

TIME TO TURN A CORNER

PART-2: REVISITING THE CARETAKER GOVT

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The 'Caretakers' 2007-08: Performance and lessons



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Fakhruddin Ahmed to the democrat- fair election within two years. ernment kept its promise of volun- whether the military backers of the exit by the military backed govern-

ernment of Dr. through organisation of a free and another military coup.

What lessons can the political parties,

who have generally been critical of the

"caretakers", draw from the last two

years' experiences? Obviously, they need

to think hard about the future of the

caretaker (CTG) system. By being able

to organise a credible and acceptable

election, the "caretakers" demonstrated

once again the positive role the CTG

can play in our highly partisan politi-

cal environment. But the problems

with the CTG system, particularly the

partisanisation of the judiciary, have

also become apparent in the last few

years. Political parties and civil society

need to assess the caretaker system

objectively in the light of our ground

realities. We need to decide whether in

the absence of trust among the political

parties about the neutrality of an

incumbent administration, we would

need to continue with the caretaker

system, and if so, what changes we

would need to make to ensure the

intervened once again in routinely made by a military govern-Bangladesh's politics on January 11, ment only to be broken on one pre-HE peaceful handover of 2007 declaring a state of emergency, text or another. A military governpower by the military- the new government pledged a ment is generally forced out of power backed 'Caretaker' gov- return to a democratic government by a popular movement or by

Pakistan's history is replete with ically elected government of Sheikh Though this pledge was regularly such experiences of military rule Hasina on January 6, 2009 is unprec-repeated by the government, doubts including that of its last military edented in South Asian history. For were expressed by observers within dictator General Pervez Mosharraf. the first time, a de facto military gov- and outside Bangladesh as to The voluntary, timely and honorable tarily giving up power to elected government would indeed keep to ment and its role in organising a free, representatives within the time limit their promises and return to the fair and credible parliamentary elecit set for itself. When the military barracks. After all such promises are tions on December 29, 2008 under. score the differences between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Not only is the military establishment different in the two countries, the military being less entrenched in Bangladesh, the relative strength of other institutions vis-à-vis the military is also different. In Bangladesh political parties and civil society are much stronger and they were not willing to accept an indefinite continuation of an unelected government. Indeed none of the major power groups including the military itself found it in their best corporate interest to prolong the involvement of the military in running the affairs of the state. What is, however, remarkable is that all power groups finally demonstrated an willingness to negotiate and make compromises in order to have a free and fair election so that the citizens can be the ultimate masters in deciding how they would like to be governed. The unprecedented high voter turn out - 87 percent - was a clear verdict of the people in favour of a rule by democratically elected government. The credibility of the elections,

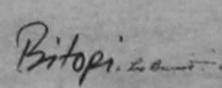
enhanced the prestige of the military backed "caretaker" government (CTG), which was eroding fast as the CTG was making one mistake after another in pushing its other major agenda of political reforms. The "caretakers" repeatedly argued that they would not only hold an election but bring about a qualitative change in politics. The performance of the "caretakers", proved, once again, that an unelected caretaker government can at best organise free and fair elections; but implementation of political reforms need mobilisation

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I AM TRUTH. I CONSORT WITH FACTAND EXACTNESS. I DEMYSTIFY AND I SET STRAIGHT. FOR 18 YEARS I HAVE UNCLOAKED, I HAVE REMOVED VENEERS. I AM A COMMUNAL CONSCIENCE. I TELL IT LIKE IT IS. I AM WHAT IT IS. I AM THE BRUTAL HONESTY THAT SLAYS DECEIT. I AM LIKE DAYBREAK. I AM TRUTH AND TODAY I COME OF AGE. IAM DAILY STAR



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non-partisan character of the "Caretakers".

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