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## **A DECADE OF BANGLADESH : PROMISES AND PROGRESS**

The victory of Bangladesh on the 16th of December, 1971 will be a reference-point for many future events affecting the destiny of this nation. Till 1947, the territory comprising Bangladesh was an integral part of British India. Between 1947 and 1971 it formed part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Since 25th of March 1971 it has been known as the People's Republic of Bangladesh. During this decade of this existence, both state policy and the structure of government have undergone great changes. In January 1975 Bangladesh ceased to have a parliamentary form of government, and became a one-party state with a Presidential form of government. In August 1975 a military coup brought into power a military-bureaucratic regime which brought changes in Bangladeshi international alignment.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent democratic process during the next two years led to the establishment of a Presidential form of government designed on the French model.

People's aspiration underwent drastic transformation from mere demand of economic justice to ultimate independence in 1971. Both the governments, though followed policies of their own during the post-independence period but promised well-being of the people. These policies promised to bring benefit to the people but something went wrong. An analysis of few aspects would reveal the gap between policy announcement and realisation, promises and subsequent shift, preaching and practice, and preferences to petty interest over general interest, and so on. In this paper an attempt is made to highlight some of the causes that have forced the leadership to deviate from their chartered path to achieve national objectives, pay very dearly and put the national

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1. Mosharaf Hossain, "Nature of State Power", *The Journal of Social Studies*, vol. 5, 1979, p. 3

existence on the brink of destruction. The purpose of this paper is to highlight before the present leadership some wrongs and failings of the past to avoid recurrence of these in order to steer the nation to its cherished objective and save the nation from the grave catastrophe. For ease of understanding the paper has been divided into five distinct phases as (a) pre-1947 period, (b) pre-independence period (1947-1971), (c) Awami League period (1971-1975) (d) Zia's Regime (1975-1981) and (e) Post-Zia period leading to the imposition of Martial Law.

### **PRE-1947 PERIOD**

Prior to the departure of the British rulers from India the areas comprising Bangladesh were aptly described as the 'rural slums of Bengal'.<sup>2</sup> Colonial rule here led to the growth of three distinct social groups dominated by upper caste Hindus: (a) agents of foreign trading and business interests, (b) western educated officials meaning the administration, the police forces and judicial services, and (c) Zamindars who collected land revenue on behalf of the government.<sup>3</sup> Muslims who constituted the majority remained under-represented among the dominant classes because of the failure of Muslim upper classes to orient themselves with the opportunities arising out of the conquest of Bengal by the East India Company.

As a late starter the educated Muslim boys found it extremely difficult to compete with the educated Hindus, who were not only larger in numbers but also had people in position to dispense patronage. Thus finding it wellnigh impossible to dislodge the Hindus from their entrenched and dominant positions Bengalee Muslims made common cause with the Muslims of other areas of India in waging a successful struggle for the establishment of Pakistan.

### **PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD (1947-1971)**

With the departure of the British from India, the seat of authority was transferred from London to Karachi and subsequently to

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2. Ibid, p.9

3. Ibid, p.9



Islamabad. Before partition, the Hindus were politically, economically and socially dominant in Bangladesh (East Pakistan) but the creation of Pakistan in 1947 reversed the dominance of the Hindus in East Bengal. The place of Hindu elites of the pre-partition era was taken over by West Pakistanis, refugee Muslims from other parts of India, and Bengali Muslims.<sup>4</sup> An important thing to note is that popular Bengali Muslim leaders were excluded from the top hierarchy of the emerging ruling elite of Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

During the sixties, the people of East Bengal were disillusioned with the misrule of the Muslim League, the ruling Party. Bengali Muslims became frustrated by the sheer neglect of their province by their fellow Muslim brothers of West Pakistan (Table-1). They also found that the opportunities created in the services, professions, and the business by the migration of Hindus were quickly absorbed by the West Pakistanis and non-Bengali Muslim refugees. The introduction of quota system for recruitment in the civil services brought the Bengali Muslim representation to 34% by 1966. But in the absence of any conscious policy East Pakistan's representation in the military remained very negligible (Table-2). The positions of neighter classes underwent any appreciable change by 1971. The economic and political causes of Bengali Muslims led to the formation of the Awami Muslim League. The Awami League seized the opportunities to expand its support base.

Some of the later events had a far reaching impact on the political orientation of the Bengali Muslim masses and these helped Awami League to consolidate, expand and become the most organised political force in East Bengal. The Language Movement of 1952 and the demand of full provincial autonomy during 1954 elections made the Awami League the avant-grade of rising Bengali nationalism.

