

BANGLADESH IN CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2025

Fall of kleptocracy, or a temporary setback?



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On February 10, the Transparency International (TI) released the annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025. Bangladesh has scored 24 out of 100, the 13th lowest in the world, one step lower, counted from the bottom, compared to 2024. This score is only one point higher than what it was in 2024, and the ranking from the top is 150th, one rung higher. The result shows a relatively positive perception of the successful July uprising that defeated kleptocracy, but a negative assessment of the prospect of "dekleptification" due to reform setbacks, sustained corrupt practices, and deficits in transparent and accountable governance during the period after August 5, 2024.

Bangladesh's score is two points lower than its own overall average during 2012-2025. It is five points less than the average for 59 authoritarian regimes of the world, six points lower than the average for 29 countries with Closed Civic Space (30), and eight points lower than the lowest-scoring region of Sub-Saharan Africa (32). In the newest CPI, Bangladesh remains the second lowest in South Asia, better than only Afghanistan. Bangladesh is also globally in the lowest quintile within the list of 182 countries, among 122 that scored below 50, and among 96 that scored below the global average of 42. Accordingly, Bangladesh is in the company of those having a "very serious corruption problem."

To be clear, corruption remains a global menace, and, as on previous occasions, no country has scored full marks. Over 67 percent of countries (or 122) scored below 50 percent in 2025, and 96 countries, or nearly 54 percent, scored below the global average. This means that, like Bangladesh, over 80 percent of the world's population live with a "very serious corruption problem." Overall, global scores have declined compared to 2024. The scores of 68 (37 percent) countries have declined, while 64 countries (35 percent)

have retained their previous score. Only 48 countries (26 percent) have achieved an improved score. For a longer-term analysis, only 21 countries, or 11.53 percent, have "significantly" improved their standing in the CPI since 2012, and 111 countries (or 61 percent) have remained stagnant. Bangladesh is among the 50 countries whose standing has significantly worsened since 2012.

Among Bangladesh's South Asian neighbours, Bhutan continues to be the best performer, scoring 71 and ranking at the 18th position from the top. In the rest of the region, scores have remained well below the global average: India and Maldives both scored 39, Sri Lanka scored 35, Nepal scored 34, Pakistan scored 28, and Afghanistan scored 17. This year's worst performers are South Sudan and Somalia, who share the bottom rung with a score of nine, followed by Venezuela scoring 10, and Eritrea, Libya, and Yemen each scoring 11. At the other end, the list is topped by Denmark (with a score of 89), followed by Finland, New Zealand, and Norway.

The key global message of CPI 2025 is that corruption is worsening worldwide, even in countries claiming to be democracies, due to deteriorating standards of compliance and enforcement. This is also accompanied by a pattern of increased restriction on media and civic space, stronger barriers against openness in public interest decisions, and lack of transparency and accountability. Globally, public frustration is heightened due to corrupt leadership, inequality, and failing public services, while people, especially the youth, are taking to the streets against these evils.

However, CPI 2025 also shows that corruption is not inevitable. Many countries have proved that progress is possible if political leaders and governments act with integrity and take action to tackle corruption beyond rhetoric, implement

robust institutional and political reforms for transparent and accountable governance, effectively prosecute the corrupt (especially those engaged in political, governmental, and corporate corruption), end attacks on media and civic space, and dismantle the secrecy structures and networks that enable illicit flows of corrupt and swindled money within and across borders.

Looking at Bangladesh's performance

This is no unique experience, though. Many countries that previously scored similarly to or even lower than Bangladesh (examples include Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, Ukraine, and Angola) have successfully managed to improve their CPI standing thanks to sustained efforts to push comprehensive and strategic institutional reforms and carry out robust digitalisation of public services in tandem with effective prosecution of

was no reform implementation plan, no risk analysis, nor any risk mitigation strategy. The foundation for state reform that has been created through various ordinances has been rendered fragile due to "ad hocism," political and bureaucratic resistance, and a pick-and-choose approach. Almost nothing has been done to reform the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), leaving the aspirations for its independence, accountability, and effectiveness only a pipe dream. The government's failure to walk the talk of transparent, accountable, and conflict-of-interest-free governance has been clear. Inaction and even resistance from the ACC, in collusion with the government bureaucracy, to strategic reform recommendations have largely sabotaged reform prospects. All these against the backdrop of widespread extortionist capture of politico-governance spaces across the country have unfolded an "our turn" syndrome that presents ominous indications of the resistance capacity in the kleptocratic ecosystem.

