

We need a national government

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WITH a rock solid determination for reforms, besides running the affairs of the government in a political vacuum by a council of advisers, it was feared that a spark anywhere might turn into a political firestorm. In Dhaka University, the highly politicized student wing came forward to give that a jump start. I commented in my last article published in The Daily Star on September 18 that the students never really came back from the streets. I wish I were wrong. From a trifling squabble between a few students and young soldiers a different ballgame unfolded. Instead of negotiating for peace, when some teachers fueled the fire with political demands like withdrawal of national emergency, resignation of the IG police, home secretary and unconditional apology from the Army Chief, they certainly lost the moral high-ground. The nation is deeply disappointed with the behavior of the university teachers at a critical time. The unbecoming behavior robbed us - the army of former students, the right to demand their release, but still pray for leniency on humanitarian grounds.

The political parties have their followers among the students, teachers, lawyers, government officers, media and intellectuals, businessmen, commoners; even among the imams of mosques, to defend and debate. A government is run by the cabinet but the partisans in all fronts put up proactive

defense down to remote villages against the government. It's nearly a year that we had a political government. The nation had invited the advisers' as caretakers - not a government, much less a revolutionary one. When the caretakers set the reforms in motion without organic political backup, they had drawn resistance and hostility from all vested quarters. Viciously necessary organizational advocacy from the partisans were totally missing for the apolitical regime. Political activities might be restricted; but one-sided whispering campaign was very much active. Under economic constraints, natural calamities and wavering on decisions, the caretaker regime became vulnerable to defamation and propaganda. The workload was simply staggering for the ten and the team was buckling under pressure. To conceive a caretaker council with all powers of a revolutionary government but without a bridge with the people, and the armed forces with the burden of responsibility but without authority is ridiculous.

The advisers contradicted one another on many occasions; especially open admission of 'minus two theory' was a public relations disaster. A harmful impression was conveyed that the advisers were not together and political vendetta was part of the apolitical agenda. A noble intention of anticorruption drive for clean politics had a good start but was soon marred with controversies. The demolition of illegal shanties and uprooting of street hawkers were the right things wrongly done, at a wrong time. Unfortunately, the economy was

also substantially dependent on black money and malpractices for a long time to accept reforms without resistance. Price hike of essentials and nosedive of booming real estate prices were a part of economic resistance. Many in the wild fire of student protest were not students really; but the uprooted hawkers, shanty dwellers and vagabonds.

An honest and efficient government will never allow the bureaucrats to make money; at the same time, an honest bureaucracy can hardly stop a corrupt government from their nefarious activities. When highest political positions forced into money making machines, both bureaucracy and business were contaminated with quick money and promotion culture. Even under a bloody revolution habits do not change overnight. No matter how desperate the necessity and endeavor, a minimum time is needed for the reforms to percolate into the mainstream of national culture. Transparency in the political field should set a trend in business and bureaucracy. The political reforms earnestly desired by the people should be pursued with the singleness of mind and sustained beyond next election.

If one can role a stone, from a hilltop it travels much faster and more distance than the applied force under Newton's law. But law of gravitation is not enough; weight and speed should have been combined for the desired impact. The council of advisers had the support of the people and

weight of the army, but they divided the effort into paltry pebbles and threw those in all directions. It alerted offenders and allowed time for regrouping. In the trivial squabble between a few students and young soldiers, whose age was below the average of the students, the vested interests behaved in full ferocity. The long arm of bad politics, muscle and money spoke the rest.

The armed forces cannot be the sole underwriter of the caretakers for the length of the time beyond 90 days and their activities, more importantly, the caretaker government must have a safe exit route from legal and constitutional brawls; once an elected government is installed. The question needs to be addressed now; who will offer the exit route and how. Liberation war, counter insurgency operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Shabarbarah, Matin-Alauddin, Huq-Toha operations, floods, devastating tidal bore in the coastal areas, election duties, where has the army not gone to hold the flag high and make the governments functional. While the duties speak for the sacrifice of the soldiers, we must admit, it also speaks of the weakness of political health of the country. It is an honor for the armed forces to make sacrifices for the cause of the nation. Dying is not a big deal for the soldiers. If someone is trying to kick a soldier and asking the army to retreat humbly from a situation, I bet, that army will not fight and give life for the nation.

