political players.

There were reports aplenty about major scandals involving swindling of public money in procurement in multiple sectors, not just health. Money laundering captured many headlines, with allegations of the involvement of the politically powerful including public representatives and public officials competing with business entities. Some public representatives even came out to be human traffickers.

What particularly contributes to non-delivery of the zero-tolerance pledge, and hence poor performance in CPI, is the ever intensifying linkages among politics, big money and corruption which have been taking an institutional shape, causing detachment of public interest from the decisions and actions of

the state.

The other dimension of the continued structural weakness is that the conventional processes as well as institutions of checks and balances and accountability in governance and statecraft have been converted into a monopolised territory of the ruling party. This continues to multiply the agents of corruption—beneficiaries, colluders, protectors and promoters of this illegality—many of whom are mandated to implement the pledge of zero tolerance. A striking example is the banking sector which has been bedevilled by loan default and all possible means of swindling public money. Policies and decisions often reflect the design of swindlers and defaulters, rather than the public interest.

Examples are rare where the corrupt, especially the big fish, are genuinely punished. The reality is that they indeed enjoy impunity

thanks to political, financial and governmental linkages, real or manipulated.

Without a paradigm shift in the present political culture, corruption cannot be controlled effectively, nor can our performance in CPI be expected to improve. Politics, political parties, political processes and positions must be insulated from the influence of money and criminality. One crucial gap in this regard is the absence of legal provisions to transparently and accountably manage conflict of interest and beneficial ownerships. Conflict-of-interest regulations can prevent abuse of entrusted power, while beneficial-ownership regulations can prevent tax evasion and money laundering.

Joining the international standards set up in 2014 to enable automatic exchange of bank information internationally could go a long way in promoting financial integrity, especially to prevent tax avoidance. Opportunities opened up by the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) have not yet been fully taken advantage of to prevent money laundering and facilitate repatriation of stolen assets.

The culture of impunity of the corrupt must be uprooted. The Anti-Corruption Commission must break out of the dividing line it seems to have drawn for itself which prevents it from going beyond the small fries and bringing to justice the big fish, irrespective of their identity, status and political or other linkages.

No less important is the need to promote a culture of tolerance for openness, disclosure and dissent which is key to public participation in the anti-corruption movement. It is the responsibility of the government to create the conducive environment for participation of the civil society, NGOs, media and citizens at large in this movement. As long as the government treats its critics as enemies instead of change agents to strengthen the scope of compliance and accountability, the space will continue to increase for the Frankenstein of corruption to gain power.

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## BIDEN PRESIDENCY

## Why another era of mainstream liberalism could be fatal

SARZAH YEASMIN

IN the words of Amanda Gorman, the youngest poet laureate to read at a presidential inauguration, America is “not broken but simply unfinished”. While we await this new administration of many firsts to finish putting America back together, turn the country around, bring the world back to normalcy with America's axiomatic leadership, bring back respect in politics, join accords and sign treaties, we also have to ask ourselves if we want to go back to the “good old days” of liberalism. President Joe Biden's ideology is the normal, old-school liberalism that created the conditions for demagogues like Donald Trump. Liberals invited Trump to their weddings, showered him with tax breaks, and for years refused to prosecute his tax fraud and other improprieties. This is the same liberalism that realised American greatness in the Trump hotels and towers that form the city skylines.

Trump is the physical manifestation of the struggle that lies within the crux of the American body politic. As he left office on January 20, he also left many progenies of new Trumps in the making. America's great institutions are not immune to acts of subversion, as many have been filled with Trumpians. The courts may have halted the nonsensical Trumpian mayhem of election fraud claims, but the court system, packed with Trump appointees, will make partisan decisions that would derail many progressive efforts in the years to come. Right before leaving office, the Trump administration filled the apolitical civil service with their political allies.

At the popular level, it may be only a matter of time before a Trump 2.0 rises to prominence. Populist rhetoric has been utilised by the Tea Party, then the Proud Boys, both in denial that America might refuse to vote for their preferred candidate. The result: an attempt to overthrow the United States government on January 6. The harrowing experience will be recorded as a dark day in history for many Americans, but as a day of national pride for many Trump supporters. This day was foreshadowed by the magnitude of polarisation that has become increasingly contentious and visible.

The Biden administration must go beyond fulfilling its promises—there must be more than healing and damage control if the United States is to avoid another catastrophe. Global observers of American politics have stakes in the electoral outcomes of the superpower, as it determines the geopolitical fate of the world. We must remember that Biden won by narrow margins in the battleground states, and close to 47 percent of the country voted for Trump. This may very well be the beginning of widespread white extremist mobilisation. The cancer has already spread. The insurgents who rattled the halls of the Capitol were protecting the sanctity of their version of democracy from unscrupulous politicians. In their perspective, people took power in their own hands through grassroots organising for a worthy cause—fighting for the soul of America. They lost faith in their party and the institutions of law and order.

