

Corruption: Why do individuals become corrupt?

By Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

Corruption is described as use of power by public officials for personal benefit that accrues to that person directly or indirectly. Corruption could be of many varieties, not necessarily taking only money as bribe.

Corruption has become a major issue in political and economic significance in recent years in developing countries. Political leaders and public officials disregard the necessity and relevance of public morality and often indulge in corruption.

The seriousness of problems and threats posed by corruption are enormous to the stability and security of societies.

Corruption undermines the state institutions, norms of democracy, ethical values, justice and jeopardises sustainable development and the rule of law.

Further the links between corruption and other forms of crime exist, in particular organized crime and economic crime, including money-laundering.

The cases of corruption that involve vast quantities of assets, which may constitute a substantial proportion of the resources of states, and that threaten the political stability and sustainable development of those states.

Its prevention, detection and control are essential for welfare of the people.

Since international cooperation is necessary to fight corruption, the UN in 2003 adopted a Convention Against Corruption.

Immediate - past government of Bangladesh regrettably shied away from signing the Convention, although Transparency International put Bangladesh on top for a number of years among corrupt countries. The low level priority to signing the Convention has demonstrated its lack of commitment in fighting corruption.

Under the non-party care taker government, Bangladesh has signed the 2003 UN Convention Against Corruption and it is commendable. The care-taker government started its “moral” crusade against suspected corrupt persons as soon as it came to power on January 12 of this year.

The number of corrupt people who have been found guilty by the court is publicly known. Media reports suggest by December of this year, many more will likely to be found guilty by the court.

The Anti-Corruption Commission under its energetic chairperson has been doing a great job in making people aware of the negative impact of corruption on people, and its corroding effects in society.

Many economists say that if corruption did not exist, Bangladesh’s annual growth would have been in double-digit figure.

Why do individuals become corrupt?

Corruption is a human weakness. Human is generally vulnerable and whatever their weakness is, it is going to get exploited, particularly around money or possessions.

Corruption existed in the past exists now and will continue in future. Total elimination of corruption in human society is not possible because corruption is done secretly.

All human beings want wealth and the drive for it runs deep. Money is indispensable in the world for certain standard of quality of life and security. It is true that individuals want money for pleasure, power and fame.

How much money is required for individuals to achieve this aim? That is the question for individuals to judge and decide

Money is a means to achieve an end but if money becomes the end, not means, then that is called greed. Greed is dangerous and ruins life because it diverts a person from the right path.

One's starting point of being corrupt is largely determined by the social environment, opportunity, and temperament. Psychological studies demonstrate that men tend to be more corrupt than women. Financial data supported the same position.

Some psychologists go deeper and take into account of the environment of upbringing in childhood. Besides, emotional makeup adds to define how men and women view corruption.

It is a reality that human beings never get enough money when they want them greedily. It is greed that overwhelms a person to be corrupt. Plato has said : " Poverty consists not in the decrease of one's possession, but in the increase of one's greed."

Often such greedy corrupt individuals feel miserable when they compare with other rich people. They want to be on top of others in possessions.

Corruption is an addiction and it displays a startling quality. If corruption is not subdued, it takes over a person. The corrupt person loses control of himself/herself. The call is to confront reality and master the self.

It is very hard to tell greedy and corrupt people to mend their ways. They ordinarily have big egos. They get offended, if advice is tendered. Because they are rich and greedy, they think they know all about success in life.

Philosophers say that wealth, fame and power are exclusive and therefore precarious. For example, as long as one sits on a chair, the other cannot sit on it too. That is why wealth, fame and power are exclusive.

When wealth is shared, it diminishes one's riches. Individuals do not realise that their riches are ephemeral. They forget that wealth does not survive bodily death.

Philanthropist Carnegie once said that to die rich is a disgrace because “you cannot take it with you” in death.

Contemporary psychology has accustomed human beings to the fact that there is more to themselves than possessions or earthly riches. Money is not everything and does not necessarily bring happiness. Happiness is a state of mind and a greedy mind is never satisfied and therefore tends to be miserable.

“There comes a time” writes Aldous Huxley, “ when one asks even of Shakespeare, even of Beethoven, is this all?”