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**The Vicious Triangle of Corruption, Human Rights  
Violation and Injustice in Bangladesh:  
Is there a Way Out?**

by

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# **The Vicious Triangle of Corruption, Human Rights Violation and Injustice in Bangladesh: Is there a Way Out?**

**Dr. Iftekharuzzaman\***

## **I. Introduction**

Corruption is an insidious crime that prevails in every country of the world. It has destructive effects on states, peoples and societies. It is an outcome of deficits of transparency, accountability, integrity, rule of law and ineffectiveness of the institutions that are expected to hold power to account. Cost of corruption is usually understood and analysed in terms of adverse social, economic and developmental challenges. It is also considered as an outcome of governance deficits which in turn result in further corruption creating a vicious cycle. Similar mutually reinforcing relationship also exists between corruption and weakening of the key institutions of democratic accountability or the national integrity system. Deficit of rule of law for its part protect and promote corruption as much as corruption also leads to further erosion of rule of law. Corruption erodes public trust in government, and leads to violation of human rights and breeds injustice. By distorting the political and economic structures and weakening the social fabric, corruption can also be a potential source of mistrust of the government and insecurity of the state. Corruption is also increasingly linked to violation of human rights, deprivation of justice and the spread of the culture of impunity.

This paper is an attempt to contribute to the discourse on a triangular relationship between corruption, violation of human rights and injustice drawing upon the experience of Bangladesh during the past fifteen years of authoritarian and kleptocratic rule. The main theme of what follows here is that Kleptocratic state capture to enable

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\* Executive Director, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). Views may not necessarily reflect any official position.

and sustain corruption in Bangladesh was responsible for gross violation of human rights and injustice at unprecedented dimensions. The transformation of a government elected to power through a well-recognised national election of 2008 into authoritarianism was primarily an outcome of the regime's design for unaccountable abuse of power. Corruption was facilitated, promoted, protected and granted impunity through politically influenced, dysfunctional and professionally bankrupt state institutions. State power was captured by kleptocratic syndication, and in order to strengthen and sustain authoritarian control of the state various repressive measures were adopted and systems were created for widespread, multi-dimensional, multi-level and often ruthless violation of human rights and deprivation of people's access to justice. Judiciary itself was also deeply politicised and used with the same purpose of reinforcing kleptocratic control of the state structure and denial of justice and protection against violation of nearly every category of human rights including civil and political rights. The paper highlights this vicious triangle of corruption, human rights violation and injustice in general and Bangladesh in particular as experienced during the period of kleptocratic regime from 2009 until its fall on August 5, 2024.

## **II. Corruption – the global menace**

Although corruption is a global menace, there is no one universally accepted definition of corruption. The UN Convention against Corruption that was opened for signature on 9 December 2003, came into force on 14 December 2005 and ratified till date by 192 States-Party, as well as its Secretariat, UN Office of Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) have also refrained from specifically defining corruption presumably because of diverse manifestations of corruption at national, and international levels. However, they provide a list of various forms of this crime that include bribery and embezzlement in both public and private sector, trading in influence, abuse of functions, illicit enrichment, illicit national and international financial transfers including money laundering, concealment and obstruction of justice of various forms.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/corruption/en/learn/what-is-corruption.html>

The word corruption comes from the Latin verb *corruptus*, which means to break. Corruption is a behaviour or act that breaks away or contradicts with ethical and moral standard, traditions, laws and civic virtues. Corruption is defined by Transparency International as abuse of entrusted power for private gain<sup>2</sup>. The UN's Global Programme against Corruption (GPAC) defines corruption as the "abuse of power for private gain". Most often abuse of power for personal gain occur in both public and private domains and usually by a collusion for win-win game of individuals or groups of individuals from both sectors.

A more elaborate description of corruption is “the abuse of office whether in Government, administration or business ... (it) is about the giving and seeking of favours, it is about buying political influence, taking kickbacks, bribing officials. It is about subverting public good for private gain”<sup>3</sup>. Along UNODC listing, corruption includes any or a combination of such acts as embezzlement, fraud, nepotism, negligence of duty for private gain or promoting any vested interests - financial, political or otherwise, misuse of public or institutional fund and extortion. Corruption, therefore, is more than bribery. The wide variety of acts that are classified as corruption make definition of corruption wide and flexible, which is also partly the reason why corruption is studied under several disciplines – economics, political science and governance, development studies, sociology, anthropology and psychology.

This paper defines corruption as the abuse of power for private gain. In this sense, power does not have to be in the public sector alone, because power-base can be outside the public sector as in case of business or corporate sector for which the financial power is the key. Similarly, institutions outside the public and private sectors – national or international and non-governmental organizations - are not necessarily free from corruption. The same is true in situations of corrupt activity that takes place by abusing social power or power

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>

<sup>3</sup> Richard North, “Corruption: Stopping the Rot” in *BBC On Air*, August 2003, p.10.

drawn from knowledge, intellect and information. Nor does power have to be “entrusted” as in cases where power, usurped by extra-constitutional means such as military or military-backed rule, is abused.

Corrupt activities in the public sector, particularly transactions for public contracting at various levels and project implementation deals there is most often a triangular win-win game between individuals or entities in possession of political, administrative and business or financial power. This form of corruption is collusive corruption as opposed to coercive corruption where the public service recipient is a hostage to the abuse of power by the service provider or duty bearer. Such coercive abuse of power takes place even in case of petty corruption because the service provider holds delivery level power at whatever sector or stage it may be. The key element in the concept of corruption, therefore, is the abuse of power, and the extent of discretion with which power can be exercised without checks and balances for accountability.<sup>4</sup>

Amartya Sen recognizes motivational importance of personal gains from corruption and stresses values, norms and behavioural factors.<sup>5</sup> The possibility of exercise of power without accountability is the key driving force. Factors that create such possibilities include inadequate laws, systems, rules and regulations as much as ineffective enforcement of the same due to weakness of the institutions of the national integrity system.<sup>6</sup> Behavioural factors

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<sup>4</sup> For a review of conceptual approaches, see by Zoe Pearson, “An International Human Rights Approach to Corruption”, in Peter Larmour and Nick Wolanin, *Corruption and Anti-Corruption*, Canberra, Asia-Pacific Press, 2001, pp. 30-60.

<sup>5</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp-275-8.

<sup>6</sup> Transparency International developed the National Integrity System approach as a comprehensive means of assessing a country’s anti-corruption efficacy sector by sector. When all the pillars in a National Integrity System function effectively, corruption remains in check. The pillars include: Legislature, Executive, Judiciary, Public sector, Law enforcement, Election Commission, Ombudsman, Audit institution, Anti-



behind corruption may consist of a combination of incentives drawn from compulsion or need and greed. Poor salaries, benefits, infrastructure, logistics, etc., in the public sector are often viewed as the source of need-based incentives to corruption. When salaries and benefits are for instance inconsistent with the cost of living, it is considered a justification for indulging in corruption as a second source of income, though earning additional income outside regular job in the due process and subject to disclosure may be treated as legitimate. Moreover, ‘poor salaries and benefits’ in all cases do not motivate corruption, and there may indeed be many duty bearers who serve with honesty and integrity despite predicaments. It should be added in any case that the dividing line between need-driven and greed-based corruption is very thin.<sup>7</sup> What starts off with a need-driven incentive can soon turn into greed-driven corruption with sky as the limit, especially when there is absence, or insufficient enforcement of legal, ethical and anti-corruption standards in the public service, leading to systemic corruption. This in a way is about a cost-benefit calculation. If the ‘benefit’ of corruption is higher than the risk or cost it entails, it can be a rational behaviour to take the risk to be involved in corruption. If, however, the risk was higher than the anticipated gain it would act as a deterrence against a corrupt or illegal activity. The other personal factor is the lack of trust among the people about the capacity of the state to control corruption, a sense of disempowerment that leads to accepting corruption as a way of life which forces, and often motivates, people to be involved in corruption, causes an erosion of values and ethics, and drives into a culture of normalised corruption.

