



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

# How do we overcome our corruption crisis?



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A recent survey of eminent economists in Bangladesh ranked corruption as the number one problem the government needs to address. The endemic corruption has crippled the country's economy, destroyed the social fabric, and even penetrated our schools. Only in Bangladesh is it possible for SSC and HSC students to protest for the right to cheat based on leaked exam papers, as happened in Rajshahi in 2006. Corruption is institutionalised, almost as a sort of mandatory tax, and people actually idolise those with money, regardless of the source of wealth. The Monsoon Revolution has overthrown the kleptocracy at the pinnacle of the corruption pyramid, but it is now up to us to eradicate the disease of corruption from our culture.

From the late Roman Empire (3rd-5th century AD), to China's Qing Dynasty (18th-19th century), and in more recent history the Weimar Republic in post-World War I Germany, there are numerous examples of how widespread and virtually normalised corruption has led to the downfall of once mighty empires. There is a huge lesson in that for Bangladesh and the revolution has to lead us away from a similar plight.

Perversely, in a society where corruption is the accepted norm, those who illegally accumulate vast wealth, are virtually worshipped. Instead of focusing on prosecuting the corrupt officials, the embezzlers, or the strong-armed business people who accumulate wealth through force, everyone ends up striving to be like them. This moral bankruptcy leads to a truly Darwinian culture where each and every one is desperately trying to accumulate wealth through any means possible, with no fear of punishment and more importantly, absolutely no degree of shame. This erosion of shame from our culture is ultimately the root of the endemic corruption. Only when there is no shame can the kleptocrats openly flaunt their wealth as they parade their luxury vehicles and designer jewellery on the way to opulent destination weddings and parties. And only when there is no shame does everyone else look at this not in disgust—at the theft and thuggery that led to this—but ruing the missed opportunity that they themselves have not yet availed themselves of such wealth. Is there even a fix to this?

Several countries have actually successfully eliminated or dramatically reduced corruption. After gaining independence in 1965, Singapore made it a top priority to fight corruption and introduced zero tolerance policies. The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau was created as an independent entity

with broad powers. They were free to pursue and prosecute corrupt officials without any fear of political interference. Those that were found guilty faced harsh penalties. If there are no penalties or if political connections can get you out of trouble, what is to stop you from being corrupt? Simultaneously with these measures, Singapore began paying competitive salaries to public servants, to reduce the temptation to take bribes.

Similarly to Singapore, Rwanda made a strong commitment to reform its governance systems and eliminate corruption following the 1994 genocide. Independent anti-corruption bodies were set up and the government made a point of publicising corruption cases and the ensuing penalties. Rwanda also took a page out of Denmark's book in creating a lot more transparency and allowing access to government data. To that end, they embarked on a digitisation process that reduced bureaucratic inefficiencies and opportunities for bribes. Estonia took it a step further by introducing e-procurement systems that make it harder for officials to manipulate contracts. Income and assets declarations of public officials are actually accessible to the public. In fact, in Denmark, as in many European countries, civil society plays a strong role in monitoring government activities. The media plays a critically important role in exposing corruption cases.

In order for all this to work, however, the media needs to be free and the judiciary needs to be independent of the government and politics. In Bangladesh, neither of these two conditions were true. Whenever the media attempted to expose the most extreme cases of corruption and money laundering, they were ordered to cease and desist. As a result, people began wanting to be like the corrupt and indeed, started mimicking them in their own spheres. That is how we built a culture where the ends justified the means. Any path to wealth became acceptable, with no legal or social consequences. Far from it, opulent displays of illicit wealth have become *de rigueur*. Victims of the corruption cannot be bothered to report it because they are either scared of the thugs or because they know there will be no consequences for the criminal behaviour. Instead of the perpetrator being punished, we have reached a point where the victim is punished for reporting it. Whistleblowers need to be admired, encouraged, and in cases where the dollar amounts are huge, rewarded for their courage and efforts.

The very people who should have been most responsible for enforcing the law and ensuring that corruption did not get out of hand

actually become the most complicit, namely the police. This is not without international precedent. After the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia went down an ambitious path of police reform because the police had become extremely corrupt. The Georgian government fired most of the police force and rehired a smaller, more efficient, better paid and more professional workforce. Tough times call for tough measures. Since the main function of the police force in Bangladesh had become to enforce the party line of the kleptocracy and to line their own pockets with bribes, it is clearly high time to apply the Georgian approach.

