

Is Awami League heading towards another disaster ?

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Of late, a large number of Awami League (AL) leaders and supporters, seem to be quite elated and in top mood. The reason perhaps is more than one. A reasonably successful Awami League sponsored human rights convention which focused mainly on the minorities' bashing and the rough treatment that has been meted out to its leaders and sympathizers after the October elections, coupled with the ever swelling number of people who regularly throng its Bongabondhu Avenue office these days, with the common perception in the AL camp centering the BNP's abysmal performance [during the last four months or so], has significantly turned the overall depressing mood into somewhat of an euphoria.

On a different note, the Awami League [AL] leadership having messed up all its good work of four and half years at the fag end of its own tenure, now feels delighted when it sees its prime adversary in any trouble or when it [BNP] apparently makes an obtuse or wrong decision. For example, denying visa to the famous Pakistani human rights activist, Asma Jehangir for the AL's recently concluded convention certainly did not add any feather to the BNP government's multi-coloured cap, yet it did expose a certain angle of its [BNP's] own weakness, bringing in a good

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amount of credibility to the continuous AL propaganda, viz-a-viz, BNP's anti-democratic and autocratic attitude.

Similarly even the BNP supporters are taken aback when silly mistakes are committed by the 'Hawa Bhabon' strategists ; like the one they made recently while naming the Bogra Medical College. There is absolutely no harm in naming or re-naming any institution after the late President Ziaur Rahman [such as the proposed Bogra Medical College], but why should you do it through an executive order when the parliament is very much in session and any member on a private member's day can move a resolution to that effect, which can be passed unanimously [since the main opposition is not in the house now].Once again, what benefit do you derive by changing the age-old nomenclature of an institution from Mymensingh Agriculture University to anything else ? And then to top it with another folly, you deny having even discussed it in the Cabinet meeting. As if the whole world is sleeping !

That the BNP leadership has also let down its own supporters and well-wishers to a great extent is no secret either, and almost everyone agrees and accepts the above fact ; yet 130 days or so is too little a time to pass sweeping [adverse] remarks or predict the downfall of an elected government, having 219 MPs in its fold. Conversely what the saner section of the people feel is that the Awami League's decision to perpetually boycott the parliament from day '1' was almost a suicidal decision and even more preposterous was its argument that "the atmosphere is not congenial for the 55 odd members to take part in the parliament's proceedings even today".

How can you talk of congenial atmosphere with so much emphasis when you have not even spent two minutes inside the parliament? As innumerable party men and well-wishers feel [whom Sheikh Hasina however does not give even a damn], that the best strategy for the AL would have been effective participation inside the house and continuous walk-outs, if needed everyday, instead of continuous boycott. Just look at the way MP Mashur Rahman [of Jhenaidah] and others are talking in the parliament. It is almost like scoring dozens of goals in a football match without the opponents in sight anywhere !

The problem is that today, as far as the general masses are concerned, there is hardly any choice left, or rather a substitute 'third force' on whom you can lean on ; it is either 'Kodu' or 'Lau'[the two different names of the same pumpkin as they are commonly known in rural Bengal], which in substance are akin. Although the BNP government has achieved some success in certain areas within the time frame it had itself set, such as the environment sector (polythene exodus) and cleansing of the traffic mess by dumping old vehicles or taking them off the roads, yet the sudden price hike of essentials and utility services [through the SROs or as some naughty people say, 'Saifur Rahman Order'], coupled with an alarming deterioration in the law and order sector, does not speak very high of the BNP's much trumpeted governance at the moment. In fact, the present government has opened more fronts than it can ultimately manage---starting from witch-hunting of officers to settling of political scores by instigating the

Bureau of Anti-corruption to file hundreds of random cases against the former AL Ministers, sympathizers, bureaucrats [with even the slightest AL odour], or the '73/74 recruits in the civil and police service. And by God. Had there been no High Court and the generosity of their Lordships [as far as the anticipatory bails are concerned], the jails and prisons of the country would have been flooded with elites of all sorts by now.