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corruption Commission, Political parties, Media, Civil society and Corporate sector. [https://www.transparency.org/en/national-integrity-system-assessments#:~:text=The%20National%20Integrity%20System%20\(NIS\)%20is%20a,government%2C%20civil%20society%2C%20and%20the%20business%20community](https://www.transparency.org/en/national-integrity-system-assessments#:~:text=The%20National%20Integrity%20System%20(NIS)%20is%20a,government%2C%20civil%20society%2C%20and%20the%20business%20community)

<sup>7</sup> As M.K. Gandhi said, “The earth has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed”, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/427443-the-world-has-enough-for-everyone-s-need-but-not-enough>

### III. Implications of Corruption

Corruption is a major impediment to development and democratic governance. By weakening the institutions of the national integrity system, it prevents rule of law. Corruption erodes public trust in government, and breeds injustice. By distorting the political and economic structures and weakening the social fabric, corruption can also be a potential source of insecurity of the state. Corruption is also increasingly linked to violation of human rights, justice and to the spread of the culture of impunity to all three – corruption, human rights violation and injustice.<sup>8</sup>

It is well-researched and well-documented that corruption is inversely related to democracy, democratic institutions and economic development.<sup>9</sup> There are strong evidences that corruption increases poverty and impedes the institutional capacity to reduce it. Economic theory and empirical evidence suggest that corruption impedes economic growth and hence accentuates poverty by discouraging or raising the cost of investment and entrepreneurship, curtailing access to public services, lowering the quality of public expenditures, enabling tax evasion, reducing revenue collection, promoting rent-seeking, and distorting allocation of public expenditure.<sup>10</sup> From the point of view of governance and democratic institutionalization, corruption weakens institutions, leads to low or distorted participation and to erosion of the trust of citizens in leadership, public office and institutions.

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<sup>8</sup> International Council on Human Rights Policy & Transparency International, *Corruption and Human Rights: Making the Connection*, Versoix, Switzerland, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance, Seymour Martin Lipset and Gabriel Salman Lenz, “Corruption, Culture and Markets”, in L.E. Harrison and S.P. Huntington (eds), *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York, Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Eric Chetwynd et al., *Corruption and Poverty: A Review of Recent Literature*, January 2003, [www.u4.no/document/literature/corruption-and-poverty](http://www.u4.no/document/literature/corruption-and-poverty)

Implications of corruption are multi-dimensional and pervasive. Amartya Sen asserts that a “high level of corruption can make public policies ineffective and can also draw investment and economic activities away from productive pursuits towards the towering rewards of underhanded activities”.<sup>11</sup> As a universal phenomenon corruption affects all, but the poorer and marginalized suffer more. As the former UN Secretary General Kofi Anan said, “this evil phenomenon (corruption) is found in all countries – big and small, rich and poor – but it is in the developing world that its effects are most destructive. Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately – by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a government’s ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign investment and aid. Corruption is a key element in economic underperformance, and a major obstacle to poverty alleviation and development”.<sup>12</sup> The incumbent Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, ranked corruption at the top of the list of contemporary criminal justice issues.<sup>13</sup>

Corruption, by its very nature, is about subverting fairness. It generates disproportionality and inequality. Corruption affects the poor both directly and indirectly. Directly through increasing the cost of key public services targeted to them, lowering quality of such services and limiting or even preventing the poor's access to essential services such as education, health and justice. Indirect implications of corruption on the poor include diverting Government resources away at the expense of social sectors. By limiting growth and development corruption also reduces the scope and prospect of poverty reduction. In addition, while corruption affects everyone, the poor are more

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.275.

<sup>12</sup> “Statement on the Adoption of by the General Assembly of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption”, New York, 31 October 2003, [http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/speech\\_2003-10-31\\_html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/speech_2003-10-31_html)

<sup>13</sup> Divya Prasad and Lazaria Eeckeloo, Corruption and Human Rights, Geneva Academy, 2019, p.8

vulnerable especially because they are easy victims of bribery, extortion and intimidation.<sup>14</sup>

Corruption is protected and perpetuated by biased policy regimes and faulty governance practices that favour the rich and well-connected. Statistically significant positive association exists between corruption and income inequality. The more pervasive corruption is in a society, the higher is income inequality which in turn, leads to further perpetuation of corruption. Similar positive association exists between corruption and poverty – the higher the level of corruption the higher the level of poverty. Countries that top the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) as least affected by it also rank high in Social Inclusion Index, while those in the bottom scale of CPI are also found to score low in terms of Social Inclusion Index, which indicates that in such countries the degree of marginalization and exclusion is higher.<sup>15</sup>

Increased corruption has a direct relationship with concentration of state power in the executive and rising trend toward authoritarianism. State institutions are rendered ineffective through politicisation and other means of professional compromise to serve the interest of the corrupt syndicates and even facilitate, protect, promote high level corruption including money laundering, and provide impunity. Analysis of successive years of results of CPI shows countries under authoritarian regimes score much less than those under democracy. The 2024 CPI showed that 24 countries in

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<sup>14</sup> Among many materials on corruption and poverty linkage, see for example, Sanjeev Gupta, Hamid Davoodi and Rosa Alonso-Terme, “Does Corruption Affect Income Inequality and Poverty?” IMF working paper, 1998; World Bank, “Voices of the Poor Programme”; Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2003*. Berlin, 2003. Deepa Narajan, Raj Patel et al, “State Institutions in Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?” World Bank, Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/corruption-and-inequality-how-populists-mislead-people>; <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/2024-corruption-perceptions-index-authoritarianism-chokes-climate-action-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>

the category of full democracy scored 73 out of 100, 50 flawed democracies scored 47, 36 hybrid democracies 37, and 59 under authoritarian regimes scored 29.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the corrupt are regimes the more are restrictions on civic space which are key instruments of lack of transparency and accountability and authoritarianism. 26 Countries in the category of open civic space score 70, 40 having narrowed civic space scored 51, 37 having obstructed civic space scored 38 while 47 under repressed civic space scored 31 and 27 with closed civic space received 29 on average.<sup>17</sup>

#### **IV. Corruption, Injustice and Human Rights Violation**

It is no surprise, therefore, that corruption has been globally recognised, especially throughout the UN system as one of the main challenges to promoting human rights and access to justice. The UN Human Rights Council says, “transparent, responsible, accountable, open and participatory government, responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people, is the foundation, (which) is one of the indispensable conditions for the full realisation of human rights”.<sup>18</sup> The UN Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 similarly packages concrete actions for promoting access to information, combatting bribery and corruption and illicit financial flows as well as recovery of stolen assets; and effective, transparent and accountable institutions at all levels with fundamental freedoms and access to justice under the banner of Goal 16.<sup>19</sup>

Corruption, especially grand corruption and related illicit financial flows have a ruinous effect on State institutions and the state capacity to ensure the political and governance eco-system for rule of law and justice, which leads to erosion of capacity to uphold,

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Council Resolution 31/14 on ‘The role of good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights’, A/HRC/RES/31/14, adopted on 23 March 2016

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, Transforming Our World. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/Res/70/1, p.30.

respect and protect human rights. The triad of corruption, injustice and human rights violations are manifested by the interconnectedness and mutually reinforcing relationships amongst the three. Corruption thrives when systemic checks balances for accountability are absent or weak due to ineffectiveness of state institutions, especially those involved in ensuring rule of law like the law enforcement agencies and judiciary. Weakness and dysfunctionality of these State institutions provide impunity to the corrupt, which in turn transform laws and institutions into enablers of corruption rather than public interest. Through the weakened and ineffective law enforcement agencies and judicial system the scope of fair trials suffers, especially when bribery, cronyism, and political interference in judiciary and judicial process. This in turn prevents the scope of equal access to justice. Corrupt and politically influenced justice system fosters impunity to corruption, forces people to take corruption and abuse of power as a way of life and leads to erosion of public trust in judiciary, and hence leads to further corruption. It can also lead to erosion of democracy and democratic practices, while unaccountable abuse of power can in turn lead to the judicial ineffectiveness to an extent that it can become a pillar of rise of authoritarianism, cronyism and kleptocracy.

