

Should we go back to pre-1/11 days?

This is absolutely essential if we as a nation are to move forward, and not go back to witness a repeat of the sham democracy of the Jatiyatabadi-Jamaat and the Awami rule. It is not difficult to understand who are at odds with this government, who have suddenly become very vocal as protagonists of human rights and rule by an elected government, and who want emergency to be lifted now and general election held without further delay.

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YES, this is the question I would like to ask all politically conscious people, other than BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami and AL hard core sympathisers whose patience seems to be wearing thin these days over the issues of emergency rule and holding of general election. Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed has categorically declared more than once that parliamentary election will be held in the country by the end of this year, and the state of emergency would be lifted before election.

A former bureaucrat and a man of integrity, Mr. Fakhruddin will not stay in office even a day longer than needed, which means holding a credible election and laying a solid foundation for a meaningful and genuine democratic governance system in this country.

A lot of groundwork has been done, and is in the process of being done, to facilitate holding a fair and credible election leading up to ushering of a truly genuine democratic dispensation, which our people have been in search of since our independence in 1971.

You cannot have a fair election without a genuine and authentic voter list with photographs, which

for the first time, is now being prepared. You cannot expect to have a democratically functional parliament and an elected government accountable to the people, something we have not had so far, unless suitable ground rules are in place to ensure that educated people with impeccable credentials for public service, integrity, and commitment to serve the nation can participate in parliamentary election and other nation building activities unhindered, and that those who have misgoverned this country in the past and have wrongfully accumulated vast wealth and property for themselves, their family members and their cronies by abusing their power and authority and in flagrant violation of their solemn oath of office are suitably punished for their wrong doings and debarred from taking part in future elections.

The process of accountability of our tainted leaders, recovery of state wealth and property stolen by these people, and freeing politics from the stranglehold of black money, muscle power and manipulation is a gigantic task which this government has taken up in right earnest.

Let us allow this government to finish this task. This is absolutely essential if we as a nation are to move forward, and not go back to witness a repeat of the sham democ-

ocracy of the Jatiyatabadi-Jamaat and the Awami rule. It is not difficult to understand who are at odds with this government, who have suddenly become very vocal as protagonists of human rights and rule by an elected government, and who want emergency to be lifted now and general election held without further delay.

Obviously, these are the same tainted politicians and their cronies who had been in and out of the government during the last sixteen years of our experiment with parliamentary democracy, and who are, incidentally, now either in, or out, of jail with the stigma of massive corruption charges haunting them day in and day out.

They know, as even a moron does, that it is the emergency power rules which give this government sustenance and power insofar as the concerned government agencies have succeeded in putting behind bars some political big-wigs and high profile criminals who considered themselves above law till the other day, and forcing many of them to confess their guilt and cough out a portion of their huge haul of ill-gotten money, and which alone can swiftly and justly try and punish them and consign them to the dustbin of history as political garbage.

They also know full well that it is the state of emergency which has given this government the whip hand not only to rein in the political thugs but also to democratise state institutions which were thoroughly politicised and rendered ineffective by the past political governments. Hence, all the clamouring and shouting for lifting of emergency.

Imagine the situation that we had been through before this government came to power. The caretaker government of President Iajuddin Ahmed, with the BNP-Jamaat leadership breathing down its neck, would not dare deviate from the election roadmap scripted by BNP and was bent on holding the scheduled January 22 election, while AL was flexing its muscle to thwart the election.

Had the scheduled election been held, with the army performing its duties as ordered by the government, there would have been a blood bath and wanton destruction of public and private property across the country. But our two major political parties were the least concerned about what would have happened to this country and its people. Their leaders were only focused on how to climb back to power so that they could continue amassing wealth and property by plundering the state exchequer and destroying the democratic institutions.

That the patriotic armed forces decided to stand by the people and put their foot down to nullify all political machinations to destroy peace and harmony by lending support to the president to restore peace and order through emergency, and to reconstitute the care-

taker government, is the measure of the strength, efficiency and patriotism of the leadership of our armed forces.

An extra-ordinary situation like the one we had been on the verge of in January 2007 did certainly call for an extraordinary measure like declaration of emergency to deal with the situation. Nothing short of that could have saved this country from the spilling of blood of innocent people and from total anarchy. And nothing short of that can help us achieve what we want to -- punish those who have plundered our state wealth and property in the name of democracy and development -- and build solid infrastructures for genuine democracy and welfare of the people through meaningful democratic reforms.

Without emergency, this caretaker government could not have achieved what it has so far. The separation of the judiciary from the executive, the reconstitution of the politicised democratic institutions, the revamping of the bureaucracy and the police, the proposed legislations for creation of a Supreme Judicial Commission for appointment of Supreme Court judges free from political influence, freeing of the Election Commission Secretariat from the Prime Minister's Office, the proposal under consideration for creation of a National Constitutional Commission for appointment to all constitutional posts free from government control, recovery of over Taka ten billion of ill-gotten money from corrupt politicians and their business associates.

