



# Make corruption prevention a constitutional mandate

*In conversation with Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director, Transparency International Bangladesh, and head of the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission.*



Iftekharuzzaman

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What are the key recommendations for reforming the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC)?

**Dr Iftekharuzzaman (DI):** Our recommendations fall into two categories: actions the ACC can take to enhance its independence and effectiveness, and broader structural reforms for a national anti-corruption framework. No ACC can combat corruption alone—it requires institutional and societal support, alongside a robust legal framework.

Our first recommendation for structural reform is to strengthen Article 20(2) of the 1972 Constitution. While it discourages unearned income, we propose amending it to: *"The State shall create conditions where, as a general principle, no individual can abuse*

*constitutional or legal authority for personal gain..."* It is crucial to establish a constitutional safeguard against the abuse of power, as corruption often stems from the exploitation of authority at all levels, as witnessed over the past 16 years.

Unlike many countries, Bangladesh lacks a national anti-corruption strategy. We recommend replacing the National Integrity Strategy 2010 with a National Anti-Corruption Strategy, defining the roles of state and non-state institutions. The Constitution must play a central role, with clearly defined short-, medium-, and long-term responsibilities, rather than merely forming a committee.

The existing 2010 strategy is misaligned with anti-corruption efforts



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**Addressing corruption requires decisive actions. System must be made more accountable and transparent.**

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and has often been misused. Therefore, a dedicated National Anti-Corruption Strategy must be formulated, and an Office of the Ombudsman, under Article 77 of the Constitution, should be established and empowered through legislation to ensure the strategy's effective implementation.

Additionally, we recommend permanently abolishing the practice of whitening black money in the budget, as it legitimises illicit income and implicitly condones corruption by providing an opportunity for offenders to rectify their wrongdoing at the end of the year.

To enhance financial transparency, we propose integrating two international initiatives. First, Bangladesh should adopt the Common Reporting Standard (CRS), which ensures that financial transaction data of individuals, both domestically and internationally, is

instantly and automatically accessible to regulators such as the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU). Second, we recommend ratifying the Open Government Partnership (OGP), which promotes transparency by mandating the public disclosure of government decisions related to the public interest.

Next are recommendations regarding the status, structure, and functions of the ACC. We suggest granting the ACC constitutional status, increasing the number of commissioners from three to five (including at least one female) to promote professional diversity, and reducing tenure from five to four years to encourage greater dynamism.

To streamline complaint management and prevent delays, we propose diversifying the professions of the Complaint Scrutiny and Selection Committee members and

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- » Bangladesh should replace the National Integrity Strategy 2010 with a comprehensive National Anti-Corruption Strategy, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of both state and non-state institutions in combating corruption.
- » Permanently abolish the practice of whitening black money in the budget, as it legitimises illicit income and implicitly condones corruption by allowing offenders to legitimise their wrongdoing.
- » Establish an Office of the Ombudsman for Anti-Corruption to oversee the implementation of the National Corruption Prevention Strategy, with sectoral ombudsmen to ensure accountability across key areas.
- » Even with the establishment of an ideal ACC aligned with global best practices, lasting success will remain unattainable without a fundamental cultural shift in Bangladesh's political and bureaucratic systems.
- » To strengthen the ACC's authority in prosecuting high-profile corruption, Section 32A of the ACC Act, 2004, should be repealed

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