The war of 1965 helped in strengthening the demands of the East Pakistanis as advocated by the Awami League. As Maniruzzaman notes, "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—a political

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4. M.G. Kabir, *Minority Politics in Bangladesh*, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980) p.13
  5. *Ibid*, p.15

TABLE-1  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURE AND  
REGIONAL ECONOMIC DISPARITY  
1959/60—1969/70

a. Development Expenditure (Rupees in million)

|                   | Second<br>Plan 1959/60—64/65 |                  | Third<br>Plan 1964/65—1969/70 |                  |
|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
|                   | East<br>Pakistan             | West<br>Pakistan | East<br>Pakistan              | West<br>Pakistan |
|                   | Amount %                     | Amount %         | Amount %                      | Amount %         |
| Public<br>Sector  | 6700 38                      | 10,800 62        | 11,300 45                     | 13,700 55        |
| Private<br>Sector | 3000 21                      | 10,700 79        | 5,500 25                      | 16,000 75        |
| Total             | 9700 31                      | 21,500 69        | 16,800 36                     | 29,700 64        |

b. Regional Economic Disparity

|                              | 1959/60 |      | 1964/65 |      | 1968/69 |       |
|------------------------------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
|                              | E.P.    | W.P. | E.P.    | W.P. | E.P.    | W.P.  |
| Per capita<br>Income<br>(Rs) | 269     | 355  | 285.5   | 419  | 291.5   | 473.4 |

Source: Government of Pakistan, Planning Commission, *An Outline of the Fourth Five Year Plan, 1970-75* (Karachi: Government of Pakistan Press, 1970); and A.R. Khan "A New Look at Disparity." *Forum* (3 January, 1970)

entrepreneur par excellence—thought that East Pakistan's sense of isolation could be manipulated to spark a national explosion among the politically discontented and economically frustrated



TABLE—2  
MILITARY ELITE IN PAKISTAN  
JULY, 1955

| Officer Rank | East Pakistan | West Pakistan | percentage of East Pakistanis |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Army         | 14            | 894           | 1.6                           |
| Navy         | 7             | 593           | 1.1                           |
| Air Force    | 60            | 640           | 9.3                           |

Source: *Dawn* (Karachi), January 8, 1955

Bengalis.<sup>6</sup> In early 1966 Sheikh Mujib put forward his famous Six-point programme, 'the charter of Survival.'<sup>7</sup> The six-point programme was a significant departure from the past autonomy demands of the Bengalis. Jahan notes, "Unlike previous Bengali demand, it did not call upon the Central Government to do more for East Pakistan, but asked the Central Government to let East Pakistan do more for itself".<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent fast moving events saw the withdrawal of Agartala conspiracy case, freeing of Sheikh Mujib, departure of Ayub Khan and taking over of power by Yahya Khan. Then came the event of 1970 election. The Awami League termed the election of 1970 as referendum on its Six-point programme. A mention of Awami League's election pledge in the sphere of economic policy is necessary for it has relevancy to the future events:<sup>9</sup>

6. T. Maniruzzaman, *Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973; reprinted, Dacca: Bangladesh Books International, 1975), p. 36
7. *Ibid.*, p. 36
8. Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*, (Dacca; Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 167
9. A Mannan, Publicity Secretary, All Pakistan Awami League, 1970. cited by Nurul Islam, *Development Planning in Bangladesh, A Study in Political Economy*, (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1979), p. 24

- a. Establishment of a socialist economy and, as a first step towards the achievement of this objective, nationalisation of banking and insurance companies, jute industry, cotton textile as well as other basic and heavy industries;
- b. Implementation of land reforms and change in the system of the ownership of land with a view to distribute land among the landless labourers;
- c. Reform of the tax revenue system and, specifically, abolition of salt tax and land revenue in all landholdings below eight acres.

