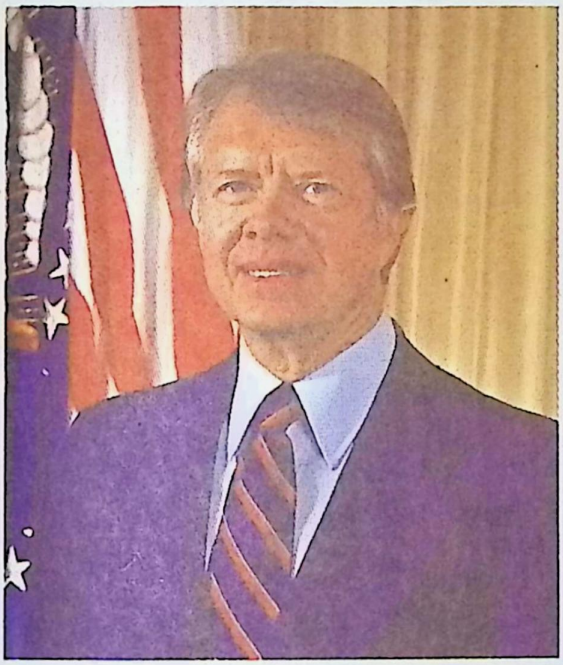


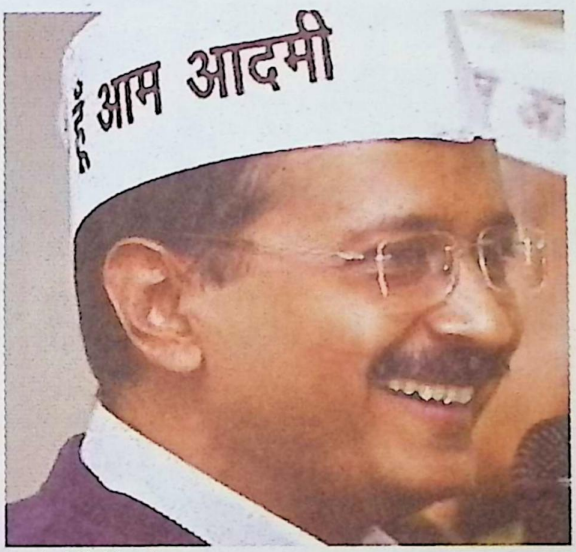
Jimmy Carter

In the days following his seizure of power in a coup d'etat in Bangladesh, General H M Ershad made a public show of bicycling all the way to his workplace. Everyone knew it was a stunt, that it could not become the norm.

changes in the pattern of global weather? Nasheed did not repeat the performance. And then he was pushed out of the presidency.

There was the inimitable Muammar Gaddafi, whose desire to be seen as a common citizen like everyone else often appeared to be something of the fetishistic kind. At home and abroad, he made sure that a huge tent accompanied him everywhere since he had little wish to inhabit a mansion. Such behaviour was just plain absurdity, for that tent was no ordinary tent. It was almost like a palace, was fully air-conditioned and filled with furniture of the most opulent sort. It was in such grand ambience that Gaddafi's visitors sought, and often got, an audience with him. His personal security comprised Amazonian women and not a male was seen there. That too was a stunt. What was the Libyan leader trying to prove? That he was empowering women? That he could not live without the company of women?

One of the more prominent of stuntmen in our times was Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He always played the victim in politics, with the rest of the world knowing hardly anything about his careful organization of how things dramatic could be manipulated in his favour. In Sanghar, a small town in Sind, some people began to shoot at Bhutto's electoral campaign motorcade in summer 1970. The bullets went flying everywhere except at Bhutto. He jumped theatrically from his vehicle, tore off the buttons of his shirt and dared his would-be assassins to pump their bullets into his chest. No one responded, for it had all been carefully planned by Bhutto. In December 1971, he walked out of the UN Security Council, tearing to pieces what he said was a copy of a resolution adopted by the council a little earlier. It later transpired that it was only a few blank pages rather than the resolution he was pouring his anger into.



Arvind Kejriwal

In the days following his seizure of power in a coup d'etat in Bangladesh, General H M Ershad made a public show of bicycling all the way to his workplace. Everyone knew it was a stunt, that it could not become the norm. And that is precisely how things turned out. Again, his Friday visits to mosques and telling the faithful of his dreams the previous night about his offering of prayers in that mosque fooled no one. As one imam put it, for a whole week before that 'dream prayer', intelligence men scoured the mosque Ershad would visit, making sure the place was safe. That was another stunt.

Populism is one thing. Stunts are quite another. In his bid to endear himself to Russians, Boris Yeltsin behaved rudely with Mikhail Gorbachev, who was still president of a country called the Soviet Union. When his time came to be Russia's leader, Yeltsin turned out to be an embarrassment. Frequently drunk and always boorish, he is hardly remembered today.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.