Conducting a national election was the best designed agenda for a



'caretaker council of ten', it is not expected to run the government and carry out reforms for two long years. A car may be faster but not robust enough to carry a truckload. In any case when the fixed period of 90 days runs into years the idea of caretaker becomes redundant and

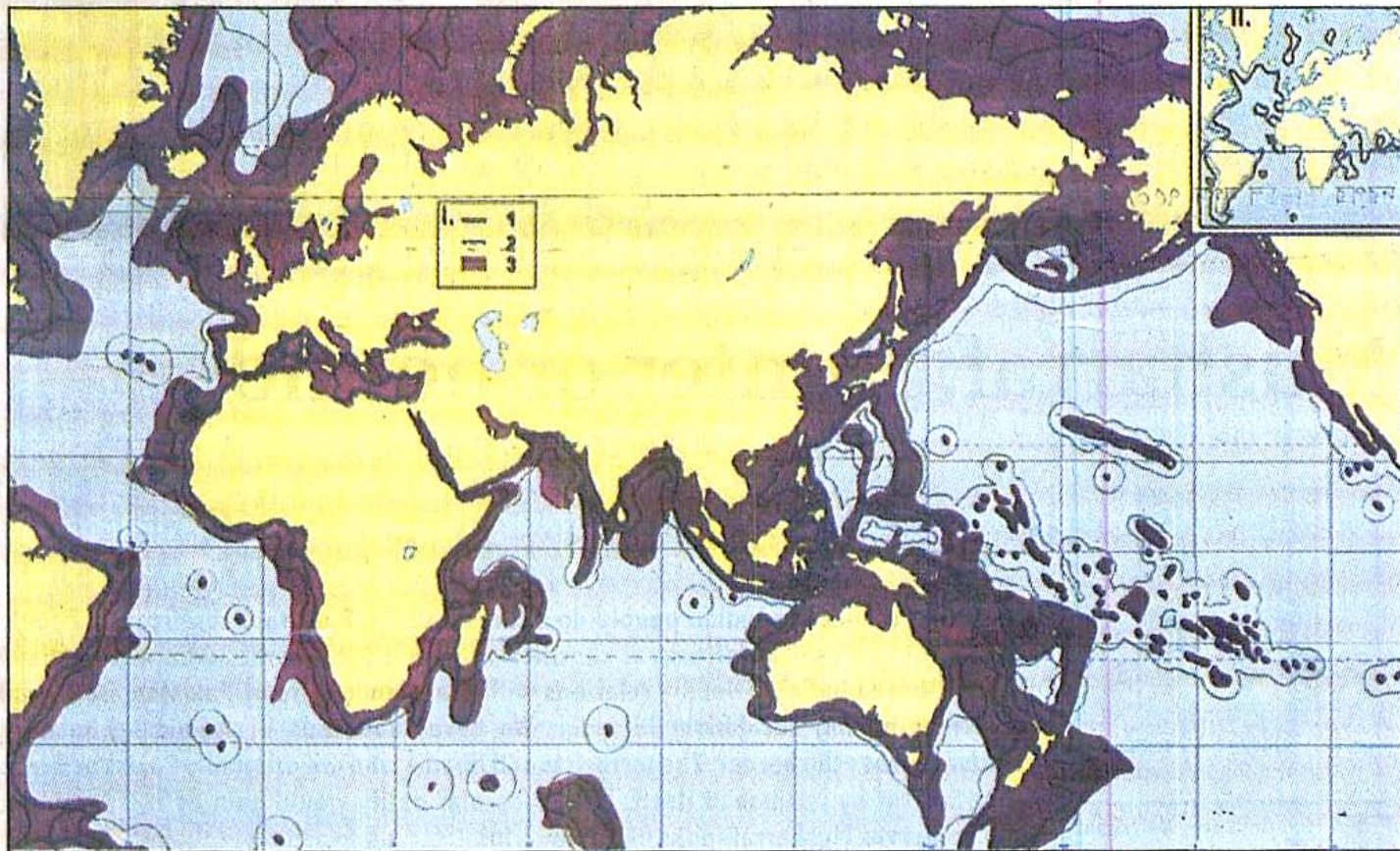
dies a natural death. Only option is to go for a national government under universal law of necessity with honest and courageous people who are willing to take the political heat of the reforms and sustain it into the elections. We must admit, deferring election up

