

# Great expectations

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that in the past hampered country's economy a lot by enforcing violent political programmes like hartals, blockades etc.

The crackdown on corrupt political bigwigs and businessmen got people's overwhelming support, but some steps like anti-boarding and harassment of top businessmen caused severe setbacks as the steps sent a chill of panic among the businessmen community.

At the beginning of the caretaker regime, the wholesale eviction drive across the country to recover public land made several lakh vendors and hawkers jobless what many economists think did greatly damage the informal small business sector.

Besides, natural calamities like the devastating floods and horrifying cyclone Sidr made the ways difficult for the interim administration.

Following the natural disasters and lack of farsighted steps on the economic front, at the end of the year the country's economy has been largely stagnant. Economists' observation about the country's economic situation is more panicking than encouraging.

In its last over 11 months tenure, the caretaker government faced one vigorous agitation against it in last August at educational institutions and their adjacent areas centring the incident at Dhaka University (DU) campus.

To control the situation, the government withdrew the army camp from DU campus, shutdown all public universities and enforced curfew in the divisional headquarters.

Besides, the veteran freedom fighters launched movement for trial of war criminals and the demand for imposing ban on war criminals has been raised strongly.

The recent resignation of an adviser, Ayub Quadri, over the artefacts fiasco put the caretaker government in an embarrassing situation. Many political analysts, however, observed that Quadri could have taken some early action and saved a lot of embarrassment for the government.

Many people, however, still dream of changes for better days and believe the caretaker government will be able to overcome the current situation when the country's economy will be thriving again in an atmosphere where corruption is under control.

Political analysts, however, believe 1/11 (January 11) changeover really provides the interim regime with the historic opportunity to contribute to establishing a desirable democratic rule in the country by bringing qualitative changes in the country's political culture.

But, the developments in past few months made many political analysts sceptical about the implementation of the much-talked-about reforms roadmap that stipulated that the stalled ninth parliamentary election must be held by December 2008.

## JOURNEY OF A HISTORIC REGIME

When the country was experiencing grave political turmoil, President Iajuddin Ahmed was forced to resign from the office of the chief adviser dissolving the council of advisers and declare the state of emergency on January 11.

The next day, with the formation of the caretaker government afresh, rule of an un-elected regime began in Bangladesh with unlimited tenure, as the constitutional obligation for holding the parliamentary polls within 90 days after dissolving the erstwhile parliament was not followed as a result of emergency.

The current interim administration is a unique one in the history of caretaker governments that held parliamentary polls within the stipulated timeframe in 1996 and 2001.

The current caretaker government was welcomed by the people even though their fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution were suspended by the state of emergency.

Thus, the interim regime began its journey with the pledges to present the countrymen a free, fair and credible election for ensuring good governance.

With the huge task of running the government for additional time, the caretaker government tried to expand the council of advisers but failed, as the constitution does not allow appointing more than 11 advisers, including the chief adviser.

## CRACKDOWN ON CORRUPTIONISTS

From February, it launched crackdowns on the corrupt people and detained political bigwigs including the two former prime ministers who were once considered above the country's laws. People appreciated the clampdown on the corrupt people who were put behind bars regardless of their political identity for the first time after the country's independence.

To intensify the anti-grafts drive effectively, the government reconstituted the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), formed national task force on curbing serious crimes, and formulated rules under the emergency powers to prevent corrupt people taking part in the elections.

Many of the political bigwigs including Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia might not be able to contest the next parliamentary election if they are convicted on corruption charges by the trial court, according to the emergency power rules.

Since the reconstitution of the ACC on February 25, it served notices on 256 former lawmakers and ministers including the two former pre-

miers asking them to submit their wealth statements. Of them, 239 submitted the wealth statements to the ACC.

It has so far filed 141 cases against former ministers and lawmakers and of them 53 cases are now under trial and verdict in 18 cases were delivered sentencing former ministers, lawmakers and businessmen to various terms of imprisonment.

