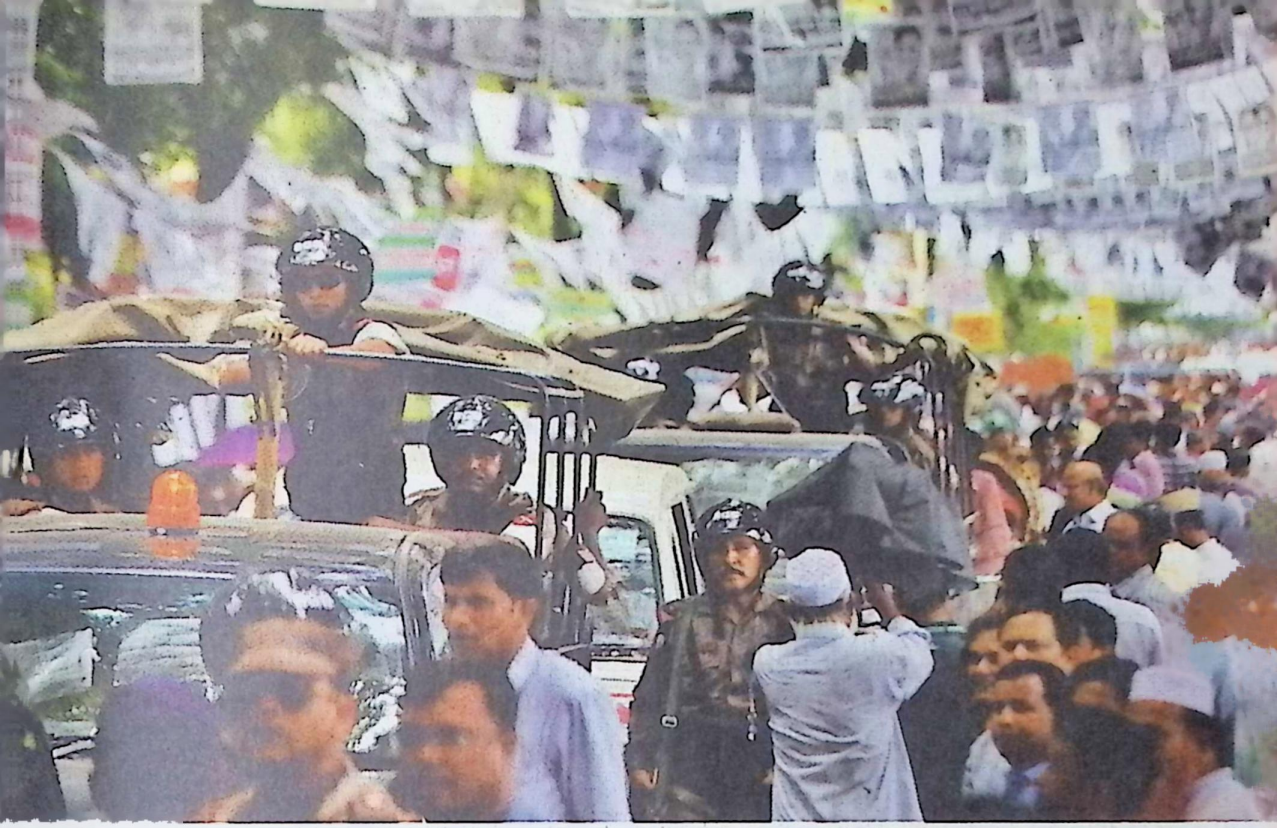


PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

could have given the party a chance to bag the fruit of the Shahbag movement. It is indeed sad that Shahbag has become a skeleton of its previous self and a Prothom Alo survey says that despite the front-page treatment it has received during its helicon days, it has not been able to take its message to the ordinary masses. No chance there.

So, an early election is not a possibility. The war crimes trial verdict and its execution might not save the day for other bigger issues have now overshadowed it. The government should invite the main opposition to a dialogue to settle the issue of the caretaker government. Meanwhile it must take some face saving measures to regain the level of popularity it had enjoyed only four and a half years ago. The AL leadership might not like him, but Professor Muhammad Yunus is hugely popular among ordinary Bangladeshis, especially the Grameen's borrowers, which amount to 900,000 poor Bangladeshi women. Splitting their bank will not surely go down well with them. As the first step to restore sanity, the government can sit with Yunus to find a way to resolve the Grameen crisis.

Then there is the albatross round the AL's neck--the Padma Bridge. For the party, what could have been a jewel in the crown has turned into a thorn in the flesh. The AL leadership's denial of corruption and comparing it with Bangabandhu's uncompromising stance against imperialism (Sheikh Hasina's budget speech) will not help any of the parties involved. There's only one person's alleged involvement in the scam that has prompted the World Bank (WB) to show its back to the bridge's finance, and that person and his feelings should not come before national interest. The government should sit with the WB again and do the needful to bring it back to the project.

Besides the collapse of Rana Plaza, alleged abduction of labour leader Aminul and Bangladesh's labour law has contributed the most to the suspension of the GSP facility that Bangladesh used to enjoy in the US market. Instead of nabbing the culprits or amending the law, the government has pursued a strange policy according to which it blamed everyone but the real culprits for GSP suspension. Now that the EU has told Bangladesh that the latter should not take its GSP for granted, the government should do everything to retain the GSP facility in the European market.

And on top of it all, the AL must immediately sit with the main opposition to find a way to hold an election that will be acceptable to all the parties. Holding a one-sided election with Gen HM Eshad's Jatya Party is not a sane idea; neither is inviting an unconstitutional power, the apprehension of which former President Baddruddoza has expressed the other day.

AL has led Bangladesh towards its glorious independence. Whim and arrogance is unbecoming of the party that has for years fought military dictatorship to uphold people's right to vote. AL leadership's future decisions should reflect its august past. The party, like the country is at a crossroads; it is a time when a single political move can make or break.

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