



Anti-Corruption Commission.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Make corruption prevention a constitutional mandate

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FROM PAGE 17

rotating committee membership twice a month. Committee activities should be decentralised, with recommendations made at district or divisional ACC offices, rather than being subjected to further scrutiny by the central JABAC at headquarters. For complaints related to lesser offenses (as defined by ACC guidelines), district or divisional ACC offices should be empowered to take independent action.

Despite being legally required, the ACC has failed to establish a Prosecution Unit in the past 20 years. We recommend that the ACC formulate a Prosecution Policy specifying which scheduled offenses it will investigate based on severity and public interest.

The feasibility of plea bargaining for offenses under the ACC's jurisdiction, particularly for petty corruption (e.g., small bribes in government offices), should be thoroughly examined. Many countries have found this system effective in streamlining anti-corruption processes. The ACC Reform Commission recommends conducting a comprehensive evaluation of its advantages and risks, particularly in cases involving petty corruption and money laundering. Given the complexity of standard money

must be introduced.

Firstly, the "Selection Committee" under Section 7 of the ACC Act, 2004, should be renamed as "Selection and Review Committee." This committee should not only nominate commissioner candidates but also conduct biannual reviews of the ACC's performance. It should be chaired by the senior-most judge of the Appellate Division and include senior judicial figures, the Chairperson of the Public Service Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General, a nominee from both the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, and a Bangladeshi citizen with expertise in anti-corruption and governance, nominated by the Chief Justice.

The selection process should be transparent and competitive. Candidates must be shortlisted based on qualifications, experience, and vision for the ACC. The final selection process should allow public scrutiny, with shortlisted names displayed on the ACC website for seven days before submission to the President.

Commissioners must have at least 15 years of experience in law, administration, judiciary, financial institutions, auditing, or governance. Additionally, biannual performance evaluations, including public hearings, should ensure accountability

be possible without a cultural shift within Bangladesh's political and bureaucratic systems.

TDS: What measures do you propose to address internal misconduct and ensure transparency in the commission's operations?

DI: First, to promote accountability and ownership, the ACC's salary structure should be revised. It should have its own pay scale, at least double the national pay scale, reflecting its distinct responsibilities. Additionally, officials involved in investigations should receive risk allowances, and performance bonuses from the ACC's own fund should reward efficiency and integrity.

To combat corruption within the ACC, a high-level task force should be formed immediately, comprising officials from various investigative and intelligence agencies. This task force will identify corrupt officials at all levels, who should be dismissed and prosecuted.

In the long term, the ACC's Internal Anti-Corruption Committee should be replaced by an independent Internal Discipline Division. This division would ensure compliance with the ACC's code of conduct, investigate misconduct, scrutinise asset statements, and take punitive actions when necessary.

Finally, a comprehensive Corruption Prevention Strategy must be developed, incorporating expert input and an objective evaluation of past efforts.

TDS: What are the recommendations for expanding the ACC's legal framework to prosecute high-profile corruption cases, including money laundering and embezzlement?

DI: To strengthen the ACC's legal framework and enhance its authority in prosecuting high-profile corruption cases, Section 32A of the ACC Act, 2004, should be repealed, as it requires government approval before filing cases against judges, magistrates, or government employees. Additionally, every district must have a regional ACC office; the current presence in only 36 districts is insufficient. In districts with existing branches, a Special Judge Court must be established, while new districts should have both a regional unit and a Judge Court with the necessary expertise and logistical support.

Moreover, the absence of a legal framework to prevent conflicts of interest enables officials to exploit their positions for personal or familial gain. To address this, a comprehensive law must be enacted.

TDS: With the ACC's history of being used as a political tool, how do you intend to build safeguards to prevent future governments from misusing the commission for partisan purposes?

DI: To build safeguards preventing the misuse of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) as a political tool, we recommend several strategic measures.

The ACC is mandated to collaborate with various institutions, but this has not been effectively implemented, leading to unhealthy competition. To prevent this, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) must be signed, and focal persons should be designated and authorised by agencies such as the NBR, CID, BFIU, and the Directorate of Registration to assist the ACC. For high-profile corruption and money laundering cases, independent Task Forces led by the ACC, including senior officials from relevant agencies, should be established.