The recovery of another Taka four billion from corrupt Titas Gas staff now under process, hauling up



Can we go back to this?

of high profile political leaders including AL chief Sheikh Hasina and BNP chief Khaleida Zia on corruption and criminal charges and bringing them to justice, facing the onslaught of repeated floods followed by Cyclone Sidr, and providing relief and rehabilitation to millions of affected people are no mean achievements of this government.

In vindication of the emergency, let me ask one simple question. Could our people ever know that a lady prime minister of this country presided over an administration laced with corruption so pervasive that our country was declared number one corrupt country in the world for consecutive four years, if there had been no emergency rule

in the country?

We have been witnessing how powerful some of these political leaders are, as writ petitions one after another are filed for them and a long line of prominent lawyers, including a lawyer from distant United States of America, appear for them challenging their detention, the venue of the trial, the law under which they have been prosecuted, the authority of the court trying them, the language of the notice by appropriate authority asking for submission of wealth statement, the authority of the official who signed the notice etc.

I wonder if an ordinary citizen, having committed a crime, can have

this luxury of writ petitions and delaying of trial.

Let us bear with this caretaker government and the emergency power, which sustains the government in its anti-corruption drive and its pro-democracy reforms initiatives a few months more so that the government can finish the job on its hands.

It will be a travesty of truth and justice if we allow those who pilaged and plundered our state wealth and property, masquerading as our political leaders and social elites, to go unpunished and give them a new lease of life to rule again, this time with vengeance.

Brig Gen Shamsuddin Ahmed is a former military secretary to the President of Bangladesh.

Europe looks East

Admiration for India's economic performance and dynamic new entrepreneurs such as Tata, whose \$12 billion acquisition of Anglo-Dutch steelmaker Corus hit headlines across the 27-nation bloc in early 2007, is tainted, however, by anti-globalisation sentiments across the EU. Although the debate on outsourcing has been less fierce in Europe than in the US, a majority of Europeans fear the rise of India -- and even more of China -- as a threat to European jobs and wages rather than an opportunity for expanded business.

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FRENCH president Nicolas Sarkozy flew to India to take the seat as principal foreign guest at the country's Republic Day pageantry on January 26. It was more than an opportunity to soak in the sun amidst a burst of colors. It was a sign that after years of fascination with China, European Union governments are waking up to India's economic potential and growing global clout.

Following in the footsteps of their US counterparts, European leaders and businesses beat a path to Delhi in search of new opportunities -- and to woo Indian companies seeking to invest in the EU.

The Sarkozy visit follows a November 2007 summit held in the Indian capital, at which lead-

ers from both sides vowed to clinch a free-trade agreement by the end of 2008, tackle climate change and strengthen an ambitious "strategic partnership" pact signed in 2004.

Transforming the upbeat rhetoric in Delhi into a robust and effective EU-India relationship will take time, effort and persistence.

For one, both sides must make up for years of mutual neglect. Used to viewing India as a plodding economic elephant and mesmerised by the stronger lure of China, EU policymakers and businesses have been late in recognising the country's newfound economic dynamism, including the success of the Indian information-technology sector, the rise of India's computer-services outsourcing indus-

try and the emergence of Indian world-class industrial giants, eager to scour Europe for markets and acquisitions. EU investments in the country totaled a modest €1.6 billion in 2006, compared to €3.7 billion in China.

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In Delhi, policymakers are trying to bring EU-India ties out of the shadow cast by their growing relationship with the US. Successive EU enlargements, the EU's growing reputation as a global defense and security actor as well as continued strong EU economic performance are key reasons for India's increased interest in Europe.

Mutual interest has resulted in increasing interaction between the two sides within the United Nations framework and on a bilateral level. Ties have strengthened since the first EU-India Summit in Lisbon in 2000, with cooperation on political, geopolitical and multilateral issues as well as economic and trade ones.

Significantly, India has shed earlier inhibitions about engaging in dialogue with the EU on developments in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Still, both sides struggle to give substance to their strategic partnership and have different views on what this means in practice.

The EU's first-ever Security Strategy published in December 2003, identified India -- along with the US, Russia, Japan, China and Canada -- as a country with which the Union should seek to develop a strategic partnership to build an "effective multilateral system leading to a fairer, safer and more united world."

The EU wants to use its strate-

gic partnerships to share global responsibilities and meet 21st century challenges, including terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, state failure and regional conflicts.

As an emerging power, India's immediate concerns are understandably very different from those of the EU and its member states. As it aspires to play a more forceful global role, as illustrated by its demand for a seat on the UN Security Council and participation in international peacekeeping operations, India views a strategic partnership with the EU and the US as a vehicle for ensuring greater worldwide prestige and political clout.

While developing a strategic partnership with the EU is a goal, Delhi's primary focus, however, is on its troubled neighborhood. Rivalry with China and tensions with Pakistan as well as political turmoil in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka dominate the country's foreign-policy agenda.

Not surprisingly, there is a significant mismatch of aspirations. The EU has made no secret of its disappointment at India's failure to stand up for democracy and human rights during Burma's recent military crackdown on dissidents.

