

The expectations in 2011

Government must watch out for the pitfalls

THE year 2011 is already upon us. And it is as good a time as any to look forward to what the nation ought to expect from the government, given its record in the year just gone by. The first point to note is some intrinsic strengths the government possesses, mainly by virtue of its three-fourths majority in parliament, whereby the ruling party can show magnanimity by giving the opposition some space. For its part, the opposition, being a crucial component of democracy, must come to terms with its own responsibilities to its constituents and to the country through opting for active participation in the Jatiyo Sangsad. Reverting to the performance of the government, we are deeply distressed at the cavalier manner in which a number of so-called politically motivated cases have been withdrawn. We believe the law should have been allowed to run its course. Such withdrawals of cases have only raised questions about the future of the rule of law. In addition, there has been a clear degree of politicization of the bureaucracy. Appointments to administrative positions along partisan lines have obviously undermined morale in the civil service, something we should have done without.

Clearly, the government is to be given credit in some other areas. Agriculture has made notable progress. Again, the nation, having observed the seriousness with which religious extremism has been tackled, naturally now expects the government to go all the way towards containing and neutralizing this threat. Our nascent democracy can only add substance to itself if the anti-extremism campaign is carried to its logical end. We note here that through bringing five of Bangabandhu's killers to justice in early 2010, the government lived up to the expectations of the people where a restoration of rule of law was concerned. The repeal of the Fifth Amendment is another feat the country can rightly be proud of. In much the same manner, the expectation in the new year is that the powers that be will move full steam ahead into ensuring that the trial of war criminals is carried to legal and moral fulfillment before the term of the present government comes to an end.

The government has been the pivotal force behind the enactment of a raft of good laws. Mention may be made of laws relating to women and children's rights as well as the Right to Information Act. The momentum ought not to slow down.

In 2011, we look forward to the administration plugging the holes in its armour through acting with foresight. It cannot afford any more to get the lines between the government and the ruling party blurred. An effective government is one which means business, a task to be accomplished by avoiding the pitfalls engendered by political partisanship. Additionally, the government can do itself and the country a favour by taking some tough, exemplary action against the unruly elements of the Chhatra League, who have done much damage to the ruling party's credibility already. In the government structure itself, there remains much room for improvement where the performance of some ministries is concerned. Finally, there are the extra-judicial killings which have tarnished the image of the government and the country. Decisive action against such violations of the law is an imperative.

For the government, it is of critical importance that it recover the ground it has lost in the two years it has been in office. For that to be done, introspection is called for with a policy of inclusiveness coming to play.

Congratulations to JSC and JDC achievers

The dropout rate gives us worry, though

RESULTS of maiden Junior School Certificate and Junior Dakhil Certificate exams are just out combined passing rate being 73.04 percent. Considering the nature of the exams and the sudden challenge upon the students, we should be comfortable with the outcome. To be precise, the pass rate in JSC exams is 71.34 percent and in JDC exam 81.03. It needs to be noted, however, that the passing rate is less than the 92 percent as in primary terminal exams, leaving room for improvement there. The number of schools with cent percent pass rate is 863 while only 2 madrassas got that credit. Boys fared better than the girls. Pass rate among boys is 75.65 while the rate is 70.68 among the girls. Examinees of the Barisal Board achieved the highest passing rate of 81.75 percent.

We congratulate the high achievers and all those who came out successful. They showed their intellectual ability, merit and courage.

While we celebrate the New Year with the achievement of these young minds, we cannot help express our concern in the rates of drop outs. The chilling stat of nearly five lakh students who either failed or did not appear at the exams is highly alarming and more troubling is the fact that these unfortunate souls may not come back to studies due to poverty. It is assumed that a large number of these students live in rural areas and many will not take their exams twice because of their poor financial condition. Instead of sitting for exams for the second time they might engage themselves in supporting their family.

Education being the engine of national progress, the fact that so many will peter away in the early stage of their life is not acceptable. It is heartening to note that the Education Ministry is going to meet soon to decide how to retain these students in academic life.

We urge upon the concerned authorities to create an atmosphere of hope among the poor students and their parents by offering incentives like a mid-day meal, supply of basic school stationery, to take exams free of cost etc., so that they don't wander away from class rooms. Sooner we arrest the trend of leaving school the better for us. We cannot afford to be the pall-bearers of lost generations just due to problems which can be resolved collectively with a little bit of wisdom. Let's not forget that people devoid of functional literacy cannot move ahead as a nation. That's

Good morning 2011

ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

SO at last you are in 2011. Congratulations! In the meantime, did you know that you had survived several major crises and scares that happened around the world before you could reach the second decade of this 21st century?

But are you preparing for what is likely to take place this year? Think, and brace yourself.

