

Pathways to Integrity: A Strategic Report on Reforming Bangladesh's Anti Corruption Commission

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1. Introduction

The July Revolution of 2024 marked a turning point in the history of Bangladesh, bringing to light the deep frustrations of a nation that had endured decades of inequality and authoritarian rule. As noted above, this historic uprising was not just a sudden event, it was years of repressed collective frustration from the populace. The Awami League, which most people viewed as a fascist party, was dominant in Bangladesh for many years. Poverty, cruel dictatorship, brutality, and corruption were characteristic attributes of the leadership of the country. Out of fear and oppression, the people remained mute and could not express their discontent, which was building up over the years.

The year when everything turned around was 2024. All due to extreme bias in quotas, which were most visible in education and government job placements. For the longest time, it was nearly impossible to use merits in Bangladeshi job applications or get into formal education due to the dose of discrimination caused by the quota system. This social issue turned out to be the major catchphrase for the all-too-struggling spiritual leaders, professionals, students, and other members of society in the months of June and July of 2024. What evolved from a highly localized effort against the injustice of quota discrimination quickly turned into a mass movement advocating for the elimination of the entire system of subordination.

The anti-quotas protests seemed to resonate with everybody, who viewed them as a chance to confront the greater abuses committed by the Awami League in government. Economic imbalance, politics of loyalty, and disregard for accountability within the state apparatus were highlighted, turning the protests into an all-out anti-government revolt. The people's desire to get rid of the government, which they regarded as fascist, was the driving force of the July Revolution, which was of vast scale and intensity in history. The protests were marked by large scale rallies, strikes, and acts of civil disobedience, which eventually led to the downfall of the Awami League in power.

During the Awami League regime, corruption reached a staggering level, which further increased the outrage of the public against the government. In terms of corruption, Bangladesh ranked 149 out of 180 countries, reflecting long established corruption in public institutions (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2023*). During this regime, public service seekers paid an estimated amount of TK 1.46 lakh crore as a bribe to access basic public services (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2023*). 72.5% of the households reported various forms of corruption when engaged with the law enforcement agencies that ranked as the most corrupt sector (*Transparency International Bangladesh National Household Survey, 2017*).

Some specific cases of corruption can give a snapshot of the systemic issues. A land acquisition officer who was found guilty of embezzling Tk 7.35 crore but faced only a downgrade from senior assistant secretary to assistant secretary rather than a dismissal and after three years he will get back to his previous senior rank (*Khan Baharam, Hossain Sajjad, The Daily Star, 2024*). Similarly, A former land surveyor of Madaripur, who was involved in a compensation scam where he granted TK 1.64 crore to two individuals for supposedly using their lands that

never belonged to the two in the first place, was reinstated despite his earlier forced retirement (*Hossain Sajjad, The Daily Star 2024*). Also, An assistant commissioner (land) of Bogura sadar upazila, who was convicted of forgery, faced only a temporary salary reduction and he will start receiving the regular salary after 12 months (*Khan Baharam, Apu Ashik, The Daily Star 2024*). These examples, widely reported in the media, showcase a pattern of indulgence and indemnity within the public sector.

Documents from the Anti Corruption Commission reveal shocking findings, such as that a former Inspector General of Bangladesh Police (IGP) and director general of RAB, and his family had purchased at least 204.5 acres of land between 2009 and 2023. Of these, 112 acres were purchased during his tenure as Inspector General of Police and RAB chief. In 2020-21, he and his family acquired nearly 87.9 acres of land (*Anti Corruption Commission Records, 2023*). In spite of all these, he received an Integrity Award in 2020-21.

Corruption increased to public procurement, with reports from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OCAG) unveiling severe irregularities. For instance, Bangladesh Railway purchased 12 pieces of equipment, where each machine costs Tk 3 lakh whose actual price was only TK 19,000 in the market (*Hassan Ahmadul, Prothom Alo 2023*). In another instance, a project director at the Department of Fisheries leased his own car to the department, profiting from the arrangement. These incidents indicate the widespread inefficiency and exploitation across the system (*Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, 2023*).

Allegations of corruption were even raised on major national projects like the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project that faced claims of \$5 billion in embezzlement by the former prime minister and her family (*Global Defense Corp, 2023*). Although the allegations were sourced from a fishy website, this emphasizes the need for a credible investigation and transparency.

Furthermore, sectors such as health, public services, and banking were rife with irregularities. For example, the Hallmark Group scandal involved the embezzlement of BDT 2,731 crore from Sonali Bank. Tax officials misused insider information to evade taxes and manipulate stock markets, while officials in the Public Service Commission (PSC) leaked BCS exam questions for financial gain (*Hye Hasnat, The Financial Express 2024*). All these stated corruptions are just the tip of the iceberg.

Following this massive upheaval, an interim government was formed to navigate the country towards a new era of reform and renewal. The interim government has already initiated a series of measures to restructure and revitalize the key national institutions, recognizing its deep institutional decay that had taken root under the previous regime. Therefore, several commissions were formed to oversee the reform process, one of which focused on the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC).

For a long period of time, ACC has been criticised for its inefficiency and vulnerability to political manipulation. Hence, this is now a critical focal point for the reform agenda. Its transformation is necessary for restoring public trust and ensuring transparency and accountability within the governance framework of the nation. This report inquires into the underlying challenges faced

by the ACC, analyzes the limitations that have hindered its effectiveness, and proposes applicable recommendations for its comprehensive reform. By tackling these problems, the interim government hopes to create a more just and corruption free Bangladesh that reflects the goals of its citizens as expressed during the July Revolution 2024.

