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A FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES OF BANGLADESH

Introduction

Economists, both expatriate and local, have portrayed the developmental challenges of the country to be almost insurmountable. A sample of prognostic remarks may be illustrative. The mildest one, perhaps, was sounded by Rene Dumont, who said, Bangladesh has to run fast in order to stand still.¹ Just Faaland and J.R. Parkinson, while not accepting the view of Kevin Rafferty of *Financial Times* that "Bangladesh is the end of the great development dream"², tended to doubt the development potentials of the country and said: "If the problem of Bangladesh can be solved, there can be reasonable confidence that less difficult problem can also be solved. It is in this sense that Bangladesh was to be regarded as the test case" of development.³ Joseph F. Stepanek, with half a decade of familiarity with Bangladesh as USAID official, depicted a similar grim picture: "Bangladesh is a test development case for the poorest of the poor countries, a test case operating under most perplexing

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1. Rene Dumont, *A Self-reliant Rural Development Policy for the Poor Peasantry of Sonar Bangladesh*, A Tentative Report, (Dhaka : Ford Foundation) May 1973.
 2. *Financial Times*, 6 June 1975.
 3. Just Faaland and J.R. Parkinson, *Bangladesh : The Test Case of Development*, (Dhaka : University Press Ltd., 1976), p. 5.

circumstances.⁴ For Nurul Islam, a Bangladeshi economist, also, Bangladesh presented a particularly difficult challenge to the development planners, policy makers and practitioners.⁵ To A.R.Khan, another noted economist of the soil, "the problems are so acute and extensive that they would be a formidable challenge to even the most brilliant and well-organized political machinery."⁶

One may of course, question the time value of these and other numerous pieces of prognosis made in the immediate aftermath of independence and the decade that followed, when the gloomy outlook of the war-torn economy was compounded by political upheavals and a desperate atmosphere pervading all spheres of national life. The situation is not that despondent now. Bangladesh has admittedly been able to shed the 'international basket case' image that shadowed its standing in the 1970s. Major indicators of the economy have also marked upward change, at least in money value and absolute quantity.⁷ One may also bring in the cautious optimism expressed by the economists to balance the picture of seeming hopelessness:

Development is possible. The technical means exist to increase output, particularly of food, very greatly, and to diversify economic activities and to develop a broader economic base. It is too much to hope for any dramatic changes in economic welfare by the end of the century, but enough could be done to make the people feel better off and for all to realize that Bangladesh was beginning to get control of its future....⁸

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4. Joseph F. Stepanek, *Bangladesh : Equitable Growth*, (Washington : Pergamon Press, 1979)
 5. Nurul Islam, *Development Strategy of Bangladesh*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1978)
 6. A.R. Khan, *The Economy of Bangladesh*, (Delhi : The McMillan Co. of India Ltd., 1973), p. 181.
 7. Abdullah Farouk, *Changes in the Economy of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1982), pp. 106-117.
 8. Faaland and Parkinson, *op. cit.* p. 193.



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Development activities in terms of construction of physical and social infrastructures, increased investments in agriculture and industry are taking place and increasing volume of external resources is also flowing in to finance those activities.

All said, however, the basic nature of the developmental challenges remain more or less the same. The problems listed by the economists in terms of huge burden of population and its rapid rate of increase, constant food shortage and at times near-famine situation, devastating floods and cyclones, violence and corruption, lacuna in implementation and management of development programmes, all perhaps still constitute a valid catalogue of developmental challenges of Bangladesh. With slight improvement in poverty situation in the first half of the current decade, percentage of below poverty line population is believed to have increased again following two consecutive devastating floods.⁹

Trend values of critical indicators of the economy also support such arguments. A study on the changes in the economy of Bangladesh over the past decades since 1947 concludes :

...the improvements that have come in the living standard of the common man, are the results of a spill over of the technological improvements elsewhere in the world. Our own efforts have achieved very little in the desirable direction...In terms of the structure of the economy, very little desirable change has taken place. The burden of public debt is growing and there is an adverse balance of trade.....the more important fact is that the rich in most cases do not know how to use that wealth...and that the poor are unable to find jobs to earn their living without favour. Compared to all economies in our neighbourhood, we have changed our economic structure so little for the better from the colonial stage.¹⁰

9. *Holiday*, 17 March 1989.

