

The new cabinet

Can it claim to reflect "People's Will?"

A new cabinet has been sworn in. And like so many times in the recent past, we restate our position that the government of Sheikh Hasina resulting from the elections to the 10th Parliament lacks the popular mandate to lay any claim to it being truly representative of the people. Thus the cabinet sworn in yesterday may have some legal cover but suffers from a serious lack of public mandate.

Furthermore, the party that was coerced, cajoled and enticed to participate in the election has not only formed the opposition but is also represented in the cabinet. Other than war-time cabinet in some special cases, it is probably the first time in the world that an opposition party is also in the cabinet. We also notice that although many of the corrupt and inefficient persons in the erstwhile cabinet have lost their place there are some of those in the cabinet with questionable credentials.

However, even if we are to accept the contentious argument of constitutional obligations that compelled holding of the election, that obligation, from the perspective of Sheikh Hasina, has been fulfilled, and therefore, the current dispensation, bereft of "People's Will" behind them, should be changed as quickly as possible. Thus the primary task of the government is to immediately pave the way for a government that would be come through an election reflecting the "Will" of the people and not one that has come to power through a parliament in which majority MPs were elected "unopposed". And the sooner that process is commenced and concluded the better it will be for democracy in the country

The death of a man of values

Habibur Rahman was our voice of conscience

THE death of Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman leaves a void in national life. And we mean it not as a clich  but as a statement which comes straight from the heart. And we do so because Rahman was, in these perilous times the nation happens to be passing through, a powerful voice of conscience for all of us.

In his long legal career, capped by his taking charge as chief justice of Bangladesh, Habibur Rahman did what men and women of his profession are expected to do, which is to uphold the law and the idea of justice as a surefire way of ensuring the dignity of all citizens. As chief advisor of the caretaker government in 1996, he convinced people across the spectrum that not only were fair, decent elections possible but also that the march of democracy in Bangladesh could not be stopped through unconstitutional means any more.

In a larger sense, though, Justice Habibur Rahman was an embodiment of all the good that could come of being an individual with a sense of purpose. Life, he made it a point to remind himself and others around him, had to have an objective that would redound to the good of society. And implicit in his belief was his faith in the ability of religion to direct individuals to goals far above the mundane realities of life.

It is such a larger than life man who now passes into memory. We pray for the salvation of his soul.

Power and energy: Easier said than done!

S.A. MANSOOR

BDANGLADESH is an energy starved country. We are restrained by financial and technical ability to opt for expensive energy exploration drive. So we need to depend upon effective use of our existing resources and capability to meet our ever-growing energy demand.

We have opted for a nuclear power plant. This is a dangerous decision. Russia makes and operates the most dangerous and 'radiation-wise' unsafe nuclear power plants in the world. For national safety, we must abandon this potentially dangerous project. Why can we not go for absolutely radiation safe U238 (not, repeat not U236) nuclear power plant? They can be bought from European sources, or South Africa and even China, which makes and operates the largest U238 nuclear power plant in the world.

The handling of the 'spent fuel rod' from the proposed Roopur nuclear power plant will be extremely dangerous because of radiation leakage. Russia will not take it back. Disposal is a major and most critically dangerous part of the operational process.

Till our coal mines are established, and ample coal is available, our best option is to go for liquid fuel (furnace oil) fired power plants, which will give us 'value for money' overall return. Handling wise, coal ash is a big logistic problem. Coal firing generates ash, as well as atmospheric pollution. Large capital investment is needed for ash transport and elimination of smoke and fly ash! This could be as high as fifty percent of the total investment for the power plant, and most of this handling and pollution treatment equipment needs to be imported.

Our gas resources are finite, and using gas for power generation will be a big problem for us a decade hence.

We must give alternative sources of energy top-most priority. Today, we use mostly use photo-electric voltaic based power supply that depends on sunlight, which is scarce for half the year with over-cast skies and rains! However, we have not explored this avenue seriously.

There is also tremendous prospect for generating methane, a gas that can be the fuel for power generation. For this, we only need 'sold human waste,' which in almost all urban areas goes to waste. It is an endless potential natural resource for producing methane gas. Thailand has made successful use of this potential. We should follow the example.

The writer is an engineer.

