

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Game plan or disaster planning?



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WE have had enough of acid rain from pungent political exchanges between two key players in national politics and the gloomy outlook depicted by dooms-

day sayers. Now is the turn for seeing the positive around the corner, glimpsing a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel.

The prime minister is clearly conciliatory in her approach to the caretaker issue. No one should read it as a sign of weakness, rather see in it a reflection of maturity and realism on the PM's part. This strikes one as a change of heart, by past standards. Sheikh Hasina is playing her cards astutely. Is the opposition leader playing her cards well enough?

It all began with the PM's quip on World Environment Day: she good humouredly, if with a bit of sarcasm, complimented the opposition leader for calling hartal and offering an environment-friendly day. Almost co-incidentally, she spread the olive branch across to the opposition saying she is opposed to any one-sided decision on the fate of CTG, that the door is

open and invited with an open arm the opposition to join the parliament with its formula of caretaker reform. The PM should be open to initiating talks outside the parliament as well. She has clearly sued for an understanding with the opposition; she has even hinted at the fateful consequences for the ruling party and the opposition should they refuse to work together on this specific question: anarchy, possibility of a replay on 1/11 and risking hijacking of democracy.

Mark her latest entreaties with the opposition leader on a passionate note: "Yes, you will call for a two-day hartal when CTG-related bill is tabled on the floor of the House and then when it will be passed, you will call for another three-day hartal and subject the people to hardship only."

There is substance in her offer, centred on two openings in the situation that seem too obvious to an open eye: First, the Supreme Court verdict admits of a leeway to retain the caretaker system, albeit with

necessary reform to be decided upon by the political parties, for the next two general elections. Second, an across-the-board consensus has already emerged on de-linking judiciary from the CTG system. So, the moot points and the key agenda are already well laid-out, these need to be

For, a long respite may cause a foot-dragging. Lest the large intervening period water down the sense of urgency or foster a tendency to playing football with the issue, the roadmap should be all detailed and blueprinted with a specified timeframe.

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deliberated and hit a common ground on.

In fact, the 13th Amendment whereby the exceptional interim caretaker arrangement was adopted had itself spoken of a review in time to switch back to trusting a party government at the end of its tenure with the task of holding national elections through an independent and powerful Election Commission.

But there is plenty of time before the next general elections to try and come to a negotiated settlement. This can work both to their advantage as well as disadvantage.

It is unfortunate that where the ruling party had been giving out contradictory signals earlier on, now it is the opposition party which is doing this. Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, acting general secretary of

BNP, has dubbed the government's intent of doing away with CTG (as per SC verdict) and its inviting the opposition for talks as being mutually contradictory. This is a knee-jerk skin-deep reaction; it deliberately misses out on the two-year scope for retention of the caretaker government on the platter. After the June 5 hartal, BNP gave an impression that it would not call for hartal anytime soon but they seem to be headed for another hartal, dreadfully a longer version, by some available indica-

tions. Apparently, one may be baffled at the continuing intransigence of BNP to come to terms with an issue on which the opposition and the ruling parties should be reading from the same page. Their public positionings notwithstanding, BNP and AL are going through a struggle beneath the surface. Perhaps, BNP's public positioning of going it alone seems to be rooted in the party's belief that with its 32% vote bank it has a capacity of troubling the government despite its 10% seats in parliament. It may also be latching on a hope that AL being a party with a long tradition and a sense of pragmatism would not opt for a one-sided election because that would place legitimacy of the government produced thereby under a question-mark. But if BNP stretches this line too far, it may risk forcing AL's hands into going for an election in spite of a BNP boycott with a loyalist Ershad's Jatiya Party (JP) in the opposition. There have been two previous instances of such an aberration. The nation cannot hunker down to such a huge disappointment.

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Making decisions

JAMAL KHAN

SOMETHING is very interesting, even intriguing and mystifying, about decision-making -- a cognitive activity loaded with operational content and implementational accountability. In point of fact, decision-making is the very essence of management. It is inconceivable that one can either conceptualise or operationalise management in a void, i.e. managing without deciding. Decision-making can, as we all recognise, be of various types, e.g. routine, non-routine, programmed, un-programmed, minor, major, short-term, long-term, unilateral, multilateral, informed, uninformed, deterministic, and stochastic.