2. Methodology

The methodology section outlines the approach and processes employed in gathering and analyzing data for this report, "Pathways to Integrity: A Strategic Report on Reforming Bangladesh's Anti Corruption Commission." The objective was to derive comprehensive insights into the challenges and potential reforms necessary for strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of Bangladesh. To achieve this, the following methodological steps were undertaken:

2.1. Data Collection

1. Expert Opinions:

- A key component of this report involved synthesizing insights from experts in governance, law, and public administration. These opinions were sourced through various reputable platforms, including interviews published in newspapers, opinion pieces, and expert commentary in research journals.
- Experts provided diverse perspectives on the current state of the ACC, including its operational challenges, structural inefficiencies, and the potential pathways for reform.

2. Secondary Research:

- A thorough review of daily newspapers, such as *The Financial Express*, *The Daily Star*, and other leading publications, was conducted. These sources provided timely updates on corruption cases, ACC's actions, and public and expert reactions to its performance.
- Peer-reviewed research papers from academic journals were consulted to incorporate a scholarly analysis of anti-corruption strategies and the effectiveness of similar institutions in other jurisdictions. This helped in contextualizing the ACC's issues within a broader framework of anti-corruption mechanisms globally.

3. Review of Institutional Reports:

- Reports from international anti-corruption bodies, such as Transparency International and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), were reviewed to gain insights into best practices and benchmark standards for anti-corruption institutions.
- Comparative analysis of institutional reports allowed for the identification of gaps in the ACC's current operational model and highlighted areas requiring immediate reform.

2.2. Data Analysis

● Thematic Analysis:

- The data collected from various sources were categorized thematically. Themes included leadership and structural reforms, financial independence, public engagement, internal capacity enhancement, and legal and judicial reforms.
- This thematic analysis helped in organizing the information coherently, ensuring that each aspect of the ACC's operations was thoroughly examined.

● Comparative Analysis:

- Comparative analysis was employed to juxtapose the ACC's structure and performance with those of anti-corruption institutions in other countries, notably the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) of Singapore. This comparison provided a reference point to understand the effectiveness of different anti-corruption strategies and how they could be adapted for Bangladesh.

● Critical Review:

- A critical review of the existing literature and expert opinions was conducted to identify biases, limitations, and areas of consensus and divergence. This process ensured a balanced representation of viewpoints and strengthened the validity of the conclusions drawn in the report.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

● Confidentiality and Integrity:

- All data used in the report were obtained from publicly available sources. Care was taken to ensure the confidentiality of sensitive information and the integrity of the data throughout the research process.

● Attribution and Referencing:

- Proper attribution was given to all sources of information, ensuring that the intellectual contributions of original authors and experts were duly acknowledged. This report adheres to academic standards of citation to maintain transparency and credibility.

By employing a combination of expert opinions, secondary research, and a rigorous analysis framework, this report aims to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based roadmap for reforming Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission.

3. Background

Emergence of the Bureau of Anti-Corruption

The struggle against corruption in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, has been a long and arduous journey, especially pronounced since the nation's independence in 1971. The efforts to combat corruption in post-independence Bangladesh have been marked by repeated attempts to address deeply entrenched systemic issues that continue to challenge governance and development. Understanding the historical context of anti-corruption initiatives in Bangladesh is essential to comprehending the current state of affairs and the necessity for the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission. The ACC was created in response to the urgent need to combat widespread corruption that hampers economic progress, weakens public institutions, and erodes trust in government. Its role is crucial in fostering transparency, accountability, and integrity within both the public and private sectors, thereby contributing to the nation's overall development and stability.

The roots of Bangladesh's anti-corruption framework can be traced back to 1957 in East Pakistan, with the establishment of the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) under the Anti-Corruption Act. Initially, the BAC operated as a temporary body, significantly hampered by a lack of autonomy. Its personnel were drawn entirely from the police force, limiting its independence and raising concerns about potential conflicts of interest (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2001*). This arrangement meant that the BAC was essentially an extension of existing law enforcement rather than a dedicated, independent anti-corruption agency. It wasn't until 1969 that the BAC began to develop a more permanent structure, introducing its own recruitment process, a crucial step towards establishing a distinct identity and building specialized expertise. The following year, in 1970, the BAC published an operational manual to guide its investigations, providing much-needed standardization and procedural guidance. This period represented a gradual evolution from a temporary measure to a more formalized institution.

Following Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the BAC underwent several reforms aimed at enhancing its structure and effectiveness in combating corruption. However, these reforms were often piecemeal and insufficient to address the underlying challenges. A significant setback occurred in 1987 when the organization was placed under the President's Secretariat and later, in 1991, under the Prime Minister's Office. These placements exposed the BAC to significant political influence, undermining its impartiality and hindering its ability to investigate high-level corruption (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2001*). This political control became a major point of criticism, as it compromised the BAC's independence and its perceived neutrality.

By 1990, the BAC had expanded its presence significantly, establishing a headquarters and a network of 66 regional and district offices. It also operated under various legislative frameworks, including the Corruption Prevention Act of 1947, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1958, and the Bureau of Anti-Corruption Manual of 1970. The BAC broadly defined corruption as "everything unlawful" and the "abuse of power for private advantage" (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2001*). While this definition was comprehensive, its broadness may have also contributed to difficulties in focusing investigative efforts. Despite a staff of 1,271 employees by this time, the BAC's effectiveness was significantly limited by a lack of skilled personnel. Only 26% of employees were actively engaged in anti-corruption work, creating a severe manpower shortage that further hampered operational efficiency (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2001*). This lack of specialized training and experience within the BAC workforce further undermined its capacity to handle complex corruption cases.