10. Farouk, p. 93-94.

The developmental challenges facing Bangladesh today may be summarized as follows :

- Whether net growth in GDP is possible on a sustained basis with the existing meagre base of resources and increasing burden of huge population, with or without external resources;
- Considering the fact that 50-60% of the population currently live below the poverty line, could growth of GDP be achieved with equity and distributive justice ?
- Whether development is possible keeping the existing structure of production relations in tact ?
- Whether development is possible in the face of renewed and repeated challenges posed by natural calamities like floods and cyclones that destroy whatever assets and infrastructure Bangladesh builds with her limited resources ?
- Finally, can Bangladesh face all these and other challenges with the existing capability of the political system ? Could it be improved upon ? Is it desirable and feasible to alter the existing political order ? If so, how ?

It is the last set of questions that is central to any development debate in a resource poor developing country like Bangladesh. Among the non-economic factors that influence development process¹¹ politics perhaps is the most decisive. Economists also posit the feasibility of their macro-economic models¹² on political plane arguing that "the problem is essentially one of government,, administration and leadership."¹³ Although development and politics are intertwined, it is politics that provides philosophical base, direction, operational frame, implementation resources and above all, the

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11. For an elaboration of non-economic factors in development, see, Irma Adelman and C.I. Morris, *Society, Politics and Economic Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967)
 12. Stepanek, *op. cit.*, Nurul Islam, *Development Planning in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: University Pres Ltd, 1979.)
 13. Faaland and Parkinson, pp. 192-93.

acceptability of the development package. Thus, while principles of rational choice dictate the order of feasibility tests to be: technical, followed by economic, social and then political, for all practical purposes, actual selection follows the reverse order. Such limitations of the formal techniques of planning exercises and the primacy of politics have also been recognized by economists who had first hand experiences with the planning process of Bangladesh.¹⁴

In fact, development is the political management of economic issues. Development planning and policies encompass political and social considerations, such as the distribution and exercise of political power as well as the distribution of resources between sectors of the economy and of the costs and benefits of development between various interest groups. Again various interest groups and socio-economic classes participate with varying degrees of influence and power in the political process and in the decision making process with regard to developmental issues. The historical circumstances around the emergence of Bangladesh, the nature and composition of the various social forces and the character of the political leadership determined the intensity and pattern of interaction between economic and political considerations in the planning process of the country.

Against this backdrop, a study of the political management of development and political response to developmental challenges becomes a rewarding exercise not only in the field of political economy but also in the field of political development.

Such an exercise, however, has to tackle a set of theoretical and empirical questions. In the first place, what exactly is meant by political response? What should be an appropriate model of political response? Where does it fit in the process of political development? Since there are alternative models of economic development as well, how would one synthesize the two sets of models to arrive at an integrative decision making mechanism for a developing country like

14. Nurul Islam, *Development Planning*, *op. cit.*

Bangladesh ? These are among the questions that are intended to be addressed in the paper. The paper is, thus, a normative one. Detailed discussion on the state of political and economic development of the country is beyond the scope of the paper.

The first section deals with conceptual aspect of the key variables that is, political response and political development. The second section postulates certain premises regarding the political culture and economic structure of the country on the basis of which an attempt is made in section three to make a set of policy proposals which operationalise the theoretical framework of an appropriate form of political response for Bangladesh.

Conceptual Framework

Political Response : Paradigms associated with concept of political development provide a useful beginning in defining political response. The most appropriate definition of political development in this context is the process through which the political system expands its capabilities to perform certain key functions of control, management, self-promotion and development. Thus, political scientists have identified five inter-linked categories of political capability, namely, (a) regulative capability, (b) extractive capability, (c) distributive capability, (d) symbolic capability, and (e) responsive capability.¹⁵ Nature and direction of political response of a state emanates from these capabilities. It may, however, be pointed out that not all political responses are geared to developmental challenges although development remain the universal objectives of all states in the Third World. In the like manner, not all political responses to developmental challenges have economic objectives. Some have important non-economic contents. Thus, political response is constituted by the wide range of actions of political leadership, including perception, goal formulation, resource mobilization and implementation with respect to certain issues and problems that fit in the overall structure of priority of the actors.