The government has forced some corrupt people to deposit with the exchequer around Tk 800 crore which they had accumulated through corruption.

**ECONOMY IN RECESSION**  
Economists said political turmoil from October last year followed by the sweeping anti-corruption drive slowed down investment. Business organisations are uncertain whether to go for new investments or not. And government's dillydallying over some big investment proposals contributed to the slow foreign direct investment (FDI) growth.

The government has initiated formation of Truth Commission and Regulatory Reforms Commission to restore the business community's confidence. Despite the measures, the businessmen are still in uncertainty about the political situation and economic scenario, prompting them to keep away from new investments.

Import of capital machinery fell by 30 percent in the first quarter of the current fiscal year due to slow growth of both local and foreign investments. According to Bangladesh Bank statistics, capital machinery worth \$366 million was imported during July-September period of 2007 while it was \$402 million during the corresponding period in last fiscal year.

Import of raw materials, however, went up by 18 percent with edible oil and oil seeds being half of the total.

Industrial credit disbursement was not satisfactory in the first quarter of this fiscal year despite having huge liquidity in the banking system. The disbursement saw nine percent growth during this period as against 28 percent during the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year.

The amount of excess liquidity in the banking system remained Tk 13,129 crore till the end of August 2007.

Bangladesh received \$132 million FDI in July-August 2007, 3.64 percent more than \$137 million received during the corresponding period of the previous year.

Production of medium and large manufacturing industries saw slower growth in the last fiscal year.

According to central bank statistics, industrial production growth percentage came down by 2.48 percent to 10.01 percent last fiscal year, which was 12.48 percent in 2005-06 fiscal year.

Moreover, inflation keeps rising and it stands at a 10-year high around double digits causing unbridled increase of prices of essentials and making public lives miserable.

In such a situation, economists observe Bangladesh economy is currently going through the most critical and challenging period since independence because of the extensive damage caused by natural calamities and the increase of oil price in the international market.

To improve the economic situation by restoring confidence of businessmen, the government has recently formed Better Business Forum headed by the chief adviser.

**CONTOVERSY OVER REFORMS IN PARTIES**  
The government's role, however, in bringing reforms in the political parties triggered enormous controversy as many political leaders and analysts accused it of working behind the scenes for splitting the parties in the name of reforms.

From the very beginning, the policymakers of the interim regime launched blistering attacks on politicians, particularly of Awami League and BNP, the parties that ruled the country in the last 15 years after ousting the military ruler HM Ershad through a mass uprising in 1990.

Despite its repeated calls for reforms in the political parties, the interim government itself did not come up with any specific proposals for reforms rather it ignored the demand for opening a national dialogue with the political parties on reforms.

In such a situation, no serious progress would be made in bringing reforms in the political parties. Meanwhile, the BNP has become split over reform issue with, some claim, the blessing of the army-backed interim administration. But, the pro-reform leaders failed to gather support from the grassroots level leaders in absence of Khaleda Zia, who was detained on September 3.

The Awami League, the other major party, though not officially divided, is facing internal conflicts over deciding on the party's policy on reforms in absence of Hasina, who was detained on July 16.

During the caretaker regime, attempts were made to float new political parties. This reminded the people of past military regimes when new political parties were set up under state patronisations.

However, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus retreated from his move to forge a new political party as he did not receive the desired response.

## GOOD NEWS

Following the declaration of the state of emergency, people, however, experienced a year without political violence, hartal, strike and major social crimes as law and order situation was largely controlled.

Moreover, separation of the judiciary met the long cherished demand, which was ignored during the regime of the previous political

governments. The interim regime also reconstituted the Election Commission, and the Public Service Commission, as both the constitutional bodies were mired in controversies.

Under the initiatives of the caretaker government, the unbridled corruption in Chittagong port was curbed largely and efficiency of the port has been increased dramatically.

The dreaded militant kingpins—Shakib Abdur Rahman, Bangla Bhai and four others—were executed sending a message of the government's tough stance against militants who have been working to destabilise the country.