They were heard, empowered and emboldened by their commander-in-chief in the White House. Trump's Twitter may have been shut down but the crowds willing to commit violence and put their lives on the line are revealing their insurmountable conviction. The movement is beyond one Twitter account. While right-leaning Fox News, the most watched news network in America, villainises Black Lives Matter

protesters as radical anti-fascists and humanises the insurgents, it is very important for us to stop dismissing and start understanding how fascist predispositions are standardised throughout the world. At any cost we cannot repeat the Trumpian dystopia of the past four years as the same brand of politics of fearmongering and pathology can be exported to the rest of the world and have devastating consequences. We have witnessed spikes in right-wing hate crimes, human rights violations and strengthening of nationalist parties across the globe, from Brazil to Germany to the Philippines. Covid-19 deaths are also shared disproportionately by countries with right-wing nationalist governments, a common symptom signifying the pitfalls of demagoguery.

When Donald Trump ran for office, his base was riled up against many things that is wrong with America—the forgotten White working

We may harbour some cautious optimism when it comes to domestic policies and economic relief. However, historically, Democrats have not had significant difference with the Republicans on foreign policy. The unanimous and effortless confirmation of Avril Haines, who approved drones to be used against civilians under the Obama administration, as the Director of National Intelligence, could mean that Biden's approach to foreign policy will likely be similar to the militarism of Obama.

President Obama inherited injustices from mass incarceration to the mortgage crisis, but failed to sufficiently address them in a manner beneficial to working-class Americans, whether they be Black, White, Asian-American, Native American, or Latino. Eight years of a historic presidency might not have been enough in undoing the wrong that lies in the root of



'America is many countries in one, from the liberal college campuses of the northeast to the Rust and Bible Belts in the mid-west and the south of the country, each America with a different way of life.'

PHOTO: AFP

class in Appalachia, joblessness and deaths in rural America and inner cities, failing trade deals, unmet promises of Washington insiders. Trump was perceived as a viable alternative, and still is for many Americans, even if that means putting some communities under the bus. The disparate treatment of the insurgents at the Capitol speaks volumes about the ingrained racism in institutions of power. The real damage lies in the division where there is no scope for polarised and segregated echelons of the society to connect. America is many countries in one, from the liberal college campuses of the northeast to the Rust and Bible Belts in the mid-west and the south of the country, each America with a different way of life.

The liberalism of giving less to the little man produces sustained frustration in the public. Racism alone cannot explain the Trump phenomena. The deep schisms in the social fabric are visible in the widening rural-urban divide, wealth and income inequality, the impeded mobility of the working class, piling up bills from hospitals, crushing student loan debt, and the declining industrial cities of the Rust Belt. The Biden administration's temporary moratorium on problems may not be enough.

America's inception, but Obama's hope and change did not go beyond mere rhetoric. The result was rising economic inequality, racial injustices that have proven intransigent, and anger boiling over in the 2016 election.

Regardless of the great slew of executive orders signed by Biden in his first week in office, what is worrisome is that this administration may be a repetition of the failure of the past Democratic administrations. The consequences of taking the middle path may again materialise into a more serious firebrand who is more charismatic, more diplomatic and able to fill in the void in the Republican party left by Trump; as Trump said in his parting words, he will be back in “some form”. What will happen in 2024 is in the hands of Democrats. They have the House, the Senate, and the presidency. Constitutionally, they are able to pass the legislation they want, from Medicare for All to free college to a Green New Deal. If they fail to do so and refuse to protect working-class Americans from the depravities of contemporary capitalism, they will reap what they sow in the next election cycle.

The greatest hope for democracy and the cause of justice is the stronger presence of the political left in politics today than there was in

2016. Biden's victory would not have been possible without the grassroots efforts of the left that went above and beyond simply organising for Biden, an old-school establishment candidate who initially did not present anything exciting on the stage like Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren. With rising socialist politicians like Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, working-class Americans have leaders they can trust in Washington for the first time in decades. They rallied

support for Biden, who became one last desperate attempt to gasp for breath for a nation struggling to rise from the dead. Many people voted for this administration with the hope of survival. But we need to go beyond surviving if we want to stop another Trump from happening. We need to thrive.

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**বঙ্গবন্ধুর জন্মশতবার্ষিকী ও মুজিববর্ষ উপলক্ষ্যে বঙ্গবন্ধুর ওপর লিখিত দুইটি মৌলিক পাণ্ডুলিপি (১টি বাংলা ও ১টি ইংরেজি) আহবান**

উচ্চশিক্ষা ক্ষেত্রে জাতির পিতা বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমানের অনবদ্য অবদানকে চিরস্মরণীয় করে রাখতে বঙ্গবন্ধুর জন্মশতবার্ষিকী ও মুজিববর্ষ উপলক্ষ্যে বঙ্গবন্ধুর ওপর লিখিত দুইটি মৌলিক পাণ্ডুলিপি (১টি বাংলা ও ১টি ইংরেজি) প্রকাশের জন্য বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়সমূহের শিক্ষক ও অবসরপ্রাপ্ত শিক্ষকগণ এবং বিভিন্ন শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান ও গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠান/সংস্থার শিক্ষক/গবেষকগণের নিকট হতে নিম্নবর্ণিত শর্তসাপেক্ষে পাণ্ডুলিপি আহবান করা হচ্ছে।