A 2001 report by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) provided a scathing assessment of the BAC's performance, highlighting persistent problems that plagued the organization. These issues included political interference, which continued to compromise the BAC's independence; flawed inquiry processes, which hindered effective investigations; and even instances of corruption within the organization itself (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2001*). The report also pointed to a large backlog of pending cases, low conviction rates, weak prosecution efforts, and inadequate training for investigators. Furthermore, politically connected individuals accused of corruption often enjoyed protection, further undermining the BAC's ability to enforce the law impartially. Structural flaws, such as legal barriers and bureaucratic interference, combined with instances of BAC staff involvement in corrupt activities, severely eroded public trust in the organization (*Transparency International Bangladesh, 2001*). These findings painted a picture of an organization struggling to fulfill its mandate, hampered by a combination of internal weaknesses and external pressures. In response to these deep-seated problems, the TIB report recommended the establishment of an independent Anti-Corruption Commission to replace the BAC, advocating for a fundamental restructuring of the anti-corruption framework in Bangladesh to enhance effectiveness and public trust. This recommendation laid the groundwork for the eventual creation of the ACC.

4. Historical Performance of Anti Corruption Commission

4.1. Anti-Corruption Commission (2004-07)

In May 2004, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was formed under the *Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004*, to replace the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC). The new commission was intended to be more effective and independent in its approach to combating corruption in Bangladesh (*Rashid, 2007*). The ACC was structured to comprise three commissioners, including a chairman, all of whom are appointed by the President for a four-year term. Importantly, the Commissioners are not eligible for reappointment, and they can only be removed from office under conditions similar to those applied to Supreme Court judges (*Rashid, 2007*). The Commission's mission was broad, aiming to control corruption by identifying key areas of vulnerability, undertaking targeted investigations, and implementing preventive education and advocacy measures (*Rashid, 2007*).

However, despite its foundational goals and legal framework, the ACC's early years were marked by internal and external struggles that severely hindered its effectiveness. One of the key challenges was the controversial appointment of the Chairman and Commissioners, who were perceived as politically biased. This caused considerable opposition, particularly from civil society and opposition parties, who called for neutral leadership (*Institute of Governance Studies, 2007*). Additionally, the reappointment of staff from the old BAC, following a court ruling, perpetuated the inefficiencies that had plagued the former institution (*Institute of Governance Studies, 2007*).

From the outset, the ACC was marred by dysfunctionality within its leadership. The top three members of the commission were embroiled in personality clashes and public disagreements, which further hampered its ability to tackle the significant backlog of cases around 20,000 from the previous administration, plus an additional 7,000 new complaints (*Institute of Governance Studies, 2007*). As a result, the ACC did not file its first corruption case until 2006, a delay that was indicative of the leadership's inability to get the commission off the ground (*Institute of Governance Studies, 2007*).

The ACC struggled with weak leadership, lack of political backing, and the absence of a proper organizational structure (*Institute of Governance Studies, 2007*). The Commission's inability to coordinate effectively with other anti-corruption bodies further exacerbated the problem. Public and civil society criticism of the Commission's ineffectiveness grew louder, as the country's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) stagnated, with little improvement in anti-corruption efforts (*Rashid, 2007*). This period of dysfunction ultimately culminated in the resignation of the ACC's leadership during the 1/11 Caretaker Government period, marking a turbulent end to the Commission's early years (*Institute of Governance Studies, 2007*).

The *ACC Act of 2004* had outlined an ambitious mandate for the Commission, including the power to inquire into and investigate corruption cases, file lawsuits, raise awareness, and recommend preventive measures to the President (*Rashid, 2007*). However, these powers were

not effectively exercised due to political interference, leadership issues, and a lack of institutional capacity, which resulted in limited impact during the ACC's first few years.

In sum, the ACC's early history was characterized by poor leadership, political interference, and organizational dysfunction, which undermined its ability to fulfill its core mandate. The failure to address these issues early on led to public disillusionment and stagnation in anti-corruption progress.

4.2. Anti-Corruption Commission (11 January 2007-2008)

The period from 11 January 2007 to 2008 marked a transformative phase for Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), as it took on a prominent and assertive role in combating corruption. This transformation began with the imposition of the Caretaker Government (CG) on January 11, 2007, which launched an ambitious nationwide anti corruption drive. Leadership within the ACC was reinvigorated with the appointment of a former CG advisor and ex Chief of Army Staff as Chairman in February 2007, along with two new Commissioners. The new Chairman who was known for his integrity and strong leadership brought a sense of purpose and credibility to the ACC's mission (ACC, 2007).

To enhance its capabilities, the ACC worked in collaboration with joint task forces (JTF) and received vital support from the National Coordination Committee (NCC), which was established on March 8, 2007. This partnership allowed the ACC to collect evidence, seize assets, issue arrest warrants, conduct raids, and recover funds that were illegally deposited abroad. The Anti-Corruption Act of 2007 further expanded the ACC's authority, enabling it to operate more effectively with a strengthened administrative and logistical framework (ACC, 2007).

During this time, the ACC launched a vigorous campaign against corruption, filing 701 cases in 2007 and 979 in 2008. Charges were brought against 170 individuals in 2007 and 397 in 2008, including several high profile figures. Many were arrested, imprisoned, and brought to trial. These actions received extensive media coverage, with print and electronic outlets frequently spotlighting the ACC's bold measures against influential political and administrative leaders. The campaign earned widespread praise from civil society, development partners, and the general public, establishing the ACC's role as a powerful force in the fight against corruption (ACC, 2007).