The prevalent belief in Bangladesh is that the model career is one where one accumulates as much wealth illegally as fast as possible and then stashes it overseas through money laundering. Once the money is overseas, citizenships and passports can be bought, and as soon as things heat up at home, one can head overseas for a comfortable and opulent retired life. Clearly, the channels through which money is laundered abroad need to be tightened down. Aside from that, however, it is extremely important for there to be exemplary and severe punishment, just as in the case of all the countries that have successfully fought corruption. In China, Zhang Zhongsheng was handed the death penalty for accepting \$160 million in bribes. In South Korea, former president Park Geun-hye was given a 25 year prison sentence, while Najib Razak, the former prime minister of Malaysia, was given a 12 year prison sentence and a \$50 million fine. In dollar terms, their crimes were peanuts compared to the estimated \$160 billion that was looted from Bangladesh. In the case of the IMDB scandal in Malaysia, the country was able to get a lot of the money back by collaborating with other governments and agencies. This is critically important so that people cannot think they will be safe if they siphon their money off overseas.

On Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Bangladesh has always ranked at the absolute bottom or near the bottom, faring worse than every other country in the world except a mere handful. It is near impossible to attract foreign investors, to inspire confidence, indeed to even convince our own citizens of the future of the country unless we can climb out of these depths. If we cannot start climbing up this ladder, the entire Monsoon Revolution will have accomplished little. All it will do is clear the way for the same story to unfold with new actors. As other countries have demonstrated, there is a path out of this. It seems absurd to even have to say this, but we must begin by reinstalling the basic sense of shame in committing a crime. When a person accumulates wealth illegally, call it out, put it in the media, publicise the prosecution and punishment. Free the media and judiciary, and set up independent anti-corruption teams to move forth with zero tolerance. Let the criminals feel the shame. Otherwise, the only shame will be on Bangladesh.

# Disincentives for Dhaka University teachers



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When I joined a private university after I graduated from Dhaka University (DU), I used to get a good salary. I worked there for about two years and a half. Then I joined DU but for one-third of the salary I got at my previous job. It is peculiar that DU tries to recruit high quality candidates but provides poor salaries. The salary of a university lecturer does not differ significantly from that of a college lecturer. But their quality is not same.

Living on the monthly salary from DU's was really difficult for me. I had to use my previous savings to manage a newly married life. Thankfully, I had an alternative to increase my income by teaching courses at the private university where I previously worked. I could only maintain a decent life with the additional earnings from the private university.

However, most of DU teachers do not have the opportunity to earn extra income. Some teachers used to teach in English medium schools for extra earnings. After private universities were established, many DU teacher started teaching there as adjunct faculties which reduced their financial constraint partially.

In order to increase the earnings, several faculties and institutes at DU opened evening programmes. But not all programmes have equal demands, plus junior teachers often have relatively fewer opportunity to take courses in evening programmes. Meanwhile teachers of the departments that do not have evening programmes cannot earn any extra money.

Taking the opportunity of this low salary, the university authority has created some positions—more like traps for teachers—which are allocated based on political affiliation. As a result, the teachers are made subservient to partisan politics. A house tutor, for instance, gets allowance, pays lower house rent and uses their experience as house tutor for promotion. Similarly, a good number of sub-standard apartments whose rent is considerably low are also allotted by and large politically. This way a large section of teachers gets involved in university politics to reduce financial constraints.

Because of low salaries, many teachers have already left this university. The recent trend indicates that many teachers who went abroad for higher studies did not come back. In some departments, nearly half of the teachers did not return after finishing their PhD degree.

The university does not have incentives for those who have excellent academic backgrounds. For instance, a professor with a doctorate from Harvard University gets the same salary as a professor with no additional degree but who was promoted just because of his/her length of service. Moreover, there is no incentive for publishing research articles in highly-ranked journals. An article published in any journal of Dhaka University is given the same weight as one published in an

internationally reputed journal.

The low pay also demotivates some teachers to allocate much time to the university. They only come to the campus when they have classes. They do not even carry out rigorous research. Some even stop research after becoming a professor. Despite the low pay, a large percentage of teachers still engage in rigorous research and lend much time to the university. They regularly publish scholarly articles.

Teaching is a profession that demands mindfulness and continuous improvement through persistent effort. Hence it needs a certain salary without any comparison with other professions. If teachers cannot maintain a modest standard of living with their salary, they cannot be expected to produce an optimum level of intellectual output. With the present salary structure of Dhaka University teachers, it is very difficult to maintain a respectable life. Only a

year. The salary structure of DU can be estimated based on the average salary of its graduates. The average should be calculated by median which is not influenced by extreme values.

If the salary is not raised, DU will end up with average quality teachers. Even if qualified teachers join this university with the current salary, they will get involved in multiple jobs for financial freedom. This will surely hamper the education quality of the university. There will be unhealthy competition among teachers. For example, teachers of some departments now compete with each other for exam invigilation to earn additional money.

When the issue of a separate pay scale for Dhaka University teachers is raised, it does not get proper attention. In the past, DU teachers were reproached by the heads of the government. At times, the government mentioned budgetary constraints as a barrier to solving the problem. However, we did not witness any shortage of money when the government bought expensive cars for public officials. Money becomes scarce only when the remuneration of teachers is asked to increase. Dhaka University teachers use minibuses and vans to commute, but other public officials are given individual cars to commute.

