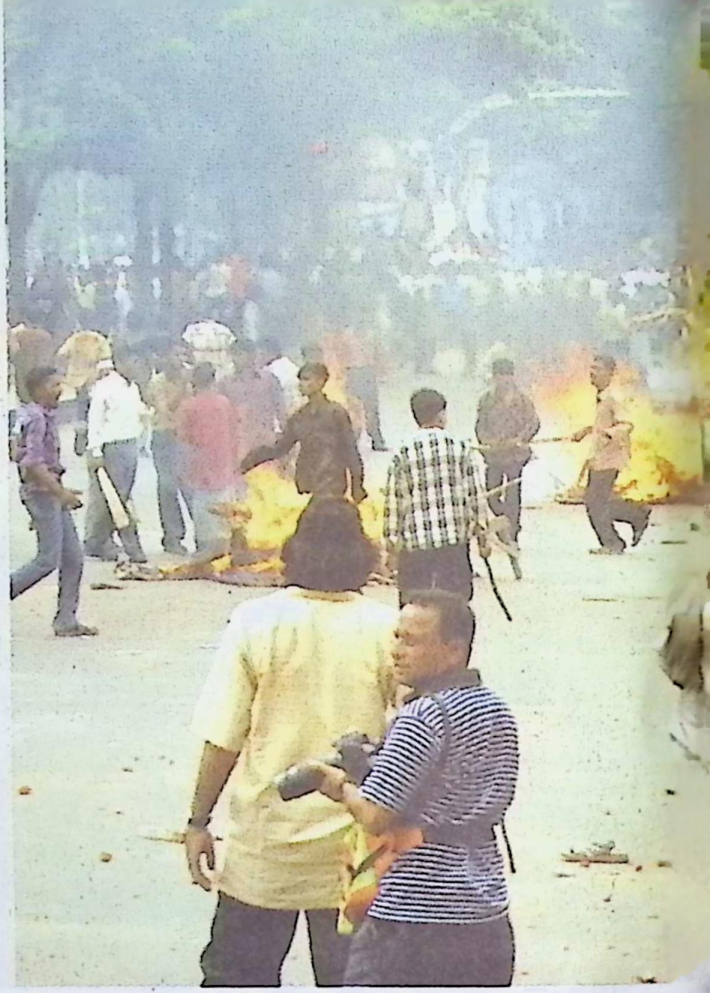


Sheikh Hasina



Let history never repeat itself like this.

After assuming power, the caretaker government led by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed has taken the right step of bringing alleged corruption suspects to book. In the last one and a half years we have witnessed the arrests of two former prime ministers and other political leaders and businessmen who had thought themselves above the reach of law. The three stooges of the previous government have been replaced by three new neutral election commissioners; the Anti-Corruption Commission has been revamped; the Public Service Commission has been overhauled; the judiciary has been separated from the executive; the Right to Information Act is in the offing; an ordinance has been promulgated to form a Human Rights Commission (HRC), although it is not clear what is dissuading the government from forming the HRC. To make reforms complete we expect that the government will also set up the office of an Ombudsman.

The rule of the CTG has been an experimental one; it has had both positive and negative repercussions. The fruit of the structural reforms that it has initiated are now near and the only way to attain this is in the form of a good election. The participation of all the political parties is necessary to have a good election. The upcoming dialogue that the CTG has initiated is a long overdue step to bring a national consensus so that the country does not slide back to the days of anarchy and lawlessness. All the political parties must participate in the dialogue and the issue of freedom of both the leaders of the two big political parties must not hinder it. The boycott of the parties will jeopardise the road map for democracy and, worse still, will put us in a situation we will regret to find ourselves in.

Even though leaders of all the major parties have talked of reforming their rank and file, in reality, they have so far stubbornly refused to materialise them. While it is not the job of the government to force the parties to bring reform, the leaders of the BNP, Awami League (AL), Jatya Party (JP) and others must rise above their petty interests, and, for the sake of the country's democratic future, must seriously think of bringing democracy to their folds. In the BNP and AL Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have always run their parties in a dictatorial manner. The less said about HM Ershad and his JP the better. Ironic, it is though that the leaders who talk of democracy with every breath they take will nurture tyranny at home. This must change, and none but the leaders of their parties should take the responsibility to bring it about. The parties must have elections in every tier, and the Election Commission can help them by sending in observers to monitor these elections.