Despite hurdles to manage daily lives, people of all walks, however, celebrated Bangladesh cricket team's triumph over India and South Africa in the World Cup Cricket and West Indies in Twenty20 World Cup.

The ongoing preparation of the voter list with ID cards is a widely appreciated project of the caretaker government. This massive project is expected to complete in 2008. When completed, this would work as a national database of voters. It is also expected to quell allegations and accusations regarding the voter list.

## Credit growth

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decreased by 13.25 percent. Credit disbursement of government owned commercial banks increased 4.1 percent in the first 10 months of 2006.

Meanwhile, credit disbursement of private commercial banks increased 15.49 percent in first 10 months of 2007, which was 20.88 percent in 2006.

The BB data also reveals that credit of specialised banks increased 4.30 percent in the first 10 months of 2007 while the increase was 9.97 percent in 2006.

The picture, however, was different in the foreign commercial banks as the banks' credit disbursement increased 21.73 percent in the first 10 months of 2007. The figure was 14.80 percent in the corresponding period of 2006.

The overall excess liquidity in the commercial banks stood at Tk 14,239 crore on November 1, 2007.

Of the excess liquidity, the government owned commercial banks have Tk 3,758 crore, private commercial banks Tk 7,345 crore, foreign commercial banks Tk 2,978 crore and specialised banks Tk 157 crore surplus liquidity.

According to the BB statistics, deposit in commercial banks increased 10.50 percent in the first 10 months of 2007, which was 14.69 percent in the same period of 2006.

## Ex-MP Pramanik

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second in command Siddique Islam alias Bangla Bhai on February 28, 2004.

Of the accused, lecturer Rafiqul Islam of Baghmara upazila, principal Mostafizur Rahman and Hafez Mizanur Rahman have already been jailed for 31 years in another case with former post and telecommunications minister Aminul Haq for patronising militants.

## They took

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goods at ZIA for the last 20 years. Abbas and Nasir said they stole the statuettes believing that those were made of precious stones.

They gave their stunning statement to journalists yesterday when they were paraded before a press briefing at the headquarters of Rapid Action Battalion-1 at Uttara in the city.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Abbas at Tilipapara in the city's Khilgaon and Nasir at Mollahartek of Uttara Sunday night.

Abbas told journalist that on December 21 night his aides Nasir Uddin, driver of civil aviation department Monir Hossain, Hamid and Nikhil Chandra Das went to his Uttara home and handed him the two statuettes—one black and another white.

He said he broke the statuettes in two and realised that those were earthen.

Abbas also said they broke the statuettes into pieces in front of some neighbours including former Jatiya Party lawmaker Anwara Begum. They later dumped the fragments at the garbage dumping station of Uttara.

As the media started covering the theft incident, Abbas got frightened and he hid himself in a house in Khilgaon. Nasir also fled from his Mollahartek home but returned on December 25.

Rab-1 Commanding Officer Lt Col Sayid Saqline, Rab Legal and Media Wing Director SMAK Azad, Major Atiqur Rahman of Rab Intelligence Wing briefed journalists about how the gang stole the Vishnu relics from ZIA.

Rab officials said they are conducting drives to arrest ZIA janitors Mohammad Ali and Abdur Razzak, associates of Abbas and Nasir.

On Sunday, investigators recovered four fragments that seemed to be parts of the two stolen statuettes. Experts of the National Museum were working to identify the fragments.

On Friday, around 200 Rab personnel and 25 Dhaka City Corporation teams rounded up around 200 fragments. Later, two National Museum officials identified 27 pieces on the spot as parts of the stolen idols. No officials from the museum were on the spot yesterday.

Our Benapole correspondent

# Probe points

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portion was found to be only 2,500 PSI (pounds per square inch) against the recommended 4,000 PSI, the ministry said quoting the report.

'Impact Load' created due to piling up of concrete debris from upper floors caused the successive caving in of the lower floors, the reports said.

