

Bangladesh Armed Forces have been performing many remarkable and significant development activities since the inception of the nation. They have always accomplished their tasks with greater cost effectiveness and value for money. The Armed Forces have also contributed greatly in peace making at the national level as is the case with CHT and at the global level as the largest troops contributing Force. Their active involvement in disaster management and other responses in aid to civil power are worth mentioning. The contribution, which the Army can make in dealing with disasters, has long been recognized in most countries throughout the world. Our employments in development activities and in aid to civil power have provided the Armed Forces with an image, highly conducive to positive civil-military relation.

As the term of the BNP led government was closing to an end, the nation hopelessly witnessed an unfolding of drama that was pushing it towards an impending political disaster of unimaginable magnitude. On January 11 this ominous fall was averted and the nation heaved a sigh of relief. The new Chief Adviser took oath, as President Iajuddin Ahmed resigned from the post of Chief Adviser and thus averted a serious national crisis. Meanwhile, emergency was declared to enable the Caretaker Government wield greater authority with the assistance of the Armed Forces. Since then the Caretaker government is enduring the trials and tribulation of setting things right which have been vitiated by the democratic governments.

Political Developments Leading to Declaration of Emergency

The 14 Party led opposition's Dhaka siege' programme on June 11 marked the onset of the movement to topple the government. It was followed by an anarchical situation in the garment sector which testified that the government control on the administration, especially on the police administration, had loosened seriously. The security forces, responsible for maintenance of the law and order, were mere onlookers, frustrating the investors, especially the foreign investors who later decided to close their shutters for an indefinite period.

The main opposition party Awami League leading the 14 Party Alliance, demanded that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the two Election Commissioners resign, as a precondition to participating in the election. They also demanded reforms of the caretaker government, the Election Commission and the election system. No consensus could be reached between the ruling and the opposition camps about the reforms of the caretaker administration and the EC. The opposition remained stuck to three major issues-removal of Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz, excluding KM Hasan, as Chief Advisor and revising the voter list. Another important demand of the opposition was to place the Army under the Chief Advisor rather than the President.

In the meantime, BNP displayed an eagerness to sit across the table with Awami League to discuss the reform agenda. On 28 October 06, the entire world was flabbergasted watching the ghastly and brutal killing of innocent activists in broad day light. The rampage and brutality reached a cataclysmic proportion. No one had the slightest idea how this senselessness would end.

The stand-off suggested that the country was heading for a disaster. Strong groupings within both the 4-party and 14-party alliances were actively working against any sort of compromise. Amidst such a state of political limbo President Iajuddin unilaterally took oath as the Chief Adviser and formed a Caretaker Government obtaining choices from the political parties. Consequently, the situation got further complicated.

The country, therefore, was inching towards a political catastrophe. The Awami League led alliance was on a countrywide non-stop blockade programme to press home their 11-point demand and resumed their siege programme on November 12. The people were held hostage under the siege.

It was not possible for a rational mind to sit idle and be a bystander to this anarchy and senseless killing of the innocent civilians. Therefore, the honourable President declared national emergency and formed a new caretaker government. The Armed Forces were reposed with the responsibility of restoring order in the country and assist the government in its effort to conduct a free, fair and credible election by December 2008.

Achievements of the Caretaker Government

The Caretaker government being assisted by the Armed Forces is trying to pull the nation out of the morass in which the nation is wallowing as an effect to poor governance for the last three decades. The degeneration has been so pervasive that it has become difficult to even set the priority of job. However, the government has underlined corruption to be the root of all evils and launched an all out war against this demon. There have also been stringent measures against various other ills that have vitiated the society to its bone marrow.