Churchill had once said: "There is nothing new in the world, only history chapters you haven't read." Quite a laconic way to ignore the brave and often bitter world swirling around you. Throughout any year we are faced with events which we are unable to avoid. They often surprise us and catch us unprepared. It is, therefore, wise to indulge in a bit of analysis and then see if one can prognosticate. Keep ourselves a little more mentally prepared.

What was the world like in the past year? Let us recap. We began with the big earthquake in Haiti. The world saw the devastation of a city called Port Au Prince, its capital. Even the presidential palace was ruined. But the president escaped. The world ran to its aid. Even we in Bangladesh sent a special medical team to combat cholera that broke out there.

As the year unfolded, we had Toyota recalls. That was embarrassing for the giant automaker. So humiliating for the Japanese CEO that he went public and bowed deep down to express apology -- the quintessential Japanese way of saying sorry. But did it end there? The worldwide egg scare then began. However this could not take hold. We then moved into a series of country bankruptcies, initially with Greece and Ireland, moving on to Spain and scaring the Italians. Europe caught the cold and the world sneezed. The European currency, the Euro, came under siege.

Of course, don't forget the oil gushing for three months from a British Petroleum well deep in the floor of the Gulf of Mexico. A manmade disaster if ever there was any. Both humans and technology got together to contain it. While this was going on, we had a volcano in Iceland spewing ash in the atmosphere, which stopped aircraft -- both big and small -- from flying in and out of European air space.

In the meantime, the political clock was also ticking in the United Kingdom and the United States as well as in several other countries in the Middle East, Asia, Australia and Latin America. Elections were being held there with startling regularity and results made known.

The Republican Party in the United States thumped their way into the House of Representatives and outgunned the Democrats. They also got more than a respectable place in the US Senate, thus challenging President Obama to political duels on equal terms far into the future.

A young, and to many handsome, Tory got elected as prime minister of Britain and changed the rules of the game played by the Labour Party for the past decade or more.

Two big transitions were also taking place. One war in Iraq was being scaled down while another war in Afghanistan was being escalated. Both these wars are being led by the United States. Though the wars captured our attention, many of us did not notice that China and Germany were using the time and space to continue their rise in power and influence in the world. So were Brazil and India.

But as politics grappled with our fate, two events dazzled all of us around the world. These were the Winter Olympics in Canada and the World Football Cup in South Africa. The players and their feats again surprised us. Vuvuzela, an instrument

use nuclear weapons if the South escalated its military posture in the disputed seas and around an island, the face-off ended peacefully as the sun set on December 31, 2010.

So now what about the New Year 2011?

Wait, we did not mention the biggest blowup of 2010. How could we forget the WikiLeaks and its gargantuan revelations?

An internet website called WikiLeaks, like a fly in the ointment, spilled information to all. Secret information became public, and from that time on remained in the public domain. The powerful and the secretive world of the United States, its

nance. There have already been elections in four countries in South America. Four more elections in four other countries in that continent are expected in 2011. These elections will help to consolidate democracy there. Elections will also be held in more African countries this year. In Asia besides Thailand other countries are likely to move closer to democracy with elections. In spite of economic progress Thailand's army will be focusing on how to share power.

Bangladesh would continue to hug on to democracy. The opposition BNP will try to consolidate its grip and try to influence political discourse. But the degree of its success will be determined by several factors, including support it gives to the War Crimes adjudications. The forthcoming by-elections to the Jatiya Sangshad and the local government elections would be a test of their strength. In the meantime, under the leadership of the prime minister, much progress is expected. The Awami League has only three more years to perform. Hence, their "honeymoon" is over.

On the basis of the understanding reached last January between our prime minister and the Indian prime minister we may see progress in some areas of our bilateral relations. The visit of the Indian prime minister to Dhaka in early 2011 should lead to some concrete results. We may see things moving, especially with regard to return of some enclaves and adverse possessions. Connectivity with northeast Indian states could be on the way to being in place. The Indians are in a hurry here. Bangladesh will have a heavy foreign policy agenda this year.

Both Iraq and Afghanistan would see drawdown of US forces. Iraq would see the complete removal of their combat troops, leaving about 50,000 US troops to advise and train the Iraqi security forces.

Natural disasters would take their toll in many parts of the world. Drought, and floods, earthquakes and mud-slides, cyclones and snowstorms would ravage new areas due to climate change. But disaster management systems would be working better and would be more smartly coordinated.

The cyber-war that has led to the great information hemorrhage would assume new forms. New actors would emerge to take charge where WikiLeaks would leave off.

We would be in the cusp of a new generation of information sharing and communication.

Fourth generation i-phones and computer tablets and pads would be the norm around the world.

Tomorrow is Monday January the 3rd of 2011. Tomorrow is a working day in Bangladesh and throughout the world. The industrial machines would again start, the armies would again drill and the inventor would again sit at his desk to create. Tomorrow is yet another day. Tomorrow is business as usual.

