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## Editorial

### A Bangla language of government

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I am writing in the middle of the night, overpowered by the emotion of the flower laying and mournful music playing at Dinajpur's Shahid Minar.

Dinajpur is a good place to come to, to recognize this most significant of Bangladeshi days, for it is a community at peace with itself: walking through the streets tonight I stopped and reflected, talked and laughed with groups of Muslims and Hindus united as Bangladeshis.

As a visitor to Bangladesh, it is easy to be struck by the gentleness of this nation, the warm welcome, the sense of purpose and the humour of the people. Quite apart from the lovely Bangladeshi graduates of the university where I taught in Thailand, who have done everything to make my stay sunny and memorable, the poorest of people I have encountered on journeys through rural areas have shown friendship to me, and even invited me into their homes for a cup of tea. This is one of the most endearing of nations.

Observing commerce in the marketplace and even on a local bus, where a vendor with a tray of grapes boarded with a scale to ensure accurate charging for a bagful of fruit, observing labourers working hard in the fields and in the workshops, but seemingly never without a smile, it becomes apparent that Bangladeshis are an honest people, working hard to survive, and doing so with dedication to their families.

Corruption is not a part of the natural language of the people of Bangladesh. It is a tongue spoken only by those at higher levels of government, who would force a cultural tyranny on the people as foreign as Urdu is to the Bangla language and culture.

Just as the birth of Bangladesh launched the Bangladeshi people on a new beginning, each repetition of International Mother Language Day presents an opportunity for renewal, for moving forward with development of a Bangladeshi identity.

It is a time to recognize all cultures which face repression, and to fight for their rights of survival: no outside force should damage a people's identity, and language is the soul of culture. But it is a time, also, to develop a Bangla language of government, one which represents the history and spirit of the people.

The interim government is doing the right thing by clamping down on corruption. Each report on the arrest of a corrupt official, or a mobile

court imposing sanctions on a dishonest company, sends a message that a privileged position is no longer an excuse for abuses.

Yet, something must fill the void left by each successful eradication of abuse, or corruption will surely return and prosper while the hard-working Bangladeshi people are impoverished.

The answer must come from the people of Bangladesh if it is to provide a lasting solution. If we look at the universities of Bangladesh, it is apparent that they foster much talent, both in their faculty and student bodies, but what chance do graduates have of making progress if they join a government service with tangled lines of responsibility, and procedures so intricate that any initiative is rejected while allowing the "Boksheesh Economy" to thrive?

Should change in Bangladesh come from Western forces? It is easy to forget that the dysfunctional bureaucracy of Bangladesh stems from a British colonial administration which had no interest in allowing local interests to develop and thrive.

International agencies, also, are often ignorant of, and insensitive to, local cultural needs, calling for economic reforms that often hurt poor people, and putting forward models of development based on Western ideas that are doomed to failure in a society with fundamentally different social as well as economic characteristics.

In a course I have developed in my own field, of transport infrastructure development and management, I point out, to take one small example, that Western models which show the supposedly optimum infrastructure development based on factors such as a person's value of time are heavily biased against the poor, because a poor person's earnings are so much lower than a wealthy person's in a country like Bangladesh. Different forms of thinking must be developed for Bangladesh to prosper.

Strong reforms are difficult when dysfunctional practices are so entrenched, but bureaucracy must be simplified, and organizations redesigned to streamline authority and allow initiative to flow.

Government salaries should be increased to remove the temptation of corruption, but, more than that, new government organizations must be developed, and people who are willing must be sought to build a government service on one of the nation's strongest assets: its commitment to values of family, and loyalty to friends.

Just as Dr. Yunus saw the way ahead in microfinance, which empowered the poorest to build productive lives and contribute effectively to the economy, so government must look to the ordinary people and build on their values, as well as represent their interests as it moves forward.

A Bangla language of government will see all the people as part of one family, giving them all a voice, a Bangladeshi voice, and promoting a fair and equitable form of development in which all can participate.

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