Following the collapse, the government on December 11 formed a four-member committee headed by Shah Alam, chief engineer of the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajku), to probe the incident. Later, another member from the Explosives Directorate was included in the committee.

Three other members of the committee are Dr Raquib Ahsan and Syed Ishaq Ahmad, both associate professors of Civil Engineering Department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), and Nazrul Islam, deputy chief (Planning Cell) of the Housing and Public Works Ministry.

Associate Professor Syed Ishaq Ahmad of Buet, also a member of the committee, however, told The Daily Star, "The building might not have been collapsed if it wasn't attempted to be demolished."

Preferring anonymity, another member of the committee said, "If Rajuk carried out the tasks with proper necessary precautions, the accident would not take place."

"During the demolition work, the

vibration in the building led to the collapse. But the probe committee did not mention it to save Rajuk," he added.

Regarding the demolition of the 22-storied structure, Bureau of Research and Testing Corporation of Buet made the following observation: "The whole building needs to be demolished then perhaps the best method would have been to demolish by explosives. Expertise for demolition of such a tall building within a congested area is unavailable. The demolition here should be the reverse process of construction."

**UNBADD**  
Hasina yesterday asked her party leaders and workers to intensify movement in a constructive way for restoration of democracy.

"Carry on movement in a constructive way, shunning the path of indiscipline, so no one could find a plea for extending the state of emergency, even using power by promulgating full martial law," she was quoted by her counsel as saying when she appeared in the trial court.

Hasina couldn't hold back tears as she made a mention of the killing of Pakistan's former premier Benazir Bhutto, and posed a question as to whether a popular political leader has no right to live.

"Virtually there is no difference between the grenade attack on me and the suicide attack on Benazir," she said, adding that Allah saved her.

# Hasina falls sick

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they do not have any problem but the defence should come up with a petition.

Following a written prayer by Hasina's lawyers, the court granted the permission and asked the security personnel to take her back to the sub jail, a special prison set up in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex.

Before leaving the dock at 12:15pm, Hasina was sweating heavily prompting her relatives to give her a towel. Visibly exhausted, she was frequently wiping her face on the towel.

The ceiling fan over the dock was turned on to make her feel cooler.

Later, the defence lawyers informed the court about her fluctuating blood pressure and increased temperature.

Half an hour after the hearing began, the defence raised the issue of inadequate sitting arrangement in the courtroom. Hasina standing in the dock made a few observations.

Chief Public Prosecutor ABM Sarfuddin Khan Mukul at that time said she herself did not make larger courtrooms when she was the prime minister. The comment triggered a heated debate between the opposing lawyers that continued for 10 minutes.

In reply, Hasina said, "The annex building in the Supreme Court was established during my term and I never had to have courtrooms set up in parliament complex."

Termining Mukul's comment inciting, Sheikh Selim, also a former health minister, requested the court to order the chief PP to retract his words. As Mukul tried to justify his comment, the defence continued their protest and demanded immediate withdrawal.

The judge asked Mukul to withdraw the comment after Hasina's chief counsel Shafique Ahmed drew his attention to the matter. The situation got back to normal as the chief prosecutor took his statement back.

The judge then asked everybody to keep discipline saying that anyone can make a mistake.

# Rice prices hit

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market to buy another sack yesterday.

The shopkeepers asked at least Tk 3,300 per sack this time, he said. "I have no alternative to skipping a meal for my six-member family," he sighed.

Speaking anonymously, a trader from Karwan Bazar said he sent his manager to Naogaon yesterday to buy rice. "My manager told me a maund of Aman paddy was selling at Tk 800."

One maund of paddy contains maximum 27 kg rice and if this price remains, it will cost Tk 30 a kg of rice in Naogaon, he added.

"I learned from newspaper reports that the price of Indian rice rose to \$500 from \$425 a tonne. It seems that the price of one kg coarse rice will reach Tk 35 within a few days."

