

## Parliamentary polls

Contd from page 1

referred to the proposal made by a certain quarter for amending the Constitution and even holding elections under a martial ordinance suiting to their needs. He said "I told them categorically that we will not change the Constitution by applying Martial Law only the people's elected representatives have the right to amend it"

He said our loyalty to democratic principles has inspired us to take this stand.

President Ershad mentioned the reformative measures effected by his Government for improving the socio-economic condition of the country during the last four years, which included decentralisation of administration and judicial system, land reforms, new economic policy for a balanced growth of private and public sectors and said these far-reaching steps have already opened up a new vista for progress on the socio-economic fronts.

## TEXT

The following is the English rendering of address to the nation over radio and Television by President Hussain Mohammad Ershad on Sunday evening reports BSS.

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim  
Dear Countrymen

Assalamu Alaikum,

After another few days, four years will be completed since the responsibility to run the country was vested in us. We had to take up this responsibility at a promulgated due to unavoidable reasons. When we took up the responsibility we had three major goals like some reforms in the socio-economic and administrative fields, economic rehabilitation and transfer to democratic rule within a short time.

I had held out the assurance that we would place Bangladesh as a nation radiant in its own individual before the world.

I have come before you today to tell something about the background of my assurance and also to announce an important decision.

We had assured of reforms the existing administrative system had the long nurtured socio-economic system in vogue in the country. No direct link between the administrative system and the people could grow up, the participation of people in administration does not arise.

Although lip service was paid to the principle that the people are the source of all power, yet in course of the first decade of our independence no practical effort was made to establish the people as the main element of control and execution of power.

We have tried to take the administration nearer to the common men. We undertook the step to decentralise the administration with a view to establishing the direct authority of the people on it. We did it from the point of realisation of its historic necessity. The upazila system is the first important step in that direction. For the first time in our history, the administrative executive power has been vested in the hands of the people's representatives.

Dear countrymen,

With the introduction of the upazila system the administration has not only gone nearer to the people but the power to adopt planning locally and implement it has also now been vested in their hands. Civil and criminal courts now have reached much nearer to the common men.

Decentralisation of the capital-based judiciary was equally necessary side by side with the decentralisation of the capital based administration.

We have therefore, decentralised the judiciary in conformity with the social reality and the hopes and aspirations of the people. The High Court branch of the Supreme Court are now in six centres outside the capital and the steps have helped the general people in availing of higher judicial facilities.

When the power was vested in us in 1982 the economy of the country was not at all in good shape. On the contrary it could be said that the economy was in a shattered condition. The foreign exchange reserve was abnormally low. The slowness in the industrial production had caused great concern. We had started our function with appalling food deficit.

The indiscriminate nationalisation in the industrial and commercial sectors did not help production. It also did not expedite the industrialisation and the development and flourishing of national capital too. Rather the attempt had narrowed down the industrialisation and investment. Because of the

unfavourable situation, the national economy was going to be in great danger of becoming crippled with foreign loans and turning into a market for foreign goods. Instead of production increase in the mills and factories the state exchequer was under heavy pressure and an anarchy was prevailing in the entire economy.

This situation was beyond the capacity of our society. It was urgently needed to end such a situation without delay not only to streamline our economy but also to protect our existence. It was a great challenge.

We had to face these challenges soon after our taking up the responsibility. We had to take up the hard and complicated programmes in the fields of industry, banks and insurance, production and capital development and capital investment.

And by the grace of Allah, we had succeeded in our programmes. We could successfully overcome the crisis and free the economy from the stagnant position by disinvesting capital from industry, banks and insurance and by paving the ways for private investment in the industrial sector. The rate of GDP in 1981-82 in the country was 1.61 per cent but it increased to 4.2 per cent in the year 1984-85.

It was said that Bangladesh would live if 68 thousand villages live. Again sixty-eight thousand villages mean crores of peasants of the country, because peasants make up 80 per cent of the country's population. Land and peasants are the backbone of our economy and they contribute the lion's share to the GDP.

Land reform is the precondition for the meaningful development in the agricultural sector. But this important work was neglected in the past. We took up this most urgent task on priority basis. We have brought about significant reform, to the centuries-old land tenure system. In our society agricultural labourers and farmers are perhaps the most deprived section. We have been able to take an honourable stand in respect of their wage structure. We have been able to end the perpetual uncertainty of the sharecroppers whose contribution to the agricultural production is most significant.

We believe that the fundamental reforms in administration, economy and land ensured system have marked the beginning of a far reaching change in the socio-economic field. Our people have in the meantime started getting the benefits of these changes.

