

Forgotten code of conduct

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On November 19, we three political alliances, believing in the spirit of the Liberation War, presented a common outline for the removal of autocrat Ershad and for a transition to democracy through free and neutral elections to a sovereign parliament.

Ershad's autocratic government has been brought down through a successful mass upsurge. The parliamentary election will be held in the country on February 27, 1991 under an interim and caretaker government led by the acting president selected by us as per constitution.

The democratic process can advance through a recognition of democracy at all levels, development and practice of democratic values. Moreover, the conspiracy by the collaborators of autocracy has been going on to destroy the people's victory by hindering the democratic process. So we on behalf of the three alliances have demanded the arrest of the collaborators of Ershad's autocratic government and recovery of illegal arms. We have also pledged not to take any identified accomplice of autocracy in any of the parties of our alliances.

Holding a free and neutral election has become a national duty for establishing democracy in the country. We believe the people, who have emerged victorious at this stage of democratic movement through the

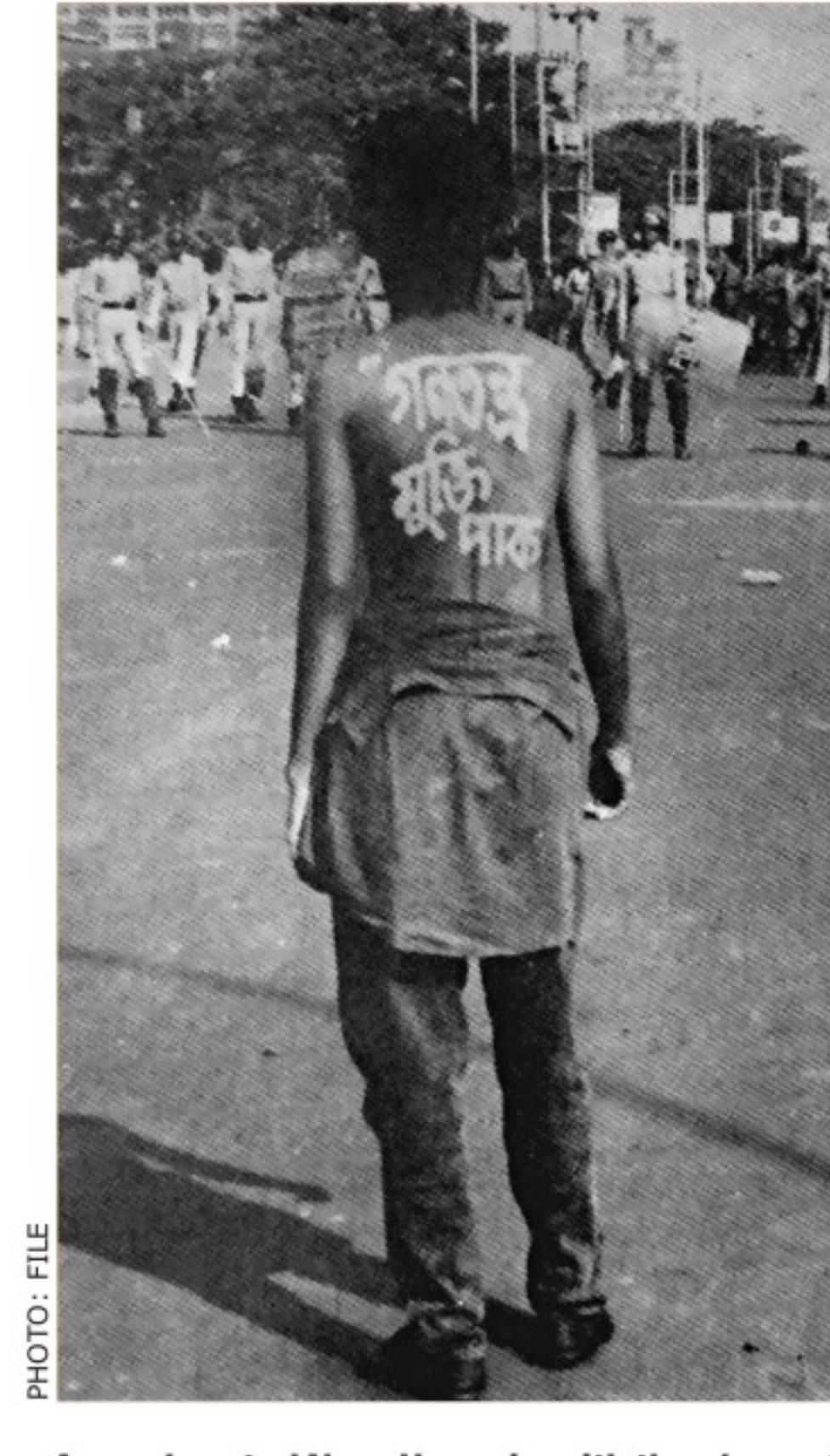


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STAR FILE PHOTO: SK ENRUL HAQ

An undaunted Noor Hossain with the slogan "freedom to democracy" inscribed on his back confronting law enforcers during the hartal on August 21, 1989. His death on the street soon after ultimately speeded up Ershad's fall. Deposed president HM Ershad being taken to a special court from his special jail in Gulshan in connection with various corruption charges after his fall.

sacrifices of hundreds of martyrs, will fulfill their national duty of holding a free and neutral election with responsibility. They will foil all conspiracies to mar the election.

We, the leaders of the three alliances, urge the workers of our parties and the people to fulfill our following pledges for holding a free and neutral election.

1. The political parties in the three alliances will follow gen-

eral democratic norms of mutual respect and tolerance of others' views in their electoral statements and activities. The parties in the alliances will always try to instill democratic spirit in their workers.

2. All will try so that the political parties in the three alliances can publicize their own opinions and special features through independent and legal ways. Combined attempts will

be made so that offices, public meetings, rallies and processions do not come under attack.

3. The parties in the three alliances will refrain from publicizing slander or make derogatory remarks about other parties' patriotism and religious beliefs. The parties will not support communalism and will unitedly resist communal propaganda.