Restoration of Law and Order Situation

The anarchy during the closing months of previous government proved beyond any doubt that the government's control on the administration, especially on the police administration had loosened seriously. The security forces responsible for maintenance of the law and order, were mere onlookers of the chaos that was triggered by the obstinacy of the ruling party vis-à-vis the rowdy and disruptive attitude of the oppositions. Indiscriminate bomb attack by religious extremist, vandalising of public properties in the name of strike, political killing, extortion, harassment, burning people alive, anarchy in the garments sector, merciless beating of human-being to death in the open street and social disorder reached to such extreme that Bangladesh was approximating to become a failed state. The caretaker government with integrated support from both civil and military organs could successfully restore the law and order situation

wiping out the impression of being ineffective state. The law and order situation in the country is now better than any other time in the history of the nation.

Reforms of EC

The Election Commission was a mere dance attendance on the ruling government. They had been serving as an instrument of election rigging. Such an Election Commission had to be separated from the Prime Minister's Office, so that they have absolute administrative and economic freedom. As a first step to the reforms, the entire structure of the commission has already been separated from the Prime Minister's Office keeping the financial dependence on the Government. Besides, dialogue with the political party has begun on the draft reform proposals and to obtain their views regarding the modus operandi of conducting the election.

Reforming Public Service Commission

The Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) has a significant role in promoting excellence in public administration and governance, since it selects competent persons for the public services of the republic. A TIB study shows that the effectiveness and independence of the PSC fundamentally depends on two factors i.e. the willingness of the government and the structural and institutional strength of the PSC. For the last 36 years, all successive governments have used the PSC as an institution for partisan recruitment, and also kept it structurally and institutionally dysfunctional. The present Caretaker Government has already taken few remarkable steps to reform PSC such as:

- a. Internal self-regulatory and transparency mechanisms which will report to the Parliament through the Standing Committee on Public Service.
- b. A reform committee to modernise the examination and recruitment system for meeting the challenges for the civil service of the 21st century. The existing generalised exam system would be abolished, and cadre-specific examination would be introduced.
- c. There must be complete abolition of partisan, political, or any other influence in the recruitment, and completion of exams within a very short time.
- d. The existing restrictions against challenging the result of examinations would be abolished.
- e. The secretariat should be re-arranged, with competent persons in the appropriate positions.

Preparation of National ID Card and Voter List

According to existing laws, since 1994 it has been a legal obligation of the Election Commission (EC) to provide ID card to every legitimate voter and no one should be allowed to cast his/her votes unless in possession of valid voter ID cards. The provision of ID cards was,

however, suspended by separate presidential orders for conducting the last three general elections as the EC had failed to provide ID cards to all voters prior to the elections. A number of attempts were made to prepare voter ID card to prevent flaws in the electoral rolls. In 1996 the project of preparing voter ID was bogged down due to absence of a national database. In 2004 the ministry of home affairs attempted to develop machine readable passport and national ID card. A 10 Member committee was formed to study the system related to voter cum national ID card that are being implemented by different countries of the world. The report submitted by the committee gave out the estimate of 1400 cores expenditure to prepare national database which could be completed by 6 years time. In view of the unsuccessful attempt in the years 1996 and 2004, present caretaker government has vested the responsibility of preparing National ID cards and a voter list with photographs to the Armed Forces after scrutinizing the proposals of different organizations. The members of Armed forces are working with fullest sincerity and devotion to complete the challenging task within the stipulated time and with minimal cost.

Disaster Relief Operations

Two waves of flood came during the month of August. One third of the country was under water and about 9.2 million people became affected. Concerted effort by civil and military authority could save the nation from post flood disaster. This was for the first time relief was distributed without being subject to pilferage of dishonest people. SIDR, one of the most terrible cyclones of this century hit the south western coastal belt of our country on 15 November 07, leaving behind its devastating effect on the livelihood. Around 4000 people lost their lives, and thousands of families became homeless. Appropriate pre and post cyclone measures were taken by the government which could minimize the loss substantially. A massive relief operation is being coordinated by the Armed Forces Division which has enabled effective distribution of the relief goods to the distressed people.