**শর্তাবলি**

- জাতির পিতা বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমানের জীবন, সুদীর্ঘ সংগ্রাম, নেতৃত্ব ও আত্মত্যাগ, রাজনৈতিক দর্শন, রাষ্ট্র পরিচালনায় তাঁর নীতি ও আদর্শ এবং শিক্ষা ও সমাজ ভাবনাসহ সামগ্রিক বিষয়ের ওপর পাণ্ডুলিপি রচনা করতে হবে।
- নির্বাচিত লেখককে প্রকাশিত পুস্তকের জন্য এককালীন ৩,০০,০০০.০০ (তিন লক্ষ) টাকা সমানী প্রদান করা হবে।
- বাংলায় সর্বোচ্চ ১২ পয়েন্ট ও ইংরেজিতে সর্বোচ্চ ১০ পয়েন্ট কম্পিউটার কম্পোজ করে ০৪ (চার) কপি মূল পাণ্ডুলিপি এ৪ (A4) সাইজের কাগজে স্পাইরেট অথবা থোলা বাঁধাইপূর্বক লেখক কর্তৃক কমিশনে দাখিল করতে হবে।
- নির্বাচিত পাণ্ডুলিপির ক্ষেত্রে পাণ্ডুলিপি প্রণেতা কর্তৃক পাণ্ডুলিপি ১/১৬ ডবল ডিমা ই বা ১/৮ ডবল ডিমা/ক্রাউন সাইজে সিঙ্গেল লাইন স্পেসে ফরমেটিং করে পেনড্রাইভ/সিডি/ডিভিডিতে কমিশনের রিসার্চ সাপোর্ট এন্ড পাবলিকেশন ডিভিশনে দাখিল করতে হবে।
- লেখক কর্তৃক পাণ্ডুলিপির মৌলিকত্বের ঘোষণাপত্র আবেদনপত্রের সঙ্গে জমা দিতে হবে।
- বাংলা ও ইংরেজি উভয় ভাষায় পাণ্ডুলিপি প্রণয়ন করা যাবে। ইউজিসি মুজিববর্ষ প্রকাশনা নীতিমালা, ২০২০ অনুযায়ী প্রাপ্ত পাণ্ডুলিপি নির্বাচন করা হবে। তবে অন্য কোন প্রকাশক বা ব্যক্তি উদ্যোগে পূর্বে প্রকাশিত পুস্তক পুনঃমুদ্রণ বা পুনঃসংস্করণের জন্য গ্রহণ করা হবে না।
- পাণ্ডুলিপির বানান রীতিতে প্রমিত নিয়ম অনুসরণ করতে হবে ও বিশেষজ্ঞের মতামত নিয়ে পাণ্ডুলিপি মুদ্রণ ও প্রকাশনা প্রক্রিয়া গ্রহণ করা হবে।
- প্রাপ্ত পাণ্ডুলিপি ইউজিসি পুস্তক প্রকাশনা কমিটি কর্তৃক প্রাথমিকভাবে নির্বাচনের পর বিশেষজ্ঞ মতামতানুযায়ী যদি পাণ্ডুলিপির বিষয়গত ও ভাষাগত মানোন্নয়নের আবশ্যিকতা দেখা দেয়, সেক্ষেত্রে সংশ্লিষ্ট পাণ্ডুলিপি প্রণেতার সঙ্গে কমিশনের পক্ষ থেকে যোগাযোগ করা হবে।
- ইউজিসি প্রকাশনা কমিটি কর্তৃক প্রাথমিকভাবে নির্বাচিত পাণ্ডুলিপি সংশ্লিষ্ট বিশেষজ্ঞগণের দ্বারা মূল্যায়ন এবং আনুমানিক সম্পাদনার কাজ শেষ করে চূড়ান্ত পর্যায়ে পাণ্ডুলিপি পুস্তক আকারে প্রকাশের ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে।
- পাণ্ডুলিপি পুস্তক আকারে মুদ্রণ করার পূর্বে নন-জুডিসিয়াল স্ট্যায়েন্স লেখককে কমিশনের সঙ্গে 'সমঝোতা স্মারক' সম্পাদন করতে হবে।

উল্লিখিত শর্তের আলোকে কমিশনের মাধ্যমে বই প্রকাশ আহ্বায়ী লেখকগণকে আগামী ০৪ মার্চ ২০২১ তারিখের মধ্যে ৪ (চার) কপি পাণ্ডুলিপি আহবানপত্র কমিশনের রিসার্চ সাপোর্ট এন্ড পাবলিকেশন ডিভিশনের পরিচালক বরাবর জমা দেওয়ার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

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