The impact of the ACC's success during this period extended into the political sphere. Ahead of the ninth parliamentary election in 2008, major political parties incorporated anti-corruption pledges, including commitments to strengthen the ACC, into their manifestos. However, the momentum faded under subsequent party led governments as political priorities shifted and the initial drive for anti-corruption reforms waned. Despite this, the 2007–2008 period stands out as a defining chapter in the ACC's history, marked by decisive actions and significant reforms that temporarily elevated its effectiveness and stature.

4.3. Anti-Corruption Commission (2009–2013)

Between 2009 and 2013, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in Bangladesh faced significant challenges as political actions often contradicted earlier promises to strengthen the institution. Following the Awami League-led Grand Alliance's landslide victory in the 2008 parliamentary elections, senior leaders, including the Prime Minister, publicly reaffirmed their commitment to empowering the ACC. However, instead of strengthening the ACC those assurances were undermined by efforts to reduce the commission's independence. The government proposed changes to the ACC Act of 2004 early in its term, aiming to increase the commission's reliance on the executive branch. Though the amendments were first introduced in 2009, they were not passed until November 2013, delaying crucial reforms and limiting the ACC's operational freedom (*ACC, 2013*).

The government's strained relationship with the ACC stemmed in part from its criticism of actions taken during the 2007–2008 Caretaker Government era. During that time many political leaders, including party chiefs, had been arrested under corruption charges. These moves were widely perceived as politically motivated, prompting accusations that the ACC had exceeded its authority and spent excessive resources on legal proceedings. Under growing pressure, the ACC Chairman at the time stepped down, and he was later summoned to appear before a parliamentary committee to explain the commission's actions during the Caretaker Government's tenure (*ACC, 2013*).

During this period, the ACC's ability to act independently was further eroded as numerous corruption cases from the Caretaker Government era were dismissed or withdrawn. High-profile cases, including those involving Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, were either concluded with acquittals or stayed by court orders. Only two individuals were convicted and imprisoned, which reinforced public skepticism about the ACC's willingness or ability to hold powerful figures accountable. These developments drew criticism from civil society groups and international observers, who questioned the ACC's independence and its role in tackling corruption.

Despite all these challenges, the ACC achieved a notable milestone when its first commission (2009–2013) successfully completed its full term for the first time in its history. This achievement brought some stability to the institution, although its performance remained constrained by political interference and structural issues that limited its effectiveness.

This period highlights the difficult balancing act the ACC faced as it attempted to carry out its mission in a politically charged environment. While early promises of reform raised public expectations, the reality of systemic obstacles and political pressures often left the commission struggling to fulfill its mandate.

4.4. Anti-Corruption Commission (2014 to 2024)

A Transparency International report has found that the Anti-Corruption Commission in Bangladesh is largely ineffective in investigating and preventing corruption. The Right to

Information Act (RTI) is a significant achievement, but it is far from achieving its objectives even after five years. The report found that out of 588 cases only around 57 cases resulting in successful prosecutions in 2012, most of which were political in nature. The government set up a committee to investigate politically motivated cases filed against politicians and others in 2009, which by March 2011 had withdrawn 4,687 cases most of which involved members of the then ruling party. The committee also dropped 12 corruption cases against the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, as well as other cases filed against senior party leaders, known party supporters, and their relatives. (*The Daily Star, 2014*).

Public perception of the ACC's effectiveness has been mixed during this period. While the commission has made strides in raising awareness about corruption and initiating high-profile investigations, concerns about its independence and susceptibility to political influence have persisted. A recent review by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), looking at the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) across 50 different measures, painted a pretty concerning picture. On the issue of independence, the ACC seemed to be too influenced by politics and didn't have enough freedom to operate effectively. Their funding was also a problem. Their budget stayed stuck at a tiny 0.031% of the national budget between 2016 and 2018, and even their training budget was frozen at a mere 0.5%. What's more, they seemed to lack the necessary expertise to handle complex cases like illegal property transfers, banking corruption, and embezzlement. When it came to accountability, things weren't much better. There was no proper system in place to keep an eye on what the ACC was doing, and they only reported to the President. Perhaps most worrying was their track record on big-time corruption: out of all the complaints they received, only a tiny 6.75% were actually investigated, and of those, only 21% ever made it to court. This really shows how ineffective they were at tackling serious corruption. They did a bit better when it came to public education and outreach, but even there, their budget was seen as inadequate. Finally, the ACC didn't have any clear plans for reaching out to marginalized communities and didn't really work with anti-corruption agencies in other countries. (*The Financial Express, 2020*).

5. Problems Facing the Anti Corruption Commission:

5.1. Government Interference and Political Influence

One of the most persistent challenges for the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in Bangladesh is the influence of political entities on its operations. Political interference often manifests in the appointment, transfer, and dismissal of ACC officials, as well as in the handling of high-profile cases. For instance, investigations involving politically connected individuals are frequently delayed or even abandoned, undermining the commission's credibility (*TIB, 2022*). Political

misuse of the ACC to target opponents further tarnishes its legitimacy, creating public skepticism about its impartiality (U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2012).

5.2. Limited Financial and Operational Independence

The ACC lacks an independent and stable source of funding, relying instead on allocations determined by the government. This dependency significantly curtails its autonomy. The limited budget prevents investments in advanced technologies, restricts the hiring of skilled personnel, and impedes the pursuit of complex investigations, such as financial crimes and corruption involving foreign entities. Without sufficient resources, the ACC struggles to maintain the operational efficiency required to combat corruption effectively (TIB, 2022; LSE Blogs, 2019).

