

# Benazir's corruption: The crisis of accountability



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The year was 2018. On August 30, the results of Transparency International Bangladesh's (TIB) "Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2017" were released. According to the survey, the country's law enforcement agencies (LEAs) ranked in the highest position in terms of the experience of corruption by surveyed households. Of the households that received services from them, 72.5 percent were victims of different forms of corruption.

The Bangladesh Police Service Association (BPSA) rejected the TIB survey results in a statement issued on September 11, 2018. The statement, sent by the additional deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, also the office secretary of the Police Service Association, alleged that the TIB's survey report "identified the police as a corrupt institution based on preconceived notions." It was also claimed that, "In case of any unlawful behaviour of the police, proper legal action is taken after investigation."

The story of identifying the LEAs as the "most corrupt sector" in the TIB survey and subsequent rejection by the BPSA came to my mind in the wake of the recent allegations of massive corruption against former police and Rab chief Benazir Ahmed. Documents from the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) show that Benazir and his family bought at least 204.5 acres of land between 2009 and 2023. Of these, 112 acres

were purchased during his tenure as inspector general of police (IGP) and Rab chief.

Was Benazir Ahmed's purchase of such a vast amount of land while he was head of police and Rab consistent with the legitimate income he was earning? Is it not an illegal act to force people to sell land by intimidation? Where was the process of "legal action" claimed by the BPSA when Benazir was engaging in such unlawful behaviour day after day as a senior officer in the police force? Why was Benazir's corruption exposed only after his retirement, and not when he was in office?

Not only was no action taken against Benazir's massive corruption and abuse of power when he was in office, he was also being given one reward after another. This is not only an internal problem of the LEAs. The entire government, including the ministry of home affairs, is also responsible here.

The Public Security Division of the home ministry honoured him with the Integrity Award 2020-21. But ACC data shows that he and his family bought nearly 87.9 acres of land in 2020 and 2021. The Integrity Award is supposed to be given to someone who meets the standards of scrupulousness and honesty. Where were those standards when Benazir was given the award? Apart from the Integrity Award, Benazir was awarded the highest medal of the police force, Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM), a

total of five times between 2011 and 2019. With so many intelligence agencies in the country and so much surveillance, is it at all believable that the authorities, including the LEAs, were not aware of his illegal activities? How dysfunctional could a country's institutional system be that the person who was involved in massive corruption was rewarded

of farmland by intimidating the Hindu community in the Gopalganj Sadar Upazila, and Rajoir Upazila of Madaripur. Benazir engaged a police officer named Taimur Islam to buy the land. Taimur used to go to the land owners on Benazir's behalf and pressure them to sell the land at reduced prices, threatening them that they would lose the land anyway

abroad. To avoid these complications, Benazir had repeatedly renewed his passport as a private employee while still in service. At one point in 2016, as reported by *Daily Jugantor*, when the passport directorate objected to the renewal of Benazir's passport as a private employee while he was the director general of Rab, the directorate was forced to give the passport under pressure from the Rab headquarters.

Would it have been possible for a person to do these kinds of corruption and irregularities for years if he was not in important positions in LEAs and if the authorities had not promoted and awarded him? Then, on what grounds can the authorities now avoid responsibility for his misdeeds? The incident of Benazir Ahmed's irregularities, corruption and abuse of power demand special attention because it is not just a case of Benazir's irregularities as an individual, it is also a question of checks and balances of the power and accountability of Bangladesh Police and Rab as institutions.

Benazir's case clearly shows that it is possible for top police and Rab officials to abuse power for personal gains without any accountability. They can invest in land and businesses in violation of government service rules, use police force members for personal or family business, buy land at a low price by intimidating the vulnerable communities, and travel abroad with a fake identity. What is the guarantee that such blatant abuse of power and corruption are not still being practiced by some other powerful officials?

Even after media reports about Benazir's illegal wealth started to appear, there were allegations that the authorities were not proactive enough. The *Kalerkantho* report on Benazir Ahmed's illegal assets was published on March 31, the ACC decided to form a committee

to investigate his illegal assets on April 18, and following the ACC's application, the court ordered the seizure of his assets and bank accounts on May 23. But before that, Benazir withdrew money from the bank, sold many assets, and left the country with his family on May 4. There was no action from the ACC or any department of the government to prevent Benazir from going abroad while the investigation was going on. So, what is the guarantee that his departure abroad did not happen as part of his understanding with the authorities?