Sometimes predictable and sometimes probabilistic and hardly linear as a process, decision-making is curvilinear, iterative, can occur under favourable as well as unfavourable conditions, and has both payoffs and constraints. In the same breath, one must recall that decision-making has consequences, favourable as well as unfavourable. A decision-maker has to live with a given set of consequences, some of which are known and obvious and others are unknown, unanticipated, unexpected and latent. Should consequences be favourable, decision-makers may justifiably feel good and take credit. But as and when these turn out to be unfavourable or inimical, the effects or outcomes can be consequential and the impact may be intergenerational or even multigenerational.

The right decision, or if a decision is implemented with some minor correctable faults, may produce a wide range of benefits, e.g. popular well-being, achievement orientation and culture, merit principle, performance focus, decentralisation, flexibility, and strategic choice. On the flip side, inimical as well as unintended results are likely to flow once a wrong decision is put in place, namely, ascription, parochialism, patronage, spoils system, rigidity, defensiveness, elitism, asymmetry, centralisation, tardiness, stagnation, alienation, nonparticipation, noninvolvement, unethical behaviour, corruption, and entropic forces.

Less understood, at any rate, is how decisions have either a long or short horizon. In developing countries, including Bangladesh, far too often decision-making tends not only to be centralised, urban-centric and consumption-oriented,

but the decision cycle tends to be long, sometimes tortuously long, and unbelievably circuitous. With the time horizon being long and drawn, the direct as well as indirect costs of life and living escalate, rising and legitimate demand can remain unmet, the means-ends incongruence spreads, aspirations get delayed, inequality gaps widen, and frustration deepens.

Here lies the point. When decisions -- management's lifeblood --

opment into brisk and bustling development.

Decision theory's formulation of rational comprehensive theory, incremental theory and mixed scanning theory provides helpful glimpse into what goes on in the public sector and corporate settings. These theoretical formulations complement each other and help decision-makers frame decisions to fill emerging and projected needs and cope with changing and

dence, the acceptance of the bounded rationality, the recognition of the futility of seeking the ideal, the penchant for compromise, tradeoff and patchwork, the mutual partisan adjustment of competing and contending interest-group needs, the recognition of disjointedness and muddling through, the incompleteness of data and information, the time and cost constraints under which decisions are attempted and made, and the like.

Last but certainly not the least, mixed scanning theory represents an operational accommodation between rational comprehensiveness and disjointed incrementalism. The theory posits, inter alia, that while the ends can be formulated rationally, comprehensively and holistically, the means by which the ends can be reached or approximated can be deployed and mobilised incrementally.

Decision-theory is challenging, the least of which is the implementation and enforcement of decisions, once vetted. Easier said than done, implementation is fraught with drift, mutation, overruns, non-compliance, easy money, pile-ups, unexpected turns, and unintended reactions and consequences. So is enforcement -- which looks trim, tidy, neat and elegant theoretically -- but bares its fangs once it enters a given socioeconomic space where myriad and formidable special interests are waiting to pounce on the fledgling back of decision-making. What is significant in this respect is that implementation gets problematic, difficult, and even unachievable, if bad theory precedes action.

Let us get one thing settled, here and now. Decision-making cannot be wished away, oversimplified, delayed, watered down, taken for granted, and made light of. As and when casualness, opportunism, turf-fighting and myopia confuse, delay, frustrate and vitiate decision-making, societies, communities, institutions, organisations and people pay for it -- in one way or another, sooner or later, implicitly as well as explicitly and sometimes for generations and centuries to come. The bottom-line is; decision-making, follow-up, civilisational impulse and leadership are intertwined. Casting aside obligatory limitations and negativities, decisional soundness, quality, fairness, justice, due process, representation and equity are what citizens/customers desperately look for.

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are chronically delivered in a dilatory, hesitant, cost-indifferent and time-insensitive manner, it goes right to the heart of the management system, that is, the management system is more systemically and decisionally constrained and less capable, discretionary and delivery-oriented.

