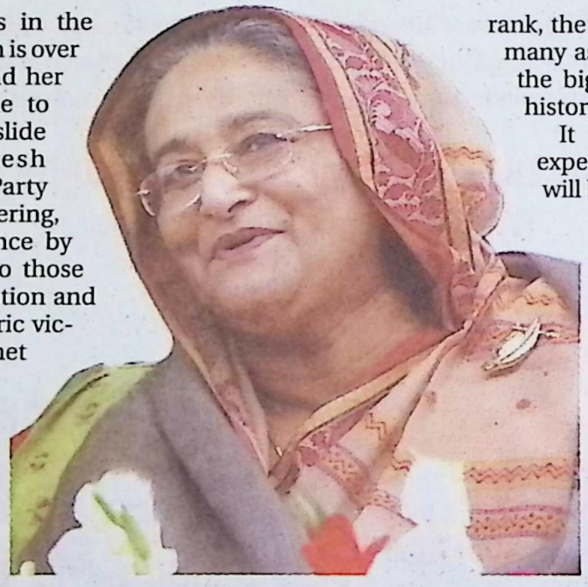
Time to Deliver

Stop extortion and mugging; start a war on corruption; curb the spiralling prices of essentials

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More than six months in the helm, the honeymoon is over for Sheikh Hasina and her government. Hasina has come to power riding an electoral landslide that routed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led Four Party Alliance. During the electioneering, Sheikh Hasina showed prudence by avoiding giving nominations to those with a past tainted with corruption and abuse of power. After her historic victory she has formed a cabinet where most of the ministers are widely believed to be honest.



Last week she has come up with a list of Awami League (AL) presidium after which she has reshuffled the cabinet. Both have offered small surprises. While the new presidium and the central working committee contain a lot of new faces, some old guards of the party have been shown the door. Five big guns have fallen silent, of which four hit the headlines during the last caretaker government's regime for calling for reform in the party. Sidelining these leaders, Sheikh Hasina has picked a new team that has many young faces. It is indeed heartening to see many women leaders being given important posts in the party's central working committee, the party's second most important body. It will surely give a new boost to the party, which is entwined with the history of our independence movement.

The change in the rank of the sixty-year-old party is welcome. It is a sign that some kind of evolution is going on in the party and in the long term it will help the party to gain a stronger footing in the next elections. On the other hand it is good to see the old guards of the AL politics taking their exit with tact, which only mature politicians are capable of showing. In the first cabinet reshuffle that she has made, Sheikh Hasina has also pulled many surprises. She has inducted a bunch of fresh faces, all of whom have an honest past. As there are seven advisers with cabinet rank, the new Hasina government has as many as 50 ministers, making it one of the biggest cabinets in the country's history so far.

It is only natural that people's expectations from this government will be high. Even though the Sheikh Hasina's government has huge public support, its otherwise clean image has been tainted by news of alleged rent seeking and involvement in illegal tender business of some of the members of the AL. The newly elected party leaders must deal with such practices with a strong hand. The party leadership must bear it in mind that it will be better for the party if it can clean it of such criminal elements.

The government, in its turn, must not discriminate while swooping on the criminals, who, if the newspaper reports go right, are flexing their muscles again. Illegal rent seeking by goons in the name of local MPs and Awami League leaders (in almost all cases, the leaders themselves have been kept in the dark) must be stopped. The many-headed monster of corruption has raised its head in government establishments. Prices of essentials, especially before Ramadan, are slowly going beyond the means of many. It is time the government starts to prioritise what it has on its plate and handles the issues accordingly. The Prime Minister needs to list specific targets for the ministers and their future evolution must be based on that list.

So far, the Awami League and its government enjoy huge popular support. The Prime Minister and her team should keep it in mind that there is this trend in our democracy that the electorate never sends a party two consecutive times to power. The Awami League has all the means this time to win a second term in office; everything depends on whether it can deliver what it has promised in its manifesto for change. ■