4. The parties in the three alliances are making a pledge to shun confrontation in carrying out electoral activities. Our earlier announcement of not taking into the political parties of the three alliances the identified collaborators of Ershad's autocratic government and holders of illegal arms will be strictly enforced.

The parties will keep vigil so that the voters can exercise their right to vote independently and peace and discipline is maintained in the polling centres.

5. The parties in the three alliances will not try to influence the administration or law enforcing agencies in their own electoral interest. They will try to uphold the neutrality of the administration.

6. The three alliances will try to ensure that the mass media

can play an independent and neutral role. If any false and confusing news is published united protests will be made.

7. For free and neutral election if any incident of undemocratic provocation happens attempts will be made immediately to resolve the matter through talks. Permanent contact will be set up at national and local levels to ensure that this policy is followed at all levels.

8. We unitedly make the following proposals for ensuring free and fair voting on the polling day:

a) To ensure supervision of proper distribution of all ballot papers in the constituencies,

b) Recording final results at the polling centre after the ballots are counted, steps to give certified copies of the results of the centre to the polling agents of the candidates,

c) Resisting any attempt for dishonesty and media coup in gathering polling results, announcing it and publicizing it,

d) Ensuring neutrality of the administration and maintaining peaceful environment in the polling centres,

e) Strict measures to prevent rigging and corruption,

f) Ensuring observance of a ceiling on electoral expenses for the candidates effectively.

9. The parties in the three alliances will take forward the democratic process by accepting people's mandate given through the elections.

Of the unfulfilled joint declaration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Joint declaration on the outline of 15-party, 7-party and 5-party alliances for removal of the autocratic Ershad government, holding elections to a sovereign Parliament and establishing a representative government through elections supervised by a non-party, neutral interim government.

People from all classes and professions have joined a heroic struggle in the ongoing mass movement demanding the removal of Ershad government, establishing a permanent democratic system and restoring the spirit and values of the Liberation War.

At different stages of the struggle people have been sacrificing their lives, enduring jail terms, repression and defying fear of death for establishing a genuine representative system of governance.

The main goal of the struggle of the people is to bring an end to changes of power through unconstitutional means, such as murder and coups, and to ensure transfer of power through free and neutral election organised in a constitutional manner.