to the end of 2008 is not constitutionally provisioned nor formally approved by the people. No matter, caretaker, interim or national government, two years is too long a period that will certainly need the approval of the people or their representatives in the parliament

to set the legal and constitutional controversies at rest. It is time to decide and the nation cannot afford to be shy while carrying out vitally important political reforms to save it from anarchy.

The author is a freelancer

Importance of sea floor nautical charts in delimiting maritime zones and boundaries



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THE sea floor chart is a valuable tool in order to display the limits of maritime zones under national jurisdiction as per UNCLOS 1982. However it must be borne in mind that the nautical chart was specifically designed for the safe passage of vessels over the oceans and seas and these days it shows the coastline and the seaward area over which the delimitation is to be made.

The chart is recognized by all the coastal states and it projects in good detail, the configuration of the coast and the morphology of the sea floor. At present, in almost all countries, the nautical chart is the only type of chart or map which is close to meeting the needs of legal establishments and cartographers responsible for carrying out the task of boundary delimitation. It is however very well known that due to the mathematical nature of its projection, the charts so prepared contain distortions/inaccuracy which may affect its use in delimitation. The technical elements considered when choosing the chart are - chart projection, chart scale, horizontal datum and vertical datum. These factors have fundamental importance influence on the practical definition of maritime boundaries. The charts used for the purposes of delimitation between the countries should reflect the present situation as accurately as possible and they should be based on the most recent surveys carried out by the hydrographers of the coastal countries. Some projections are 'Conformal' in that angles are preserved and the shape of areas is retained even if scale must vary from one point to another.

Adjacent States must use a Transverse Mercator projection chart to define a maritime boundary to its advantage as the narrow strip of sea and land is mapped with a minimum distortion. If the area of sea and land between States is not much extended in latitude, then also the Mercator projection may be used advantageously. The Transverse Mercator has the main advantage of allowing manual geometrical construction and the measurement of distances, angles and surfaces with errors which are acceptable when the graphic method is accepted as valid by the parties involved. It is recommended that a common geodetic datum be adopted and the adjustments necessary to pass from one geodetic system to the other one be quantified to avoid any possibility of cartographic incompatibility when positioning maritime boundary delimitations. If this transformation is not possible for lack of data, or even if feasible it is not convenient, the best solution is to agree on the use of common charts during the negotiations.

The adoption of a common Geodetic Datum could avoid problems mainly in the use of the equidistance method. In order to determine maritime boundary delimitations, it may be necessary to perform surveys both on land and at sea through Geodetic and topographic surveys, Tidal and oceanographic surveys, Bathymetric surveys and Geo-scientific surveys. Most importantly determination of the low-water line which defines the normal baseline and base points for straight line segments of a baseline system, positioning of the geodetic coordinates of benchmark and other re-adjustment of ancient and or distorted surveys must be carried out beforehand. Thorough reconnaissance is to be done to identify and select those points to be as the baselines along the coast. Such points may be those used as turning points or terminal points of a straight baseline system

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or the low-water line itself. Off-lying rocks, islands and low-tide elevations are particularly important in this respect. Efforts should be to locate all geodetic control points in the area which may be used to reference the baseline points. When the coastline is deeply indented and cut into, or fringed with islands with numerous embayments, headlands and off-lying rocks and islands and it is planned to use a system of straight baselines, care must be taken to carry out a detailed reconnaissance in order that the points along the baselines may be well chosen. An accurate chart of large scale is most desirable for this purpose.