15. Robert P. Clark Jr. *Development and Instability : Political Change in Non-Western World*, (Illinois : The Dryden Press, 1973), p. 3.

Attempt at finding out inter-linkage among the capabilities, may provide useful insights in political response. To begin with, regulative capability of a political system is used to exercise control over the behaviour of constituent individuals and groups.¹⁶ Although regulative capability, by definition, implies legitimate monopoly over the instrument of coercion, expansion of coercive power¹⁷ does not necessarily, lead to an addition to regulative capability of the system. The development elites also extend their political authority to physically, culturally and economically segregated segments and interest groups of the society through a combination of coercive and noncoercive methods. Thus, building communication infrastructure to link isolated pockets of the country, monetizing the non-monetized sectors, fiscal and monetary control over MNCs, expropriation, nationalization and state ownership, all are important instruments of regulative capability having developmental implications.

Perhaps the linkage between regulative capability and development process is more direct. Regulative capability, specially coercive forces, has special relevance to specific models of development. Urban-industry led growth models require quelling of labour unrest to ensure uninterrupted industrial production.¹⁸ At times unrest in the peasant economy for better wages and higher prices for agricultural output is suppressed to facilitate siphoning of resources from rural agriculture to urban industry. Preference for apolitical calm in the name of order is a pet word for the authoritarian development elites in the Third World countries.

Expansion of a state's regulative capability requires simultaneous increase in extraction of resources—human and material—to enhance

16. Gabriel Almond and B.B. Powell, *Comparative Politics : A Developmental Approach*, (Boston : Little Brown and Company, 1969), p. 196.

17. The IISS (London) published annual report, *Military Balance* would reveal the impressive growth of police and paramilitary forces in different countries mainly out of the primary concern of the state machinery for the survival of the regime in power.

18. Mary Kaldor, "The Military in Development", *World Development*, Vol. 4, No. 6, pp. 454-482.

the ability of the state to perform critical functions including regulative ones. In a way, extraction is another facet of regulative capability, because taxation, levy, hiring, marketing operation, requisition—all regulate the economic and socio-political behaviour of individuals and groups. Of course, the enormous burden thrust upon the state in terms of building physical infrastructure and social overheads logically forces the state to assume the leading role in mobilizing funds for development. But the developmental orientation of the ruling regime is revealed in the manner the extraction capability is utilized to mobilize resources. Thus, in a trade-off between economic rationale and political expediency, most of the ruling regimes in the Third World countries prefer indirect taxation which incidentally cuts consumption level of the lower strata of the society and depresses effective demand. This is not mainly because indirect tax is easy to administer compared to direct tax in view of the weak tax administration apparatus, but because political considerations, including pressure groups, political support base and political pay-offs for running the burgeoning party enterprises get precedence.

While regulation and extraction form the basis for launching development efforts, the developmental profile of the state is reflected in the way in which the polity increases its distributive, symbolic and responsive capabilities.¹⁹ State actors' compulsions to distribute resources, create symbols and respond to public needs are determined by development elite's perception and ideological frame as to who is to benefit from development and who is to pay for development. In general, distributive capability varies in the degree to which they are intended to alter fundamentally the prevailing pattern of allocation of resources and the manner in which costs and benefits of development are distributed. But then radical allocation of resources, like egalitarian land reform programmes, may invite political repercussions, including ouster from power.

However, in any public policy, a comparatively small group of citizens reap the material benefits, a yet smaller group takes part in

19. Almond and Powell, p. 195

decision making, with vast majority of the population remaining far removed from the policy machinery. This is when symbols are created by media and charisma to enlarge the profile of the leadership and make the populace feel immediate to the policy frame.²⁰

On the basis of the brief run-down of different categories of political capability, certain tentative conclusions may be drawn. First, nature and direction of political response depend not only on the type of political capability but also on the precise goal of the political elite. Political goal, in turn, is determined by the interest groups they serve. Second, growth of political capability as such does not lead to political development, as we are given to believe.²¹ Political development in the sense in which it is commonly used, depends on the particular direction in which growth of political capability takes place. Thus, elements of normative judgment are inherent in the concept of political development. This brings us to the question of evaluating different models of political development within which political response takes place.