Dhaka university can increase its



It is not a scarcity of resources that keeps DU's problems unresolved; it is simply a lack of intention. PHOTO: STAR FILE

limited number of teachers who have the opportunity to earn additional income can raise their standard of living but with huge extra effort.

Living on the university campus is another source of disincentive. Teachers have to pay the full house rent although many apartments are ramshackle. A teacher has to repair an apartment to make it worthy of living and the university authority reimburses only a small part of it.

The salary structure of equivalent professions in the public sector is similar to that of Dhaka University teachers. But the public officials get other perquisites such as car loans and car maintenance allowances. Besides, during the last regime, unbridled corruption made certain public sector jobs very lucrative and led to further income equality in society, especially among different groups of public sector job holders. Such inequality negatively impacts the personal lives of those who try to make an honest living including many public university teachers.

Therefore, public university teachers' salaries must be revised. Once it is revised, all teachers should be made accountable and they have to achieve their research target every

revenue to meet its own financial requirements. At present a student pays a monthly fee of Tk 30 only. The university can charge its students monthly fees based on their "ability to pay." Their parents' income should be taken as an indicator of their financial ability. By dividing the students into various income strata, differential fees may be charged. If this technique can be applied successfully, the university's revenue will certainly increase. Poor students too may be supported financially by the revenue earned by the university. However, finding the actual income of parents is a real challenge.

No government so far has shown adequate effort to solve this fundamental problem regarding the salary of teachers at this university. As is normal, a university with resource constraints poses fewer threats to the position of authority. Once the problem is fixed, teachers will be less dependent on partisan politics and have more room to be open-minded, free thinkers. They will be driven by reasoning and always challenge authority. It is not a scarcity of resources that keeps the problems unresolved; it is simply a lack of intention to solve these issues at all.

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**দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

শেখ হাসিনা মেডিকেল কলেজ, টাঙ্গাইল এর সরকারী কাজে জনস্বার্থে ব্যবহারের জন্য ২০২৪-২০২৫ অর্থ বছরে নিম্ন বর্ণিত উপাদান সমূহ ক্রয়ের লক্ষে প্রকৃত টিকাদার/ সরবরাহকারী প্রতিদানের নিকট হতে সীলমোহরসহুত্ব খামে দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

দরপত্রের নামঃ- শেখ হাসিনা মেডিকেল কলেজ, টাঙ্গাইল।

ক্রমিক নং	কাজের নাম	বিবরণ
০১	কাজের নাম	১। ডিক্টিফা ও পদ্য ডিক্টিফা সরঞ্জামাদি সরবরাহ ২। ক্যানিক্যালস ক) Erba XL200 এর টি-এজেন্ট খ) Erba Elite 580 (CBC) এর টি-এজেন্ট ৩। কম্পিউটার ও আনুষঙ্গিক ৪। আসবাবপত্র
০২	দরপত্র মূল্য	দরপত্র প্রতিটির মূল্য ১০০০/- (এক হাজার টাকা মাত্র) অফেরত যোগ্য নগদ প্রদান পূর্বক ত্রুটি করা হবে।
০৩	জামানত	দরপত্র জমা করার সময় অধ্যক্ষ, শেখ হাসিনা মেডিকেল কলেজ, টাঙ্গাইল এর অফিসে দরপত্রে উল্লিখিত সর্বমোট মূল্যের ০২% অর্থের ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/ পে-অর্ডার দরপত্র জামানত হিসেবে সংযুক্ত করতে হবে (যে ফেরত যোগ্য)।
০৪	দরপত্রের সিডিউল বিক্রয়	২০/১০/২০২৪ হতে ০৯/১১/২০২৪ ইং তারিখ পর্যন্ত (সকাল ৯:০০ ঘটিকা হতে দুপুর ২:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত)।
০৫	দরপত্র জমা প্রদানের সময়	১১/১১/২০২৪ ইং সকাল ৯:০০ ঘটিকা হতে ১১:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।
০৬	দরপত্র খোলার সময়	১১/১১/২০২৪ ইং সকাল ১১:০৫ ঘটিকা (অধ্যক্ষ মহোদয়ের অফিস কক্ষে)।
০৭	অন্যান্য নির্দেশনা	দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তির বর্ণিত বিষয়সমূহে যথাযথভাবে পালন পূর্বক দরপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে।

কিঃ দ্রঃ কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে দরপত্রে উল্লিখিত দ্রব্যসামগ্রী/সরঞ্জামাদির পরিমাণ কমানো/ব্যাড়ানো এবং যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ কিংবা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

*(অধ্যক্ষ ডায় মোঃ নূরুল আমিন মির্জা)*  
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