I have mentioned earlier that we began the work of running the government with critical food deficit. Damage of crops by successive natural calamities deepened that crisis still further. Many had expressed the apprehension that Bangladesh was going to face a famine still more devastating than that of 1974. I declared that we would not allow a single man to die of starvation. By the grace of Allah and with the united endeavours of the people, administration and Armed Forces we had been able to face the calamity. Not a single man died of starvation.

Dear countrymen,

I pledged to establish Bangladesh with new dignity on the world's map, we shall give still greater dignity to every man in a nation glorified with its own distinction.

The call for strengthening the bonds of friendship and co-operation among the South Asian countries was first uttered from Bangladesh. That cherished objective has now taken shape. The summit of the Heads of State and Government of the seven South Asian countries was held on the soil of Bangladesh in December last. The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) was born in the capital of Bangladesh. Leadership of this Association symbolising the friendship and co-operation of one hundred crore people of this region had first been given to Bangladesh. Bangladesh today is representative of unity of 100 crore people.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Foreign Ministers' conference was held in Dhaka. The unity of the Islamic Ummah was consolidated at this conference. Bangladesh had achieved a higher dignity in the Muslim world.

General Assembly of the United Nations begins in September next. The upcoming UN Assembly will reflect the witness yet, another manifestation of the recognition of this dignity of Bangladesh. Bangladesh will assume the presidency of the world body.

Our relations with all neighbouring countries have been

elevated to a newer scale on the basis of sovereign equality. Our ties with all countries of the world are deeper today. Bangladesh, rich with the spirit of the great national liberation war of 1971, today stands with still greater self-confidence. By the side of the peace loving and freedom loving people of the world including those of Palestine, Namibia, Afghanistan and Kampuchea, Bangladesh today is the recognised voice of the deprived peoples of the world.

Dear countrymen,

Eversince I had taken over the administration of the country I have said time and again that the Martial Law was not a long-term or permanent arrangement for any country. I said my government and I believe in democracy. I also said that our objective was to establish a multi-party democratic society and to restore the constitutional rule on a firm institutional framework.

I have said, this is a Martial Law with a difference. The Martial Law had to be promulgated due to unavoidable reasons. But we have not abrogated the Constitution. We have suspended it. We did not want to throw the country into a Constitutional vacuum. When we announced our decision to hold elections on the basis of suspended Constitution some quarters proposed to amend the Constitution itself. Even some suggested holding of election not on the basis of suspended Constitution but through a Martial Law decree. But I stood firm on the issue of Constitution. I told them clearly, we would not amend the Constitution by the power of Martial Law. The jurisdiction of amending the Constitution lies with the elected representatives of the people. Our allegiance to democratic system inspired us to take this stand.

From this realisation I had promised, when I took over the responsibility of the government, that we would return to a democratic system within two years. I had said that power would be transferred to elected representatives in phases. I believe that in order to ensure absolute sovereignty of the people and to make the democratic system complete power should be handed over to peoples representatives from the lower levels upto the national level.

Being true to my thinking and promise, I had first arranged for the elections of the union councils and the municipal councils. In the second phase, elections for the Upazila Chairmen were scheduled for 24th March, 1984. In the third phase date for the presidential polls was fixed on 24th May, 1984 keeping up with the suspended Constitution and application of the procedures of the 1978 polls. Some of the opposition groups and parties expressed their reservations about the decision of the government and demanded that parliamentary polls should be held before any other elections. In the interest of social amity and political harmony which my government placed above everything, the schedules for elections of the Upazila Chairmen and the presidential polls were declared postponed.

In keeping with the opinion of the Opposition parties and in honour of the suspended Constitution, we decided to hold the presidential and parliamentary polls on the same day. The polls date was fixed on May 27 and we expected that all quarters would accept our decision in its right perspective and without being emotional. But our hopes were not fulfilled and the polls had to be postponed once again.

My government and myself, then, invited the opposition parties for a national dialogue in the interest of political amity and understanding. We have always believed that delay in the peaceful transition to democracy would never do any good for the country and the nation.

During the national dialogue myself and my colleagues had talks with over 50 political parties. We had tried to understand their attitudes on the issues of elections and transition to democracy. The main political parties including the alliances had participated in the dialogue. They had informed us of their demands and stands regarding elections both verbally and in writing.

We had analysed their demands deeply and announced the decision of holding the parliamentary elections first as they had demanded with a view to honouring their opinion and to be faithful to our promises for restoration of democracy in the country at the earliest possible time. I had also realised their main preconditions