When the justice system is compromised, loses independence and lends itself for sale for personal benefits, it becomes incapable of discharging its mandate as protector and upholder of human rights. A state system that is incapable of preventing and controlling corruption, its judiciary becomes part of the enablers of systemic violation of human rights. The victims of human rights violation are deprived of redress and justice while the perpetrators get protected and rewarded. The institutional and governance space for promotion and protection of civil and political rights become weakened while deliberate restrictions are imposed through repressive laws and administrative actions on other freedoms like free speech, freedom of media, freedom of association, right to assembly and civic space. The non-state capacity to hold the power to account are increasingly compromised and lost. Ineffective institutions including judiciary can also compromise its capacity to protect social, cultural and economic rights. Corruption is intrinsically discriminatory and causes denial of

such rights as right to work, food, housing, health, education, social safety and protection. By diverting public resources and funds away from critical areas of public interest it benefits the privileged cronies and politically connected syndicates who benefit disproportionately and unaccountably through klepocratic state capture. As a result, the common people, especially the marginalised sections of the society are not only deprived from the economic, political, social and cultural rights, but also bear the burden of cost of corruption.

The inter-connectedness between corruption, injustice and human rights violations is therefore correlative and mutually reinforcing which is destabilizing for the society, economy and polity. Corruption not only undermines values and practices of human rights, but by corrupting institutions of accountability, rendering them dysfunctional and converting them from role of protectors of law and justice into promoters of violation of law and corruption, it further institutionalizes violation of human rights and justice. Corruption demeans basic human values of dignity integrity, equality and freedom of everyone in the society, more so the sections of the society who are marginalised and disadvantaged because of gender, social, economic, cultural, religious, ethnic, disability and other markers of identity. It leads to shrinkage of the scope of ensuring equality in terms of human rights and justice. As Advisory Committee of the UN Human Rights Council on the issue of negative impact of corruption states in its final report, it is difficult to find a human right that could not be violated by corruption.<sup>20</sup>

Corruption compromises judicial independence, propriety, impartiality, integrity, principle of equality before law and fairness of justice. It distorts justice and prevents access to justice for everyone, particularly the people outside the powerful and dominant forces in the political and governance space. The poor and disadvantaged sections of the society are especially vulnerable to corruption not only for its direct burden is more on them because of the unaffordable illegal payments needed to access services including justice and legal protection, but also for the bias of the law enforcement in favour of

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<sup>20</sup> UN HRC, A/HRC/28/73, 5 January 2015.

the corrupt who are richer and more influential. Judicial corruption directly undermines rule of law and justice and distorts the investigation process for high-profile or politically and governmentally sensitive cases, more so when coupled with corruption in the public sector, particularly in those involving administration, law enforcement and security agencies. Corruption in judiciary makes it less capable to hold other branches of the state – the legislative and executive to account. Judicial abuse of power and compromise of integrity on partisan political basis or other transactional and non-transactional connections suffers from conflict of interest, which lead to unholy collusion between the three organs of the state and can lead to concentration of unaccountable power and erosion of democracy which in turn lead to authoritarianism and kleptocracy.

Kleptocracy, the worst form of grand corruption, is a term that comes from the Greek words Klepto and Cracy, which mean thief and rule respectively. It is the rule of the thieves, where, high level power is unaccountably abused to enable a network of ruling elites to steal public funds for private gain capturing policies, undermining laws and using public institutions. Unaccountable illicit financial transfers or money laundering out of the country flourishes, which harm the source countries for the benefit of host countries that become the demand side of global economy of corruption, especially money laundering. Kleptocracy enables wealth to stay in the hands of a few. Public money and resources are stolen in a systematic way. Rule of Law is grossly undermined by weaponising institutions, especially the judiciary, law enforcement agencies and regulatory bodies. Elections are rigged to monopolise state power. Civil society, media and other professional bodies are controlled or co-opted. Dissent is criminalized leading to gross human rights violations and injustice.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/07/what-kleptocracy-and-how-does-it-work>; <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/countering-kleptocracy-through-open-government-and-democratic-oversight/>; <https://www.sanctionsscanner.com/knowledge-base/kleptocracy-1067>



## **V. The Triad of Corruption Human Rights Violation and Injustice in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh earned its independence in 1971 in the wake of a massive national independence movement leading to the glorious war of liberation to establish a democratic state ensuring “equality, human dignity and social justice”. The country has since achieved notable performance in terms of several socio-economic indicators achieving better than comparable countries in the region of South Asia and beyond.<sup>22</sup> However, this performance, in addition to the debatable implications in terms of distributive justice, contrasts strikingly with pervasive corruption and poor performance in nearly every governance indicators, indicating that Bangladesh’s performance in growth and socio economic transformation could have been much better and more equitable if it could achieve higher standards of governance and effectively controlled corruption. Bangladesh’s performance in terms of nearly every index related to governance has been embarrassingly poorer than other countries in South Asia<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> These include rise of per capita income from \$134 in 1971 to over \$2,820 in 2024-25, which is higher than India and Pakistan; better score in Human Development Index than Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan; higher position than any other country of South Asia in Global Gender Gap Index; success in maternal and child health, Polio eradication, Diarrhoea control; and life expectancy at birth ahead of Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan.

<sup>23</sup> In Democracy Index 2024, Bangladesh was ranked 100<sup>th</sup> out of 167 countries, third lowest in South Asia after only Pakistan and Afghanistan; by Rule of Law Index 2025, it was 125<sup>th</sup> among 143 countries, 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in South Asia after Pakistan and Afghanistan; in terms of Regulatory Quality Index 2023, 157<sup>th</sup> among 193, second lowest in SA after Afghanistan; Global Governance Index 2024, 132<sup>nd</sup> among 191, 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in South Asia after Pakistan and Afghanistan; Political stability index 2023, 161<sup>st</sup> among 193, 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in the region after Pakistan and Afghanistan; Voice and accountability index 2023, 138<sup>th</sup> among 192, 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in South Asia after Pakistan and Afghanistan; Press Freedom Index 2025: ranked 149<sup>th</sup> among 180, in the “Red” category in terms of freedom of media and freedom of expression; Transparency (or Corruption Risk) Index 2024: 94<sup>th</sup> among 143, 2<sup>nd</sup>

While there is no doubt that cost of corruption is extremely high in Bangladesh, due to complexities in the measure of multi-level, multi-dimensional corruption ranging from petty bribery to grand corruption and money laundering, there are no concrete credible single estimates of average annual loss to the economy in terms of indicators like share of GDP. However, it is estimated that Bangladesh's per capita income could be doubled if corruption was moderately controlled, and annual cost of corruption is at least 2-3 percent of GDP.<sup>24</sup> Public sector corruption reached alarming level during the kleptocratic regime of 2009-2024. 23 to 40 percent of the total value of road and bridge-related construction projects during 2009-24 were lost to collusive corruption involving politicians, contractors, and public officials<sup>25</sup>. Nearly 40 percent of estimated allocation for publicly funded projects to procure goods and services in such sectors roads and bridges, power infrastructure, hospitals and education facilities were lost to bribery and extortion, of which 50 percent went to politicians and their accomplices while the other half to others in the collusion syndicate<sup>26</sup>. The amount of illicit financial outflows is estimated to be about US\$ 234 billion, during 2009-2024 at an average annual outflow of about USD 16 billion. This was considered equivalent to 3.4% of Bangladesh's current GDP or more than twice the net flows of foreign aid and FDI flows over the corresponding period<sup>27</sup>. Corruption diverted public resources away from basic public service sectors related to rights, equality and justice like law enforcement, justice, passport delivery, road transport, land, education, health, housing, public safety and security, social

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lowest in South Asia; and Corruption Perception Index 2024: having scored 23 in 100 ranked 151<sup>st</sup> in 180, second lowest in the region followed only by Afghanistan.