Ashfaqur Rahman is a former Ambassador and Chairman of the Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies.



Silver-lined dawn of a new year.

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that produces a bee-like buzzing sound to attract attention in public stadiums, made its debut and created a world sensation. Then came the World Expo in Shanghai, China. The goal post of human possibility was shifted further when China welcomed 100 million guests to this extravaganza.

2010 also reaffirmed the superior strength of the human spirit over human fate. In Chile, 30 odd miners were trapped hundred of meters inside the belly of mother earth. It took several weeks before these brave men were brought out. These miners were for all purposes "dead," yet they were rescued by men of steel boring into hard earth, racing against time and bringing them above ground. The world watched amazed on TV, as billions prayed for the safety of the lives of whom they could only relate to as fellow humans. These trapped men created a bond among humans and declared victory of the human spirit.

The year came to a blissful end, in spite of serious spats between China and Japan and then between North and South Korea. In spite of much huff and puff, especially by North Korea to

diplomacy and its statecraft were brought crashing down to Earth through this naughty portal.

Now seriously, on to 2011.

First, the state of the world. Interestingly, this year the developing world will be much in focus. The emerging economies, including Bangladesh, would look forward to brisk economic growth. We would be able to manage our economies better. Our exports would rise. Our foreign reserves would grow. Foreign and internal investments would be sizeable. All these economies would perform nimbly and trade more and more with each other.

The developed countries in Europe, Japan and even the US would be facing periods of economic hardships. They would try to recover with bigger stimulus packages but in the end, because of their demographic deficit and structural weaknesses, their economies would remain anemic. China, however, could grow at 10-12% while India could clip on at 8-9%. We in Bangladesh could be growing at a smart 7%.

Now let us look at the state of gover-

More exchanges for the better

MENG JING

FREQUENT high-level visits signal the desire of China and the EU to strengthen their economic and political ties

A review of this year, the 35th year of relations between China and European Union, shows that both Brussels and Beijing attach great importance to the further development of bilateral exchanges.

At the end of April, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso visited Beijing with a group of commissioners. Half a year later, Premier Wen Jiabao visited Brussels with a big delegation from the Chinese government.

Strategic dialogue has been upgraded from vice-foreign minister level to the current level, which involves Vice-President of the Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, and Chinese State Councilor for foreign affairs, Dai Bingguo. In addition, the 3rd High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED) took place in Beijing on December 20 and 21.

The frequency and high level of the exchanges indicate the desire on both sides to strengthen the partnership between Beijing and Brussels.

Economic and trade cooperation,

which continues to grow, serves as the cornerstone of bilateral ties. The EU has been the largest trading partner of China for six years, and China has grown to be the EU's second largest export market.

However, a protective tendency against Chinese products has emerged -- the first 10 months of this year witnessed the initiation of 10 trade remedy cases by the EU against China -- and China continues to maintain a large trade surplus with the EU. Beijing has tried to convince the EU that the reason for the trade surplus is the EU's restriction on exports of high-tech products.

Although the EU previously ignored this argument, it now seems that Brussels is seriously considering opening up its high-tech market. At the recent HED in Beijing, the EU agreed to hold a meeting with China about trade in high-tech products.

However, although this is obviously a positive step toward more balanced trade between the EU and China, it is not yet clear when the EU will loosen

its restrictions on high-tech exports.

China and the EU have had different fortunes in the wake of the global financial crisis. While China was one of the first countries to recover from the global economic downturn, the EU is still in serious trouble, in particular, the euro is in a very vulnerable position due to the huge debts of several EU countries.

Inside the EU, there is a general impression that the EU should adjust and develop a more suitable policy toward China.

China has expressed its willingness to back European sovereign debt on several occasions. At the recent HED, Vice-Premier Wang Qishan pledged that China would support European stabilisation efforts if necessary, and during his visit to Athens in October, Premier Wen assured Greece that Beijing would purchase its bonds and increase investment in the country. One month later, when President Hu Jintao visited Portugal, he promised to take concrete measures to help the country.

China's support would not only help protect its own investment in the EU, it would also increase confidence in the euro.

However, China still has concerns. The arms embargo, introduced by the EU in 1989, is still valid; Market Economy Status (MES) has not yet been granted to China -- even though some EU countries have proposed lifting the arms embargo and granting MES to China, the 27 member states remain divided on the issues.

2011 is an important year for the EU's external relations. The roles of President of the European Council and the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy were established under the Lisbon Treaty and after about one year's preparation, the European External Action Service (EEAS) was launched in December. Yet, despite the ambitions of the EU, how important the role of the EEAS will be and how it will function will only become clear in the coming years.

Inside the EU, there is a general impression that the EU should adjust and develop a more suitable policy toward China. A long list of cooperative programmes between Beijing and Brussels is expected for the coming years, aimed at increasing mutual understanding and mutual respect.

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