This question has arisen because during the consecutive tenures of the Awami League government, Benazir Ahmed held three of the most important positions in law enforcement. He was Commissioner of DMP from October 2010 to January 2015, Director General of Rab from January 2015 to April 2020, and IGP from April 2020 to September 2022. There are questions about how much of his behaviour in these positions was that of a professional law enforcement officer, and how much was of a ruling party politician. Besides, many "crossfires" and "gunfights" occurred during his tenure as the Rab and police chief, for which the responsibility rests on him as well as the government. Investigating Benazir Ahmed's corruption is not enough. The allegations of violations of human and democratic rights against him should also be investigated, and he should be brought back to the country and punished. It is also important to uncover who were the beneficiaries of Benazir's corruption and what irregularities were legitimised through them. The most important thing is that the crisis of accountability of various institutions of the government that was exposed through the Benazir incident is also addressed.



VISUAL: STAR

time and again, instead of being punished?

The government and law enforcement agencies claim that Benazir Ahmed's corruption is his personal responsibility, that no agency or ministry will take responsibility for him. The problem with this type of claim is that when Benazir was committing the crimes, he held important positions in the agencies concerned. Moreover, he used his administrative powers and even members of the agencies under his control for his personal benefit. For example, according to a report published in *The Daily Star*, during his tenure as IGP and Director General of Rab, Benazir Ahmed purchased over 600 bighas

without getting any compensation if they did not sell that to Benazir. Benazir also engaged several police and Rab officials to supervise the construction work of one of his resorts until he went into retirement in 2022. How pathetic is it that a man whose responsibility was to protect citizens has instead used his power against vulnerable populations for his own gains?

He used his official powers not only to grab land, but even to make passports as a private employee while still in service. Government officials cannot travel abroad without prior approval. Moreover, using an official passport creates various complications in case of investing and obtaining residence permit

## Is there a problem with the world of cricket?



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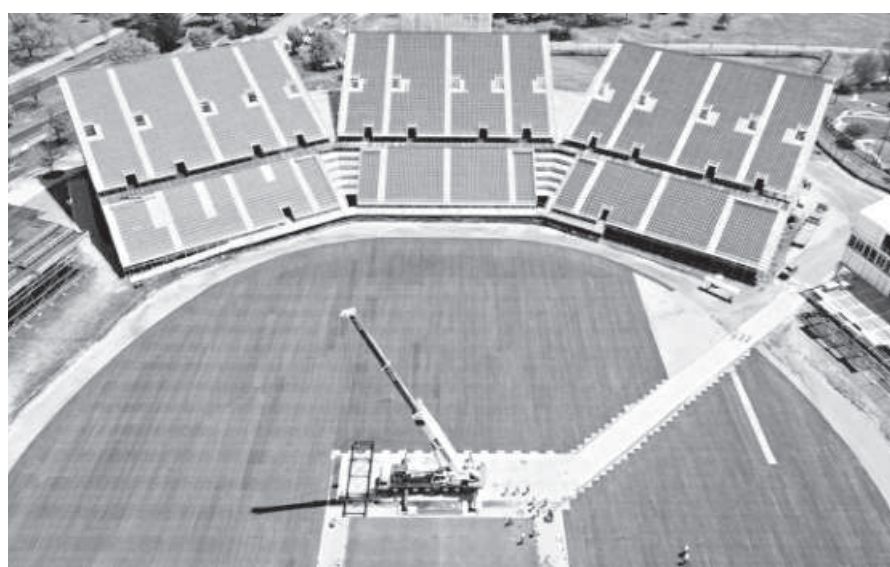
**MADIHA ATHAR KHAN**

A post on X (formerly known as Twitter) which gained popularity on other social media platforms as well reads, "If you want to promote cricket in the USA, then make India and Pakistan play a 5-match T20I series over there. Don't spoil the biggest cricketing event in the world for the heck of it." There are other posts about the low-scoring pitch in New York with many voicing the sentiment that these are not good enough to play T20 matches on.

The brand image of cricket as a sport has been shaped by the role played by batters. If you ask most cricket fans about their favourite matches or performances, chances are that they will name an unforgettable batting innings. Inadvertently perhaps, batters have assumed the roles of main characters in the team, bowlers the supporting characters, and the fielders have become silent extras. The advent of T20 cricket has only heightened this effect.

The Indian Premier League (IPL) has also set the tone for what to expect from T20 matches. People are accustomed to nearly every match being a 200-plus run stunner where the team batting second nearly achieves the target. There should be no trend set in a sport, to the extent that every match reads like a scripted performance. But when there is such a long tournament played in one country that has perfected its business model by securing eyeballs on every game, they are incentivised to create exactly that. This situation has prompted even the biggest names in the game like Virat Kohli to say that he does not want to see matches where the bowlers have no room to make an impact.

Just because the New York pitch—which has quite an interesting backstory of being constructed in Adelaide and then transported to New York—has failed to produce any of those high-scoring matches, people have been quick to criticise it. It begs the question: what actually is the true essence of cricket?



An aerial photo of the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium under construction in New York, USA, taken on May 1, 2024.