5.3. Limited Scope and Focus

In Bangladesh, corruption is legally defined under the *Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947*, which broadly categorizes it as activities involving the abuse of public office for personal gain, bribery, embezzlement, and misuse of power. While this definition provides a foundation for addressing public sector corruption, it remains limited in scope, failing to comprehensively address modern forms of corruption such as private sector malpractices and foreign bribery (TIB, 2022). This narrow focus leaves significant areas of corruption, particularly in the private sector and international dealings, unaddressed. Furthermore, ambiguities in the legal definition create loopholes, allowing individuals and entities to exploit gaps in the law to evade accountability. Addressing these definitional gaps is essential to ensuring a more robust and inclusive anti-corruption framework.

5.4. Weak Legal Framework and Jurisdictional Limitations

The legal framework governing the ACC imposes significant constraints on its operations. For instance, the requirement to obtain government approval before investigating public officials creates bureaucratic delays and compromises the commission's ability to act swiftly. Moreover, the ACC has no jurisdiction over certain critical sectors, such as the judiciary and the military, where corruption risks are often high. These limitations hinder the commission's ability to fulfill its mandate effectively and address systemic corruption comprehensively (GAN Integrity, n.d.; TIB, 2022).

5.5. Effectiveness and Impact

The ACC's overall impact on reducing corruption remains debatable. While initiatives like community engagement programs have been launched, their effectiveness is questionable. For

instance, the lack of measurable outcomes from these programs suggests that they may not be effectively translating into tangible results (*LSE Blogs, 2019*). This raises broader concerns about whether the ACC's strategies align with the realities of corruption in Bangladesh and whether alternative approaches might yield better outcomes.

5.6. Corruption Risks in Specific Sectors

Key sectors, such as procurement, customs, and business licensing, are particularly vulnerable to corruption due to their complex administrative procedures and lack of transparency. These sectors present lucrative opportunities for rent-seeking behaviors, which often go unchecked. Despite their vulnerability, the ACC has not effectively prioritized these high-risk areas, leaving critical corruption hotspots insufficiently addressed (*GAN Integrity, n.d.*).

5.7. Resource Constraints and Capacity Issues

Resource limitations continue to hamper the ACC's operations. The commission suffers from a shortage of skilled personnel, inadequate funding, and insufficient access to modern investigative tools. These constraints are particularly evident in cases requiring technical expertise, such as digital forensics or international financial investigations. The ACC's reliance on deputed officials, who may lack long-term commitment to its mission, further exacerbates these capacity challenges (*TIB, 2022*). Without adequate resources, the ACC cannot function at its full potential.

5.8. Underlying Governance Deficits

Corruption in Bangladesh often reflects deeper systemic issues, such as weak rule of law, limited public accountability, and insufficient transparency in government operations. Addressing these governance deficits requires a multifaceted approach that includes institutional reforms, enhanced transparency measures, and greater public participation. Tackling corruption at its roots involves more than prosecuting offenders; it necessitates creating an environment that discourages corrupt practices altogether (*World Bank, 2000*).

5.9. Public Distrust and Limited Engagement

Public trust in the ACC has eroded due to its perceived inefficiency, susceptibility to political influence, and lack of transparency. The commission's inability to effectively engage civil society and incorporate public feedback into its initiatives has further alienated citizens. This disconnect reduces the reach and impact of the ACC's anti-corruption efforts, as public participation is a critical component of any successful anti-corruption campaign (*TIB, 2022*).

5.10. Insufficient Use of Technology and Data Analytics

The ACC lags behind in adopting modern technological tools essential for combating contemporary corruption challenges, such as cross-border financial crimes and digital fraud. The lack of investment in data analytics and advanced investigative technologies limits the ACC's ability to proactively detect and prevent corruption, leaving it reliant on outdated methods that may not effectively address current trends (*U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2012*).

6. Expert Opinions on Strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in Bangladesh

Experts and analysts have thoroughly assessed the current challenges and the necessary reforms required to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in Bangladesh. Their evaluations underscore the critical need for leadership changes, structural reforms, financial independence, public engagement, capacity enhancement, and judicial reforms to establish a more robust and effective anti-corruption body.

6.1. Leadership and Structural Reforms

A consensus among experts highlights the importance of appointing new leadership as a fundamental step towards enhancing the ACC's effectiveness. The existing leadership structure, which is often perceived as being vulnerable to government influence, has been identified as a major impediment to the commission's independence. Establishing an autonomous operational framework is essential for creating an environment where anti-corruption initiatives can be executed without political or bureaucratic interference. Additionally, structural reforms aimed at addressing internal inefficiencies are critical. A restructured organizational framework would streamline operations and foster a more strategic approach to combating corruption (*The Financial Express, 2024*).

6.2. Financial Independence and Enhanced Resource Allocation

Experts advocate for a stable and independent funding source for the ACC to enable it to fulfill its duties effectively. Greater budgetary control would allow the ACC to allocate resources as needed, invest in modern forensic technology, and maintain efficient case management systems. Financial autonomy is also essential for recruiting and training skilled personnel,

ensuring the ACC has the necessary human resources to handle complex corruption cases. The persistent issue of inadequate funding has consistently undermined the ACC's capacity to function optimally (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

6.3. Improving Public Engagement and Accountability

The erosion of public trust in the ACC, due to perceived inefficiencies and lack of transparency, necessitates the enhancement of transparency and accountability mechanisms. Experts suggest that establishing advisory committees comprising senior citizens, academics, and civil society members could provide essential oversight and bolster public confidence in the ACC's initiatives. Involving diverse societal segments in oversight roles can help foster a more inclusive approach to anti-corruption efforts (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

6.4. Enhancing Internal Capacity and Efficiency

Modernizing the internal infrastructure of the ACC is critical for managing and processing cases efficiently. Experts recommend upgrading case management systems and implementing a comprehensive Management Information System (MIS) to streamline operations. Furthermore, the establishment of a Special Investigation Unit (SIU) dedicated to high-profile cases, under the chairman's supervision, would enhance the ACC's ability to handle complex investigations effectively. This focused approach is expected to lead to more successful prosecutions of corruption cases (*The Financial Express, 2024*).