Additionally, Section 309 of the Income Tax Act, 2023, must be amended to exempt the ACC from its confidentiality provision, which currently prevents the NBR from providing crucial financial documents

without a court order. Previously, the ACC could access such information freely, but the new law has hindered its work. MoUs with the CAG and IMED should also ensure the ACC has timely access to corruption-related findings.

To depoliticise appointments, the ACC Secretary and Director General must be selected through an open, competitive process rather than government appointment. Similarly, 60% of Director General and 75% of Director positions should be reserved for internal candidates, ensuring institutional integrity while maintaining merit-based selection. Deputation should be limited to 10% of senior positions.

Lastly, full automation of ACC operations—covering complaints, investigations, and prosecutions—will enhance transparency, minimise political interference, and safeguard the commission's independence.

TDS: What role can the ACC play in fostering a culture of integrity and transparency across state institutions?

DI: The ACC can play a central role in this regard, particularly by addressing political and electoral financing. Political parties and candidates should publicly disclose their funding and financial details. The ACC recommends mandatory verification of affidavits submitted during national polls, ensuring the consistency and legitimacy of income sources to prevent corruption and the accumulation of illicit wealth. The Election Commission, with support from the NBR and ACC, should verify candidates' income and asset declarations and avoid nominating individuals linked to corruption. Moreover, all public representatives must submit detailed income and asset statements for themselves and their family members to the Election Commission within three months of taking office, and updating them annually.

Corruption remains pervasive in key sectors such as police stations, registry offices, revenue offices, passport offices, as well as education, health, local government, district and sub-district administrations, and utility providers. The ACC advocates for the introduction of end-to-end automation in public services, which will enable the monitoring of transactions and promote accountability and transparency. This initiative should be pursued as a mid-to-long-term recommendation.

TDS: What strategies are being considered to engage mass people and youth as active participants in anti-corruption efforts?

DI: To actively engage the public and youth in anti-corruption efforts, ethical and anti-corruption content should be integrated into the school curriculum from primary to higher secondary levels using modern, engaging methods. Governance and anti-corruption courses, training, internships, and fellowships should be introduced at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The ACC's hotline (106) must be widely promoted through school textbooks, mass media, and social media. Targeted anti-corruption campaigns should be conducted via mass and social media platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Above all, corruption must be framed not only as a punishable crime but also as a socially, culturally, and religiously unacceptable, destructive, and discriminatory scourge. Innovative and appealing strategies should be used for sustainable corruption prevention.

The interview was taken by Miftahul Jannat.



ILLUSTRATION:
ANWAR SOHEL

laundering procedures—which typically recover only 1% of laundered funds—plea bargaining could encourage offenders to return illicit assets in exchange for reduced penalties. This should be implemented incrementally or on a pilot basis.

The workforce and capacity of the Digital Forensic Lab should be expanded to strengthen financial crime investigations. The lab should report directly to the ACC Chairman, ensuring independence from other divisions. Furthermore, Section 54(2) of the ACC (Employees) Service Rules, 2008, should be abolished, as it contradicts natural justice and undermines employee independence.

Finally, the ACC must establish its own fund, with the government allocating it in the annual budget. At least 10% of fines or confiscated assets from ACC cases should be deposited into this fund. This will incentivise ACC's work, support capacity building and case investigations, and ensure proper audit oversight.

TDS: What specific measures are being considered to ensure the ACC's complete independence from political and bureaucratic influences?

DI: To ensure the ACC operates independently of political and bureaucratic influence, a series of structural reforms in the appointment process of commissioners

while maintaining investigative independence.

TDS: What are the immediate challenges in reforming the ACC during this transitional period?

DI: The immediate challenge in reforming the ACC lies in overcoming the political influence that has historically shaped appointments to the Commission, thereby undermining its independence. To address this, in addition to establishing the Selection and Review Committee, we propose the creation of an Office of the Ombudsman for Anti-Corruption. This office will oversee the implementation of the National Corruption Prevention Strategy and include sectoral ombudsmen.

We have outlined 47 recommendations, categorised into short-term, medium-term, and long-term measures. While short-term recommendations can be implemented within six months, medium-term actions will require 18 months, and long-term reforms may take up to 48 months. Furthermore, the Constitution will play a critical role in enforcing anti-corruption laws and holding the ACC accountable, particularly concerning the cases it handles.

However, even if an ideal ACC, based on global best practices, is established through these reforms, success will not