<sup>24</sup> Former Finance Minister, drawing upon a World Bank study is quoted to have recognized that at least 2-3 percent of GDP is annually lost to corruption, *The Daily Star*, 10 July, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/articles/press-release/7098>

<sup>26</sup> *White Paper on the State of Bangladesh Economy: Dissection of the Development Narrative*, 2024, p. 109

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 330.

protection, labour rights and protection from climate change. Bribery is so widespread in the public service delivery sectors that for over 70 percent of recipients a “no bribe no service” experience has been normalised.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, whatever resources were allocated, were also eaten up by collusive corruption in public procurement, project implementation and bribery at the delivery end.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has experienced one of the fastest growths in its ultra-wealthy population globally since 2012, with a projected 11.4% increase in high net-worth individuals (those with net worth of \$30 million) between 2018 and 2023. This came along with widening income inequality. In 2025, the top 10% of people controlled 58.5% of the total wealth, while the bottom 50% held only 4.8%.<sup>29</sup> The Global Inequality Lab reports that 44 percent of Bangladesh’s total national income was held in 2021 by only 10 percent high income people while the bottom 50 percent possessed only 17.1 percent of GDP. Just one percent of the population hold more than 15 percent of total national income in 2024.<sup>30</sup>

Abuse of power and corruption are among key factors behind such unequal distribution of social and economic opportunities, and increasing exclusion of the poor and disadvantaged from the benefits of growth. Corruption discourse mostly focuses on it as a malaise that prevents development, undermines democracy and accentuates discrimination. But that it also deprives people of nearly every category of human rights including right to life in particular were graphically exposed in Bangladesh like some other parts of the

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<sup>28</sup> Successive TIB research have shown at least 70 percent service recipients in public sectors to have been victims of corruption, and more than 77 percent of those who had had to pay bribe reported experience of no “bribe no service” <https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/articles/story/7137>. Another recent study has estimated 54% of public funds used for climate change-related project were lost to corruption. (...)

<sup>29</sup> <https://share.google/t9XI0FURfJxcJMoB6>

<sup>30</sup> <https://wid.world/country/bangladesh/>

world<sup>31</sup> many a times during the kleptocratic period. The Rana Plaza collapse tragedy in Savar near Dhaka is one of the worst possible examples of corruption-induced deaths that took nearly 1200 innocent lives, mostly women.<sup>32</sup> The same is true about series of fire accidents like Tazreen Garments and others that are responsible for loss of lives and property which was normalized by corruption, collusive abuse of politically connected power and poor governance.<sup>33</sup>

Add to this the distinctive feature of political culture, especially the increasingly intense collusion of business with politics. Politics is about investment. Money is invested to rise to positions of politics and power in the party or in the government. Politics and election are a "winner takes all" game in which nothing short of victory is acceptable. Losing the election means everything is lost, whereas winning is looked at as a mandate to make profit out of the investment. Not all politicians are in the same category, though in fact, a major qualitative transformation has taken place over the years in the political space. In the first Parliament of Bangladesh the proportion of MPs who had business as their primary occupation was below 18 percent. Rising steadily since then, the ratio had reached 59 and 61 percent respectively in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament, while the

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<sup>31</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/04/world/europe/turkey-earthquake-corruption.html#:~:text=Guclu%20Bahce%20attracted%20doctors%2C%20teachers,be%20pulled%20from%20the%20wreckage,https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2020/report/Amphan/Amphan\\_Study\\_ES\\_Eng.p,https://www.transparency.org/en/press/20060806-corruption-in-humanitarian-aid-a-double-disaster](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/04/world/europe/turkey-earthquake-corruption.html#:~:text=Guclu%20Bahce%20attracted%20doctors%2C%20teachers,be%20pulled%20from%20the%20wreckage,https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2020/report/Amphan/Amphan_Study_ES_Eng.p,https://www.transparency.org/en/press/20060806-corruption-in-humanitarian-aid-a-double-disaster)

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/corruption-the-killer-in-savar-thoughts-for-international-response/>, [https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2014/es\\_ffs\\_RMG\\_follow\\_up\\_14\\_en.pdf](https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2014/es_ffs_RMG_follow_up_14_en.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2020/report/Churihatta-Nimitali/Ch\\_urihatta\\_&\\_Nimitali\\_Study\\_EX\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2020/report/Churihatta-Nimitali/Ch_urihatta_&_Nimitali_Study_EX_EN.pdf)

aborted 12<sup>th</sup> it crossed 65 percent.<sup>34</sup> This does not include indirect and beneficial ownerships. People often enter politics and assume politically important positions including that of public representatives not by virtue of political participation, experience and people's mandate, but by investing money and muscle for gaining politically empowered position as investment and profit-making.

Politically influential position including that of public representative from highest to the lowest level have been converted into license for abuse of power for personal gain through all possible means. Politics has been to a great extent criminalized where money and muscle rules. One example of direct criminalization of politics as a key source of political capital was shockingly brought to focus by the killing in India of a three times "elected" MP who was accused in 21 cases between 2000 and 2008, according to his own affidavit submitted to the Election Commission as a candidate for the January 7 2024 "(s)election". Three of those cases were allegations of murder, while the rest involved smuggling of arms, explosives, drugs and gold, extortion, tender manipulation, and sheltering extremists. He was even on a "wanted" list of the Interpol<sup>35</sup>. Another example is the former Bangladeshi "lawmaker" who has been suffering jail sentence in Kuwait of seven years for human trafficking, torture and money laundering<sup>36</sup>.

Politics has also for long been a zero-sum game where the winner takes all practice prevails to establish monopolistic control of the political and governance space and the spoils that come along. Business and profit-making relationships of public representatives with the government is considered a matter of politically legitimised

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<sup>34</sup> <https://ti-bangladesh.org/images/2024/report/pw/Parliament-watch-11th-Parliament-Presentation-Bn.pdf>, <https://ti-bangladesh.org/images/2024/report/pw/Parliament-watch-11th-Parliament-Presentation-Bn.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/editorial/news/why-was-mp-anwarul-azim-murdered-3616136>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/kuwait-former-bangladeshi-mp-guilty-of-human-trafficking-facilitating-migrant-worker-travel-on-fake-contracts/>

right. Business, investment, recruitment, public contracting, profiteering, land grabbing, embezzlement, extortion and influence peddling have also normalised intra-party turf-war including same-side violence and killings.

