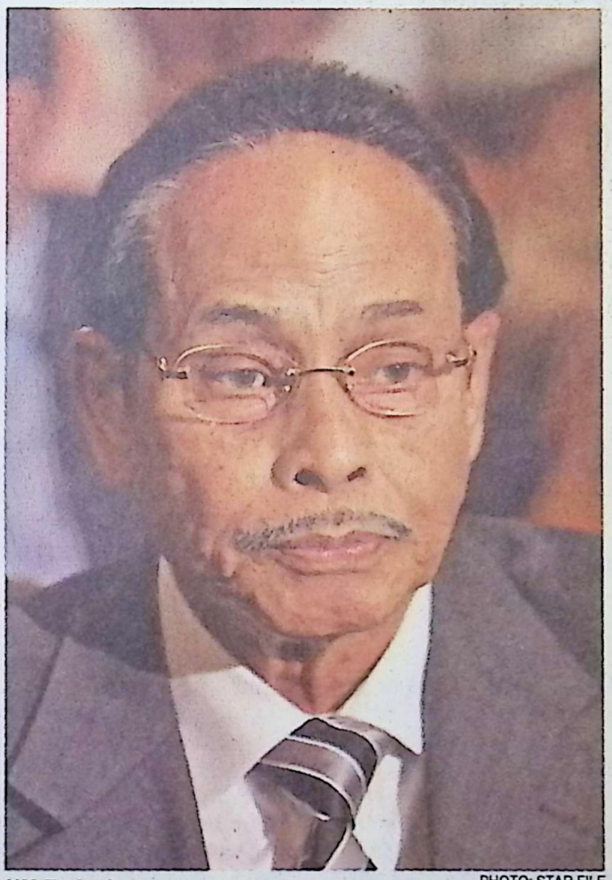
happen finally. Ershad's desperate bid to quit the electoral race turned into a futile exercise. Ershad himself was made unable to withdraw candidacies from two of the three constituencies where he had filed nominations to contest the polls. After making the announcement to quit the polls, he kept speaking against the January 5 election to the media. Thus he was made 'ill' and kept confined to the CMH hospital in the capital until the election was over and the new government was formed.

He was elected MP against his will. For this he did not need to seek votes. He was made winner from one of the two parliamentary constituencies. From his hospital bed, Ershad had witnessed the drama unfold in his own party. A group of his party leaders under leadership of his wife Raushan Ershad, tied the knot with the government in the run up to the election. They got their reward. Thirty two of his party leaders were elected MPs in the voter less election. Of them 20 were elected unopposed. It was learnt that Ershad had tried to negotiate with the government and wanted to sit in the opposition bench. He urged the AL high command not to induct any of his party MPs in the cabinet. But Ershad did not have control over his party.



HM Ershad

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Before Ershad's move, some of his party leaders led by Raushan had opened negotiations with the government for ministerial berths in the new cabinet. They had demanded that Sheikh Hasina induct seven JP MPs in her cabinet. Sheikh Hasina however, made three of them ministers in her 49 member- council of ministers. This time around, JP is not as important to Sheikh Hasina as in other occasions. JP's demand was high when the AL high command was writing the script before the January 5 election, keeping in the mind that the BNP-led opposition alliance would not join the election. Sheikh Hasina had inducted five JP leaders in her election time 29 member-cabinet and appointed another as her adviser with minister status. And another JP leader who was inducted in her cabinet in January 2009 had been kept in the election time cabinet.

According to the present script, the JP will also have to play the opposition role in the new parliament. Raushan was recognised by the Speaker as the opposition leader of the new parliament with status of a minister. Some JP MPs will work for the treasury bench while the rest will oppose the government. Such a situation has never before existed in the contemporary world history of parliamentary democracy. The drama will be staged in the parliament when it will go into session. Some ruling AL leaders including Suranjit Sengupta, Obaidul Quader have openly criticised the JP's dual role. Some parliamentary affairs experts termed the JP's dual role indecent against the norms of parliamentary democracy. A senior AL leader made a witty comment to describe the unique opposition– "this is a mango bar made of jackfruit'.

There are two more minor parties in the mango bar that were not invited by the prime minister to join the cabinet. These two parties–Tarikat Federation and BNF–each has one MP. And interestingly, the BNF chief was elected MP in a parliamentary constituency in the capital after Ershad withdrew his candidacy from there. And the Tarikat Federation chief won a seat with AL support, using the AL electoral symbol 'boat'.

How well will the opposition bench, which consists of AL's favourites, be able to perform its due role in the House to hold the government accountable for its actions? How will it be able to ensure a balance of power between the government and the legislature? Or at the end of the day will the opposition bench prove that it was literally 'a mango bar made of jackfruit'?

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.