

FROM THE EDITOR

The highly thought-provoking, prudent and very much pragmatic observation made by M shafiullah, a former Ambassador of Bangladesh to Libya and Tunisia, on the very present issue of democratic movement in the Middle East that concerns us with multifaceted consequence, predominantly of economic interest, suggesting appropriate and effective measures that we may undertake in time to withstand and encounter the untoward circumstances involved, deserves our urgent and meaningful consideration. He writes:

Ziine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt were pushed out by people's power. Gaddafi is spilling blood of the Libyans to rule for life.

Decades of authoritarian rule made the people so desperate that they thought nothing more to lose but to come up to the despots on the street. The growth of people's power is the contribution of the authoritarian rule where the people cross threshold of fear psychosis over their tormentor! Bangladesh had undergone similar experience in 1990 when it consigned the decade old military dictator to history. It is, however another story to resurrect the fallen autocrat to meet political ambition of democratic leaders. An example of Realpolitik indeed!

The thirty years hurdle for North African and Middle Eastern [and for Gaddafi 42 years] rulers remind people that political party chiefs here are also crossing the three decade threshold at the helm of affairs of their respective political parties or twenty years either in government or in opposition by turn. No institutional mechanism is in place to pass on the baton to the next leaderships in a democratic and transparent manner. People's power in North Africa and Middle East sends a resounding message that the days of Dynastic rule is soon going to be an object of museum especially in the Republican states. A people's power could even manifest in a democratic system when basic aspirations and concerns are trampled down by insensitivity. Kinsat, Rupganj and Ariel Beel remind what to avoid or what to respect under the democratic system.

Politicians are expected to be more sensitive to the hopes and aspiration of the voters who elected them to parliament. There is hardly any room for debate or a set of pre-conditions exit to participate in the

proceedings of the parliament; once elected, pays, honorarium, and perks are taken home and privileges are jealously guarded. It is an aberration to the sensitivity of the voters to abstain from parliament. Absence of opposition party just turn parliament a tool in the hand of party in power and the growth of Dysfunctional democracy which did not work anywhere. One of the primary causes of the current turmoil in countries in Africa and the Middle East emanate from the fact that the autocratic rulers introduced dysfunctional democracies with an eye to dynastic rule. Their system overthrew them. Neither would it work in Bangladesh. It invites only one-eleven with consequences known to all and sundry.

People's power is not unidirectional instrument against government only, it could be used against opposition party hierarchy who are insensitive to its own elected members who are not allowed to enter parliament to discharge their constitutional responsibility. Perhaps a time will come when the aggrieved MPs may cross the threshold of fear to convene a parliamentary party meeting to challenge party autocracy. They would find people behind them.

Fighting corruption was a common battle cry heard in the Freedom Squares against the fallen ruling families and their cronies or those autocrats like Gaddafi who are still fighting a losing battle. In Bangladesh the previous political government made us quadruple champion in global TI corruption perception index. This was consistently met with denial. It took one-eleven to open the lid of corruption in high places.

Corruption in our society is just like Dhaka traffic jam. You encounter it every day with no respite in sight. You even forfeit your right to pin point who are the most corrupt in public service providing system on pain of court case or other harassment. Latest TIB report is a case in point. This nation should be grateful to the present Chief Justice of Bangladesh who in his grace took cognizance of the TIB Report on judiciary. He also directed to clean the system. It is unfortunate that the stake holders in other sectors of the same report went on hunting the TIB Trustees. The Home Minister became the 'defender of faith', Little knowing that the same people she endeavours to protect would prepare files on her once out of office.

Responsibility of unending and brazen corruption in the official organs ultimately comes on the shoulder of the government. People's power speaks during elections. It was witnessed in 2008 elections that a high profile corrupt government is booted out. Whereas an independent Anti Corruption Commission [ACC] enhances the image of the party in power, helpful to re-election, protect it against corruption charges when out of office and keep the corrupt elements under pressure. Low corruption is a safeguard to democracy.