Remembering Mr. Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman

MAHFUZUR RAHMAN

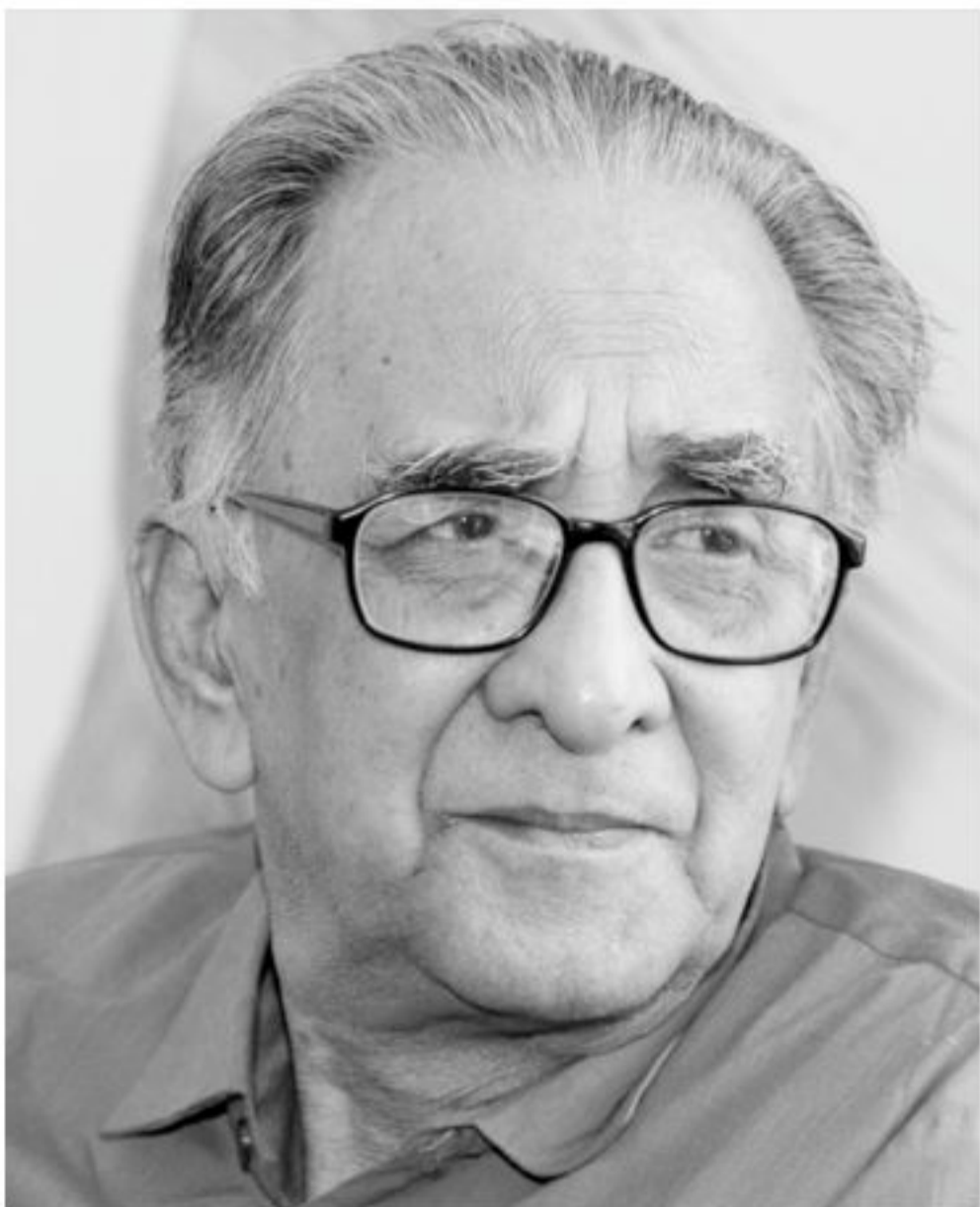
HE was always Shelley Bhai to me: Shelley Bhai while he was Chief Justice of Bangladesh, Shelley Bhai while he was head of caretaker government, just as he was Shelley Bhai when we were students. His passing has robbed me of a true friend. And yes, to him that was what I had always been -- a friend despite a very large difference in our stature. He never cared about stature.

It was year 1950. I met Shelley Bhai on the veranda of my khalujan's house in Bakhshibazar where old Dacca and new Dacca meet. He was there with his father, a close friend of my khalujan, Maulana Sheikh Abdur Rahim. A brilliant student, he had earned his B.A. in history with a first place in first class, and was to enroll in the first part of a two-year Master's course in history at Dacca University. He stayed with us for a few days till he found a 'seat' in Salimullah Muslim Hall.

Those were heady days. I was only a few years younger than him and a student in Dacca College. I was greatly taken by his radical ideas for an exploitation-free society. We argued over just about anything. An argument over romantic poets turned hot. To me Wordsworth was a greater poet than Shelley. It was the other way round, he insisted. His idealism soared with Shelley's skylark. The argument stopped abruptly, with Shelley Bhai staring at an inchoate boy.