The continued ineffectiveness of the national parliament, the Jatiya Sangsad, in terms of its proper role in the Westminster type of Government that the country has restored with high expectations in the wake of a long-drawn struggle against authoritarian rule is at the core of deficit in the overall state institutional structure. Soon after restoring parliamentary form of government, the Parliament faced a huge credibility crisis. Confrontational politics for winner takes all game led to a situation that boycott of successive sessions became a regular practice. Even when sessions were not formally boycotted, Members of the Parliament (MPs) were hardly serious about attending the sessions. The culture of parliamentary boycott was eventually replaced by enforcement of monopolisation of parliamentary political space by successive rounds of manipulated elections resulting in a virtual non-existence of opposition bench in the House. The parliamentary standing committees failed to perform the oversight role. In sum, the Parliament's delivery as the forum for debate on matters of public interest, as a law-making body and as an institution to ensure accountability of the Government to the people remained far from the expected level. On the other hand, democratic practice in the political parties is a rare commodity in terms of degree of reflection of the views of rank and file in decision-making<sup>37</sup> as well as the issues of transparency and disclosure of key information including political and electoral finance<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Transparency International Bangladesh, *Local Participation and Expectations in the Nomination Process of National Elections*, February 2011; <https://www.cmi.no/publications/4967-democratic-dynasties>

<sup>38</sup> Transparency International Bangladesh, "Transparency in Political Finance in Bangladesh", 2009, [http://www.ti-bangladesh.org/research/Crinis\\_Report\\_251009\\_full\[e\]2.pdf](http://www.ti-bangladesh.org/research/Crinis_Report_251009_full[e]2.pdf); [https://files.transparencycdn.org/images/2025\\_WorkingPaper\\_DigitalDisclosurePoliticalFinance\\_English.pdf](https://files.transparencycdn.org/images/2025_WorkingPaper_DigitalDisclosurePoliticalFinance_English.pdf)

Not only the parliament, other institutions of democracy and the national integrity system like the judiciary, the election commission, public administration, law enforcement agencies and the Anti-Corruption Commission have been significantly politicized and effectiveness compromised resulting in greater scope of sustained corruption and a culture of impunity. The state structure has been exposed to kleptocratic capture by those who benefit from corruption at the expense of those who would like to control it.

Examples are replete in Bangladesh that when the state institutions, particularly law enforcement agencies and judiciary are affected by corruption, instead of accountability of violators of human rights they become protectors of the perpetrators while the victims are exposed to further vulnerability including threats to wellbeing, violation of the right to justice, safety and security of life. While the historic July Movement was an unprecedented example of Bangladesh's successful youth and student-led people power resulting in the defeat of the kleptocratic regime of 16 years, it witnessed the peak of multi-dimensional violations of human rights including right to life, individual liberty, safety and security, civil and political rights including freedom of speech and assembly, media freedom and right to information perpetrated by the highly corrupt, kleptocratic and abusive regime. The UN Human Rights Office estimated directly protest-related deaths during the movement at 1400, among whom 12 percent were children. They also reported the number of people injured as 13,529 including 736 with eye injuries.<sup>39</sup>

The years since 2009 witnessed tyrannical abuse of power and kleptocracy through forcible monopolization of political and governance space and institutional structure. Apart from civil and political rights, criminalization of right to dissent and media freedom

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<sup>39</sup> UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Fact-Finding Report Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, Geneva February 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/bangladesh/ohchr-fftb-hr-violations-bd.pdf>

and freedom of opinion, right to life and liberty were particular weapons to establish monopolistic control of power and protect its abuse. Repressive laws were enacted and Constitutional amendments were imposed for the same purpose. The abolition of the constitutional provision for the Caretaker Government system for holding free and fair elections became the justification for the depriving the people's right to vote and the right of political parties to take part in three successive (non)elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024.

Over the period from 2009 to 2024 that witnessed transformation of a government that came to power following a nationally and internationally acceptable national election held in 2008 into one of the worst forms of authoritarianism and kleptocracy was marked by 4,356 instances of gross human rights violations including 2715 extra-judicial killings, 1,132 deaths in custody and 689 enforced disappearances.<sup>40</sup> Such violations can be credibly attributed to multi-level corruption. These were firstly examples of abuse of power to suppress free speech, dissent, media and political opponents. And secondly, in most cases the law enforcement, security or intelligence agencies that became the key pillars of abuse of kleptocratic power, were involved either as perpetrators or abettors, beneficiaries, enablers or at best acquiescent for lack of action, deliberately or not.

The chain of secret detention and torture facilities operated by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) during the fallen kleptocratic regime revealed multi-dimensional human rights violations including enforced illegal custody to facilitate abductions, tortures, extra-judicial killings and disappearances. The specific number of Aynaghors, the illegal detention facilities used for such ruthless

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<sup>40</sup> This is according to annual reports for the relevant years by Odhikar, <https://www.omct.org/en/network-members/odhikar>. While the Odhikar estimates are for the period 2009-2024, another leading human rights organisation, Ain o Shalish Kendra reports the total number of such cases of gross violations for the period 2013-2024 to be 2987. <https://www.askbd.org/ask/>



violations of human rights to protect and promote the interest of the authoritarian and kleptocratic regime is unknown, but estimated to be 700-800 across the country including Dhaka<sup>41</sup>. There were hardly any crimes that the law enforcement agencies, especially RAB, were not involved in. In one of the worst such crimes, RAB were the direct perpetrators in the grotesque case of contract killing in which seven people were brutally murdered on April 27, 2014 in Narayanganj, to enable elimination of rivals in politically connected abuse of power<sup>42</sup>.

In addition to specialised detention and torture centres like Aynaghors and Taskforce for Intelligence (TFI)<sup>43</sup>, offices of so-called law-enforcement and security agencies were also used for illegal detention as demonstrated during the July Movement when seven leading movement coordinators were abducted by the Detective Branch of Police, some of whom were undergoing medical treatment in hospital, and detained illegally just because they were exercising their right to dissent against Kleptocracy<sup>44</sup>. Fake narratives were also used as a weapon to criminalize free speech and suppress violation of human rights<sup>45</sup>. Free media and free speech were indiscriminately criminalised as in case of the brutal assassination of the journalist couple Sagar and Runi, an example of enduring impunity that had a chilling effect on media freedom<sup>46</sup>. It is widely believed they were

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.risingbd.com/english/national/news/110381>

<sup>42</sup> <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/vkoi5vigsw>; <https://www.bbc.com/bengali/articles/c0v0z2w5x1ro>; <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/86913/do-we-know-the-whole-story-behind-the-narayanganj>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/17/bangladesh-secret-interrogation-centre>

<sup>44</sup> <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/yics5rf0jku>  
<https://www.bssnews.net/july-uprising/295833>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/articles/press-release/7048>;  
<https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/241525/tib-condemns-govts-use-of-fake-narratives>

<sup>46</sup> <https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1762811995475017871>

targeted because of their investigative reporting on corruption in Bangladesh's energy sector which they were about to publish<sup>47</sup>.

In a specific example of protecting and providing impunity to grand corruption and money laundering the politically biased Appellate Division issued a directive to stop investigations against one of the top level money launderers and kingpins of kleptocracy<sup>48</sup>. It is also no secret that the DGFI played the enabler's role in the forced takeover of a group of banks by the same group of companies that eventually used the dysfunctional banking sector oversight system to plunder and launder billions of dollars out of the country<sup>49</sup>, one of the key factors that brought the country's banking sector to the brink of collapse. On the other hand, in revenge for trying to uphold judicial neutrality by resisting the highest level political pressure and refrain from issuing the Cangaroo-judgement to scrap the 16<sup>th</sup> amendment that deprived the authority of the Supreme Judicial Council to remove High Court Judges and handed it over to the Parliament<sup>50</sup> a former Chief Justice known for his strong stance against allowing bail to notorious smugglers and corrupt individuals was forced to leave the country using the DGFI, one of the most infamous intelligence agencies of the country<sup>51</sup>.