Power Management

Power crisis has been one of the most burning issues in the country for some time, and the bite is more acute during the summer. This crisis is seriously affecting the livelihood and industrial sectors in the last few years whereas no substantial effort has been rendered to enhance the generation. Because of prudent management the load shedding could be reduced to 200 MW from 1200 MW even with the existing manpower and infrastructure. Simultaneously, in the month of September the average electricity production was increased by 500 MW.

Establishing Political Democracy

Democracy is a system of governance in which sovereignty rests with the people who rule either directly or through representatives. With the representative democracies the major issues have been the increased popular participation, greater social equality and maximum well being of all or most citizens. The political parties who are supposed to be the models of democracy blatantly violate the same in every step of governance even within the parties itself. During this period of emergency, major political parties have set off a process of reformation to incorporate democracy within the parties before they propound it for the nation. It may be mentioned that these are purely self-actuated initiatives of the political parties being perhaps driven by the quaim of conscience.

National Security Council

The National Security Council (NSC) has

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come to be a subject of public discourse in Bangladesh once again. The call to establish an NSC was made not by the military establishment but by the politicians. Even the largest democracy, India has formed NSC, which is actively contributing in ensuring her national security. Some of the think tanks have proposed that the NSC, may perform few major roles like coordinating the crisis management activities and identify and assess short, medium and long-term threats to national security, and help the government in formulating adequate policy and action response to protect the country from any external and internal threat.

Crusade against Corruption

It is unfortunate that the prospective take-off of Bangladesh got choked by corruption, particularly during the last few years, when neophyte political masters seemed willing to kill the goose in order to get the golden eggs sooner. This seems to have been happening in the last decade, when corruption strangled all major development sectors ensnaring the economy in a serious bottleneck. It is a crime when the elites misappropriate public money, but it turns out to be a felony when they start sending the plundered money abroad, indicating that they no longer associate their own future with the future of the country they are looting. When the political masters reach this level of depravity, the country is in real trouble. No wonder the public responded positively to the anti-corruption campaign of the current government.

However, it needs to be remembered that the main effectiveness of corruption prosecution has to be seen in its deterrent effect. For this, stiff punishment is necessary for high corruption that involves compromising national interests (as in the case of signing bad agreements with foreign companies) and inhibiting the country's economic growth. Restoration of the integrity of public institutions is also necessary. In their desire to stay in power, protagonists of the last regime went to the extreme in debasing the public institutions, beginning with the presidency down to the local school boards. People have therefore, welcomed the efforts towards

restoration of integrity of the public bodies and institutions.

It has indeed been heartening to note the interest taken by the present government to review and to make our anti-corruption measures more effective. For the last few years, there had been strong criticism and frustration among local and international monitors over the ACC's abilities. It was seriously hamstrung due to several institutional, legal and administrative flaws. Consequently, the decision by the current government to reconstitute the organisation and thus improving the effectiveness of the ACC has been a step in the right direction. The Chief of Army Staff recommended 7 steps in support of anti corruption drive initiated by the caretaker government which were:

- a. To create a moral high ground against corruption.
- b. To ensure exemplary punishment for all those found guilty of corruption.
- c. To appoint a parliamentary ombudsman.
- d. To establish an independent and neutral judicial system.
- e. To boycott the corrupt socially.
- f. The police should be reorganized and their pay increased.
- g. To continue the anti-corruption drive against corruption and corrupt persons on a regular basis.

More often than not serious corruptions involving public sector expenditure find its way out of the country into other safe havens abroad. These principles have been embodied most recently in the United Nations Convention against Corruption. They recognise that the fight against corruption requires financial management system. This will also require avoiding of conflicts of interest, financial disclosures of personal assets (particularly relevant for those desiring to be Members of Parliament) and establishing effective institutions and procedures of accountability within government and externally. Similarly for the private sector there has to be an effective regulatory framework to prevent the hiding of illicit or bribe payments in company accounts and corporate fraud. The success of ongoing anti-corruption drive can be visualized through following statistics:

- a. Published List of Corrupt Persons - 222
- b. Arrested so Far - 80
- c. Under Trial - 72
(ACC Cases - 24, NBR Cases - 13 & Police Cases - 35)