6.5. Judicial and Legal Reforms

Legal reforms are pivotal in expanding the ACC's jurisdiction and strengthening its prosecutorial capacity. Amending existing laws to include broader investigative powers, particularly in areas like anti-money laundering and financial crime, is a priority. Experts also emphasize the importance of ensuring judicial independence to prevent external influences from undermining the ACC's efforts. One proposed measure is the appointment of Supreme Court judges by an independent body, such as a Supreme Judicial Council, to safeguard impartiality and integrity within the judiciary (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

6.6. Political Will and Coordination with Other Institutions

The commitment of the government to support the ACC's independence is a recurring theme in expert recommendations. Without genuine political will, the ACC's efforts are likely to be hindered by external pressures. Collaboration with judicial bodies, civil society, and international

partners is also critical for developing a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy. Such partnerships can provide additional resources, expertise, and a platform for knowledge exchange, thereby enhancing the ACC's overall effectiveness (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

6.7. Comprehensive Institutional Reforms

Beyond leadership changes, experts stress the need for comprehensive institutional reforms to address longstanding issues within the ACC. Revisiting the ACC Act to provide clearer mandates and removing bureaucratic bottlenecks are essential steps toward creating a more agile and responsive institution. Modernizing administrative processes and enhancing inter-departmental coordination within the ACC would significantly improve its operational efficiency (*The Financial Express, 2024*).

6.8. Strengthening Investigative Powers

Experts recommend enhancing the ACC's investigative powers to allow for more proactive and effective corruption investigations. Broadening the ACC's authority, particularly in investigating financial crimes and corruption within the private sector, would reduce delays and obstructions that currently hinder its operations. Empowering the ACC to act without requiring prior approvals from other government entities is seen as a necessary reform to streamline the investigative process (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

6.9. Capacity Building and Professional Development

Investing in the professional development of ACC staff is crucial for improving the quality of investigations. Regular training programs, workshops, and exposure to international best practices can equip ACC personnel with the skills needed to handle complex cases effectively. Establishing partnerships with international anti-corruption bodies for knowledge exchange and technical support could further enhance the ACC's capabilities (*The Financial Express, 2024*).

6.10. Fostering a Culture of Integrity

A cultural shift within the ACC and the broader public sector is necessary to emphasize the importance of integrity and ethical behavior. Instituting a code of conduct for ACC officials, coupled with regular ethics training, could help foster a culture of accountability and transparency. Public campaigns promoting anti-corruption values are also suggested as a means to change societal attitudes towards corruption (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

6.11. Enhancing Public Reporting Mechanisms

To improve transparency, the ACC should enhance its public reporting mechanisms by regularly publishing reports detailing the progress of investigations, outcomes of cases, and resource allocation. Creating an accessible platform for citizens to report corruption and track the progress of their complaints could increase public engagement and trust in the ACC (*The Financial Express, 2024*).

6.12. Focus on Prevention and Education

Preventive measures and public education are crucial components of a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy. Raising awareness about the consequences of corruption and educating the public on their rights and responsibilities can help prevent corruption at its roots. Collaborating with educational institutions to integrate anti-corruption education into the curriculum is also recommended to cultivate a new generation resistant to corrupt practices (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

6.13. Leveraging Technology for Anti-Corruption Efforts

The adoption of technology can significantly enhance the ACC's efficiency and effectiveness. Implementing advanced data analytics, digital forensics, and e-governance tools can improve the detection and investigation of corrupt activities. An integrated digital platform for case management and inter-agency coordination would streamline processes and reduce opportunities for corruption (*The Financial Express, 2024*).

6.14. Building Strategic Partnerships

Collaborating with national and international stakeholders is crucial for a holistic approach to fighting corruption. Partnerships with civil society organizations, academic institutions, and international anti-corruption agencies can provide the ACC with additional resources, expertise, and support in its mission. Engaging with these stakeholders in meaningful dialogue can help identify emerging trends in corruption and develop proactive strategies to address them (*UNCAC Coalition, 2024*).

7. Case Study: Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB)

Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) has been instrumental in transforming Singapore from a nation once plagued by corruption to one renowned for its clean governance. This case study examines the history, structure, operational strategies, challenges, and successes of the CPIB, providing insights into the elements that have contributed to its effectiveness.