The election results of 1970 came as a rude shock and contrary to the calculations of the military junta. The situation was further aggravated by the demand of Bhutto for a share in the government. The situation was deteriorating very fast though the Awami League continued adherence to constitutional process and showed tremendous amount of forbearance. The single-track action of the military junta in complete disregard to the aspirations of the East Pakistanis led to the non-cooperation movement in East Pakistan. The success of the non-cooperation movement, launched in March 1971, was so great that it was clear that even the Bengali armed units stationed in East Pakistan could not be trusted to join hands with West Pakistani military units in suppressing the nationalist forces of the country.<sup>10</sup> Such was the level of unity achieved in otherwise divided population. As Lenin, the great organisation genius, knew very well, the sheer existence of inequality and exploitation does not automatically lead the people to rise against the constitutional government. Before attempting a revolution, the vanguard must succeed in arousing a deep sense of deprivation and insecurity among the potential supporters of revolution. Thus it took 23 years of hard political mobilisation to generate intense feeling of deprivation and to erode the influence.<sup>11</sup> The Awami League's main claim to popularity and the basis of its mass appeal was the promise of emancipation from the economic exploitation and political domination of the West Pakistanis.

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10. Mosharaf Hossain, *op. cit.* p. 3

11. Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and its Aftermath.* (Dacca: Bangladesh Books International Limited, 1980), p. 18



## AWAMI LEAGUE LEADERSHIP (1971-1975)

The historical circumstances of the creation of the independent State of Bangladesh drew its main inspiration from the economic exploitation of Bangladesh by Pakistan. Independence raised high expectations but the prevailing poverty was overwhelming and the resources were scarce. Bangladesh like many developing countries vigorously professed self-reliance but ended up with large dependence on foreign aid at great political embarrassment in the eyes of the public. The schizophrenic tendency is reflected in the governments forecasting less than the required foreign assistance in the plans. This was due to government's unrealistic assessment of the potentials of the economy, ability and willingness of the government to mobilise necessary domestic resources.

Bangladesh not only inherited but perpetuated a very status-conscious society, where the effectiveness of a person in a particular job and his relationship with the other agencies and officials, his equals as well as his subordinates, depended to a great extent upon the formal status he enjoyed in the hierarchy of the government. The system and the practice which came under heavy criticism were allowed to continue in spite of the leaders' earlier promises of change and having got the opportunity to bring about desired changes keeping in line with the aspirations and expectations of general masses.

### Economic Objectives

The constitution so formed by the ruling party reflected the economic objectives of Bangladesh. The constitution described the essential features of a society as follows:<sup>12</sup>

- a. an exploitation-free society and emancipation of the toiling masses from all forms of exploitation;
- b. equal opportunity for all citizens. The state shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and to ensure the equitable distribution of

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12. Cited in Nurul Islam, *op. cit.* p. 25

wealth amongst citizens and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic;

- c. the recognition of the basic responsibility of the state to obtain food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, jobs and social security for its citizens through planned growth.
- d. parliamentary democracy to facilitate the transition to socialism.

In the forward of the First Five-Year Plan, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and Chairman of the Planning Commission wrote that "No plan, however well-formulated can be implemented unless there is a total commitment on the part of the people of the country to work hard and make necessary sacrifice".<sup>13</sup> There are several provisions in the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to ensure the establishment of an exploitation-free society in Bangladesh. However an analysis of programmes and promises made by the leaders is required to ascertain the causes of failure in implementation and to what extent these failures were due to deliberate negligence to dispense patronage and not due to unforeseen circumstances.

With the inception of Bangladesh as an independent state, the leadership got an opportunity to start afresh in regard to their programmes or promises made earlier in view of fundamental change that took place—that is, from Six-point programme within one Pakistan to an independent entity. As a matter of fact, an evaluation of the situation in view of this fundamental change was essential for many of these programmes enunciated earlier either became redundant or needed major modification which the leadership failed to take cognizance of. The implementation of these were most unrealistic and sowed the seeds of future problems thereby complicated and failed even the most sincere efforts of all. A few such issues are narrated to focus the contradiction between programme formulation and implementation. sacrificing of larger

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13. Government of Bangladesh, Planning Commission, *The First Five Year Plan (1973–78)*, (Dacca: B.G. Press, 1973).



interest of petty interest, and last but not the least, the contradiction between preaching and practice.

### Nationalisation and its effects

Did not the question of nationalisation warrant a thorough evaluation under the absolute changed circumstances? Were the earlier reasons of nationalisation demand within one Pakistan context still valid for Bangladesh as an independent state? What prompted the leadership to act upon immediately without even allowing time for deliberation and taking stock of the existing situation?

