

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Formula, only a phone call away



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

IN the murky and charged atmosphere of growing political uncertainties, people feel that their backs are to the wall. Two reactive trends are noticeable. These are still remote from public consciousness but are being talked about anyway. Jatiya Party President H.M. Ershad, an ally of ruling AL-led Mahajote government, wishes to appear as an alternative to the two-party centred rule in the country by exploiting the public disenchantment with both AL and BNP.

These days he never tires of reminding people he wants to go it alone, field 300 candidates and aspire for power. His calculations are: should the BNP dejected on its caretaker demand, decide not to participate in the election the JP would contest in all seats and with its tally hope to sit in the opposition. But in another scenario, where an interim arrangement acceptable to BNP is put in place to hold a fully participatory election, Ershad may not leave the Mahajote, but still share as many seats as possible with the alliance. Yet, another option for the JP could be playing the power broker in the event of close electoral results between BNP and AL.

Former President Ershad's one-time colleague, now president JP splinter group, former AL minister and Ittefaq editor Anwar Hossain Manju implored Ershad: "For God's sake, participate in the election on your own, just don't say it repeatedly to confuse the nation." But there was an element of irony in Manju's remark. "In youth you secured 30 seats; now let's see in old-age how many of 300 seats you land up with if you go it alone."

Memory of Ershad's autocratic rule has been somewhat diluted through his incarceration during Justice Shahabuddin-led caretaker government, BNP rule and for a very brief spell during AL rule. Political parties have had the ammunition of leveraging him

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with a number of corruption cases. But in all but two cases relating to radar purchase and General Manjur's murder, Ershad stands unencumbered. He remains a political factor given also the fact that the Jamaat is in disarray.

We have had a not-so-brief chequered history of civil society movements. There were efforts by Gen. Osmani and Dr. Kamal Hossain to form civic platforms towards achievement of political objectives. Then Professor Muzaffar Ahmed through Sujon launched a campaign to sensitise voters about their rights to choose their representatives having unblemished credentials. This has had an impact on the public mind with the ethical side to election



gaining some ground, however small. The full potential of civil society's role as a conscientious objector to deviant political culture and pressure group to persuade key political players to heed the voice of reason is yet to be realised. Usually, political parties look at them as adversaries and not as a repository of good, neutral and self-less advice they could count on to steer clear of any unyielding political behaviourism. Mahmudur Rahman Manna is contemplating to build a platform called Oikya Front. He had to cease being member secretary to a civic movement launched earlier with Barrister Rafiqul Huq as convener as Manna became a candidate for the

DCC election. Now that the DCC elections hang in suspense, Manna is free to get back to the priority of organising a civil society front. This will be no political party, no aspirant for power; it will be only wedded to morally pressurising the two major political parties to end their standoff and go for a negotiated settlement on the contentious caretaker issue.

The template is there. Remember, the BNP had rejected the caretaker system during its rule in 1991-1996 and held an election which the AL boycotted. The lack of legitimacy of the government born of January 15 farcical election was to force its hands in the face of continuing opposition agitation to enact the caretaker government.

Supposing the Awami League similarly goes for a non-participatory election because of its persistence in holding the next general election through party government, history may repeat itself. Lack of legitimacy of such government may force it to accept an interim non-party arrangement to hold the election anew. Why muddle what can be gracefully done?

The choice is AL's: either it accepts any of the interim caretaker formulae making the rounds or it respects the HC verdict observations when forced.

Begum Zia says since the Awami League did away with the caretaker system it is for the AL to bring it back. There maybe logic in her stance but it is impolitic as strategy. I think she can really push the ball into the AL court by hanging out a list of two or three alternative formulae for neutral interim arrangement before the AL to see how the AL responds. They are promise-bound to discuss the BNP formula and consider it, mind you, under public watch. Also the world is watching.

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UNHCR is ready to offer support to Bangladesh Government



UNHCR fully understands the challenges that this refugee emergency poses for Bangladesh and we appreciate the contributions of the people and government of Bangladesh in hosting refugees in the past decades. We all know that there is no easy solution to this issue. Considering all the needs there, that people are fleeing conflict and there are people who are injured and need medical assistance, we are urging the government to provide the necessary assistance to them. We request the government to open the borders so that the people can at least find a safe haven here so that they can survive during the conflict. We haven't got any concrete reply from the government yet. We are following up. Shelter is important, same as food, medical care, and all other life-saving assistance. But those will come later when the government agrees to let them disembark. We also wish to highlight that

UNHCR is ready to offer support to the government in dealing with this evolving humanitarian situation. Our country representative in Myanmar is now in Rakhine State, together with a joint UN mission, to do an assessment on the situation. The assessment mission is part of the UN joint mission headed by Vijay Nambiar, special adviser for Myanmar to UN Secretary General. The Myanmar government has formally requested UNHCR to provide support to respond to this emergency situation and UNHCR is ready to provide help to both the displaced people and also the affected communities. We hope we can get back to northern Rakhine State as soon as the security allows. Recent update (as of June 14, 2012, 4 pm): UNHCR is no longer sending its monitoring teams to the border on the Myanmar side as they have been stopped by the local authorities from doing so. UNHCR, Regional Office, Bangladesh.

