

Why Military backed Caretaker Government feeling shaky?

- Ajoy Roy

Government declares war against an Individual !

All powerful military backed caretaker government of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, it seems, all on a sudden is getting nervous about AL chief Sheikh Hasina's return to Bangladesh. It was no secret that the AL chief went to USA a month ago on a private visit. It was also known that she would return to Dhaka after a month. At the time of her exit to USA on legal visa, neither the government nor Sheikh Hasina or her party any time let us know that she was forcibly driven out of the country. Nor the government of Fakhruddin Ahmed felt sigh of relief on Hasina's leaving the country on 5th March 2007. But to be honest the time was full of rumor that the CTG was trying hard to get rid of Begum Khaleda and Sheikh Hasina from Bangladesh politics to the pave the way introducing reforms of clean politics. Many considered Sheikh Hasina's trip to USA a positive step towards that goal, although AL made it clear that its chief was scheduled to return Dhaka within a month or so. Begum Khaleda, it was rumored, would soon follow suit, but in reality it did not materialize.

Even Sheikh Hasina's arch enemies either in the government or outside could not bring any charges against her personally, or AL of any activities that have had embarrassed the government. I would rather say that she acted like an obedient law abiding citizen rather than the chief of a popular political party. She even praised the government for taking stern actions against the corrupted politicians. She did neither go out of the way in supporting the top leaders of her own party arrested on charge of corruptions. She and her party also hailed the reconstitution of the election commission and steps being taken for introduction of transparent ballot boxes, making of voter ID cards, promised fresh fault free neutral and authentic voters list. Even when the government banned political activities in any form she did not protest even in mild languages. In a nutshell she whole heartedly cooperated with the government as could be expected from a mature political leader. Only thing she demanded from the government of Fakhruddin Ahmed a fair deal and treatment of her party and should not have been equated with the corrupt BNP, which governed us through corruption, inefficiency and favouritism. What she demanded not to compare BNP, a party in power for the last 5 years with a party in opposition i.e. AL. What she demanded to and asked from the caretaker government a firm date of holding a free, fair and meaningful election, acceptable to all including international community. I think there is nothing wrong in it.

It seemed everything were fine with the CTG of BD, the country is being governed as planned- the Chief of the CTG assured the nation that a general election would be held by 2008, every day top names including Tareq Rahman, Barrister Maudud Ahmed and Arafat, younger son of Begum Ziaur Rahman, associated with corruption are being hauled or arrested by the law enforcing agencies.

Then on all a sudden something went wrong within the government. Firstly, obviously at the instance of the government charge of extortion of huge money (by an individual on 9th April 2007) and a murder charge against AL chief was brought in on 11th April 2007 in connection of the incident of 28th April last year at Paltan. Even the Law adviser, ever smiling and all knowing Barrister Mainul Hosain remarked that such charges could not be brought against the AL chief and erstwhile leader of the opposition. The powerful adviser general Matin commented that 'We have referred the matter to 'Commission for Anticorruption (DUDAK)' to investigate. We will see that honour of such a personality is maintained.'

Secondly, when it became known that Hasina would return Dhaka on 14th April 2007 to face the charges, government seemed to get nervous, although openly there were no sign of reaction. General Matin once again commented that government would see that her honor and dignity were respected indirectly referring to the charges being investigated in anticorruption commission. It was also rumored that a government message was sent to Hasina requesting her to delay her return in view of the conditions obtaining in the country. Apparently the AL chief respected the government desire and rescheduled her plan to return to Dhaka on 23rd April 2007. Both Barrister Hosain and General Matin, two vocal members of the caretaker government once again commented that there would be no problem if she returns. Thirdly all on a sudden within twenty-four hours both advisers disclosed that a press note 'is being issued on Sheikh Hasina's proposed return to Dhaka on 23rd April 2007'. A stern attitude was reflected on the face of Barrister Moinul Hosain, and grim faced Matin refused to comment beyond what was in the press note (18th April 2007). Adviser Moinul Hosain categorically said that a request has been made to her not to return now because the government does not want to put her in embarrassing situation, particularly in view of some cases and recent comments made in USA. The press note is preemptive and temporary action so that she does not return. But in case she arrives at Dhaka, the Government would then take action, the adviser indicated firmly. When pointed out that their earlier stand that government has no pressure on Begum Khaleda's leaving the country nor on Sheikh Hasina's return contradicts the Government Press note pressurizing Sheikh Hasina not to return, Barrister Hosain offered only a smiling face to the journalists.