The decision to nationalise in March 1972 was Sheikh's considered response to the radical forces within and outside his party.<sup>14</sup> The nationalisation of private enterprises certainly enhanced the scope of state activities and governmental powers to distribute patronage.<sup>15</sup> The reliance of Awami League leaders for the support on the distribution of patronage aggravated the already shattered political and economic condition of Bangladesh. The nationalisation of major trading houses and industries, appointment of Awami League activists in high posts of these nationalised industries, as distributors of locally produced and improved goods, indentions and licence holder allowed mushroom growth of a *nouveau riche* class, living off the economy rather than investing in it. As one political document put it: "Pakistanis 22 families had become Bangladesh's 2,000. Such people can hardly provide the leadership for a socialist transformation of the Bangladesh economy."<sup>16</sup> The very policy objective of nationalisation thus could not be achieved due to gross irregularities and mismanagement in its implementation. The creation of a parasitic affluent class divorced from production and squandering easy money on conspicuous consumption, only aggravated the economic problems while the political damage to the regime was irreparable. With people's swollen aspirations and the very unfavourable resource/population

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14. Nurul Islam, op. cit. p.,55.

15. Mosharaf Hossain, op. cit. p. 28

16. National Awami Party (Bhashani), Nirbachani Ishtehar (Election Manifesto), (Dacca: Qazi Zafar Ahmed, 1973) cited by Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and its Aftermath*,

ratio, government patronage alienated many. The regime thus lost the greatest asset with which it started—legitimacy. The regime lost legitimacy—not only in the eyes of the people in general but also with the two important catalysts of political change in most developing nations—the students and the Armed forces.<sup>17</sup> The economic crisis, the government's inability to manage efficiently the nationalised enterprises as well as its dependence on external aid donors, the difference within the Awami League concerning social policies, the large scale corruption, the resentment of the army (Rakhi Bahini was alleged to be a counterbalance to potential threats from the army), the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie were the main factors underlying the weakness of the State machinery. The inherent weakness of the coercive instruments of State power on the one hand, and political interference in the State's performance of its functions on the other, made the re-establishment of law and order extremely difficult.<sup>18</sup>

The politically awakened aspirations of large segments and classes of the population could not be reconciled with the insatiable demands of a small privileged coterie (particularly in the deep economic crisis shrouding Bangladesh) by resorting to nationalisation and public sector operation which the Awami League and later the BAKSAL attempted. The situation was worsened by private aggrandisement and a continuing alienation of the elite from the masses.<sup>19</sup> By 1974, it was obvious that the policies pursued by the government had completely failed to remedy the economic, social and political ills of the country. The increasing pauperisation of the exploited classes, accompanied by obvious affluence of a new class of traders made mockery of the social goals of the State.<sup>20</sup> It was hoped that the top leadership of the party would practise self-sacrifice and right discipline as well as demonstrate its faith by positive action in conformity with what it preached.

### **Aid Bunglings**

The war of independence had caused heavy damage to the economy of Bangladesh. So a gigantic task of reconstruction and

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17. *Ibid.*

18. Mosharaf Hossain, *op. cit.* p. 29.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 40

20. *Ibid.*, p. 29



development of the war-ravaged economy had to be undertaken by the new leadership with war-like challenge. As Bangladesh was ill-equipped economically to undertake these tasks, she had to open her door to the international aid donors. The response from the international aid community was encouraging, if not totally satisfactory. The billion dollar injection of assistance appeared to vanish into a bottomless bowl<sup>21</sup> These resources directed at developing Bangladesh seemed to be fruitless. In other words, inspite of massive resources there was no sign of improvement of the economy. So the aid agencies were disillusioned. The amount so received could not be properly utilised because of the misuse of funds.

As far as the role of political leadership is concerned, it has been said that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman "himself was presiding over the most corrupt, dishonest and disorganised regime in Asia. Bangladesh became the thieves paradise, a plunderer's dream. The principal villains were the Awami League bosses and the black market racketeers who ran a lucrative rice smuggling trade across the border into India, even while famine gripped the country in 1974".<sup>22</sup> The international aid giving community became disillusioned with the happening in the country when a section of people were provided with all sorts of undue favours and privileges by the ruling class. Even foreign grant and relief materials which were put in the hands of those favoured few were ultimately misappropriated and smuggled across the border. As has been pointed out by Tony Hagen of UNROD (United Nations Relief Operations in Dacca). "Only one blanket in 13 reached a Bangladeshi in need."<sup>23</sup> The international community which saw Bangladesh as a place where instead of 'self-help', 'help-self' was the rule "became so skeptical with the conduct of the Bangladesh government that even in the crisis days of 1974, when flood and famine engulfed the whole of Bangladesh, the international community "refused to believe in the government's renewed pleas for international help."<sup>24</sup> The international community