But Ershad, who captured power illegally through unconstitutional means, has been continuing with his attempts to hang on to power indefinitely through arranging farcical polls. Every election held under this government was marred by vote theft, fraud, capturing polling centres, snatching ballot boxes, vote dacoity and media coup. It also announced fictitious polls results in voter-absent elections. In such a situation no free and neutral election is possible

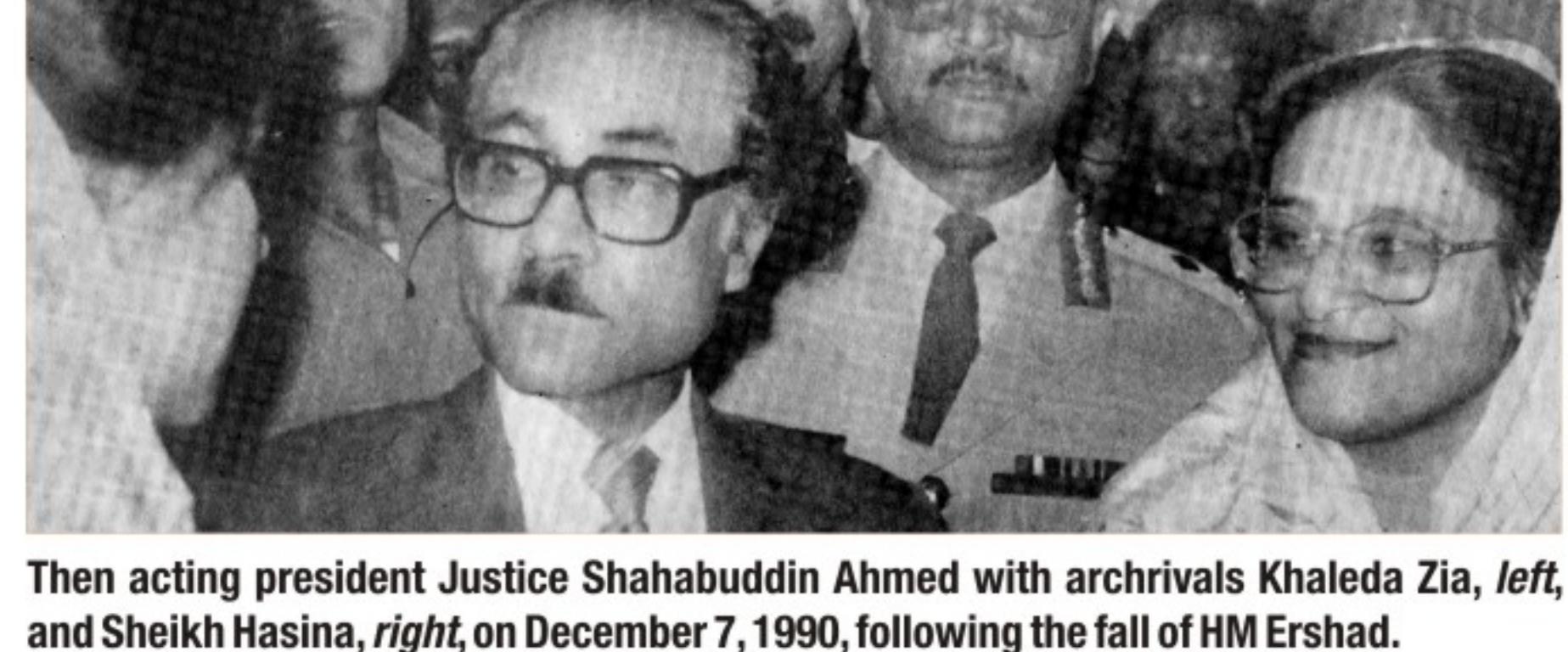


PHOTO: FILE

Then acting president Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed with archrivals Khaleda Zia, left, and Sheikh Hasina, right, on December 7, 1990, following the fall of HM Ershad.

under this government.

We, the 15-party, 7-party and 5-party alliances, will not participate in any national election under Ershad and his illegal government --- be it presidential or parliamentary polls. Such elections will not only be boycotted; they will also be resisted. We, the 15, 7 and 5 party alliances will only participate in elections to a sovereign parliament under a non-party neutral caretaker government.