The location of the low-water line will require careful tide measurements in areas where the coast is gently sloping as any error in vertical measurement may result in considerable horizontal displacement. It is extremely important to obtain the exact height above low water datum of all off lying rocks, sandbars and other features. At the same time the tidal range must be precisely determined in order that it will be known if these features are above or below high water. Whether or not a feature is a low-tide elevation or a feature permanently above high water may assume considerable importance. It is therefore very important to pay total attention to the trend of tide as well as to the possible influence on the sea level of meteorological factors. Determining the coastline becomes more difficult in zones that have large differences in tide. Photogrammetric surveys may be used in addition to the geodetic methods to define precisely the entire extent of the low-water line providing details between the surveyed points. Low lying coastlines, subject to intensive erosive processes, with large tidal ranges, and bordered by extensive soft mud banks

may make classical survey methods difficult. In such cases, aerial photograph and satellite images may be utilized at low-water, and bathymetric surveys at high-water, in order to establish the low-water

It is therefore important for Bangladesh to ensure that we have correct and appropriate charts prepared and we know how to use the charts to our advantage. As the preparation of charts would take months and years, it is advisable that enough attention to its minutest details are given now before even we try to sit with our neighbours for talks on delimitation of various maritime zones and boundaries. We have to consider the difference between the various chart datums and mean sea levels which have been established throughout the world and have significant in terms of boundary delimitation.

Chart datums are considered as the charted low-water line and are the line from which maritime boundaries and limits of jurisdictional zones are measured. The fact that there are different levels of Chart Datum means that adjacent or opposite States may use different levels at which to establish their baselines.

Consequently, differences in the development of equidistance lines can result. We must remember that considerable differences may also occur in areas where rocks, islands or reefs, exposed at low tide, are used as baseline points. The choice of the level of chart datum may decide whether they are charted as features permanently below water, and thus eliminated from boundary delimitation calculations or as low-tide elevations, and thereby possibly included in such calculations.

Make no mistake in the point that the precise definition of chart datum is crucial in boundary delimitation along with the accuracy of the data used in the actual calculations. The accuracy of the vertical datum depends on the length of the tidal records and the remoteness of the area to be delimited from the secondary station.

There may be a requirement to produce a special report, including the working documents and calculations, to substantiate the results of the survey measurements and consequent delineation of the coastline. It is therefore urgent for the Foreign Ministry to make sure that we have all types of coastal and deep sea floor charts to substantiate our claims with our neighbours when demarcating our maritime boundaries or with the UN bodies when we are going to claim our CS on or before 2011. Special cell or body must start looking seriously into our preparations so that bad home works again and again do not deprive us from getting our due share of the Bay of Bengal and its resources and in spite of repeated warnings through this column someone someday could be held responsible for playing with the future of this country's resources.

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Iran's nationalism vs US strategy

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

IRAN has a great past. Its civilization is as ancient as that of Greece. When our Prophet was born in the 6th century, two great empires held sway to the north of Arabia. Roman and Persian empires shared borders with each other and the border line was more or less through the middle of present Syria.

During the British period, Iran became a 'puppet state' and in 1953 the nationalistic Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh gained the enduring affection of millions of Iranians for the way he stood up to Britain in his quest to assert Iranian control over its oil production.

Like the present regime has turned the nuclear issue to be a prime vehicle for projecting newfound national power, prestige and confidence to citizens and the world. Iranians ask, if Israel can have atomic bombs, what is wrong with other countries in the Middle East having nuclear warheads?

It was the US that encouraged Israel to become a nuclear power. Israel and the US had a secret agreement in 1969 in which Israel had to be publicly ambivalent on the nuclear bombs. Israel neither denies nor confirms its possession of nuclear warheads.