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21 *New Internationalist* 49, March 1977, cited by Dr. M A Halim, "Lending policy of the World Bank with special reference to its contribution to the Economic Development of Bangladesh from 1972 to 1978" (Ph. D. dissertation, Carleton University, 1979), p. 18

22. *Ibid*, p.7

23. *Ibid*, p.18

24. *Ibid*, p.132

as a whole had been however, sympathetic to Bangladesh and, upto December 31, 1973 provided a total of about \$ 1373 million as loans and grants,<sup>25</sup> but no appreciable change could be noticed either in the rehabilitation or in the reconstruction of the shattered economy of the country. But in lieu, she earned the most humiliating remarks of 'international basket case.' To quote a foreign journalist who wrote on August 30, 1974:

"Corruption is certainly not new, but for many in Dacca the relative scale and open character of the plunder holds few historical comparisons. One, perhaps, is China during 1930s and 1940s."<sup>26</sup>

### Threat to Democracy

The leaders believed in the value of democratic process and organised movements towards achieving this objective. The events of 1947 and 1971 may be quoted as examples. The struggle first for autonomy, and then for independence from Pakistan was based upon the democratic principle of self-government and majority rule. The party leadership throughout its struggle during the Pakistan period had consistently proclaimed its adherence to the principles of representative government. The Bangladesh constitution precluded the emergence of one-party State. In the light of subsequent developments in early 1975, when one-party government was established by its leader, it was clear that its commitment to democratic principles and institutions was not without reservations or at least that, whatever their original aspirations, in the years following independence there was a change in the attitude of its leadership. Sheikh Mujib, the greatest of the protagonists of democracy abandoned the concept of multi-party parliamentary democracy and adopted the concept of one-party State, in which the party cadres and bureaucracy, including the Army were to be integrated under one unified leadership and control.

Again, actions leading to authoritarian rule in that the independence of judiciary was destroyed through the amendment in the

25. *The Bangladesh Observer*, 26 March 1974.

26. Lawrence Lifschultz, "Bangladesh: A State of Siege". *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 30, 1974, p. 51 cited by Maniruzzaman.



constitution in January, 1975 which states, "The Chief Justice and other judges shall be appointed by the President and a judge may be removed from his office by order of the President on the ground of misbehaviour or incapacity."<sup>27</sup> It was expected that the top leadership would practice rigid discipline and demonstrate its faith by positive action in conformity with what it preached. But one observed regular deviation from earlier commitments made by the leaders.

### Foreign Policy Tilt

The period under review came under criticism for Bangladesh's undue dependency on India in foreign policy matters. In other words India's undue influence into Bangladesh's affairs were well apprehended before the independence was achieved and manifested through subsequent events. The bureaucrats of the Bangladesh Foreign office set up in Calcutta seemed to have attempted a very cool assessment of the Indian position. To quote from a position paper: "After independence) we may resign ourselves to a period of Indian influence but we must try to minimise it as much as possible. In this way the interest of both Bangladesh and India would be served."<sup>28</sup> Segments of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and *Mukti Bahini* (Freedom Fighter) were unhappy with the overall Indian Strategy.<sup>29</sup> While the Indian authorities invested heavily in some senior Awami Leaguers, they failed to win over other important elements.<sup>30</sup> During the euphoric stage of bilateral relations, political considerations were directing the course of economic relations which later proved difficult to observe.

The delayed-recognition of Bangladesh by the People's Republic of China and the Muslim States of Middle East, in particular Saudi

27. Ibid. p. 161

28. Position Paper: 'An Analysis of Indian Plans on Bangladesh,' No. 4/2 Reference Coll (Calcutta), 2 October, 1971, cited by Dr. Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury, "Bangladesh's External Relations: The Strategy of a Small Power in a Subsystem," (Ph. D. Dissertation, Australian National University, 1980), p. 71

29. Ibid p. 71

30. Ibid, p. 73

Arabia, were attributed to this reason beside other reasons. Non-recognition of Bangladesh by China kept her out of the United Nation membership. Even prior to the actual emergence of Bangladesh it was announced that a number of Indian civil officers would be seconded to Bangladesh, and Orissa State government in fact named three such civil servants.<sup>31</sup> The Planning Commission of Bangladesh went a long way with the Indian thinking on planning. In its First Five Year Plan, the commission accepted that what Bangladesh required for increased food production was extensive use of tubewells and low lift pumps.<sup>32</sup>