Meanwhile in Dhaka, the BDR shops are experiencing a huge rush of customers in the last couple of days. Different varieties of coarse rice were being sold at Tk 20 a kg at the 40 BDR shops yesterday. Each shopper can buy maximum three kilogram of rice.

Standing in the long queue, the shoppers, mostly from low-income group, said they had to spend a lot of time buying rice since they (BDR shops) give one person only three kg.

Our Benapole correspondent

# Says BB governor

**FROM PAGE 1**  
reporters at his office taking stock of the country's economic situation during the outgoing year (2007) as well as the economic outlook for the new year (2008).

Bangladesh Bank in the new year will focus on keeping the prices of essentials at a level commensurate with the commoners' income, particularly with that of the rural people.

"The extent of inflation is higher than the income growth. Our efforts will be to balance the gap," the governor said.

He said the rural people are suffering from the rising inflation with erosion in their income and increase in the prices of agricultural inputs like irrigation and fertiliser.

The governor said the country's economy witnessed a mixed performance during the outgoing year while the economy achieved the projected growth rate of 6.5 percent despite the spiralling prices of essentials and fuel oil on the international market, consecutive two floods, Cyclone Sidr and anti-graft drive.

# Maoist rebels

**FROM PAGE 16**  
"Now we will all concentrate on the election," Koirala told reporters after the ceremony.

The twice-postponed elections for a Constituent Assembly to draw up Nepal's new constitution will take place in early April, political leaders announced earlier this month. Five members of the former rebel group, widely known as Maoists, were appointed as ministers Sunday. One was out of town and unable to attend Monday's ceremony.

"Our main agenda now will be to make sure elections are held on time," the Maoists' deputy leader Baburam Bhattarai said after the swearing-in ceremony.

Bhattarai said the communists would leave the government again if elections were not held by April 12, 2008, the end of the Nepali calendar year.

The ex-rebels agreed to rejoin the interim coalition government after the country's seven main political parties agreed last week to abolish the country's monarchy immediately after elections now scheduled for April.

The Maoists withdrew from the government on Sept. 18 demanding electoral reform and the immediate removal of the king, plunging Nepal into a political crisis and forcing the government to postpone elections initially planned for November.

The communist rebels gave up their decade-long armed revolt last year after more than 13,000 people died in the fighting against government forces.

# KM Sobhan

**FROM PAGE 16**  
judge was held at Malibagh Shahi Mosque at 10:00pm. The body has been kept in the Birdem mortuary, awaiting his two sons' arrival from abroad to have a last glimpse of their father before burial.

Acting Awami League (AL) President Zillur Rahman and Acting General Secretary Ashrafur Islam expressed deep shock at the death of Justice Sobhan.

In a condolence message, Zillur said Justice Sobhan played a key role in the movement for establishing democracy, justice and the rule of law in the country.

Zillur conveyed her sympathy to the bereaved family and prayed for the exaltation of the departed soul.

Ekaottor Ghatok Dalal Nirmla Committee and South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism and Communism (SAPUFC) have expressed deep shock at the death of Justice KM Sobhan.

In a condolence message, leaders of Ekaottor Ghatok Dalal Nirmla Committee and South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism and Communism said the death of Justice Sobhan has created a vacuum in building a secular and democratic Bangladesh as well as in the movement for the trial of war criminals and establishing human rights.

They conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

# Tigers

**FROM PAGE 16**  
before the scheduled first innings break, with 264 balls remaining -- the fourth largest in terms of balls remaining.

Bangladesh were all out for 93 in the 38th over, their seventh lowest ODI total, with Vettori returning a magnificent five for seven, and then McCullum blasting the Bangladesh bowlers out of the park as the Kiwis reached their target in just six overs.

McCullum's unbeaten 80 came off just 28 balls that included a contemporary nine fours and six sixes. Along the way he posted the fastest ODI half-century by a New Zealander, from 19 balls, and he missed equalling the world record by two deliveries. Sri Lanka's Sanath Jayasuriya holds the record for fastest fifty.

At the other end, Jamie How was a virtual spectator, contributing only seven of the 95 runs scored.

