

Politics remains on usual, confrontational course

JAMILUR RAHMAN

THE week begins on a familiar note. There is the usual trading of accusations in the political arena. Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina blames the government for poor governance and calls for its ouster.

But all this is routine -- there is not much to read between the lines, not much to surmise, just a long litany of powerful invectives aimed at the government. The listeners' job is perhaps to gauge the intensity of the anti-government feelings that the invectives carried and wait for something more tangible to come.

Constructive talks follow the tirade. The AL advisory council holds a mid-week meeting to have a closer look at the caretaker government that it blamed for its election debacle in October 2001. The AL leaders are convinced that there are structural or conceptual limitations in the scheme of caretaker government that must be removed to make it resistant to any attempt at manipulation.

The idea was introduced to rid the electoral process of the influence of the government of the day, but the AL believes the last caretaker government failed to make the elections free and fair. The conclusion is clear, the logic behind it not quite so. Is the AL having a look at a familiar thing from a stranger's point of view?

But then the element of positive thinking is not missing. The AL advisory council has invited specific suggestions from the party theoreticians and leaders on how to make caretaker government more effective. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil has said the party is working on

edly arrested from a BNP leader's house. Hasina is particularly severe on the Jamaat-e-Islami, a partner of the ruling coalition, for its 'role' in the growth of militancy.

Hasina also says her party does not believe in the go-alone policy and is ready to work with the like-

minister, themselves decided to step down. But the decision came a bit too late, only after the AL had announced formally that it won't join the conference.

It was a 'pre-planned' move by the AL, said BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. Hasina retorted, saying, the AL was invited only when everything had been done according to the ruling party's plan. The truth, need we say, must lie somewhere between the two extreme positions.

A lot had happened before the AL made the announcement. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia directed the speaker and the deputy speaker to ensure the opposition lawmakers' participation in the conference. But the speaker was perhaps not very comfortable with the assignment as he himself had irked the AL a few days ago saying that parliament was doing well despite the opposition boycott.

It seems the Commonwealth caravan is passing through an unfamiliar terrain, where the rules of parliamentary democracy, of interaction between the government and the opposition, are a bit different. The Commonwealth leaders wanted to have both the government and the opposition on board, but could not perhaps gauge the insoluble nature of the political deadlock in the country.

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possible ways of improving upon the existing electoral process. That is a healthy exercise for any political party, even if it is not going on a fault-finding mission.

Apart from expressing its reservations about the caretaker government's role, the AL also blames the then 'men at the helm' for its October 2001 defeat something it has done consistently in the last two years. Jalil, however, did not elaborate whether the built-in flaws in the caretaker administration or 'individual aberrations' were the main reason behind the defeat.

Sheikh Hasina comes down heavily on the government again on Monday. She asks the home minister to explain how the Islamic militants are operating in the country, referring to the Faridpur arrest of 18 suspected militants. The incident was a bit of an embarrassment to the ruling party as they were report-

minded. But she does not say whether there has been any real progress on the AL's plan of forging an alliance with the left-leaning partiesan issue that drew media attention in recent times.

The biggest controversy of the week, however, revolves around the question of the AL's participation in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's conference beginning at Dhaka on October 4. There was some tough bargaining as the AL set some conditions for joining the conference. The AL had spotted two non-members of parliament on the CPA steering committee and demanded their removal.

Half-releating, the ruling BNP expressed its readiness to make some concessions, but could not take a quick decision on the AL demand. Finally, the two 'aliens', political secretaries to the prime

UN and WTO in?

UMMEE SAILA

THE fifth ministerial conference of World Trade Organisation (WTO) has finished in Cancun, Mexico. 4600 delegates from 146 member countries participated in the conference. 20,000 police, CIA personnel, officers from Scotland Yard were deployed to ensure the safety of these dignitaries. Other than two ships from Mexican navy, small motor launches were also patrolling nearby beach. Around \$6 million were spent for sake of security of the honourable ministers of 146 countries. But the spending of these high amount of money was in vain. In the fifth ministerial meeting the WTO member countries failed to come on consensus ever on the major issue of the conference. The only outcome of this conference was the new membership of Nepal and Cambodia in WTO. G-21 and G-16 was also originated during conference to oppose the agricultural subsidies of the developed countries and the "Singapore Issue" respectively. This incident is viewed as failure of WTO and victory of 50,000 anti-globalize activists in Cancun.

United Nations has lost its credibility in the world because of its meaningless role in the Iraq issue. WTO has failed to make any trade strategy to keep balance between both the interest of poor, developing and developed countries. If the largest international political and economic organisation do not remember their "goal of the origin", then what is the use of their existence? If they only work to keep the interest of the developed countries, who will work to establish the legal right of poor and LDC (Least Developed Countries)? Where can they have justice?

WTO is the predecessor of the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT). This agreement came in force in 1 January, 1948. Many fruitful round like Geneva Round (1956), Dillion Round (1960), Kenedy Round (1964), Tokyo Round (1973) and Uruguay Round (1986) took place after the agreement. All these rounds played a great role to establish western prescribed capitalism, free market economy and globalization in the world. The anti globalize sentiment first came in 1990. GATT was replaced by WTO in 1995. From 1995-2003 all the conference of WTO was accompanied by anti globalize activist. The violent protest have become inseparable part of international trade and finance meeting since rioting in Seattle in 1999. An Italian police was shot dead by a protestor at a summit of industrialised nation in Genoa in 2001. In 2003 Cancun conference Lee-Kyang-Hae, 55, stabbed himself to death while participating in anti-globalize protest. He was the leader of the largest Korean farmer organization called Korean Advanced Farmer Federation (KAFF). It has 120,000 members.

The major issue in the fifth Ministerial meeting was the issue of

agricultural subsidies given by developed countries like United States, European Union, Japan etc. According to new research by economist disclosed by Washington a month ago the world's poorer countries lose a total \$24 bn a year because of the subsidies paid to farmers by rich nations in addition to \$24 bn lost by the poor countries further \$40 bn in agricultural export could be generated by developing countries if the protectionism policies were abandoned by developed countries. The EU & US \$300 bn a year to subsidize there farmer. America's 25,000 firm receive \$4 bn for producing \$3 bn worth of cotton such subsidies push down the price of the cotton product in the world market. 11 million cotton grower in west Africa became victim of the subsidy. The American subsidy axed the income level of the poor householder to put them below poverty line. Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad became the victim of the subsidy. EU subsidy in sugar cause sufferings of the people of Malawi and Thailand. Japan and Korea give subsidy in rice which cause the same sufferings to the rice growing countries. In this 5th ministerial conference 49 LCD's, African Union(AU) and the group of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) got united to speak about their rights together. 90 members out of 146 took common stand against the developed countries policies of subsidy and "Singapore Issue" on investment.

Global trade has increased to \$200 million to \$6,000 million in 50 years. But according to United

Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) the market share of LCD's in global trade declined from 2 percent in 1960 to 1 percent in 1970. The share further declined from 0.80 percent in 1980 to 0.40 percent in 2001.

In this circumstance the agricultural subsidy of the developed

countries will further increase the sorrow of the LDC's. We hope the developed countries would take a rational decision and decrease their unnecessary subsidy to their rich farmer. Otherwise it will cost the lives of many people of the poor country.