In the meanwhile Sheikh Hasina arrived London on way to Dhaka yesterday (19th April 2007) in the afternoon where she declared that she was firm to return to Dhaka on 23rd April by British airways. It was however learnt that British Airways might refuse to carry her to Dhaka although she has valid ticket. In view of the government press note banning Sheikh Hasina to land Dhaka airport. In case of such an event i.e. British Airways refusing AL chief to issue boarding pass to Dhaka Sheikh Hasina said that she would gave no other alternative but to return USA.

What were in the press note?

The press note has three parts: (1) It held Sheikh Hasina responsible chaos confusion lawlessness, anarchism and economic disruption in the country because of uninterrupted

hartal, aborodh (encirclement), processions, meetings etc called by AL and its 14 party alliance in recent past. And because of these the emergency had to be imposed.

This is the first time Government blamed directly Sheikh Hasina for imposition of emergency on by the President. But hundred-dollar question is does government realize what is the consequence of such acquisitions against Sheikh Hasina and her alliance? Has the government forgotten that its very existence was the outcome of the movement launched by AL and its alliance? Has the government willfully forgotten that whatever good works government did were the demands of the movement?

(2) The press note further alleged that Sheikh Hasina while in abroad made speeches and comments criticizing the caretaker government and the law and order agencies. The same good old acquisitions used to be made by the government in power. I expected the government of Fakhruddin Ahmed would be above such petty narrowness and prove itself an exception. Even the allegations were true, which I doubt very much, how does these speeches weaken the all-powerful government.

(3) The press note then apprehending that Sheikh Hasina would land Dhaka airport defying the government ban prescribed some precautionary measures. The government wishes that (i) no airlines would agree to take Hasina to Dhaka obliging the BD government's press note, (ii) the immigration authority will bar her entering the country even if she landed at Zia International airport, (iii) Police would take appropriate action including arresting her on the already framed charges of corruption and murder at the airport.

Can Government issue such a press note?

In my long life I have never seen such an ill conceived and ill composed press note. Firstly, it was directed against an Individual's right to re-enter one's own country with valid documents of travel, whatever the status of such an individual. Does government realize to what extent it has brought down its prestige by issuing instructions to airlines to do the needful barring Sheikh Hasina's entry to Bangladesh, which means that airlines must not issue tickets or even if they have issued ticket, they would not allow the AL chief to board the carrier at the request of the government. Now can a government with minimum sense of honor and dignity could make such illegal request not allowing a passenger to board the plane even if the passenger have valid tickets and travel documents. Are the carriers legally bound to respect government's such silly request?

Latest news from London indicates that Sheikh Hasina has accepted the challenge thrown by the government trying to bar her entry. She is scheduled to fly back home on 23rd April 2007. In the mean while She has met with members of British parliament, and obviously the subject of discussion was her return to Bangladesh. It is now interesting to see:

- (1) How Sheikh Hasina deals the most sensitive issue of her political career?
- (2) How the British Airways react and deal the matter?
- (3) How Government accepts the challenge of Sheikh Hasina and deals with her once she set foot on Bangladesh soil after one months USA trip.

On behalf of the Government General Matin accepted the challenge of the AL chief when he commented today that Government would take appropriate action if Sheikh Hasina lands at Dhaka airport ignoring the wish of the press note.

We keep our fingers crossed and only say that the entire drama is a creation of the government, and is unnecessarily overplayed!

But