Models of Political Development : Much of the current discussions and thinking on the future of politics in Third World societies originate from the wide-spread feeling among academia as well as policy and opinion making elites that contemporary political processes, institutions and actors suffer from inadequate capability to solve the various problems facing the world today.²² In response to this challenge, two schools of thought have emerged. One school, reformist in nature, holds that the institutions and structures associated with modern politics are far from being exhausted in their capacity to deal with present-day problems.²³ The crises and difficulties they encounter in terms of massive hunger, violence, social unrest

20. Clark, Jr. *Development and Instability*, *op. cit.*, p. 13

21. *Ibid.*

22. D.L. Sheth, "Grass-roots Stirrings and the Future of Politics", *Alternatives*, Vol. IX, No. 1, (March), 1983 : Rajni Kothari, Party and State in our Times : The Rise of Non-Party Political Formations", *Alternatives*, Vol. IX, No. 4 (December) 1983.

23. Sheth, p. 7

and instability are considered to be either problems of transition or unfinished work of modern politics and therefore, these can be overcome without disturbing the overall framework through corrective, restorative interventions and trying still untried means developed in the home of modern politics, that is, the West.²⁴

The opposite is the structuralist view which holds that the existing institutions and structures are either inappropriate or have run out their course and there is an increasing trend of these institutions and structures being delegitimized and militantly confronted by ethnic, social, regional and other marginalized groups. At times, bulk of the population remain passive or apathetic to participation in modern political institutions, like the electoral process. The alternative, according to this view, is to move beyond modern politics towards a new, more participative and humane politics. The future hope of politics, according to this school, lies in the innumerable grass-roots level non-party formations based on down-to-earth experience of day-to-day life, like environmentalists, professional groups, interest groups which are coming up in most of the developing countries.²⁵ These movements have come up in the Western countries much earlier and they have also made substantial in-roads in the politics of those countries. However, it should be mentioned that these non-party movements have attained political status, marginal at that, within the framework of traditional politics. A second observation is that although traditional politics is in decay, these grass-roots movements are far from being established as viable entities in the developing countries. The political scientists, thus, face a formidable but legitimate challenge of evolving an alternative political order. Till then, however, quest for viable political system will be confined to the reformist school of correcting, improving and adjusting the existing political order to suit the developmental needs.

24. *Ibid*, p. 4

25. *Ibid*, p. 4

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Two broad classes of writings on development strategies are available : those with a systemic bias dealing with strategy and those which focus on a much lower tactical level. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) model of employing the political capabilities to resolve 5-fold crises, namely, identity crisis, legitimacy crisis, penetration crisis, participation crisis and distribution crisis, and the Almond/Powell model of rational choice fall in the category of the former while Hirschman model of induced decision making mechanism, Howard Wriggins model of political survival, Ilchman/Uphoft model of political entrepreneur fall in the latter category.²⁶ These are indeed useful analytical and insightful pieces, dealing with very complex social phenomena. They also depict useful policy indications as to how to sequence the different types of crises, how to use crises, violence and new problems productively to create situations of advantages and room for manoeuvre.²⁷ A second useful insight that emerges from a perusal of the different models is that none can offer a complete package of political development for a particular polity.

A third insight relates to the phases, sequence and the span in which the development elites are to apply the models or policy options. A common belief or an article of faith among the Third World regimes is that the programme package espoused by them have to be completed in respective life time. Such a belief emanates from two sets of compulsions : first, political survival and second, magnitude and urgency of the problems. Barring few cases when decisions have to be hastily made and implementation to quickly follow, it has been empirically found that hasty measures without adequate social, political and administrative preparations prove abortive. Thus comes the decision making theory of incrementalism advocated by Samuel P. Huntington.²⁸ Incrementalism is a syn-

26. For a full-length deliberation, see, Clark, Jr., *op. cit.*, pp, 231-225.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Samuel P. Huntington. *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven : Yale University Press., 1968)

thesis of the two categories of models reviewed earlier. The essence of the approach is to rationally divide the problem into several segments or small problems, more amenable to solutions and less prone to opposition. According to this view decision making is a never ending process, and the real challenge of political development lies in creation and sustaining of the momentum in the continuing process of growth and learning.