EU policymakers have argued that as the world's largest democracy -- and given its growing economic ties with Burma -- India must use its considerable leverage to put pressure on the military junta in Rangoon. India has responded that it does not believe that sanctions work.

The EU-Indian strategic partnership has failed to soften India's tough line in the World Trade Organisation's Doha trade talks, where Delhi continues to resist US and EU demands for further cuts in industrial tariffs. India has refused to accept Western calls for stricter binding commitments to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions to combat climate change, arguing that a developing country cannot be expected to slow the pace of industrialisation.

Differences also emerged on the US-India nuclear agreement, which -- if it enters into force -- will give energy-hungry India access to US civil nuclear technology. The EU has no common position on the deal. Sarkozy used his visit to India to sign a framework accord paving the way for nuclear-power cooperation, including the supply of reactors, once Delhi clears hurdles with the UN's nuclear watchdog and the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group.

However, other EU states fear

that India could use imported nuclear fuel to feed its civilian energy program while diverting its own nuclear fuel to weapons production.

Despite such divergences, however, India and the EU cooperate in many sectors and Delhi views Europe as an important source of high technology. In addition, negotiations on a first-ever EU-India free-trade agreement were launched in June 2007, with India hoping the accord will be ready for implementation later this year.

Discussions focus on slashing tariffs on trade in manufactured goods, removing non-tariff barriers as well as liberalising trade in services, easing investment flows and trade facilitation.

Trade between the EU and India currently has grown from €4.4 billion in 1980 to over €46 billion in 2006, but still accounts for only 1.8 percent of total EU trade.

While ties are improving, building a sustainable EU-India partnership requires further action on a number of fronts, including increased contacts between policymakers, think tanks and the media. For many Indians, the focus remains on the EU as an economic rather than a political partner.

The EU meanwhile must ensure a better balance between its aid programs geared to meet India's development needs and more modern EU aid instruments aimed at encouraging economic reforms and modernisation, ensuring regulatory cooperation and joint projects in the renewable-energy sector.

The road ahead will not be easy. The EU is not in a position at the moment to respond positively to India's demands for nuclear cooperation, more decision-making rights in the Galileo project or increased security cooperation. India, for its part, will not accept the EU stance on climate change, the Doha round or demands that it take on more responsibility for resolving regional hotspots like Burma.

Such differences, however, need not become an insurmountable obstacle to a closer relationship. Political will, combined with steady, practical steps leading to more cooperation, will be crucial in forging a real EU-India strategic partnership.

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Musharraf speaking

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MOST heads of state paint a positive picture of their nation. During his recent tour of Europe, General (retired) Pervez Musharraf did the exact opposite. According to him, Pakistan's people are "ill disciplined," "tribal" and "feudal," and certainly not ready for modern democracy. Pakistan's politicians, in his view, are "corrupt."

Its Supreme Court judges are "politicised," "inept," "corrupt," and "nepotistic." Its most respected media personalities are "undermining our forces and (their) own country." Pakistan's religious leaders, we

state. Describing the West's concern with democracy in the third world as an "obsession," he said: "You have taken centuries to reach where you have come. Allow us time for going for the value that you have reached for yourself."

The problem with that line of reasoning is that it raises questions about Pakistan's preparedness for modernity. If Pakistan is modern enough to have nuclear weapons and be an attractive destination for foreign investment, why does it have a problem embracing modern democracy?

If it needs time to be "forward looking" then why should the back-

capitals to try and convince western governments of Pakistan's stability and his own good intentions. He should, instead, have faced the evaporation of support for his authoritarian regime at home.

His trip has helped project Pakistan as a troubled country, and his attitude during that trip has not helped his own battered image. A simple browsing of all the interviews Musharraf gave during this trip reveals an unwillingness to make adjustments or acknowledge mistakes.

He told one interviewer that he would leave power when he is convinced that the people of Pakistan want him to quit. But it would only be his "feeling" and personal knowledge, not the results of an election, opinion poll, or any other mechanism that would determine when the people no longer support him.

Such reasoning might have impressed Musharraf's own entourage, it only attracted sighs or giggles from outsiders. When Nik Gowing of BBC World TV asked him about the statement by one hundred retired senior military officers demanding his resignation, Musharraf's response was that only ten people had signed the statement.

This made him appear like a ruler out of touch with reality. His description of the statement's signatories as "insignificant personalities," some of whom had "served under me and I kicked them out," showed him to be arrogant.

Many of the retired military men criticising him were senior to Musharraf in the armed forces. The dignified response from Musharraf to a statement by senior retired military men would have been silenced.

Similarly, there would have been less embarrassment for the government if handfuls of Musharraf supporters had not been asked to face much larger demonstrations by his critics.

On the occasion of Musharraf's meeting with British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, at No. 10 Downing Street, the media reported that thirty pro-Musharraf demonstrators showed up with his portraits to face several hundred opponents.

The one is to ten ratios of supporters to opponents, in Londonistan, exposed Musharraf's lack of support in Pakistan even further.

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Wooing the East!