

The Interim Government and Peoples' Perceptions

Md. Anwarul Kabir

The present interim government though backed by the army has been widely acclaimed by the common people since its sudden and surprise assumption of power in January this year. This is really an unprecedented event as this is for the first time through out the history of Bangladesh that the people of all walks of life (except a few conspirators involved in the nasty politics) have welcomed an unelected and apparently 'extra-constitutional' authoritarian government. Yes! People in general have appreciated the role of the armed forces for working as the major reagent in establishing this government. But as the people have wanted to see a qualitative change in the Caretaker Government, the armed forces could dare to do so in line of the peoples' aspiration.

Perhaps, to the incumbent government headed by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed it is clear that not the armed forces rather the common peoples' aspiration is the vital force for its venture. So, perceptions of the common people towards the government should be taken into account seriously.

Right now, how the common people think about different activities so far have been initiated by the present government? To grab the real time picture of the attitude of the common people towards the government, I think, analyses of the informal conversations in public place is the best way. Fortunately most of the people in this country are politically conscious and do not hesitate to take part in open discussions whenever they get chance.

As a frequent commuter in public bus from Mogbazar to Banani, I frequently have a chance to overhear such public discussions centring politics, corruption, education, sports and what not! Most of the discussants are stranger to each other and they are from different social strata starting from lower class to higher middle class in financial terms with different professional backgrounds and age groups. I suppose these people are the representatives of the major flow of the society and we must value their perceptions if we want to establish true democracy and eager to see a qualitative change of the country,

On February 4, I witnessed an interesting discussion in the bus on my way to the workplace. The discussion had been initiated by a young man in his 30s. Pointing at something through the window and addressing his co-sitter, a mid aged person, the young man exclaimed with joy, "Look! This government is doing good job indeed!" Following them I peeped through the window of the bus and found that a huge gathering around a building near Cholera Hospital at Mohakhali. Instantly I discovered that a three storied building was being crushed by a bulldozer under the supervision of the joint forces.

“Yes, this is really a good job. But I don’t support the evacuation of slums without arranging any rehabilitation for the dwellers” the conductor of the bus continued to state, “Sir, I along with my family used to live in a slum in Mirpur and all of a sudden on the last Thursday they evicted our slum. Now we are passing through a very hard time. Sir, all the governments are against the poor. Think about the drive against street hawkers. These poor people were doing something for their livelihood. Now what will they do?”

The Youngman who started the discussion interrupted, “Brother, I am sorry for you. Yes, I do admit without rehabilitation of the people, slums should not have been evicted. Before starting the drive against hawkers the government should think about their source of income. However, the government is thinking on these issues. Already they have arranged holiday markets for the hawkers. They are also thinking about slum dwellers. I am optimistic—this government would change Bangladesh a lot.”

Bus was running slowly due to heavy traffic jam. A gentleman sitting next to me joined the discussion. He said, “Law adviser, Barrister Mainul Hosein informed that the procedure of catching up of big fishes will start soon. This is a good start. Let the corrupt leaders be arrested and brought under trial. These leaders by default assume that Bangladesh is their parental property. This attitude of the political leaders must be changed. I wish this government will uproot the pervasive corruption of the country”.

“Will Tarik Zia be caught? Howaa Bhaban crossed all the limit of corruption”, said a teenager, probably a college student.

A gentleman in his late 60s, sitting backside of the bus was observing the discussion. Now he opened his mouth, “Sons, I am not as optimistic as you. I still remember the period when Ayub Khan took the power. After assuming power Ayub Khan started to do many good works. He also started drive against black-marketers, smugglers and corrupt people. He arrested many corrupt political leaders and well know businessmen of the country. But afterwards he freed all for the sake of his basic democracy. Think about Ershad. When he came in power he also initiated *jehad* against corruption. He arrested leader like Moudud but afterward this Moudud became the right hand of Ershad. So, I don’t know what the ultimate goal of this government is. But still I appreciate the army as they have saved the country.”

By this time the bus reached Kakoli of Banani and I got off from the bus.

A vivid picture of the perceptions of the common people towards the present government can easily be snapped by analysing the above discussion. From there discussion it is evident that mass people in general have welcomed this government, and have appreciated some of its initiatives. But the drive against slums or hawkers without rehabilitation has irritated many of them. In the above discussion election has not got any priority right now. Instead of election, the people want a qualitative change of the country. Eradication of corruption is the prime demand of the time. If the government can

ensure the proper punishment of the powerful corrupt leaders then the common people will be happy.

Most of the people have positive notion towards the government. However, this may be noted that, peoples' perceptions are not static. Rather, they are dynamic. Peoples' performance is time dependent and especially performance of the government influences much in shaping the peoples' performance. However, people are now more conscious and are observe the activities of the government closely. In the recent past, the government by using its different tools of propaganda succeeded to create positive images. But due to the present setup of ICT as well as media concerns the situation has been changed dramatically. Hiding information is now almost impossible. Even Goabbles would fail to establish a lie as a truth. Due to booming of ICT success rate of conspirators have been minimised. So, the positive attitude of the people towards the government will persist only if the government stay in right track in accordance with the aspiration of the common people. Hope, one day, like our Nobel Laureate Dr. Yunus, this government will loudly utter, "Yes. We can also do. Look, we have presented the country a true democracy in a corruption free environment"