The other dimension of the movement against autocratic rulers in North Africa and parts of Middle East have a direct bearing on the Bangladesh economy. Out of estimated 70 lac overseas Bangladeshis, 40 lac are employed in the region. Sixty per cent of total 11 billion dollar remittance also flow from this source. Nobody knows for certain how long the current Democratic movement would continue and what are the countries to be affected but one thing is beyond doubt that their economy would be badly hit with consequential fallout on the expatriate Bangladesh community. It may even be necessary to repatriate a large number of them to home at our expenses.

Current crisis exposes the lead Ministry that it has no contingency plan to reach out to the workers. The Ministry is just caught napping as it happened in August 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait. I was instructed to reach Amman from Abu Dhabi in less than twenty four hours notice but 23 days after the invasion to repatriate the stranded Bangladeshis fleeing out of Iraq and Kuwait to Jordan. Eight thousand Bangladesh refugees had already reached Amman before my arrival. The Jordanian Higher Committee for Repatriation headed by the then Crown Prince Hasan , the international and

humanitarian agencies wanted to know how many would come so that makeshift camps arrangement could be made for them. I was caught on the wrong foot. Labour Ministry or the Foreign Office could not give me any reliable figure that I could provide to the Higher Committee. Ambassador M.R.Osmany in Baghdad and Ambassador Shehabuddin in Kuwait made me no wiser. At the end of three months Odyssey in the desert we repatriated by air 65000 souls through marshalling international assistance. It may not be possible today. Number is huge. International sympathy is dwindling.

In 1990 Bangladesh government had no logistics for such an undertaking. But what about now? Expatriate community remit 11 billion dollar. A catastrophic situation for Bangladeshi expatriates is evolving due to the fast moving development in the region. It may manifest in another form in other countries where they work. There is no waiting time but to build capacity to meet exigencies in times of such a crisis.

Establishing a secure communication between the Embassies and the Manpower Ministry should be the first priority followed by strengthening the Missions with Labour Attaches who are capable and professional. Provision should be there for quick transfer of fund from Expatriates' Bank to charter wide bodied plane through Red Cross / IOM. They have the network, efficiency and transparency. Shipping Ministry must have a passenger-cum - cargo ship which could be pressed in to repatriation service on emergency. Countrywide data base of expatriates must be the foundation of this exercise. I suggest the above from my experience of Gulf War repatriation.

Investors pull billions from emerging markets

Investors disillusioned by the implosion of Wall Street titans, economic anemia in Japan, and a debt debacle in Europe have found abundant opportunities to grow wealth in industrializing economies like China and India.

But now, as angry populations roil one Middle Eastern regime after the next, and discontent over escalating food prices and lagging living standards is heard elsewhere in the developing world, investors are moving staggering piles of cash out of emerging markets - and back into what they hope are the relatively stable havens of the US, Europe and Japan.

That represents a major shift in sentiment since the financial crisis in 2008 upended conventional wisdom as to what is risky and what is safe as the US model of freewheeling capitalism teetered on the brink of collapse.

Strenuous efforts by Europe to contain its debts, the ability of Japan's crucial export sector to weather a strengthening yen and strong corporate earnings in the US have played a big part in convincing investors that the outlook is pretty promising for advanced economies in 2011.

According to fund tracker EPFR Global, fund managers and other investors yanked 5.45 billion dollar from emerging markets funds in China, India, Brazil and elsewhere in the second week of February and placed it in equity funds of advanced economies - their biggest weekly inflow in more than 30 months.

Developed market funds recorded their seventh straight week of inflows in mid-February - with European equity fund flows hitting 41-week highs. So far this year, investors have committed 47 billion dollar to US, European, Japanese and global equity funds - 29 billion dollar of it into the US alone.

Meanwhile, investors have pulled out over 20 percent of the 95 billion dollar they parked in emerging markets during 2010 since mid-January, EPFR said. Since the beginning of the year, outflows totaled 1 billion dollar from mainland Chinese equity markets alone.

"Investors are, for the first time since 2007, seeing more opportunity in developed market equities than in emerging markets," said EPFR managing director Brad Durham. "The underperformance of developed markets last year, which has made valuations more appealing, and expectations of a return to faster paced growth in the US, Europe and Japan are the main drivers of this shift."