

STAR

The Fakhruddin government: No easy option

Rounaq Jahan sounds a note of caution as to the enormity of the task faced by the current administration

ON January 11, when President Iajuddin Ahmed stunned and delighted the nation (with the possible exception of 4-party alliance partisans) with his U-turn speech stepping down as the chief adviser, declaring emergency, and admitting that the scheduled national election could not be held on January 22 as it would not be free, fair and impartial, it became clear that the previous ruling coalition's grip on state power has slipped; that Iajuddin's reversal of position has been made possible by the intervention of the military who had finally refused to go along with the old order. On another previous occasion, in 1990, the military similarly refused to stand behind another *ancient regime*, that of General Ershad, when the tide of public opinion was clearly against his corrupt and autocratic rule.

There is, however, a great deal of difference in the mood of the public in 1990 and 2007. In 1990, there was a great sense of expectation and hope that the end of military rule and the beginning of rule by democratically elected politicians would usher in a system of responsive and accountable government. But after three successive governments of elected political leaders, popular mood and expectation today are very different. There is no denying the fact that a large segment of the population, in fact the silent majority, are disappointed and disillusioned with the performance of the leaders they had elected to represent and govern them. This frustration with the undemocratic behaviour of popularly elected leaders, however, does not mean that people have lost faith in democracy or democratic elections. Their experiences of the last sixteen years have only deepened their understanding of the meaning of democracy and the complexities of establishing democratic institutions.