As and when decisions are made and disseminated responsibly and promptly, such a capacity speaks of a management system's overall and specific capacity, in-house capability, and discretionary authority. The timeliness, quality, causality, direction and impact of decisions and the institutional, organisational and managerial basis of decision-making go a long way in taking sluggish and slovenly underdevel-

opment into brisk and bustling development. The reality of and the need for the rational comprehensive theory is deep-seated and undeniable. In the absence or deficiency of comprehensiveness and rationality, wide-ranging and profound socioeconomic changes cannot be brought about, incisive interventions cannot be made or sustained, and radical, but necessary, surges cannot be captured.

As different from the earlier theory, incremental theory is what it says it is, that is, a theoretical emphasis on gradualism, limited successive approximation, "satisfying," "what is good enough," the best practicable and achievable option, marginal and cautious departure from existing decisions, abiding dependence on prece-

Authorisation of 2011-12 Budget

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

THE budgetary and financial system exists partly to ensure the government's accountability to the elected legislature for its financial activities, and to see that monies voted by the legislature are not misused, though it may not always do so effectively.

Budget is intermingling of planning and control, a device for checking up on departmental progress and taking any necessary corrective action. The pre-budgetary contacts with government agencies are one of the main ways in which the Treasury can judge what is happening and embody corrective action in the budget. Once the budget made there is a further progress of controlling expenditure so that it conforms to the plan.

The budget document itself is the focal point of four separate closely inter-related processes making up the budgetary system:

- Formulation by the executive the budget to be submitted (to the legislature);
 - Authorisation by the legislature;
 - Execution by the various departments; and
 - Appraisal by the legislature.
- The government anticipates that by 2021 Bangladesh may reach the stage of high performing growth supported by advanced and innovative technology with prices of commodities stabilised, income and human poverty brought to a minimum level, health and education for all secured, capacity building enhanced, social justice established, social disparity reduced, participatory democracy firmly rooted and capacity to tackle adverse effects of climate change achieved. To achieve the goal it has prepared a Perspective Plan covering a period from 2010-2021 and the sixth Five Year Plan (2010-2015).

Our finance minister submitted the national budget for 2011-2012 before the Parliament on June 9. Apart from passing the budget the session is likely to deal with constitutional amendment bill. This is the 3rd budget of the present government. Like the other two previous budgets this is also going to be a big and ambitious budget.

It may be pointed out in this regard that BNP-led opposition did not attend the last two bud-

getary sessions, the 1st in 2009 and 2nd in 2010. In the current session two bills were placed before the Parliament seeking enactment of a new law for rehabilitation of vagabonds (by repealing existing Bengal vagrancy Act 1943) and Elevated Expressway Project (Land Acquisition) Ordinance 2011. The president promulgated the Ordinance on May 12.

BNP has hinted at simultaneous rallies on the streets as protest against non-fulfillment of their various demands from the government.

The government will face various demands from the people of northern Bangladesh. In a big seminar, in which the finance minister was present as the chief guest, the representatives from north Bengal strongly demanded the fulfillment of election pledge of the AL. For fulfilling the commitments the government may consider special allocation for supporting industrialisation, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Some leading members of the public even suggested decentralisation of budget making process to accommodate various recommendations of the rural people, which include providing subsidies on farm technology to enable the poor and marginal farmers to purchase the technology.

There is no option other than industrialisation to address the problem of seasonal unemployment. Thus, it appears to be appropriate for the government to offer packages for supporting small and medium enterprises through budgeting instruments.

Placement of big and ambitious budget before the parliament is not enough. The government should be cautious and careful about its lack of necessary ability to implement it.

The greatest challenge before the government is rising inflation due to global inflation and increased import costs. Soaring food prices on international and domestic market have resulted in domestic inflation of 10.67% in April 2011. Some economists have recommended expansion of food distribution and safety net programmes to contain rise of inflation. BIDS has suggested scaling up of public investment to boost private investment by removing the power, energy and infrastructure bottlenecks.

Though it appears big and ambitious we are hopeful of a smooth and successful authorisation of the 3rd budget because of clear signs of turning round of Asian economies after two years of depression.

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