It will be for the upcoming power-holders to prove that what they have been preaching in their election manifesto and campaigns will be practiced. To do so, they may find some magic bullets in the whole set of recommendations for a corruption-free ACC with a specific focus on its independence, accountability, and effectiveness. Proposals for the constitutional criminalisation of abuse of power, National Anti-Corruption Strategy, Beneficial Ownership Transparency and Public Register, conflict of interest management, Common Reporting Standard, and transparency in political and electoral finance must be components of a delivery plan. These should be in sync with examples of concrete success in holding corruption to account, especially at the highest levels.

No less important is the depoliticisation of all professions and state institutions in order to ensure professional integrity and institutional effectiveness, especially at the judiciary, bureaucracy, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies. No country has been able to control corruption without ensuring media freedom and an open civic space. Above all, Bangladesh needs leadership that will transform the culture and practice of treating political and governmental positions as licenses to abuse power for private gains.



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

more closely, a score of one point higher compared to the previous CPI represents a recognition of the power of the July uprising that caused the collapse of kleptocracy and created aspirations of "dekleptification." However, the failure to carry forward and build the foundation for transformation has also been evident. Post-uprising Bangladesh has witnessed sustained corrupt practices in political and governance spaces nationally and locally. The failure of the interim administration to set examples of governmental transparency, integrity, and accountability, as well as setbacks in the reform process, also denied us a better overall score.

high-level corruption, especially political, governmental, and corporate. On the other hand, many countries that had around the same CPI score as Bangladesh (or even higher), such as Myanmar, Thailand, Mexico, or Mozambique, have seen worsened scores over the last decade due to democratic backsliding, institutional decay, enforcement deficits, structural erosion of checks and balances, and lack of strategic approaches against corruption.

In the same manner, Bangladesh's interim government has failed to adopt a comprehensive and strategic approach in determining the reform agenda in general and anti corruption in particular. There

An education law – does it matter?



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MANZOOR AHMED

At the end of the interim government's term, the decision-makers decided to go for an education law by drafting an ordinance. The draft was posted on the education ministry's website on February 1, giving citizens barely a week to submit comments. This breathtaking sense of urgency of the authorities, on a matter that has been under discussion for 15 years, has raised some eyebrows. After all, since the first draft of the law was sent to the cabinet for approval, it was returned at least four times with questions about the provisions. Officials now say that public opinions and official feedback would be analysed and integrated into the final draft, which would require time.

According to an estimate, 149 countries recognise the right to education in their national constitutions, and 155 countries legally guarantee nine or more years of compulsory education for children. The proposed Education Act does neither; it only reiterates a 1990 act on compulsory primary education up to Class 5, which has yet to be fully implemented.

Education is a complex area of service offered through both public and private institutions, serving diverse objectives and populations of various ages, and divided into many sub-sectors. So, what may be the

nature of a national education law, and what purposes may it serve?

Countries have a plethora of laws to regulate and guide their education services. In Bangladesh, apart from the compulsory education law of 1990, we have had other laws, including the 1974 act on the takeover of primary schools by the government; various acts concerning university education and individual public universities; the Non-Formal Education Act, 2014; the Intermediate and Secondary Education Ordinance, 1961; and the Registration of Private Schools Ordinance, 1962, among others.

The point is that complex and diverse education services operate under a variety of legal provisions, and their requirements can hardly be met by a single umbrella law. Nor can a master law replace all other education laws and legal provisions. The government always needs to—and frequently does—issue

additional rules, regulations, and orders governing the operation of educational institutions and services.