Vettori had earlier been the chief architect of Bangladesh's dismissal. He ended Year 2007 as cricket's most successful bowler for the calendar year with 43 victims, three clear of Indian pacesman Zaheer Khan.

For Bangladesh, captain Mohammad Ashraful once again topped with 25 before being undone by his favourite pull shot when he delivered the ball straight into the hands of Jacob Oram at fine leg.

When Vettori brought himself on, he took Atif Ahmed and Shakib Al Hasan in one over and followed with the wickets of Farhad Reza and Mushfiqur Rahim in his next two overs before clean bowling Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

# Cheated in Malaysia

**FROM PAGE 16**  
The 100 workers were sent in the country by Kabir Enterprise to work for a company named IH Technologies-ESCO-Carlberg Beer, but they were not provided any job for a month, alleged the returnees adding that the company existed only on paper.

Nazul, a representative of Kabir Enterprise in Malaysia, later handed them over to Sijati Pati, a Malaysian agent, which employed them at Flexotronics Technology, said Minhaz Ahmad, one of the returnees workers.

The workers were underpaid and the company did not issue work visas for them to legally work in Malaysia. Moreover, the employer subjected the workers to physical abuse frequently, he added saying, "Five to six workers were even forced to leave the company. They returned to Bangladesh failing to endure the torture."

"We could not take legal action as we did not have any legal document that the employer was supposed to arrange for us," Minhaz said.

The workers informed Kabir Enterprise of the abuses over email, but no avail, he said.

On November 5, 76 out of the 100 workers gathered on the Bangladesh High Commission premises and requested the government to help them repatriate, but the high commission officials did not pay heed to their request, he alleged.

Pressed by two officials of the Bangladesh High Commission, 60 of the workers went to join their workplace without any employment contract, he said. On November 17, hired goons of Kabir Enterprise beat up the workers and five of them were admitted to a hospital in Kuala Lumpur with serious injuries, Minhaz added.

"A police report was filed, but the police failed to catch Dulal, one of the goons hired by Kabir Enterprise. Though they lost faith in the high commission, they appealed to send them home," he said.

However, the high commission officials forced the workers to rejoin their workplaces. It also gave them their passports after making them sign an undertaking, which mentioned that the workers had received their passports from Kabir Enterprise representative Mamun and the agency would have no responsibility towards the workers from then on.

Most of the protesting workers, having spent all their money, accepted their passports and left the high commission as illegal workers that night, Minhaz said. "We do not know where they are now."

"The 25 of us managed to come home on our own, with the money our relatives had sent from Bangladesh. We ask the government

why it did not take any initiative to bring us home and is Kabir Enterprise really that powerful that the government can't do anything about them?" Minhaz said.

On December 6, the Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment in a letter asked Kabir Enterprise to bring back the 76 workers from Malaysia, but the agency did not comply with the government directive.

Meanwhile, the government suspended all activities of Kabir Enterprise for its failure to ensure jobs and security to the workers.

GM Rabban Nayan, president of National Youth Forum of Bangladesh, and Harun-Al-Rashid, program officer of Tanaganita, a migrants rights organisation in Malaysia, were also present at the press conference.

# Indian HC

**FROM PAGE 16**  
days, there have been reports in Bangladesh media about changes in minimum export price applicable on export of rice from India. Some of these reports suggest that changes in the minimum export price from US \$425 per tonne to US \$500 would be applicable to Bangladesh only. Such reports are misleading and inaccurate."

It said the restrictions on export of non-basmati rice imposed by India are not country-specific. The changes notified on December 27, 2007 in the minimum export price are also not country-specific.

It said India imposed export restriction on non-basmati rice with effect from October 9, 2007, taking into account availability and prices of rice in the Indian domestic market. The restriction is not applicable to exports undertaken under food aid programme.

Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee during a visit to Bangladesh on December 1, 2007 said the government of India would waive the ban on export of five lakh tonnes of rice to Bangladesh.