- d. Trial Completed/Convicted - 44
(ACC Cases - 18, NBR Cases - 12 & Police Cases - 14)

Conclusion

So long Caretaker Government has displayed its full commitment to the nation in order to conduct a free, fair and credible election by December 2008. But the conduct of a credible election is just not enough, rather maintenance of a sustainable democracy thereafter is imperative for us. It must be remembered that the nation is not ready to backslide anymore to pre 1/11 situation. To maintain the momentum set by caretaker government it is essential to work as a team, integrating civil and military elements in the government machineries in the post election situation. It is of paramount importance to carry forward the crusade against corruption. The main mission of the armed forces is to fight for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Their peripheral role can be many and varied, limited only by the imagination of the government. The armed forces need to maintain links with the society to remain functional. We must not lose sight of the fact that the Armed Forces is like any other instrument of development available to the government. Therefore, they must remain ready and spring to action whenever it comes to crunch for the nation.

One Year of Caretaker Government Bangladesh Fights Back from the Brink

Helal Uddin Ahmed

Introduction: Located at the confluence of South and Southeast Asia, Bangladesh has remained an enigma, baffling many a pundits since her independence in 1971. Despite possessing a small land-mass with a population of almost 150 million, she has been executing a highly successful family-planning programme for many years. Although poor in income, Bangladesh is rich in culture and ideas.

In the words of the country's head of government Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, it is a country where the old and the new, the traditional and the modern play hide and seek with each other. It cherishes its past heritage, yet nurtures innovation, witnessed by concepts such as micro-credit and non-formal education, which have transformed Bangladesh as well as the world.

Background of Caretaker Government: One year has now passed since the non-party caretaker government led by eminent economist Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed assumed office on 12 January 2007 in the backdrop of a looming political disaster. During the months that preceded this event, the country was thrown into a deep abyss of political chaos and confrontation. Large-scale unease with the status-quo led to political violence, which in turn disrupted public life and shattered people's confidence on the possibility of a credible election. Besides, there was little hope that any controversial election would end the cycle of violence. A state of emergency was therefore declared by President Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed on 11 January in accordance with the Constitution, with the objective of putting an end to this unremitting chaos. A new government was installed the following day.

Need for Governance Reforms: Since day-one, the caretaker government has repeatedly demonstrated its resolve to free the people from the clutches of corruption and violence, so that the voice of the people could be heard again through a free, fair and acceptable election. It has constantly remained engaged in rebuilding trust and restoring public confidence in state institutions.

It inherited public bodies which had been highly politicised and where money and muscle-power reigned supreme. Therefore, while remaining focused on holding a free and fair election within the shortest possible time, the caretaker government could not shy away from the responsibility of creating a level playing-field for all political parties prior to the holding of next general election.

Any well-functioning democracy is premised on some basic institutions, and fair and transparent rules of engagement. It cannot flourish in an environment where partisan politics deliberately destroys national institutions. But the rules of the game were successively tinkered by past political governments of Bangladesh for

almost two decades, by nurturing and promoting a winner-take-all mindset. Corruption became pervasive, thereby weakening all spheres of governance. Social trust and respect for law became a scarce commodity. Over time, this pathological state of affairs became deeply entrenched. Decisive actions were therefore needed to put an end to this self-defeating degenerative trend in national life.

The caretaker government, therefore, took swift measures to improve the law and order situation, free the administration from political influences and build a corruption-free socio-economic milieu. A number of fundamental and structural reforms were also initiated for creating an environment conducive to holding a free and fair election in the country. The patriotic armed forces of the country have been extending all-out assistance to the civil administration, especially in improving law and order situation, countrywide anti-corruption drive and post-disaster relief operations.

Electoral Reforms: The Election Commission was reconstituted through induction of completely non-partisan individuals. The Commission then undertook discussions with the civil society, the mass media, professionals and lastly political parties. The election laws, rules and regulations would be amended in the light of these exchanges, in order to minimise undue influences of money and