The fact that the question of Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh was side stepped in the Simla Agreement, was a concession by the latter made at some political cost as evidenced by sharp adverse reaction in certain quarters. Bhasani of NAP and Jalil of the Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) argued that the Agreement 'would not serve the interests of the people of Bangladesh' and that it was a further proof of Dacca's subservience to New Delhi.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of all the concessions made to India, the government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman could not even get a fair deal in the Ganges water dispute except for a face-saving interim agreement.<sup>34</sup>

The devaluation to bring the Bangladesh currency at par with that of India immediately after independence was alleged to have been done at the behest of India. The expected benefits from this devaluation were dissipated and put Bangladesh at great loss.

The tilt is further evident from the fact that "the bourgeoisie as well as the senior army and the bureaucracy were critical of Mujib's policies on grounds that the two fundamental tenets of his state policy—secularism and socialism—which involved Bangladesh in close links with India and Soviet Union were barriers to 'capital

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31. Ibid p. 73

32. BM Abbas AT. *The Ganges Waters Dispute* (Dacca: University Press Limited. 1982, p. 33

33. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, op. cit., p. 91

34. Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh in 1976; Struggle for Survival as an Independent State", *Asian Survey*, Vol XVII, No. 2, February, 1977, p. 121



inflow' which were urgently required to meet the resources gap".<sup>35</sup>

A close look of the period would reveal that the leadership were sincere to begin with to realise the earlier promises and in realising the aspirations of the people but subsequently got deflected from the chartered path. At independence the leadership at the apex found themselves in between the conservative and the radical forces who were vying for supremacy in the Society. The leadership thus opted for a continuous compromises which in turn thwarted the national development and hit hard the millions of people. There existed perpetual disharmony and lack of coordination among the groups, namely, political leaders, planners and implementers (bureaucrats) responsible for the formulation and implementation of national plans. The political leadership was neither sensitive to the cause of the well-being of the poor nor took practical steps to motivate and organise, except in slogan, the idle labour force for nation building activities. Again, the irresponsible leadership paved the way for capital accumulation by a corrupt and favoured few. Many actions of the leaders brought dissatisfaction in the administration, Army and the coercion agency. Foreign donors lost faith in the capabilities of the recipient due to huge aid bunglings. Inequality in the distribution of 'wealth adversely affected the law and order situation.

Thus when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's second revolution lighted its way to dusty death the nation found itself in total limbo. There was politics without political parties, High Courts without justice, Universities without education, factories without production, and a country without a true independence.<sup>36</sup> The Awami League remains in disrepute for the famine and administrative harness that characterised the last years of its rule.<sup>37</sup>

### **Zia's Regime (1975-81)**

President Zia appeared in the scene of Bangladesh authority through a series of coups and counter-coups. Zia felt the necessity of initiating democratic process after the initial period of consolida-

35. Mosharaf Hossain, op. cit. p. 34

36. *Holiday*, 25th April, 1982, p. 8

37. Colin Campbell in *The New York Times*, March 29, 1982

tion of his authority under martial law. A political facade was essential for Zia and he had it in the BNP, to lead the country and counter his opposition forces as well as demonstrate to the world community for Zia and he had it in the BNP, to lead the country and counter his opposition forces and well as demonstrate to the world community. BNP is anything but a cohesive, broadbased, and well-organized political party. Zia used all the means at his disposal to build up his BNP. This did not prove too difficult as politicians scrambled to join his bandwagon, and the party became more of a functional conglomerate with all shades of political opinion and economic strata represented.

Zia's five year reign can be divided into two different, yet interrelated periods. The first period witnessed a military ruler's rather successful efforts at returning his country to civilian form of government through Presidential and parliamentary elections. This period is rather characterised by somewhat improved economic condition, improved law and order situation and the emergence of Zia as an effective leader with mass appeal. But the second period is a distorted reflection of the first. Economic recession and hyper inflationary conditions with mounting political and bureaucratic nightmare. A sense of despair and frustration inflict them today. Zia's per-eminent position in the government, party, and Army was a consequence of his constitutional prerogative to hire and fire or veto almost all will. All executive authority rested in him, since the cabinet was appointed by him, held office at his pleasure and had only advisory powers. The Parliament was accorded a subordinate position vis-a-vis the presidency. Major decisions (both of party and government) were taken unilaterally with little adherence to democratic norms. The exit of Mr. Moudud is attributed to his attempt in initiating democratisation of the Party.<sup>38</sup>

### **Economic Mismanagement**

The question arose whether the leadership had really done its utmost in the economic planning to improve the lot of the masses as the doubt is confirmed by the actual performance of the economy inspite of the declared policy measures taken by the government.