Competition for establishing partisan political influence over law enforcement and judicial process has a longer history. To subvert the investigation against perpetrators of the high profile Grenade attack of 21 August 2004, the Criminal Investigation Department of

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/03/bangladesh-end-crackdown-against-journalists-and-critics>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/appellate-division-scraps-hc-order-investigate-money-laundering-allegations-against-s>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/dgfi-helped-force-takeover-leading-banks-bb-governor-tells-ft-978021>;  
<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/economy/banks/news/how-islami-bank-was-taken-over-gunpoint-3691281>

<sup>50</sup> <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=a1245545z&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=18/09/2014&sedId=1>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/star-interview-hasina-used-dgfi-force-me-leave-the-country-3684736>

Police staged the widely known “Joj Mia drama” to secure confession of criminal responsibility by force upon a poor farmer Joj Mia who was eventually proved innocent only after regime change in 2007. Joj Mia’s experience became an example of ruthless violation of human rights under partisan political influence by those who are legally mandated to protect such rights<sup>52</sup>. Similarly, the controversy over the non-partisan and neutral Caretaker system of election-time Government for conducting free and fair elections was initiated by a politically biased decision to increase the retirement age of judges from 65 to 67 years with the crafty design to ensure that the head of the Government of the Caretaker Government to be formed would be a person of choice of the then ruling party that made the amendment. This controversial decision is considered to be one of key factors that eventually led to the scrapping of the Caretaker system<sup>53</sup>, which in turn is believed to be the main catalyst to enforcement of the strategy to establish monopolistic control on the political and governance system and enable kleptocracy. Another example of political influence over judiciary was the ‘skype scandal’ of 2012 that disclosed the government pressure that led to the resignation of the relevant Justice and undermined the credibility of the International Crimes Tribunal nationally and internationally<sup>54</sup>.

Extreme form of intolerance and suppression of dissent and freedom of expression of any type were manifested throughout the period of authoritarian regime, as exemplified by numerous fabricated cases under draconian use of the infamous laws like Digital Security Act (DSA), ICT Act and Special Powers Act. In one such case Khadijatul Kubra, a 17-year old student was arrested under the DSA and suffered imprisonment for over a year, most of the time without specific charge. The only stated allegation against her was a comment made by one of the speakers in a webinar that she

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/august-21-carnage/news/joj-mia-drama-the-real-deal-1644658>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.voabangla.com/a/7395418.html>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-260836>

moderated<sup>55</sup>. Not only the DSA, its predecessor ICT Act also provided the ‘legitimacy’ to indiscriminate violation of right to free speech<sup>56</sup>. The Foreign Donations Voluntary Regulations Act of 2016 is largely responsible for unprecedented restriction of civic space, especially for targeted harassment of rights-based NGOs and creating an atmosphere of intimidation against free speech<sup>57</sup>. The Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) Act, 2010, granted indemnity to systematic violation of the due process in large scale energy sector public procurement in the name of expedited approval of rental power projects. The law was widely criticized for preventing transparency, promoting corruption and above all violation of people’s right to raise voice for transparency and against collusive abuse of power and barred judicial redress<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/jnu-student-khadijatul-walks-out-jail-after-over-14-months-3474146>

<sup>56</sup> The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act 2006, purported to be a digital governance law to regulate electronic transactions, cybercrime and related matters, amended in 2013, and eventually replaced by the Digital Security Act 2018, is considered to be the most draconian of all in terms of its provisions and application, often deliberate to control freedom of speech.

<sup>57</sup> The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016 provided the NGO Affairs Bureau, public administration and security agencies the basis on which to promote various forms of abuse of power in the name of regulation of NGO operation with foreign donations in Bangladesh at both national and local levels included bribery, extortion and targeted harassment at the behest of the ruling authority. Article 14 of the Act in particular created an intimidating atmosphere by providing inter alia, that any NGO or individual shall be deemed to have committed a criminal offence if any remark or comment is made that can be considered inimical and defamatory to the Constitution and Constitutional institutions.

<sup>58</sup> Section 9 of the Act, repealed only after the fall of the regime, provided that no question can be raised before any court regarding the validity of any action, or any action deemed to have been taken regarding investment or procurement in the sector for which sweeping powers were vested in the Energy Ministry under the control of the head of the government.

Similarly, the ruthless killing of Abrar Fahad, a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) which shocked Bangladesh as he was targeted by some leaders of the student wing of the ruling party for critical views against the regime posted on social media<sup>59</sup>. Only because of exercising the right to freedom of expression through posting satirical cartoon critical of Government's management of Covid 19 crisis through Facebook post writer and cartoonist Mushtaq Ahmed and Ahmed Kabir Kishore were jailed under DSA in May 2020, tortured by RAB under custody, denied bail six times. Mushtaq Ahmed died on 25 February 2021<sup>60</sup>. Among many instances of ruthless violation of human rights by the RAB was the case of Limon Hossain, a 16 years old college student who was shot point blank in a farmland near his home in a typically fake and fabricated narrative of crossfire with criminals. His leg had to be amputated to save life, following which he was unable to return home under threat of further persecution by the perpetrators. Two years after the shooting he was charged in a further fabricated case of alleged possession of illegal weapon. Although eventually the fabricated charges against him was dropped he never got justice for violation of a number of items of his fundamental rights including right to life nor the perpetrator was brought to account<sup>61</sup>. Instead, the then National Human Rights Commission, in another example of state institution being politically captured, called upon the victim to withdraw his case against RAB and reach a compromise with RAB<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49986893>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/10/bangladesh-ruling-party-activists-kill-student-after-facebook-post>

<sup>60</sup> [https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/3800/2021/en/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/3800/2021/en/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>61</sup> [https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/20/bangladesh-no-justice-wounded-child?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/20/bangladesh-no-justice-wounded-child?utm_source=chatgpt.com);  
[https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news/2013/07/130701\\_pg\\_bangladesh\\_rab\\_limon](https://www.bbc.com/bengali/news/2013/07/130701_pg_bangladesh_rab_limon)

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/laws-rights/29498/limon-won%E2%80%99t-withdraw-case-against-rab>

The DSA was particularly used for suppression of political dissent and media freedom. At least 4,520 individuals were charged under 1,436 cases between October 2018 and September 2023. Of them 495 were politicians, 451 were journalists sued under this Act, while the remaining were of various other professions. Though there were victims of other categories of alleged wrongdoing like hurting religious sentiments, sexual harassment, bullying, violation of privacy, overwhelming majority were for alleged defamation due to exercise of freedom of expression. 255 media professionals were particularly targeted for their journalistic reports<sup>63</sup>.

The Fact-Finding Report of the UN Human Rights Office graphically documents<sup>64</sup> how law enforcement agencies, especially Police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and BGB with the active support and involvement of the security agencies like DGFI, DB, NSI, NTMC operating during the Kleptocratic Government were involved in extrajudicial killings and multi-dimensional violations of other rights and freedoms. Various ruthless means were used including lethal weapons indiscriminately against participants of the July uprising against discrimination and systematic violation of the range of fundamental rights including civil and political rights.