7.1. Historical Context and Establishment

In the early 1950s, Singapore faced rampant corruption, particularly within the police force and civil service. To address this, the British colonial government established the CPIB in 1952 as an independent agency dedicated to combating corruption. Unlike previous efforts that relied on the police, the CPIB was granted independence to ensure impartiality and effectiveness. (*Jon S.T. Quah, Singapore's Success in Combating Corruption: Four Lessons for China, JSTOR*)

7.2. Mandate and Functions

The CPIB operates under a clear mandate to investigate, prevent, and educate the public about corruption:

- **Investigation:** Authorized to conduct thorough investigations into allegations of corruption in both the public and private sectors, the CPIB has the authority to investigate any seizable offenses uncovered during their investigations. (*Vincent Lim, AN OVERVIEW OF SINGAPORE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF THE CPIB IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION*)
- **Prevention:** The bureau reviews public sector practices, identifies potential vulnerabilities, and recommends systemic reforms to enhance transparency and accountability. It also emphasizes educating public sector employees through regular talks, workshops, and conferences. (*Vincent Lim, AN OVERVIEW OF SINGAPORE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF THE CPIB IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION*)

- **Education:** Raising public awareness about the harmful effects of corruption is a key component of the CPIB's strategy. Through outreach programs and media campaigns, the bureau seeks to cultivate a societal ethos that rejects corruption. ([Vincent Lim, AN OVERVIEW OF SINGAPORE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF THE CPIB IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION](#))

7.3. Operational Independence

A critical factor in the CPIB's success is its operational independence. The bureau reports directly to the Prime Minister of Singapore, ensuring insulation from political interference. This structure allows the CPIB to investigate any public official, including senior government officials, without requiring prior approval from other departments. ([CPIB, Wikipedia](#))

7.4. Legal Framework

The CPIB's activities are governed by the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), which grants the bureau extensive investigative powers, including the authority to access bank accounts, examine financial records, and seize assets related to corruption. The PCA provides a strong legal foundation for the CPIB's work and serves as a deterrent to potential offenders. ([CPIB, Wikipedia](#))

Notable Cases

Over the decades, the CPIB has handled several high-profile cases that demonstrate its commitment to impartiality and accountability:

- **Wee Toon Boon Case (1975):** A Minister of State was convicted for accepting bribes from a property developer, underscoring that corruption would not be tolerated regardless of position. ([CPIB, Wikipedia](#))
- **Teh Cheang Wan Case (1986):** The Minister for National Development was investigated for accepting bribes. He committed suicide before charges could be filed, highlighting the CPIB's willingness to pursue high-ranking officials. ([CPIB, Wikipedia](#))

7.5. Challenges and Adaptations

Despite its successes, the CPIB faces ongoing challenges, including the evolving nature of corruption and the need to maintain public trust. In response, the CPIB has:

- **Enhanced Capabilities:** Invested in advanced training and technology to address complex corruption cases, such as those involving digital currencies and international financial transactions. (*Vincent Lim, AN OVERVIEW OF SINGAPORE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF THE CPIB IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION*)
- **International Collaboration:** Recognizing the global nature of corruption, the CPIB collaborates with international anti-corruption agencies to investigate cross-border corruption. (*Vincent Lim, AN OVERVIEW OF SINGAPORE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF THE CPIB IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION*)

7.6. Impact and Lessons Learned

The CPIB's rigorous approach to combating corruption has significantly contributed to Singapore's reputation as one of the world's least corrupt countries. Key lessons from the CPIB's experience include:

- **Strong Political Will:** Unwavering government support has been crucial in empowering the CPIB to function effectively and independently. (*Jon S.T. Quah, Singapore's effective anti-corruption recipe: lessons for other countries*)
- **Comprehensive Legal Powers:** The CPIB's broad legal authority allows it to investigate and prosecute corruption cases thoroughly. (*CPIB, Wikipedia*)
- **Operational Independence:** Shielding the CPIB from political and bureaucratic interference has been instrumental in maintaining its credibility and effectiveness. (*CPIB, Wikipedia*)
- **Public Engagement and Transparency:** By educating the public and fostering a culture of zero tolerance for corruption, the CPIB has helped build a society that values integrity. (*Vincent Lim, AN OVERVIEW OF SINGAPORE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF THE CPIB IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION*)

8. Author's Analysis

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of Bangladesh faces a complex array of challenges that impede its ability to effectively combat corruption. These challenges are deeply rooted in political, structural, and operational dimensions, which collectively undermine the institution's credibility and effectiveness. A detailed examination of these challenges reveals the critical areas requiring reform and strategic intervention.

8.1. Political Interference and Autonomy

One of the most significant barriers to the ACC's effectiveness is political interference. The commission's leadership and decision-making processes are often perceived as being influenced by political interests, which compromises its ability to operate impartially. This perceived lack of independence erodes public confidence in the ACC's capacity to investigate and prosecute corruption cases, particularly those involving high-profile political figures. Without true autonomy, the ACC's actions are often seen as selective and politically motivated, which diminishes its legitimacy and effectiveness.

8.2. Resource Constraints and Capacity Limitations

The ACC operates under significant resource constraints that limit its ability to conduct thorough investigations and prosecutions. Financial limitations prevent the commission from investing in advanced investigative technologies, hiring skilled personnel, and conducting comprehensive training programs. The lack of adequate resources not only hampers the ACC's operational efficiency but also affects its ability to retain and attract talented professionals who can manage complex and high-stakes corruption cases. This capacity deficit is a critical weakness that undermines the commission's ability to fulfill its mandate effectively.

8.3. Public Trust and Engagement

The ACC's relationship with the public is fraught with distrust. Many citizens perceive the commission as ineffective and unresponsive, largely due to its perceived lack of transparency and accountability. The public's reluctance to engage with the ACC is a significant impediment, as community support and cooperation are vital for uncovering and addressing corrupt practices. The erosion of public trust diminishes the flow of critical information to the ACC and weakens its overall impact on curbing corruption.

8.4. Legal and Structural Challenges

The legal framework governing the ACC is outdated and restrictive, limiting its jurisdiction and investigative powers. Current laws do not adequately equip the commission to handle the sophisticated and transnational nature of modern corruption. Furthermore, the ACC's internal structure is often criticized for being bureaucratic and inefficient, which leads to delays in case handling and decision-making. The need for structural reforms to streamline operations and enhance inter-departmental coordination is paramount to improving the commission's efficiency and effectiveness.