Moral position should not be compromised for reasons of 'realpolitik'



Imtiaz Ahmed

OUR policymakers have failed to build a productive relationship with Yangon despite several visits to Myanmar by our top leaders. They have also failed to impress upon the Myanmar government and the opposition, particularly Aung San Suu Kyi, despite the recent changes there. It is important that our government should start dialoguing with all stakeholders and see what best can be done. All channels, local, national, regional and international ought to be kept open. Humanitarian issues are very important in this age of globalisation. And one must remember that Bangladesh too emerged out of a refugee situation in 1971. If Rohingyas are fleeing rape, arson, killing then there is no reason not to shelter them. Culturally, Bangladesh has always

been hospitable to political refugees. At the same time, Bangladesh should make this an international issue, even hold an international conference either in Dhaka or in Geneva to address the plight of the Rohingyas. The world hardly knows about their plight. International obligation should not be seen only from legal perspective. There is also the issue of moral obligation. Historically and civilisationally Bengalis always had strong moral foundation, and that is the reason they could launch "just struggles" against the British and the Pakistanis. This moral position on the part of Bangladesh should not be compromised for reasons of 'realpolitik.' The latter is only short-term, while the former, that is, the moral grounding, is long-term. The writer is Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change talks go forward in Bonn



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE latest talks under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) towards a new legally binding global treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol just ended in Bonn, Germany. Although not a full conference of parties (COP) it nevertheless made some significant progress towards COP18 to be held in Doha, Qatar in December this year.

The most notable decisions were to do with agreeing the membership of a number of key bodies. These included the Adaptation Committee, the Green Climate Fund Board and the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action.

Amongst the topics of contention which were debated were the issue of loss and damage and equity.

Loss and damage: This issue had only recently been adopted in the Durban decision at COP17 in December 2011 and the work plan involves a number of regional and technical workshops to be held before COP18 in Doha next December where a further decision will be made. A number of side events and discussions were held in Bonn on this topic towards framing a decision for COP18.

Equity: This issue is linked to a famous principle of the UNFCCC namely "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" which India has been championing for a long time. Even though it did not get incorporated in the COP17 decision in Durban, nevertheless it was very clear at the Bonn meeting that this will have to be addressed in any new treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol. It is clear that different countries have very different notions of what equity means to them. Although no clear consensus emerged in Bonn, nevertheless the fact that there was a healthy debate on the topic is better than treating it as a "taboo" subject.

Finance beyond 2012: At COP15 in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009, the developed countries promised to provide \$30 billion over three years (2010, 2011 and 2012) to developing countries to combat climate change. These funds were termed Fast Start

Finance (FSF). The funds were to be balanced between adaptation and mitigation. They also pledged up to \$100 billion a year starting from 2020 as Long Term Finance (LTF). What was not clear was what would happen between 2013 after the FSF funds were exhausted and 2020 when the LTF would start.

As 2012 comes to an end developing countries pushed the developed countries in Bonn to commit to ramping up finance between 2013 and 2020. However, developed countries did not give an unequivocal response.

Post Kyoto treaty and Durban platform: The most contentious issue in Bonn was a four day fight on an agenda item. Although the issue seemed trivial, it was actually extremely sensitive and substantial. China was made to look the villain by holding up agreement on the agenda on the Durban platform that had been agreed in Durban last December.

However, what some painted as a procedural fight was actually to do with China's view that before 2020 only the rich Annex 1 countries were supposed to take mitigation targets under the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and that the other countries, including China, would then take on mitigation actions after 2020 as part of the new post-Kyoto Treaty. So what seemed to be a trivial agenda issue turned out to be a major issue between Annex 1 and developing countries. **Bangladesh's role:** Bangladesh continued to play a strong role both in its own capacity as well as in support of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group. Bangladesh won a seat on the Board of the Green Climate Fund, which is the body that will oversee the LTF and is an important position.

The Bangladesh government also showed its maturity in supporting Nepal to become the next chair of the LDC Group after COP18, as it was Asia's turn to chair the group and Bangladesh could have contested Nepal. However, since Bangladesh has previously chaired the group it was a sign of its maturity to support Nepal to be the next chair instead of contesting the chair's position.

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