What may qualify as a national education law is one that provides for a major national commitment of great magnitude that significantly expands the scope of public provision and marks a fundamental change in educational policy and state obligations

may be reinforced by law to guarantee the realisation of such change.

A case in point is the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 in India. It makes education a fundamental right for children aged 6-14 under Article 21-A of the Indian constitution. This article itself resulted from the 84th Amendment to the constitution adopted in 2002. The RTE mandates free and compulsory elementary education in neighbourhood schools, prohibits capitation fees or interviews for admission, and requires private schools to reserve 25 percent of seats for economically disadvantaged children in the neighbourhood.

The draft education law in Bangladesh does not envisage any significant change in the purposes or provisions of education services. The avowed purpose of the law, as stated in the draft, is to "frame a complementary and

supplementary law by consolidating prevailing laws and rules for greater effectiveness."

The consolidation of existing laws and rules into a new act may offer administrative convenience, but it does little to promote structural and operational reform to make the education system more equitable and inclusive, or to improve its quality and relevance. A framework law that facilitates the much-discussed and much-needed transformation of education would: a) recognise the universal right to primary and secondary education and specify the duties and obligations of various actors; b) create a structure of decentralised school management with greater accountability; c) indicate principles and criteria for the adequacy and efficacy of public funding for education; and d) facilitate new personnel management to enhance the professional status and performance of teachers. None of these issues is addressed in the draft law.

A contentious issue—and apparently the reason for the draft being sent back repeatedly by the cabinet—is that of commercial coaching centres, guidebooks, and notebooks, reputedly a multi-billion-taka industry. Many education activists have seen these as the culprits behind our educational ills and have advocated banning them by law. They have missed the point that guidebooks, notebooks, and coaching centres are symptoms of the disease rather than its main causes. The real causes are poor pedagogy, weak classroom learning, and examinations that reward memorised answers. Attempting to treat the symptoms while neglecting the disease would only create bigger problems.

The new draft law opts for a compromise by proposing the formulation of rules over

the next three to five years to regulate guidebooks, notebooks and private coaching. It does not address the fundamental issues of poor teaching and learning in schools.

The arguments given in favour of the draft law are that something is better than nothing, or that an imagined perfect law should not be the enemy of a good law. It is not clear, however, what is good about the proposed law if it lacks the essential elements of much-needed education reform. Nor is it clear what beneficial actions cannot be taken in the absence of such a law.

The two government advisers to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Ministry of Education have belatedly asked two consultation committees to provide recommendations on necessary reforms in primary and secondary education. Another committee is working on the "vision" for future education.

It is expected that the reform ideas emerging from these committees will form a reform agenda for the newly elected government following the upcoming election and referendum on reforms. One expects education to become a key topic of discourse with the new government. One also wonders whether the current decision-makers are eager to protect the status quo and are concerned about potential reforms and the uncertainties of change. Do they wish to lock in existing structures and provisions through protectionist legal measures? Would it not be more appropriate to consider an umbrella law in light of the anticipated education reform discussions? Those who pursue the cause of change are understandably unhappy about the prospect of potential new obstacles to reform.

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**CROSSWORD**  
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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13 Battery end  
14 "Otello" composer  
15 Gift tag word  
16 Cad  
18 Pot mender  
20 Running bird  
21 "Orinoco Flow" singer  
23 Tear  
24 Layout choice  
26 Coin, essentially  
28 Writer Fleming  
29 Asian sport  
31 Suit accessory  
32 Donut, in slang  
36 Misplayed note  
39 Holiday lead-in  
40 Border lake  
41 Writer Nin  
43 Eat away  
44 Knight's weapon  
45 Good judgment

46 Finish a hole

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7 Coffee makers  
8 Natural  
9 Roil  
11 Bristles at  
17 Take a stab at  
19 Writer Follett  
22 Navy bigwig  
24 Flop  
25 Goller's cleek  
27 Charged bit  
28 Longings  
30 Take advantage of  
33 Reeves of "Speed"  
34 Kick out  
35 Stopwatch button  
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38 Pants part  
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**MONDAY'S ANSWERS**

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