A pertinent question is : do the successful development elites usually follow the incremental strategy? Political scientists confirm from the history of Japan, Cuba, Mexico, Turkey that leaderships in these countries have followed the strategy, even if they have not recognized it so. On the other hand, examples of Ghana, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Peru, Egypt would reveal that insistence on comprehensive and grandiose plan, immediate results, universal solution and inability to admit and learn from mistakes—all contributed not only to rigidities in decision making but also to abortive end of the grand plans, with them, also the regimes.²⁹ Thus, although incremental decision making may not appear to be a rewarding policy from the point of view of legitimacy and survival of individual political regimes in the developing countries, the argument is, in fact fallacious and self-defeating. The biggest problem is to set a chain of incremental steps in motion because no body wants to take a risk. But until such a risk, which is worth taking is taken, the vicious cycle in politics continues.

The review of political models reveals that no individual model can present itself as a ready-made package to be adopted. The review also brings out a set of useful guiding principles which may be used to construct a workable model of political development. The principles may be set as follows: (a) Long term goals of political development should be split in a continuum of small, short term goals at tactical levels. While the long term goals should be of durable character, the short term goals, their sequence, even content,

29. Clark, Jr., *op. cit.*

may be changed depending on opportunities, resources and exigencies; (b) In order that the incremental approach survives discontinuity, different facets of political capability, namely, regulative, extractive symbolic, distributive and responsive, should be consistent and mutually reinforcing; (c) All models of political development have emphasized the significance of institutionalization of changes.

Useful as these guidelines are within the framework of incremental approach of political development, more so because they have been drawn from the experiences of large number of developing countries, the question is still begged : can these principles, or even when they are reconstructed in a model of political development, be pursued without reference to the economic development strategies ? Perhaps not. And in fact, the principles and models are operationalized in the context of certain aspects of national life and these more often than not are economic in nature. This being the case, it is thought useful and essential to have an integrated model of development that formally incorporates political and economic aspects.

Basic Premises about Politics and Development in Bangladesh

On the basis of review of existing literature on politics and development of Bangladesh a set of basic premises have been drawn to facilitate formulation of some policy responses. The premises are obvious and they more or less reflect the realities of political culture and economic structure of the country. The rationale of postulating them in encapsulated form lies in the fact that they would provide a useful basis for policy propositions but establishing them would require independent treatment beyond the scope of this paper.

Political Premises (PP) :

PP 1. Egalitarianism, imaginativeness and sense of independence are basic traits of Bangladeshi people.³⁰ However, with the type

30. Charles P. O'Donnell, *Bangladesh : Biography of a Muslim Nation*, (Boulder, Co. : Westview Press, 1984, p. 37.

of political education we received during the colonial period, egalitarianism took combative character which could not be reconciled with orderly political authority.

- PP 2.* Sense of independence, on the other hand, while contributing to the geopolitical transformation in the Sub-continent in 1971, that is, creation of Bangladesh, also, suffered partial degeneration into intense individualism and ego-centric attitude, antithetical to corporate behaviour.
- PP 3.* The selfish individualistic pursuits combined with scarce resources and limited access to opportunities have resulted in, among others, intense power rivalry and factionalism in politics. It does not end in factionalism, it ends in party split and formation of new parties. The saying goes : one Bengali makes a poet, two make a political party, and three make two political parties.³¹ Moreover, personal political passions rather than consistent ideological inclinations dominate the party politics.
- PP 4.* The political culture of Bangladesh is dominated by old agitative tactics, quick politicisation of issues and rejection mentality. Both position and opposition count political credits in discrediting one another because achievement by one is construed to be failure for the other, a narcotic habit of converting politics in to a zero-sum game.
- PP 5* Lack of consensus on basic issues is pervasive. Two antagonistic nationalistic outlooks divide the nation, centrist and religion-based politics and secularistic politics.³² Culture and politics of Bangladesh is likely to be dominated by religion for long time to come. Bulk of the people, in general, are devout Muslims. On the other hand, record of communal harmony in the country is enviable. A synthesis between the two is needed, to define the national identity of Bangladesh.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

PP 6: The people are accommodative and have a 'forget and forgive' attitude. Emotional entrenchment and ideological indoctrination do not take roots deep down. A darker side, however, of the trait is that they can not sustain revolutionary zeal. It is said that Bangladesh is unlikely to witness any revolutionary social transformation in the foreseeable future. An added reason is muted class consciousness.

