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EDITORIAL PAGE

The scourge of corruption

By Kazi S.M. Khasrul Alam
Quddusi
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Only 1 per cent people are holding 40 per cent of the country's resources. How is that! Yes, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) also revealed that each national of the land has to pay Taka 485 as bribe per year and the nation as a whole thus pays Taka 7000 crore in the same period. Even then, however, Bangladesh government has not yet signed, not to speak of ratification, the United Nation's Convention Against Corruption despite 83 countries out of 148 signatories have already ratified the convention that was adopted on October 31, 2003 and opened for signature on December 9, 2003.

Such nonchalance very squarely indicates how unwilling our previous political government -- incidentally the previous one -- was in reining in corruption though top-most complaint against it was one of endless corruption. This is, however, not to imply that the governments prior to the previous 4-party alliance government had taken genuine steps to combat the menace of corruption. Among the previous government's activities relating to combating corruption was, however, to replace Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) with Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The Independent (a misnomer indeed!) Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) even once took up an ambitious mission named "Trap Case Drive". The objective was to catch the corrupt officials red-handed with the help of prospective bribe givers as traps. We, however, did not see any significant achievement in this regard. Admittedly, this old wine in new bottle (ACC) failed to win the judgment of the people and the foreign dignitaries and they (foreign dignitaries) didn't mince words and derided it as a sheer joke and, very rightly so.

Barrage of complaints run against our ministers and official incumbents in every corner of the country. The country is still faced with severe power shortage -- essentially a dirty legacy of previous government's utter negligence and ruthless corruption in the power sector -- resulting in many other inadequacies. How unfortunate the nation is! Yes, it was more than an open secret that many power projects were alleged to be ditched by the real power-house -- many refer to Howa Bhaban -- other than the secretariat owing to non-availability of commission.

Over and above, prices of essentials constantly spiraled and underdevelopment plagued many essential sectors of the country and its economy. And, criminal syndicates -- another offshoot of reckless corruption by the state machinery --



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snatched away taka around 3 lac crore from the countrymen in five years. Interestingly, however, all the failures were largely attributed to corruption of the people -- political and administrative-- entrusted with the state machinery. The people seek real efforts from the interim government to unearth the dirty scams that crippled the nation to a degree.

Recently launched Human Development in South Asia Report 2005 treated weak governance -- an ancillary of widespread corruption -- as one of the major reasons causing human insecurity in South Asia, not least Bangladesh. Back in June 2006, Richard Boucher while giving a statement before the House Committee in International Relations commented that corruption and poor governance were the main obstacles facing Bangladesh. He also added that these vices were indeed a drag on Bangladesh's economy resulting in non-realisation of expected levels of growth hindering reduction of poverty.

While placing the 12-point Election Plus agenda for the current caretaker government, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) executive director Debapriya Bhattacharya informed that the economy of Bangladesh has already achieved an internal power to grow at a rate of 5-6 per cent annually and that another 2-3 per cent growth can be attained by ensuring good governance and smooth functioning of the government.

I think it is impossible without setting stumbling blocks in the way of reckless corruption that let loose during the tenure of the previous political regime.

The World Bank has defined poor governance as characterized by arbitrary policy-making, unaccountable bureaucracies, unenforced or unjust legal systems, the abuse of executive power, a civil society unengaged in public life, and widespread corruption. I believe widespread corruption works as a catalyst to the other maladies. Sadly, in Bangladesh, corruption has also become a serious social malady. Unfortunately, it has attained sort of benumbed social acceptance as well.

People with wealth are honored these days even if they have attained that wealth through dubious means. Our political leaders and official incumbents have become so greedy and unscrupulous that they are pretty consistent in turning deaf ears to the calls of shunning corruption. However, it is also futile to force the lower ranking people to give up corruption before streamlining the top. Institutional means to curbing corruption is indeed a good initiative.

But, I believe psychological refinement should precede institutional arrangements. And, it can be ensued from the top. To send corruption packing, it is the policy makers at the helm of the country are supposed to show the way in the first place. Anyway, however, the current non-party government led by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed can present a roadmap to the political parties in this regard which, however, should be preceded by a genuine crackdown on the corrupts irrespective of party affiliation and of social or political status.

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