PHOTO: AFP

Have we become so used to only one style that we have lost the ability to appreciate cricket's many variations? The dialogue on social media makes it seem like cricket fans have solidified what they expect cricket to be and are only satisfied when those expectations are met. After all, T20 demands a short attention span and its promise has always been to deliver immediate gratification. This has also rendered Test cricket inadmissible in the race to remain relevant under modern entertainment conditions. But cricket fans with a bigger appetite for what cricket has to offer are well aware of what the 5-day format can yield: slow-burn thrillers, unpredictable pendulum swings, grit, determination, and the awe that displays of rigorous discipline can inspire. In the same vein, low-scoring T20 matches where bowlers dominate and the matches go down to the wire encapsulate much of the thrill that we may otherwise be missing out on.

All this is not to say that there isn't a

problem with cricket at the moment. But I don't think we are pointing our fingers in the right direction. Along with the quality of New York pitches, people have also raised issues with the inclusion of 20 teams in the T20 World Cup. Granted, this results in some matches where the quality of cricket from both sides is sorely unmatched but surely, we can all see the bigger picture here. If every year

is going to be saturated with multiple major cricket tournaments, we might as well invite a bigger pool of teams to partake in it. Cricket fans should rejoice at the prospect of the sport gaining wider popularity in other nations. An issue with cricket right now is the number of major tournaments taking place close to each other. This does not give the teams that need it, the time to reflect, course correct and implement changes. The ICC Men's ODI Cricket World Cup 2023 ended in November of last year. With only seven months in hand, the teams had to prepare for the T20 World Cup. If we take a look at a five-year period in the cricket cycle, year one would see an ODI World Cup, year two would have a T20 World Cup, year three might have less fanfare but it could feature an ICC Champions Trophy, and possibly an Asia Cup (which would include all the teams where cricket is the most popular), year four would see another T20 World Cup and then the

ODI World Cup in the fifth. What that has led to is a simple continuation of momentum (or lack thereof). The teams who have been doing well continue to do so, and the struggling teams see little to no change.

As Bangladeshi fans, we have been immersed in bitterness and disappointment at the state of our cricket team despite their access to proper resources. We outsiders don't have any role to play in making changes but what can help us is to gain some perspective. There are teams such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka who are arguably faring worse than us currently in international cricket. West Indies did not even qualify for the last ODI World Cup. All of these three teams are former World Champions and have regressed at a more appalling rate than us. This is not meant to be a consolation for the Bangladesh team but rather an evaluation of the overall state of cricket and the system in place that has allowed teams like India, Australia, and England to remain at the top, often at the cost of others.

Having said that, there is undeniably always room for uncertainty in cricket, especially in T20s. This is the format in which the quality of cricket matters less than how well you can take advantage of the shorter match time and create upsets. This is also an opportunity for smaller teams to make their mark, while teams like Pakistan, New Zealand, and England in this edition of the World Cup are either already eliminated or struggling to qualify for the next stage.

There are other teams like the Netherlands, Ireland, and the USA of late, who despite not being regarded as serious contenders of the game and not having access to the same cricket resources, display firepower and an intention to prove themselves that is really commendable. They perform with a hunger to prove themselves, probably because it is that much harder for them to get their foot in the door. Much like in other areas of life, the underdogs are scrappy, making the most of what's available to pursue their passions. It is only fair that teams varying greatly in rankings become regular participants in major cricket tournaments. The problems presented by cricket can be offset by the changes that are being introduced. Normalising pitches that are more bowler friendly and being more welcoming to different cricket teams can build a more exciting future for the sport.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**  
1 Latitude  
6 Disorder  
10 Highway sections  
11 Entice  
12 Left, on a liner  
13 Film trophy  
14 Wait to pounce  
15 Cry to a rescuer  
16 Outdated  
17 Bro's sibling  
18 Sixth sense, briefly  
19 Kalahari critters  
22 Loyal  
23 Inning count  
26 Brewery sights  
29 Soak up  
32 Take a stab at  
33 Tourist's aid  
34 Penn, for one  
36 Renown  
37 Beneath  
38 Andrews of "Mary Poppins"  
39 Land units  
40 Add a change to
- DOWN**  
1 Downhill course  
2 Montague foe  
3 Not yet in stock  
4 Make coffee  
5 Id —  
6 Interlace  
7 Game show host  
8 Ship poles  
9 Barber's aid  
11 Hit movie of 1995  
15 Farrow of film  
17 Pesky bugs, informally  
20 Massage  
21 Minivan alternative  
24 Mexican snacks  
25 Endurance  
27 Muff  
28 Ignores the limit  
29 Team  
30 Pound part  
31 San Diego player  
35 Retain  
36 Be enraged  
38 Toast spread



1-25

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