Iran's strategy

The nuclear arsenal was injected in the Middle East through Israel to give an overwhelming edge to it over Arabs; the US policy is to ensure that Israel remains the strongest power in that region.

Recently the US Ambassador to Israel signed an agreement with Israeli government providing \$30 billion worth of weapons to Israel over 10 years, representing a 25% increase from present levels. Already Israel, with the assistance of the US, has replenished the weapons that were lost during the Lebanese war. Why is the military aiding Israel? It is simply to contain Iran's power and influence.

In view of this, Iran's attitude towards nuclear issue has to be understood. The Iranian regime is not inclined to compromise over the nuclear issue because they assert that it will be used for peaceful purposes. If the Middle East is turned into a 'nuclear free zone', Iran might seriously consider not proceeding with nuclear programme.

It is true that energy demand is rising in Iran. And its oil industry may not be able to satisfy the demand in the coming decades. Besides, with the price of oil so high, why would Iran want to burn oil for electricity when it can sell a barrel of oil to the world for over \$70? It is economic commonsense.

Iran sees the nuclear issue similar to oil nationalization issue of the '50s. The leaders like to take the mantle of a new Mossadegh, presenting themselves as the true saviour of Iran's national rights.

Iranians view the US' suspicion as further proof of the West's condescending attitude towards Iran that takes no account of its millennia-old civilization. Furthermore, Iranian leaders consider the rise of Iran a stabilizing influence in a neighborhood marked by 'failed' states.

The Bush administration by its flawed war on terrorism demolished two of Iran's regional enemies the Talebans and Saddam Hussein. With the administration bogged down in Iraq, Iran's standing has been on the rise. It is gradually assuming its place as the superpower of the Gulf, some-

thing the Shah of Iran aspired to.

A New Shift of power in the Middle East

Many commentators have traced a very important new development in the Middle East, the Shi'a revival. There is a view among some Sunni section that the Shi'a communities in different countries have been gaining encouragement and support from each other and Iran, as the Shi'a mother country.

President Mubarak caustically remarked that the Arab Shi'as appeared to be more loyal to Iran than to their own countries. Jordan's King Abdullah called it the emergence of 'the Shi'ite Crescent' from Lebanon to Iran. Before Iraqi war, such sectarianism was not known in the Islamic community in the Middle East.

Furthermore, close cooperation between Iran-Syria is another important dimension in the region. One is an Arab State and the other is non-Arab. But they reportedly provide support to Hezbollah against Israel.

US Strategy

Washington, on the other hand, sees Iranian intransigence over the nuclear issue as further evidence that Iran is determined to produce nuclear warhead.

For stability of Iraq, the Bush administration is compelled to sit down with Iranian officials and this clearly manifests the influence of Iran on Iraq. The rise of Iran is a new power game for the West. The US wants to limit the power of Iran in the Middle East as it does for China in the Asia-Pacific.

The US strategy is to counter Iran's influence by Arab states and accordingly the US is providing military aid to

Egypt (\$13 billion), and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States (\$20 billion), as it has been promoting Australia, India and Japan to limit the influence of China in the region.

The US-India nuclear deal is to be seen in this context of power game. Japan's proposed abandonment of pacifism, encouraged by the US, has been stalled for the time being after the poor showing at the recent upper house poll for the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. However, Japan under the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has not abandoned its intention to be a military power again on the plea of threat from North Korea.

If the US deal is cleared eventually by the Nuclear Suppliers Group, then China and Pakistan might come up with a similar deal to counter the impact of the US-India nuclear agreement.

Conclusion

Political commentators suggest that the challenge for the US is to ease China into the world and not make the mistakes Europe made with rising Germany at the early 20th century, which started a cycle of wars that included the First and Second World Wars. In the past the world has never seen the rise of a new power without war.

The incoming summit meeting of the 21 countries of APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) of the heads of states/governments in the first week of September in Sydney (where US President, China's President and Prime Minister of Japan will attend among others) may include security issues including ways of cooperation and not confrontation with China in the Asia Pacific region for facilitating further economic growth of the region.

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