

The 100- days of the AL-led Government

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The Awami League-led government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will reach its 100-day milestone on 19th April. The 100 days benchmark seems to have been established to evaluate the performance of democratically elected governments across the world. Is the public pleased with the performance of the government so far?

Public differ widely on a million different dimensions, including ideology, and political persuasion as to provide an objective assessment of the performance of the government.

The AL-led government raised high expectations of people as they were elected on a landslide majority. When the expectations of public are so high, naturally many pledges cannot be implemented during the 100 days..

What people expect in the 100 days is the direction to which the country is going and whether the election manifesto under the title of “*Din Badaler Sanad*” (A Charter for Change) of the Awami League is being translated into its programme of actions. The public want to see a break from the past in implementing the pledges made in the party’s manifesto.

Given the above brief background, let us assess the achievements and weaknesses of the 100 days of the administration of the government.

Achievements:

A dramatic change was demonstrated by the Prime Minister in constituting her cabinet, a mixture of experienced and young ministers. It is refreshing to witness women in key ministries of the government such as Home, Foreign Affairs and Agriculture.

The most obvious success appears to be the low price of the rice and edible oil in the market. Some of the seasonal vegetables are reasonably priced, although the price of fish, meat and chicken has gone up. Although the prices fluctuate in accordance with the supply and demand, there is somewhat relief among people.

Some of the major development projects including the construction of Padma Bridge are afoot. The project of deep sea port is revived. All these demonstrate dynamism in the actions of the government.

The holding of cabinet meetings in the Secretariat by the Prime Minister is commendable because almost all the ministries are located in the Secretariat and all Secretaries are not required to go to the Prime Minister’s Office in Tejgaon amidst traffic jam, wasting time and petrol.

It is noted that the process of War Criminals of 1971 Liberation War has commenced in accordance with the resolution of the Parliament adopted on 29th January, 2009. The decision has been acclaimed as the right step to put the victims’ mind into rest.

Although there are different views on the way the government resolved the BDR crisis, the important point to note is the supremacy of the civilian administration. The Prime Minister's collective decision has underscored the fact that the armed forces stay under the command of the civilian administration and the crisis was resolved by the government on a political level. It has not gone unnoticed in the international community. Further in a national poll by the Daily Star in Dhaka revealed that 70% per cent of interviewers have supported the government's handling of the crisis at BDR.

Weaknesses:

Some of the decisions of the government in the parliament or outside have led again to confrontational politics. Accordingly the normal political climate has been rocked. Destablisation in political environment impedes economic growth, development and above all shakes the confidence of people in good governance.

Within 100 days, too many issues have been raised by the government and some of these are seen to be controversial. There is a perception that during the 100 days, there should have a priority of issues that could have been addressed effectively during this period.

AL-student organisational fronts have not accepted "the Charter of Change" and as before, created unrest in the academic campuses, and the in-fighting between them has tarnished the image of the AL government. It appears that AL central leaders cannot control or discipline them, although the Prime Minister has resigned as the head of the student-front.

There are allegations that bureaucracy and officials of the government including doctors are being reshuffled on politically motivated reasons. There is a perception that past practices are being followed in the transfer of officials and as a result, senior officers are hesitant or shy to take decisions lest they are transferred and as such led to some kind of weariness in operational level of the government.

The energy sector (electricity) has not improved and therefore industrial sector will continue to suffer. Although many people in the urban areas understand that provision of energy cannot be done in a limited period, people in the countryside are disappointed not to see any tangible improvement in supply of electricity as they suffer many hours of disruption of supply of electricity in a day.

Water crisis in particular in metropolitan city of Dhaka has aggravated and the affected poor people are frustrated in not getting adequate supply of safe water for their domestic use. They want their MPs do something concrete to alleviate their suffering, particularly during the hot season.

To sum up:

The performance of the government in the 100 days could be compared to the question of "is the glass half-empty or half-full" according to people of different political persuasions. The common perception is however that the record of government so far is mixed.

“Public sentiment”, as Abraham Lincoln said “is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed”.