Soon came February 1952. Shelly Bhai was a leading light of the language movement. By that time he was Shelley Bhai to a lot of students of the University. On February 21, after the lathi-charge on the students gathered in the Arts Faculty campus, I watched him as he climbed the grilled gate of the Faculty building, exhorting students trying to go out in defiance of police ban on processions. Soon he was arrested and hauled away, along with the other members of the first group of students to go to jail.

From the late 1950s I lost touch with him. He went on to Oxford and Lincoln's Inn, came home, taught at universities, joined the bar, and became a judge. And he read. He was one of the most erudite persons I ever met. And he began to write, the volume of writing growing steadily. Koransutra, his Bengali translation of the Koran, has run into many editions. His Bengali thesaurus, Jathashabda, has been widely acclaimed. Satyajit Ray was among the admirers. The pace of output of his book seemed to increase as he grew old. At the end he had written well over fifty books, on a huge array of subjects.



Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman

The love of the Bangla language that he imbibed early in life, especially during the language movement, remained with him all his life. A great deal of his writing centred around Rabindranath. Few matched his knowledge of Rabindra literature. He always believed that the medium of instruction in national education should basically be Bangla. He called for use of Bangla in all walks of life.

His love of the mother tongue went beyond loving Bangla. He saluted all mother tongues of the world. That is how he came to write his Twenty-first February Speaks for All Languages, his 2011 publication, on which he spent an enormous amount of time.

We renewed personal contact in the mid-1990s. He had come to New York on a short visit. Except for that first visit he always stayed with us while in New York or in the neighbourhood. Every time, we would walk the streets of New York, go to the museums and theatres, and have donuts and coffee, his favourite. He loved my wife's cooking. He loved my collection of books. He loved the plants in our apartment. "You have turned your apartment into Bangladesh, Mahfuz," he said as he admired my plants of Bengal. He had great affection for my wife whom he treated as his younger sister.

We remained close to each other. Over the last one decade I have telephoned him from New York almost every month, sometimes oftener, and we had long conversations. We invariably met whenever we were in Dhaka for a visit. We would visit him at his home in Gulshan. He would always find time for us. He would greet us in his lungi and punjabi. He never looked like a chief justice or head of a government. He was just Shelley Bhai to us.

The last time I spoke to him on the phone from New York was on New Year's Day, 2014. We spoke long. He told me was sending, in the next hour, two articles to two different newspapers for publication. He was fine, he said. A month or so earlier we also had a chat. The usual inquiry about his health was followed by the usual "I am fine." The conversation drifted. And then suddenly he mentioned death. I do not know why, he also said he had come to believe that death was painless. I hope he was right.

Always a plain speaker, he surprised me once. "There two people I have the most affection for: you and Anis" (Prof. Anisuzzaman), he said to me.

Thank you Shelley Bhai. Thank you Mr. Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman.

The writer is a former United Nations economist.

RUBANA HUQ

WE were supposed to be doubling our exports by 2030. We were supposed to be hitting new highs without any hiccups. We were supposed to be the sector that would employ more people than we ourselves ever thought we could. Instead, at least 500 active factories have closed down; 1,000 factories of average level have shut shop and most of us are looking at our quantity projections from our customers trying to reconcile with lesser orders in 2014. Yes, the order projections have dropped almost to the tune of 25%. And we are all deluding ourselves saying that our customers are still not back from holidays and positive projections would follow in no time. No, they won't. Exports to EU will take a serious hit this season. And instead of reporting routine raise in export volume, we will be facing a disaster together with our work force in 2014.

Western economy is supposed to bounce back this year. Corporate America is all poised to recover with a predicted 3% growth with Japan following with a 2%. Developing countries are all set to grow but apparently the performance gap between the developed and the developing countries will narrow with Turkey's current account deficit, India's limping infrastructure and China's shadow banking surging by the day. And where will the garment manufacturing be in 2014?

The retail giant Macy's is cutting 2,500 jobs this year; French La Redoute is cutting another 1,350; M&S has reported decline in general merchandise sales during third quarter of 2013. Yet, South Korea, Turkey, Vietnam, Indonesia and India recorded increased production by December of 2013. South Korea received better orders from the US, China continued to grow but with a fractional decrease in prices, while Vietnam's activity increased at so far the fastest pace of 24%, while Taiwan reported the sharpest expansion in manufacturing with increased orders from China, the US and Japan. And let's not forget India where export growth was recorded for yet another time in the last quarter of 2013 with Turkey reported increase in new export orders with the Purchasing Manager's Index weighing at a 55.