PP 7: Political forces and institutions of the country are asymmetrically developed. Some institutions are organized, coherent and articulate while others are hesitant and degenerated, highly faction-ridden, segmented, demoralized, and lacking in confidence and always looking outward for inspirations, guidance and issues. In the absence of consensus and lack of role differentiation, the developed institutions take over role which they are not supposed to.

Economic Premises (EP) :

EP 1. : Perennial savings-investment gaps in the domestic front and export-import gap externally will continue to force the economy to be aid-dependent, the dependency currently being to the tune of about 90% of ADP. In all likelihood, this will gradually cripple the economy simply because of the fact that no conscious effort is there to reduce the degree of dependency. Recurrent calamities would perhaps justify periodic rise in the level of aid-dependency. But aid narcotism has reached a point where aid-dependent ADP finances non-development items including administrative machinery.³³

EP 2. : Lack of accountability pervades the economic sectors and administration. Project after project is undertaken (project proliferation is not as such bad), more people are employed, continued logistical and capital support is flowing in from external sources but project is not completed. Projects obtain semi-permanently on-going status until totally abandoned. No

33. Farouk, *op. cit.*

accountability about causes of abandoning and wastage of resources is enforced.

EP 3 : Most preferred economic pursuits are distributive trade and usurious practices—both yielding quick returns against little risk. Proverbial lack of enterprise is responsible. But lack of nationalistic feelings, lack of effective demand, inadequate infrastructural facilities, administrative bottlenecks are no less responsible.

EP 4 . : A close scrutiny of the resource endowment of the country would reveal that all the proven and potential resources of the country, namely, land, man and water, are concentrated in the rural agricultural sector. Land is underutilized in terms of cropping intensity; manpower—illiterate, unemployed and mostly landless, assetless and underfed—is a liability; water remains unharnessed, it is scarce when it is needed most and abundant to the scale of devastating magnitude when not needed in so much quantum. Breakthrough in the economy can only be achieved through combining the goal of agricultural development with integrated development of these three resources in all their ramifications.

EP 5 . : Environmental degradation is making a corrosive inroad in the over all life of Bangladesh. Life, property and infrastructures, all are hostage to environmental calamities like floods, cyclones, droughts. To a great extent they are man-made.

The premises laid down above are by no means exhaustive. But they do reflect the major social and political realities of the society of Bangladesh.

Integrated Approach to Politics and Development of Bangladesh

Intergrated Progarmme Area : On the basis the theoretical guidelines of integrated development in politics and development on the one hand, and the nature of developmental challenges facing Bangladesh on the other, the suggested development strategy would

be one of Integrated and Participatory Development (IAPD) process which would have two planks : political, namely, decentralized participatory political process; and economic, namely, Agriculture-led Basic Needs Approach.

Decentralized participatory political process needs little elaboration apart from the suggestion that the current decentralization programme should be given full trial, among others, in two respects: (a) making the Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad fully elected bodies; and (b) implementation of local level planning for local development. Local level planning, in turn, will be a major step in implementing the participatory process in the economic field.

The Basic Needs Approach in Agriculture is a multi-faceted programme: it is intended to take care of (a) agriculture-led development strategy through maximum use of land and water resources (b) ensuring basic needs for the landless and the assetless, (c) employment generation that simultaneously takes care of the demographic transformation, and (d) creating effective demand for industrial sector.³⁴

The strategy is apparently the same as the old seed-fertilizer-irrigation based strategy of the 1960s. But the difference is that the earlier strategy was only subservient to the broader industry-led growth model. A second difference is that the suggested approach lies in involvement of the marginal and small farmers and land-less poor through the medium of land, labour and non-land productive assets like irrigation equipment.³⁵ The motive force in the economy will be provided by purchasing power in the hands of bulk of the rural population. Rural Works Programme with cash wage instead of food wage should be stepped up to increase disposal in the hands of the poor.