Against this backdrop and reflecting the aspirations of the people, we are unitedly making the following specific declaration on the main demands and goals of the on-going movement.

1. For establishing full democracy and a democratic system of governance in line with the spirit of independence and the War of Liberation by freeing the country from the clutches of the autocratic Ershad regime and the rule of his government established through killing, coups and conspiracies:

a) Ershad and his government will be compelled to resign as per article (ka)

3 of clause 51, article (ka) 1 of clause 55 and article 3 of clause 51 of the Constitution maintaining the constitutional continuity. A non-partisan and neutral person acceptable to the three alliances that are continuing anti-autocracy and anti-communalism movement will be appointed as vice president.

The present government and parliament will be annulled, the President will resign by handing over power to a new vice president.

b) An interim caretaker government will be established, led by the acting president, whose main responsibility will be to ensure holding a free and neutral election to a sovereign Jatiya Sangsad within three months.

2. a) The head of the caretaker government will be non-partisan and neutral, which means he will not be a direct or indirect follower of any political party or be involved with any party. He will not run for president, vice president and parliament membership. No minister of his caretaker government will participate in

the election.

b) The interim government will conduct only routine activities of the administration and reorganize the Election Commission (EC) and reshuffle the activities and responsibilities of the EC aimed at holding free and neutral polls.

c) Voters' trust has to be restored and it has to be ensured that they can exercise their franchise independently without any influence and according to their will and conscience.

d) All state media, including radio and television, have to be made completely independent and autonomous to keep the mass media completely neutral. Unhindered opportunities for all contesting political parties in publicity in the state media have to be ensured.

3. The interim caretaker government will hand over power to the sovereign parliament elected through a free and neutral election. The government will have to be accountable to the parliament.

4. a) Constitutional rule based on the recognition of the people's sovereignty will be absolute and unequivocal. Any attempt to capture power through any unconstitutional way will be resisted. An elected government cannot be removed on any excuse in unconstitutional and extra-constitutional way without election.

b) People's fundamental rights will be protected, independence and neutrality of the judiciary and rule of law will be ensured.

c) All laws contrary to fundamental rights will be annulled.

21.11.90

Circulated by 15, 7 and 5-party alliances.

AMIR HOSSAIN AMU

AL fulfilled pledges



RASHIDUL HASAN

Awami League leader Amir Hossain Amu has claimed that his party has fulfilled most pledges of "Tin Joter Ruprekha," a 1990 joint declaration of three alliances led by AL, BNP and left-leaning parties.

The AL stalwart, who was in the front line of the anti-Ershad movement in the late 1980s, said his party has been trying to uphold the spirit of the 1990 mass uprising that led to the fall of the military dictator.

He claimed that BNP, which came to power twice, did nothing to establish the rule of law or uphold the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War, which are two major pledges of the 'Ruprekha' signed by AL, BNP and left-leaning parties on November 19, 1990.

He was talking to The Daily Star at his Eskaton residence in the capital.

Amu said BNP ruled the country for five years after being voted to power through the historic 1991 election.

"But the then BNP government missed the opportunity of giving democracy a good shape. They rather patronised anti-liberation war elements."

Asked about AL's present alliance with Ershad, Amu said, "We fought against a system, not any individual. The fact is Ershad's name has become a symbol of the movement."

He defended Ershad, saying he now respects democracy, and has walked side by side with the democratic forces. "I do not see anything wrong in having a political alliance with him."

Citing an example, he said many freedom fighters are with BNP. But would one describe them as bad elements, like many other top BNP leaders?

He, however, said some issues in the Ruprekha regarding the demands of professional bodies may not have been addressed.

He said the present government was working to build a "Digital Bangladesh" and had formulated an education policy in line with its pledges in the Ruprekha.

"We have made parliament effective and handled militants with an iron fist. We are not ignoring people's demands," he said.

Referring to the abolition of the caretaker government system, he said it was clearly mentioned in "Tin Joter Ruprekha" that the system would be in place for two terms.

"This undemocratic system cannot go on for years. It is a shame for political leaders."



FROM LEFT...BNP chief Khaleda Zia speaks to a policeman assigned to arrest her on November 11, 1988, at Hotel Purbani in the capital. Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina, under house arrest, is seen on the balcony of her home on June 30, 1987.