Let's look at two other lands, which could have soared in 2013/2014 and won't: Cambodia and Bangladesh. A few days back, the government of Cambodia conducted a crack-down on the striking garment workers and the police and the military were seen brandishing metal pipes, knives, AK47 rifles, slingshots and batons. Four died and twenty-three were arrested. Now where did the workers go wrong? The workers had demanded for the minimum wage to be raised to \$160 over the next five years in place of the current \$80, with gradual increases set to \$95 in 2014, \$110 in 2015, \$126 in 2016, \$143 in 2017 and \$160 in 2018. I was at the Freedom Park in Phnom Penh last week looking at an apparently calm landscape a day after the protest had taken place. However, the protests had begun in Veng Sreng Boulevard and had peaked in the Park in two days.

Strangely, the country was also celebrating the 35th Victory Day on January 7, 2013, which focused around the freedom from Khmer Rouge and the Pol Pot regime. While the Cambodian People's Party erected billboards all over Phnom Penh and beyond, while official warnings were issued to the protesters and the opposition, I stood there on their ground and looked the big Asian irony of anarchy at the cost of economy. 435 garments factories out of 475 had closed down because of the unrest and workers were all leaving their workplace with heavy hearts.

Now, do we see similarities between Bangladesh and Cambodia? Yes, we do. Bangladesh today stands crippled by political obstinacy and economic insensitivities. The 22

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Govt. should now initiate dialogue

The massive victory of Awami League backed candidates in the January 5 elections did not surprise anyone, because they were the only major political party participating in the polls, while Jatiya Party was forced to participate. Now that they have gained victory, their responsibility is to initiate dialogues as soon as the new government is formed. Too much time and money have already been wasted on the 10th parliamentary elections, but the sufferings of the common people have not eased a bit. This stalemate cannot go on forever. All the 160 million people want is the right to perform their individual duties (business, education, job, etc.) peacefully, without the fear of being burned with petrol bombs every now and then.

Tauhidul Islam
A Level candidate
Uttara, Dhaka

Find new ways of protest

Our country is going through a crisis. Although the politicians bury their heads in the sand, the common people are awake. There is no denying the fact that the recently held election earned bad reputation inside and outside the country. If the opposition party understands the situation, they should withdraw strikes and blockades to utilize the situation in their favour. They can also express their resentment and protests through the media. The opposition should find alternative ways to put forward their demands.

Abdullah-al Mujahid
Lecturer of English
Qadirabad Cantonment Sapper college, Natore

Fear of violence affected voting

My family and I were ready to cast our votes at Banani. Our spirit was running high as we made it a point to resist war criminals and their allies through ballot. However, at the last moment my mother requested us not to go for fear of violence or attack. I believe mine was not the only case. If you ask people at least in 50% cases you would find the same reason that they did not vote.

Kabir Hossain Taposh
Banani, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "No opposition!" published on January 10, 2014

Molla A. Latif

Is it not better to build the country together, instead of destroying it like the BNP-style opposition? The country may see a progressive trend in political, economic and social fronts which BNP always tried to keep backward. An opposition which does not discharge its constructive duties but pursues destruction, should not get sympathy.

Nizam Selim

Democracy has become a joke, the parliament a circus and MPs a bunch of gangsters under a fascist alliance to plunder and pillage national wealth. All the rogues and goons have flocked together to make a mockery of the public adding salt to the injury by insulting their intelligence. Alibaba and the 40 thieves are now poised to protect, promote and patronise unbridled corruption. "Public be damned" is the choir-chorus of this 10th parliamentary elections. Bangladesh is doomed, as it was under the fascism of BAKSAL. It is history revisited in 2014, and we can only wait and see how the final script is written.

Snr Citizen

How could the CEC and his team digest all that was served? And during the last five years those who have amassed so much (amounting to billions of \$) and whose stories hit the headlines, can easily contribute 50% for Padma bridge construction fund. This way they can get big tax exemptions.

Ash C.

The CEC Kazi Rakibuddin has proved amply what he is widely known for—a weak spineless corrupt official. Well, someday, sooner than later, he and his team of crooks will have to answer for their misdeeds! Nothing lasts forever!

Gopal Chandra Bairagi

Don't you think JP could be the opposition? Don't try to undermine JP. BNP did not attend parliament sessions in the 9th parliament. Thus we feel happy not to see the BNP in the 10th parliament.

Sharukh Khan

BNP has awarded the Awami League this 'golden' chance to propel the country in a motorised boat, not in the low-tech country boat. Shadow of BNP's historic blunder will loom large in the national scene for many months if not years to come.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.