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38. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 107, No. 4, January 25, 1970, p. 32



Dr. M.N. Huda, leader of the Bangladesh delegation in the third meeting of the Bangladesh aid group, held in Paris on May 25th and 26th, 1976 said, "We might have caused you some disappointment in the past. We have ourselves paid a heavy price for this.<sup>39</sup> But his assurance that we have learnt our lessons from past lapses could hardly be believed because the government of Bangladesh felt the need for a more fundamental reorientation of policies within only two years as it put off the second Five-Year Plan and worked out a Two-Year Plan (1978-80) for clearing the deck for future action. The formulation of the Second Five-Year Plan was not considered sound. The plan was formulated in the overall context of abject poverty, ever-increasing unemployment, illiteracy and chronic malnutrition and slow economic growth. To many, both within and outside the government, the plan targets, especially in the light of the past performance, the state of the overall infrastructure facilities, level of the national economy and specially in view of heavy dependence on foreign aid, were far too high. It was, as alleged, at the insistence of the President that it was drawn. Again the Finance Minister, despite shortfall in the aid commitment expressed his roaring optimism that the resource gap would be more than met through increased aid commitment from non-traditional sources, could not bridge the gap.

The Second Five-Year Plan, like its predecessor, has turned out to be a mere scrap of paper devoid of any connection with reality. The government's piecemeal measures to rectify the crisis as and when they appeared were contrary to clearly defining policies on where the government stood on fundamental issues of the economy, namely, private investment in the country, the future role of the nationalised sector, the nature of curbs on bank loans, changes in tax measures, price reduction policies, generation of employment and socio-economic measures to reduce economic disparities. The discipline in the economy that was needed to rebuild it was lost on the one hand to all pervasive personal aggrandisement and on the other to unthinking acts by large segments of the workforce pressing for immediate gains rather than long-term benefits. The controversy over the role of public and private sectors denied

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39. *New Internationalist* 49, March 1977, cited by Dr. M N Halim, op. cit. p. 130

there is none."<sup>40</sup> The nationalised commercial banks were in anarchic situation due to unruly activities of elements affiliated to the former government. The situation gradually deteriorated due to inaction of the government for their own involvements in one way or the other, resulted in huge withdrawal and drove away clients.

A stable and disciplined labour force is essential for economic progress but Bangladesh experienced the opposite due to volatile and, rival political parties competing with each other to escalate worker demands which on many occasion amounted to outright bribery.

The agriculture potential largely remained unrealised. Increase in the price of fertilisers and pesticides as well as in the cost of water for irrigation—all three elements much needed for cultivation of high yield variety of crops have driven farmer to do fresh accounting of the profitability of new agricultural practice. Most of the longtime aid officials in Dacca strongly believed that hunger would not have existed in Bangladesh except for an inefficient, still largely feudal economic and social structure. This system, it is generally agreed, is limiting the amount of food that can be produced and keeping the food that is available from being consumed by those who need it the most.<sup>41</sup> Zia's agricultural programmes, such as World Bank's notorious deep tube-well irrigation projects, inevitably enriched the rural elite and impoverished the landless agricultural workers and small farmers.<sup>42</sup> Denzil Peiris of Far Eastern Economic Review writes, "the consciences of the power-holders are not sensitive to the agonies of the poor around them" which he proves by the fact that at the time of the Presidential election in June, 1978, all the major issues were in the air "except the gut issue that most concerns them: the practical application of an economic and development strategy that will provide enough to eat for all."<sup>43</sup>

During his five year tenure in power Zia had both improved the credit-worthy image of Bangladesh in the eyes of the international

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40. *The Sunday Star* (editorial), 16 December, 1981;

41. *The New York Times*, Nov 24, 1981.

42. *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 July, 1981.

43. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 May 1978, p. 23



community, and in real terms contracted amounts of foreign debts for the country unsurpassed by any previous regime. It is evident from the statistics that the per capita share of debt liabilities on each Bangladeshi has gone up notably in 1981 from 1975. On the contrary, per capita income of the average Bangladeshi today remains where it used to be in 1975 or have actually gone down in real terms.