The evolution of RAB as an indispensable institution to support the exercise of executive authority without accountability is just a case in point that abuse of power is independent of political differences. Established as an “elite force” in 2004 to conduct an ironically coined “clean heart operation” with the stated objective of curbing terrorism, and then praised for doing so “courageously”, the Battalion that grew from an initial strength of 5,500 members to over 15,000 by the time it received the dubious distinction of receiving targeted US Sanctions in 2021 for serious human rights violations

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<sup>63</sup> [https:// cgs-bd.com/article/24476/The-Ordeal--Five-years-of-the-Digital-Security-Act-2018-2023](https://cgs-bd.com/article/24476/The-Ordeal--Five-years-of-the-Digital-Security-Act-2018-2023)

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-fact-finding-report-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-related>

including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings<sup>65</sup>. It was no surprise therefore that having successfully managed to survive national and international calls for reform and even specific demands for being disbanded by the both the opposition political parties of the day, RAB became the pillar of the power structure that not only enabled the rise of authoritarianism but also the trusted force for the kleptocracy to suppress any form of dissent throughout the whole period of 15 years and during the July uprising. That the indispensability of such a pillar as a powerbase prevails in post August 5 Bangladesh and likely to be sustained is clear enough in the way the UN Human Rights Office Report's specific recommendation to disband RAB remains ignored clearly by choice, despite otherwise unqualified praise and support that the report received from the Government and all other stakeholders including the power-aspirant political parties. Control of dissent by force and indiscriminate violation of human rights through the use of law enforcement and security agencies and surveillance system have so deeply ingrained in political and governance culture of Bangladesh that it is unlikely that the much-hyped state reform agenda will bring any substantive transformations in these agencies, in the repressive systems they have developed, capacities acquired, and methods applied that have been institutionalized.

## **VI. Is there a way out – The Whole of the State and Society**

What can be observed from the above is that the triad of corruption, human rights violations, and injustice in Bangladesh was trapped in a vicious interconnected and mutually reinforcing cycle. Corruption subverted the mechanisms of justice, leading to human rights violations, while the erosion of justice and rights, in turn, enabled corruption to thrive. The impact of this corrosive triangle under kleptocratic control was manifested in subverting the rule of law; undermined fair trials; produced distorted, biased and politically

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<sup>65</sup> Ali Riaz, "US Sanctions on Bangladesh's RAB: What Happened? What Next?", Atlantic Council, December 16, 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/us-sanctions-on-bangladeshs-rab-what-happened-whats-next/>

motivate judgements leading to deprivation of civil and political rights; granted both facilitation and impunity to the various forms and levels of abuse of power, especially of the high-level corrupt plunderers and money launderers connected with kleptocratic power; prevented people's access to justice and in particular denied protection of the victims of violation of human rights from further revengeful injustice.

Corruption, criminalized politics and dysfunctional institutions not only led to kleptocratic state capture, but grossly undermined the capacity of the state to ensure pro-people socio-economic development, rule of law, justice and accountability. It facilitated further systemic abuse of rights and justice using the state institutions and agencies to sustain where violence, exploitations, discrimination, bribery, fraud, extortion, nepotism, influence peddling, illegal occupation and plundering of public resources, grand corruption and illicit financial transfers became normalized by both state and private sector abusers of power. There was hardly any remedy for victims. Media and press freedom, freedom of information, civic participation, right to dissent and assembly were criminalized.

The triad of corruption, human rights violation and injustice is an outcome of the political and governance eco-system that has evolved over the years since independence, particularly since the fall of the Ershad regime, taken to deepest level of institutionalization during 2009-2024. However, getting out of this triangle is not yet impossible. Much of it will depend on the extent that the pillars and determinants of the political and governance eco-system are ready for transformation towards state reform and new politico-governance construct. Four mutually reinforcing drivers of an effective national integrity system built on the premise of "the whole of the state and society" are indispensable. First is the political will for accountable governance at all levels, including reforming the self from within, not only on paper but in practice without fear or favour. Second, the corrupt and other abusers of power must be brought to justice ensuring equality of all before law irrespective of the identity and status of the individual. Third, the institutions of the national integrity system including security and surveillance agencies must be



transparent, efficient, accountable and effective, both individually and collectively. Fourth, conducive environment must be created for people at large, particularly media and civil society to raise and strengthen the demand for accountability and mobilize people, especially the new generation against corruption, human rights violations and injustice. This whole of the state and society approach is graphically presented below,<sup>66</sup> in which the effectiveness of the national Integrity system depends on the collective and mutually reinforcing strength of the whole set of state and non-state institutions grounded on the politico-institutional, socio-political and socio-economic foundations. Getting out of the vicious triangle and achieving the aspirations of rule of law, sustainable development and quality of life is possible when the whole national integrity system will hold together strongly enough to prevent and control corruption and kleptocracy.



<sup>66</sup> Borrowed from: [https://www.transparency.org/en/national-integrity-system-assessments#:~:text=The%20National%20Integrity%20System%20\(NIS\)%20is%20a,government%2C%20civil%20society%2C%20and%20the%20business%20community](https://www.transparency.org/en/national-integrity-system-assessments#:~:text=The%20National%20Integrity%20System%20(NIS)%20is%20a,government%2C%20civil%20society%2C%20and%20the%20business%20community)

The humiliating defeat of what was widely considered as invincibly authoritarian and Kleptocratic regime represents a thumping reaffirmation of people power and the whole of society approach. It has opened the unprecedented gateways to eco-system transformation. The youth and civic uprising has shattered the foundations and structures of kleptocracy. The people's movement, spontaneously participated by the whole of society except the regime and its cronies protested against not only the use of force by the law enforcement and intelligence agencies but also against long years of misrule symbolized by abysmal governance failures and worst form of kleptocracy. It represented powerful outburst of public sentiment against the use of political, public or governmental and business and other positions of power as a license for corruption and self-enrichment at the expense of the vast majority of the people who were victims of gross human rights violations and injustices.

The victory of the movement marked the fall of the authoritarian regime, but whether it will eventually transform into a true exit of kleptocracy and a sufficiently robust and sustainable democratic transition remains to be seen. It will depend on if and to what extent the July Charter containing the aspirations of state reform for accountable governance will be truly realized. It will depend on the extent to which reform proposals of all the eleven reform commissions that have remained outside the purview of the July Charter will be implemented. It will also depend on structural and systemic reforms in some other left-out critical sectors of public interest like education, private sector, agriculture, environment and climate change, etc., will be part of the transformation agenda. It will depend furthermore on the extent to which the recommendations of the Fact-Finding mission of the UN Human Rights Office will be implemented, especially with respect to the law enforcement, security forces, intelligence and surveillance agencies and systems. It will also depend quite significantly on the capacity of reform leaders and power aspirants to map forces of resistance to change as much from outside as from within and adopt actionable time-bound strategy. It will depend on if and to what extent Bangladesh politics can develop the capacity to transparently and accountably manage its dependence

on money, muscle and religion. Finally, much will depend on whether the most determining forces in the whole of the state and society, especially political parties and bureaucracy, the prime movers of the executive authority can overcome the clearly visible “its our turn” syndrome.

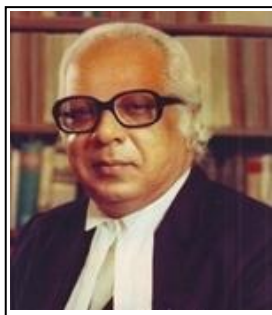
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## **Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation**

National Professor Dr. Sufia Ahmed, the spouse of the late Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, founded the Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation at the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh on 18 July 2004 in honour of her illustrious husband. The objective of the Foundation is to enable the Society to promote research within the broad areas of “Legal and Constitutional History and Cultural History of Bangladesh”.

### **Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed**

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed was born in a respectable family of the Uttar Pradesh, Gazipur, India, on 18 January 1932. From his early life, he emerged as a prominent public figure, and he became one of the main organizers to lead the great Language Movement. Ishtiaq Ahmed got his BA Hons., and MA degrees in 1953 and 1954 in Economics from the University of Dhaka.



He subsequently got MSc from the London School of Economics and was called to the Bar as Barrister-at-Law from Lincoln's Inn. He began his legal career in the-then East-Pakistan High Court in 1960. Alongside his legal profession, he taught Law at the University of Dhaka as its guest teacher.