Sheikh Hasina, as a matter of fact, due to the queer combination of her utter ignorance of the political intricacies of this country and her inherent stubbornness to accept the facts of life, is singularly responsible for most of the damage that has been done to her own citadel in the past and even today. Just tell me in simple words, what was the pressing need to drag in the former President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed into any controversy whatsoever. And here I can be more assertive than many others, because I have known the old man more than any of my colleagues and friends in the AL. As a member of Sk. Hasina's cabinet from June '96 to July 2001, I had the rare privilege of meeting Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed a number of times, although mostly on my own initiatives, and I must say that never, ever he spoke ill of anyone. Justice Shahabuddin at times did lament at the way things were being handled by us, but simultaneously he showed great personal affection for the former Prime Minister. My plain and simple argument therefore is : if we could not find any fault with him during all those five years when he was with us as the head of state, how-come he became a 'villain of the piece' overnight ? After all, our two revered 'Ladies' had successfully clipped his [the President's] wings when the country switched over from the Presidential to the Parliamentary system in 1991. Today the Honourable President of Bangladesh does not enjoy even the limited (titular) powers that his counterpart in India or elsewhere enjoy in a similar parliamentary system. With virtually no power left in his hands that Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed could possibly maneuver, how could he be accused of any wrong doings ? And who is to be blamed then ?

On the contrary, among the many significant decisions taken during the caretaker period, Justice

Shahabuddin Ahmed's timely decision to bring in the armed forces before the election, I believe, was the most prudent, appropriate and judicious decision to say the least. It was Sk. Hasina's irresponsible utterings rather, which I hate to repeat here, pertaining to the armed forces that did the real damage and not Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed's decision as the person in-charge of the Defence Ministry during the caretaker period.[The President is incidentally, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces also, as per our constitution].

Similarly, Justice Latifur Rahman, as the head of the Caretaker Government (CG), is also branded today by the AL lobby as one of the members of the 'Gang of Three' and a partisan head of the CG . Human memory indeed may be short at times, but not so much as the top AL leadership thinks it to be. Everything possible under the sun was done, to prevent Justice Mustafa Kamal from heading the CG, simply because he was perceived to be a Jamaat e Islami sympathizer ; which is again far from the truth. And to complete the circle of conspiracy in this regard the schedule parliamentary elections were dragged upto October 2001, so as to enable Justice Rahman to take over as the head of the CG, which the AL so foolishly thought would fit into its scheme of returning to power !

Justice Latifur Rahman, as destiny had in store, showed his magical prowess within two hours of his taking oath, by transferring and reshuffling over a dozen senior bureaucrats, which not only sent shock-waves all around, but also resulted in complete nervous

breakdown and loss of composure by the AL. A calculated tirade soon started, which engulfed the Chief Election Commissioner as well. An honest man from Sk. Hasina's own district, i.e Gopalganj, whom the former Prime Minister had cheerfully appointed herself defying the BNP's vehement protests at that time, suddenly become a thorn by all definitions. How could the trio--- Justice Shahabuddin, Justice Latifur Rahman and Mr.Sayed---all gang up so soon against the same person, the same ideals and the same party which had brought them into focus and fore , was the common man's query ?

Unfortunately, instead of admitting her own fault, Sk.Hasina even today gleefully speaks non-stop, much of which does not make any sense at all. The people, especially the party workers, supporters and the affected members of the minority community had quite justifiably expected that Sk. Hasina would visit them in early October,[when the BNP-Jamaat supporters, terrorists and their MPs had unleashed a reign of terror in the rural areas], which Hasina miserably failed to do. Instead, she left for USA and spent useless time there when the country and the exigencies of the situation needed her the most at home. She still appears to be undecided, unclear, ambiguous and as usual oscillating between hard reality and utopian ideas.

In any case, if the lost image of the party has to be retrieved once again, and the AL has to be put back on the right track, then certain tough decisions will have to be taken without any delay, how much difficult they may appear to be. And one of them is to join the next session of the Parliament immediately and compel the BNP to come to terms on certain basic issues and matters. The second should be to induct fresh and new blood into the leadership and purge all 'Monafeks' (hypocrats), opportunists and backbone-less leaders and on-lookers from the party. And this is

perhaps the minimum that the AL leadership can be expected to do. Otherwise another disaster is surely in the offing and the political Richter's scale may neither be able

to predict it, nor measure when it really comes.

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