



The Daily Star
CELEBRATING
33
years of
JOURNALISM WITHOUT
FEAR OR FAVOUR

READYING FOR THE NEXT BIG LEAP

SEGMENT 5

ANNIVERSARY SUPPLEMENTS 2024

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2024

FALGUN 15, 1430 BS

36

Corruption control: Can the righteous and benevolent exercise of monopolized power help?

FROM PAGE 34

Bangladesh remains the second lowest in South Asia, above only Afghanistan. We have the fourth lowest score among 31 Asia-Pacific countries, while our score is also lower than the average for the globally lowest-performing Sub-Saharan Africa region.

WHERE LIES THE KEY

Reasons for our poor performance in corruption control are not far to seek. Corruption – grand or petty – has rendered our institutions dysfunctional which has in turn prevented the rule of law, and granted impunity to the corrupt, especially the

The Government may consider commissioning an independent task force to develop a White Paper on a time-bound Anti-Corruption Action Plan. It can be constituted by an equal number of Government representatives and independent experts.

politically and governmentally connected. State institutions mandated to control corruption including the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) have been under political and bureaucratic influence. The Parliament, the apex accountability institution has been converted into the monopolized territory of the ruling party denying it the due role of holding the government to account and control corruption.

Other institutions of national integrity and accountable governance, especially law enforcement, administration, rule of law, and justice have also been subjected to partisan political influence. Policy



CARTOON: TTB

capture using lobby power, especially in the banking sector ravaged by loan default, financial fraud, and money laundering has flourished. Governance has become dependent on surveillance for targeted control and intimidation of media and civil society driven by intolerance of dissension, disclosure, and reporting on corruption.

THE RECIPE IN THE 2024 MANIFESTO

In this context, the recipe for corruption control as listed in the 2024 election manifesto of the ruling party, perhaps the most elaborate set of pledges so far against corruption in such a document, deserves particular attention. Pledging continuation of the zero-tolerance policy against corruption, the manifesto recognizes that "corruption stands as the primary impediment to the economic development, poverty alleviation, infrastructure improvement and moral advancement of the nation. It hinders the realization of overarching

developmental goals for the country. Combating corruption necessitates more than just law enforcement and punishment, it requires the establishment of a social movement." It also pledges to add education curriculum content addressing the evils of corruption and prevention measures to instill an anti-corruption attitude among students.

The ruling party commits that "strict measures will be implemented to eradicate illegal wealth acquisition, bribery and abuse of power, nepotism, muscle power violence, and racketeering". It further pledges that "transparency and accountability in project selection, cost determination, quality audit of completed projects, and government procurement and tender verification will be consistently ensured." It goes on to commit that the "use of information technology will be expanded across all areas including administration, the police department, courts, education, and healthcare,

to prevent corruption in the administration."

All these are like music to the ear of any Bangladeshi today. However, the only question is whether and to what extent these lofty promises will be translated into practice and what is the roadmap, or whether these will once again remain just a wish-list to gather dust.

IN BUILT NO BREACH OF THE SYSTEM

Countries that have consistently performed at the top levels in credible global corruption control assessments over the years include Singapore which is attributed to the arguably benevolent authoritarian rule of Lee Kuan Yew and his uncompromising practice of zero tolerance against breach of the system. That is not to say corruption does not exist in Singapore. High-profile politically connected people including Ministers in Singapore have been involved in corruption. In a recent such episode, on January 16, 2024, the powerful Transport Minister resigned after being charged with allegations of accepting gifts from a Malaysian billionaire for a business favor. Singapore's reputation as the least corrupt country is also tainted by the fact that like many of its peers of the least corrupt club, it remains one of the most attractive destinations of illicit financial transfers facilitated by syndicates of various 'professional experts'.

Although Singapore has lost five points in twelve years since 2012, in terms of CPI it continues to be among the top ranking countries in terms of corruption control. Many often attribute Singapore's success to one of the highest-paid public sector officials and politicians,

which is only part of the story. The most important factor is the built-in deterrence against corruption in the system. In 1986, soon after the Singapore Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) started an investigation in November for corruption against Teh Cheang Wan, incumbent Minister for National Development since 1979, he resigned and committed suicide, leaving a note that said, "I feel it is only right that I should pay the highest penalty for my mistake".

What Lee Kuan Yew said in a parliamentary speech a few weeks after the incident, is pertinent for any political leader, Leader of the House, and Head of the Government committed to corruption control, "there is no way a Minister can avoid investigations and a trial if there is evidence to support one. The purpose is not just to be righteous. The purpose is to create a system which will carry on because it has not been compromised... if I had compromised, that is the end of the system."

Delivering her opening speech at the first meeting of the Cabinet formed after the 12th national election, the Prime Minister stated that she would not tolerate any corruption, particularly in the public sector and public procurement, and stressed the need for financial discipline as well as transparency and accountability. One would expect the message to be not only to her Cabinet and public officials but also to every component of the power base of the Government. The extent to which corruption in Bangladesh will be effectively controlled consistent with these lofty pledges and pronouncements will depend on whether the

individual and collective lobby-power lobby power of the key actors in political and governance space will be exercised with some semblance of public interest instead of treating their respective positions of power as a license for private gain.

RIGHTEOUS AND BENEVOLENT EXERCISE OF THE MONOPOLIZED POWER?

Only a righteous and benevolent exercise of the monopolized authority in political and governance space can take us anywhere near any meaningful implementation of the anti-corruption election pledges of the government. To prevent more of the same, the Government may consider commissioning an independent task force to develop a White Paper on a time-bound Anti-Corruption Action Plan. It can be constituted by an equal number of Government representatives and independent experts.

The Prime Minister started her fifth overall and fourth successive tenure with much higher authority and power. She has made it incumbent upon herself to walk her talk, especially her declaration while launching the party manifesto 2024 that lessons will be taken from past mistakes to serve the public interest. The problem is that within her power base lie the perpetrators, protectors, and promoters of corruption. It remains to be seen if she can exercise the unrestricted and unaccountable authority that has no conventional institutional structures of checks and balances, with righteousness and benevolence putting public interest on top where no one will enjoy impunity irrespective of identity or status.



Welcome to the world of
NCC BANK CREDIT CARDS
Where you can experience fantastic
benefits & rewards!

SALIENT FEATURES & BENEFITS

- Zero annual fee on 12 transactions
- Complimentary access to Balaka and Priority Pass Lounge
- Complimentary Meet & Greet Service
- Up to BDT 40 lacs Insurance Facility
- Exclusive Loyalty Program
- Tailor-made EMI Programs
- Wide range of discounts & yearlong BoGo buffet at renowned restaurants
- Flexible and affordable fees & charges

16315
+8809612316315
for local & overseas call



NCC Bank
with you always

৩৩তম
প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকী
The Daily Star
প্রাণঢালা

অভিনন্দন

প্রবাসী পল্লী গ্রুপ
প্রবাসী ও স্বদেশীদের জন্যে

কর্পোরেট অফিস :
আহমেদ টাওয়ার (লেভেল-১২), ২৮ ও ৩০ কামাল আতাচুর্ক এভিনিউ, বনানী, ঢাকা-১২১৩.