34. For details, see Nazrul Islam, *Bangladesh Unnayan Kaushal Prashanga* (in Bengali) (Issues of Development Strategy of Bangladesh) (Dhaka : Centre for Social Studies, 1984).

35. The CARE-BRAC joint programme at NGO level on Landless Owned Tubewell Users Society (LOTUS) is an example of the latter category.

Key Policy Areas : The programme suggested above is perhaps nothing new excepting the fact that the different facets of development—politics and development—have to be considered as an integrated whole. The paper insists that integrated development strategy, operationalized partially in the past in rural development has not lost their relevance. The programme was not perhaps given a full trial—a sad commentary on development history of Bangladesh, and one of the reasons behind this state of affairs is that some fundamental issues of national life still remains to be attended to and resolved. This is where we turn now.

Consensus Building : There is a consensus at rhetorical level among all that consensus should be reached on fundamental issues. But dissension has become a conspicuous aspect of national life. The main problem lies in lack of interaction among the social forces and lack of free flow of opinion and views. The beginning may be made by a free and responsible press. A second and useful step is frequent dialogues and interaction at different levels among some of the critical social forces like intelligentsia and bureaucrats, both civil and military, if possible in an institutionalized framework.

Building of Mutuality of Stakes in National Policy Issues : Accommodation of viewpoints of the opposition, taking them into confidence, appreciating good gestures and acts of the opposition, to a great extent, may disarm the opposition, enhance latter's obligation toward government programme. Likewise, the opposition may be actively involved in different development programmes. This will certainly develop stakes of the opposition in the programmes on the one hand and enhance the support base of the programmes. It is also expected that the discontinuity of programmes due to political transitions will be minimized.

Balanced Development of Social Forces : Asymmetrical development of social forces leaves an element of inherent disequilibrium in the body politic. Thus, if the politicians lag in their role playing trial should continue in terms of allowing them to play their role. Same is the case of students and other professional groups.

Regaining Legitimacy of Electoral Process : It is believed that a credible election can restore credibility of political process. Certain reform measures should be introduced in the existing electoral process. What these measures would be may be debated in the parliament as well as in other forums. One specific proposal for closer examination could be the election process tested recently in the CHT districts where inter-candidate competition was minimal and the voters, could reveal their preferences in an unbiased manner,

Accountability : Lack of accountability is central to many of the social, political, economic and administrative malaise. Lack of accountability at one stage affects all stages in the chain. Massive corruption, autonomous growth of deviant behaviour etc., originate from lack of accountability. Rule of law is the key word in establishing accountability. Supremacy of the constitution, independence of judiciary and free press can facilitate establishment of accountability.

Institutionalized and Decentralized Decision Making Process : Centralized and personalized decision making mechanism saps initiative and limits the crisis response capability of the political system. The probability of errors of judgement is also high in centralized decision making. Thus decentralization in administration, participatory development process should be accompanied by decentralization and Institutionalization in decision making. This is expected to help ensure accountability at the level concerned.

Conclusion

In a country where suggestions, policy prescriptions and models of development are perhaps more numerous and voluminous than the problems, the question is : who will implement the suggestions made here and why? The moral and rational answer is: *all concerned*. But someone has to take the initiative and provide the leadership. Who does that? Given the reality of monopoly of initiatives and

resources, given the state of the society, and making a heroic assumption that there is perhaps a consensus among all that a non-revolutionary path is the only feasible and desirable path of change, it is submitted that the initiative has to be taken by the incumbent government.

The strategy should be one of incrementalism. If the zero-sum game of politics could be converted into politics of unlimited opportunities in a *consensual frame, of course, based on fair play*, the incumbent regime would not feel the compulsion of achieving all the success (and swallowing no failure) in its life time. Perhaps the question of restructuring the political order, that was postponed earlier in the absence of an alternative, could be achieved along the path of incrementalism. Change of political order does not necessarily entail change of political actors or even institutions. What is important is to evolve a desirable rule of the game.