9. Recommended Solutions

9.1. Strengthen Operational Independence

Objective: To ensure the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) operates free from political influence, allowing it to focus solely on combating corruption.

Steps:

- **Direct Reporting to an Independent Body:** The ACC currently operates under the executive branch and reports to the President via the Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs. This structure exposes the ACC to potential political pressures. To strengthen its independence, the ACC should report to an independent body or a parliamentary committee rather than through a ministerial channel. This structural change would create a buffer against political interference, enhancing the credibility and impartiality of its investigations.
- **Institutional Safeguards:** It is crucial to establish legal and constitutional protections that secure the tenure of ACC commissioners and staff. Implementing strict criteria for appointment and removal, ensuring that such actions are transparent and based on objective performance metrics, will safeguard the agency from undue influence and ensure continuity in its anti-corruption efforts.

9.2. Expand Investigative Powers

Objective: To provide the ACC with comprehensive authority to investigate and address corruption effectively.

Steps:

- **Enhanced Legal Framework:** The existing legal framework governing the ACC should be revised to grant broader powers for investigating corruption, including access to financial

records and the ability to probe the private sector. Strengthening the Prevention of Corruption Act and related legislation will empower the ACC to investigate complex financial crimes and hold powerful offenders accountable.

- **Authority Over Private Sector Corruption:** Expanding the ACC's mandate to cover corruption in the private sector is essential, especially in areas involving public-private partnerships and procurement processes. This would enable the ACC to address corruption comprehensively, regardless of the sector in which it occurs.
- **Collaboration with International Entities:** Given the global nature of many corruption cases, the ACC should establish mechanisms for international cooperation. Partnering with global anti-corruption bodies and foreign governments will enhance its ability to track and prosecute transnational corruption effectively.

9.3. Capacity Building and Resource Mobilization

Objective: To ensure the ACC has the human and financial resources necessary to fulfill its mandate effectively.

Steps:

- **Professional Development Programs:** Regular training and capacity-building programs for ACC staff are crucial. These should focus on advanced investigative techniques, financial forensics, and digital crime detection to equip the ACC with the expertise needed to tackle sophisticated corruption cases.
- **Specialized Units:** Establishing specialized units within the ACC to handle complex cases related to financial crimes, procurement fraud, and cross-border corruption will foster a more targeted and efficient approach to investigations.
- **Adequate Budget Allocation:** Ensuring the ACC has sufficient funding to support its operations, including the acquisition of modern investigative tools and technologies, is vital. A transparent budgetary process will also enhance public trust in the ACC's financial integrity and independence.

9.4. Enhance Public Awareness and Engagement

Objective: To foster a culture of integrity and active public participation in anti-corruption efforts.

Steps:

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Nationwide campaigns to educate citizens on the detrimental effects of corruption and the role they can play in combatting it should be a priority. These campaigns can be conducted through various media platforms, reaching a broad audience and instilling a collective sense of responsibility in fighting corruption.

- **Transparency in Reporting:** The ACC should regularly publish detailed reports on its activities, including the progress and outcomes of significant investigations. This transparency will build public confidence in the ACC's operations and demonstrate its commitment to accountability.
- **Incorporate Anti-Corruption Education:** Integrating anti-corruption education into school curricula will help nurture a generation that values integrity and transparency. Early education on the importance of ethical behavior and the negative impacts of corruption can create long-lasting cultural change.

9.5. Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Accountability Mechanisms

Objective: To create a robust legal environment that supports effective anti-corruption measures and ensures accountability.

Steps:

- **Reform Anti-Corruption Legislation:** The legal processes for prosecuting corruption cases should be streamlined to reduce delays and enhance the efficiency of the judicial system. Establishing specialized anti-corruption courts can expedite the handling of cases and ensure timely justice.
- **Public Accountability and Oversight:** Instituting regular audits and evaluations by independent bodies will enhance the ACC's accountability. These oversight mechanisms should be transparent and accessible to the public, ensuring that the ACC remains answerable to the citizens it serves.
- **Whistleblower Protections:** Developing comprehensive legal protections for whistleblowers is essential. Encouraging individuals to report corrupt activities without fear of retaliation will increase the ACC's ability to detect and address corruption early. Offering incentives for whistleblowers can further motivate individuals to come forward with critical information.

This strategic approach, based on a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities identified in the study, aims to enhance the effectiveness of the ACC and foster a culture of integrity and accountability in Bangladesh.

10. Conclusion

This report has explored the multifaceted challenges and potential reforms necessary to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of Bangladesh. Drawing from expert opinions and case studies, it is evident that significant changes are required to transform the ACC into a more effective and independent body capable of tackling corruption at all levels of government and society.

The analysis underscores the critical need for leadership and structural reforms, financial independence, public engagement, capacity building, and judicial reforms. Lessons from Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) further illustrate how operational independence, robust legal frameworks, and public trust are essential components of a successful anti-corruption strategy.

To achieve these goals, a holistic approach is necessary—one that involves the commitment of political leadership, collaboration with civil society, and engagement with international partners. Implementing these recommendations will not only enhance the ACC's operational efficiency but also restore public confidence in its ability to uphold integrity and justice.

Ultimately, strengthening the ACC is vital for fostering a transparent, accountable governance system in Bangladesh, thereby laying the groundwork for sustainable development and societal trust. The proposed reforms, if enacted with genuine political will and societal support, hold the promise of a corruption-free future, essential for the nation's progress and prosperity.

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