Ishtiaq Ahmed was appointed an Additional Attorney-General in 1972 and Attorney General of Bangladesh in 1976. He was elected President of the Supreme Court Bar Association two times. He served the Finance Committee of the Bar Council as elected Chairman for many years, and as the Chairman of the Company Law Reform Committee, he made significant contributions towards updating the Companies Act of 1913.

As an active member of Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, he served the organization as its Alternate Chairman from 1985 to 1991 and Chairman from 1992 until his death.

As a founding member of the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust, he served on its Trustee Board to the last day of his life.

For his outstanding contribution to the legal society, Barrister Ishtiaq Ahmed made himself such a personality that he may call the mentor of the society. An unbending exponent of Rule of Law and Constitutionality, he often came in conflict with the establishments, and for which he was suffered imprisonment.

Barrister Ishtiaq served as the Advisor of Law and Justice under the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh two times and paved the way for the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive.

After living a very fruitful life, Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed breathed his last on 12 July 2003. He left behind his beloved wife, National Professor Dr. Sufia Ahmed; his son, the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bangladesh, Dr. Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed; and his daughter, Dr. Tasneem Raina Fateh.

## **Activities of the Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation**

### **Lectures**

The first lecture was delivered by Mr. Mahmudul Islam, Distinguished Lawyer, Author and former Attorney General, on *Rule of Law in Bangladesh*. The lecture was delivered on 12 July 2005.

The second by Professor Rehman Sobhan, Distinguished Economist of the Country; Fellow, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, and Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), on *Identity and Inclusion in the Development of the Bangladesh State*. The lecture was delivered on 12 July 2006.

The third by Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, Governor, Bangladesh Bank, on *The Road Map to Financial System Standards for Middle Income Bangladesh*. The lecture was delivered on 18 August 2007.

The fourth by Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, Chairman, BRAC, Mohakhali, Dhaka, on *Development as a Right: The Role of Legal Empowerment in the Making of a Just Society*. The lecture was delivered on 22 November 2008.

The fifth by Dr. Tapan Raychaudhuri, Oxford, UK, on *Muslims and Hindus in British India*. The lecture was delivered on 22 November 2009.

The sixth by Dr. Gowher Rizvi, Adviser to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, on *Holding the State Accountable: Building Democratic Institutions of Government Accountability*. The lecture was delivered on 12 December 2010.

The seventh by Barrister Rafique-ul Huq, on *Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed: The Boundless Sky*. The lecture was delivered on 22 November 2011.

The eighth by Dr. Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of History, Harvard University, USA, on *নেতাজী সুভাষ চন্দ্র বসু ও হিন্দু-মুসলমান সম্পর্ক*. The lecture was delivered on 28 December 2012.

The ninth by Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, on *Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed—An Icon*. The lecture was delivered on 6 December 2013.

The tenth by Dr. Hameeda Hossain, Founder Member, Ain O Salish Kendra and Vice-Chairperson, Research Initiatives Bangladesh, on *Emerging from the Cage: Women's Struggles for Justice*. The lecture was delivered on 22 December 2014.

The eleventh by Professor Nazrul Islam, Honorary Chairman, Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) and former President, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, on *Urbanization and Urban Poverty in Bangladesh: Issues in Disparities, Deprivations and Rights*. The lecture was delivered on 15 December 2015.

The twelfth by Professor Dr. Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Vice Chancellor, University of Asia Pacific and Fellow, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, on *Towards a Disaster Resilient Nation: the Bangladesh Scenario*. The lecture was delivered on 27 December 2016.

The thirteenth by Mr. M. Syeduzzaman, retired bureaucrat, currently Member, Board of Trustees, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and former Principal Finance Secretary, Advisor and (Technocrat) Minister for Finance, on স্বাধীন বাংলাদেশের সংবিধান ও বঙ্গবন্ধুর অর্থনৈতিক দর্শন. The lecture was delivered on 12 December 2017.

The fourteenth by Mr. Justice M. Imman Ali, Hon'ble Judge of Appellate Division, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, on *Protection of Rights of Children — Role of the Judiciary*. The lecture was delivered on 27 November 2018.

The fifteenth by Mr. Justice Arijit Banerjee, Calcutta High Court, West Bengal, India, on *Expanding Horizon of the Writ Jurisdiction: An Indian Perspective*. The lecture was delivered on 26 December 2019.

The sixteenth by Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed, Professor, Department of International Relations and Director, Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka, on *Civil Society, State and Bangladesh: A Civilizational Quest*. The lecture was delivered on 19 December 2020.

The seventeenth by Mr. A F Hassan Ariff, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, on *Judicial Review of Administrative Authority, Power, and Jurisdiction*. The lecture was delivered on 9 December 2021.

The eighteenth by Barrister Manzoor Hasan *OBE*, Executive Director, Centre for Peace and Justice, Brac University, on *Bangladesh and the Protracted Rohingya Refugee Obligations – A Future Pathway*. The lecture was delivered on 8 December 2022.

Today, the nineteenth lecture of the Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation will be delivered by Dr. Iftakharuzzaman, Executive Director, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), on *The Vicious Triangle of Corruption, Human Rights Violation and Injustice in Bangladesh: Is there a Way Out?*

### **Book Publication**

*Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Lecture Series (2005 – 2018)*  
Launched on: 26 December 2019

### **Gold Medal Award for Research Based Publication (Book)**

1. Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation Gold Medal - 2005

**Author:** Dr. Zinat Mahrukh Banu, Keeper, Department of Ethnography and Decoration Art, Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka

**Book:** *Bangladesher Darushilpa* (Woodworks of Bangladesh) published by Bangladesh National Museum in 2003.

2. Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation Gold Medal - 2008

**Author:** Mr. Mahmudul Islam, former Attorney General of Bangladesh, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

**Book:** *Interpretation of Statutes and Documents* published by Mullick Brothers, Bangla Bazar, Dhaka-1100 in 2009.



## **Dr. Iftekharuzzaman**

Iftekharuzzaman (Iftekhar Zaman), PhD in Economics, is the Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). Before joining TIB in September 2004, he was Executive Director of Bangladesh Freedom Foundation (1991-2004), Executive Director of Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka (1995-99), Senior Research Fellow and Research Director of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (1982-95).



He was one of the seven members of the National Consensus Commission set up by the Interim Government. Earlier he served as Head of the Commission for Reform of the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bangladesh.

Iftekharuzzaman had his graduation with Honours in Economics from University of Dhaka, Masters from Academy of Economics, Wroclaw, and PhD in Economics from Central School of Planning and Statistics in Warsaw. He worked for a year as a post-doctoral fellow in International Relations Department of University of Tokyo.

Dr. Zaman was an elected member of the International Board of Directors of Transparency International in 2008, re-elected in 2012 for the second and in 2015 for the third term. Among his other previous honourary involvements were Chair of the Acid Survivors Foundation, Bangladesh Freedom Foundation, Trustee of Manusher Jonno Foundation and Bishwo Shihityo Kendro (World Literary Centre). He is a founding Core Group Member of the Citizens Platform for SDGs in Bangladesh, Human Rights Forum Bangladesh and Right to Information Forum Bangladesh.

Dr. Zaman was the first individual from the global South to be elected as Chair of the International Committee of the Washington DC-based Council on Foundations. He also served as Chair of the Governing Council of the Manila-based Asia-Pacific Philanthropy Consortium; Core Group Member of the Southampton-based Program for

Promoting Nuclear Non-proliferation; and International Research Committee of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo.

Main areas of his interest and expertise are governance, anti-corruption, people's engagement, social accountability, politics, development, security and cooperation, on which he has publications in and outside Bangladesh.

He can be contacted by: [edtib@ti-bangladesh.org](mailto:edtib@ti-bangladesh.org).