Aside from gnawing poverty and staggering population growth, the greatest obstacles to progress were considered by many to be Bangladesh's pervasive corruption of most of the top ministers around Zia.<sup>44</sup>

Wide spread corruption in government circles has blunted the effect of massive doses of foreign aid, analysts here say. Rural development projects have been hampered by officials lining their own pockets with funds. Scandals uncovered in the recent past indicate the stunning range, depth and variety of corruption in Bangladesh. It is also clear that the vice has spread so much because it is being practised over a long period with impunity. In the early stages of development, Zia argued, "it is bound to happen like this ..... corruption is a fact of life." In the words of one of his principal political opponents, "there used to be blatant instances of corruption under Mujib, but those were spectacular cases involving certain individuals who were out to build their own private fortunes."<sup>45</sup>

What Zia has done is to regularise corruption and make it almost necessary for everyone to become involved in it.<sup>46</sup> If one of principal features of Mujib regime was loot and plunder of nationalised industries, then Zia regime should be squarely blamed for organised and institutionalised corruption and theft of public wealth particularly the bank money.<sup>47</sup> Of the total loans sanctioned to the private individuals for six nationalised commercial banks over Taka

44. *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1981.

45. Marcus Franda, *Asia-Bangladesh Nationalism and Ziaur Rahman Part 1. Domestic Order*, AUFS, No. 7/1981, p. 8

46. Marcus Franda, *Asia-Bangladesh Nationalism and Ziaur Rahman's Presidency, Part II-International Entanglements'* AUFS, No. 8/1981, p. 1

47. *Holiday* (editorial) May 9, 1982

400 crores have already been declared 'bad-debt'. Corruption has been elevated from a crime to a custom and acceptance of this fact helped corruption grow at a faster rate. Finally, a stage came when no door would open without pre-arrangement of a cut, no file would move without bribery, no payment would be made without earlier transfer of manila envelopes. Subsequently political corruption appeared on the scene to provide protection to all types of crimes.

The considered views of leading intellectuals expressed in a Seminar that enormous waste of resources were due to morality factors in developmental activities. Late Zia stated while addressing the annual convention of economists in 1979 that corruption and irregularities led to misuse of nearly 40 per cent of all resources allocated for development purposes. Dr. Iqbal Mahmud, a former minister, remarked that "developmental activities since the emergence of Bangladesh created a group of indentors with enough resources at their command to influence almost any political and administrative decision. He described corrupting influence of these elements, a new phenomenon of far reaching consequences not to be viewed as a mere extension of corruption prevalent from old days among petty bureaucrats."<sup>48</sup>

### Post-Zia Period

With the initial uneasy period of the Martial Law, Zia initiated the process of democratisation and brought in stability, vital to national development. But the process suffered a set back with the assassination of Zia as it set in a period of chaos and uncertainty which ultimately led to the imposition of Martial Law. The reason of this critical situation is not difficult to find.

The process of democratisation initiated by Zia was yet to institutionalise any system. In fact, the party BNP, was a conglomeration of heterogeneous elements could function only under Zia through his policy of 'balance'. Zia's successor failed to maintain party discipline—the crying need of the hour to tide over the critical situation. The leaders became engaged in fighting party and individual problems rather than attending to national problems. In this most critical situation, party interest got precedence over national



interest. Unprecedented bickering and self-interest among members of the ruling party led to place intrigues. People's expectations soared high with the leader's promises but were shattered by the subsequent events. Law and order situation deteriorated, administration broke down, chaotic conditions engulfed the total life of the nation. People lost faith in the government and were critical about its capability, and corruption charges against the leaders were talked about in public.

The imposition of Martial Law became imminent but the people were not sure about its timing. The statements of the former President and the Chief Martial Law Administrator amply depict the dismal situation obtaining in the country and this demanded an immediate change to relieve the people of their plight and change for the better.

Former President Abdus Satter said that the country's law and order, economic and political situation had reached such a stage where proclamation of countrywide Martial Law became inevitable in national interest.

Lt. Gen. Ershad said that a situation has arisen in the country in which the economic life has come to a position of collapse, the civil administration has become unable to effectively function, wanton corruption at all levels has become permissible part of life causing unbearable sufferings to the people, Law and order situation has deteriorated to an alarming state seriously threatening peace, tranquility, stability and life with dignity and bickering for power among the members of the ruling party ignoring the duty to the state jeopardising national security and sovereignty. The people of the country were plunged into a state of extreme frustration, despair and uncertainty. Such was the scenario when the Martial Law was imposed on the early hours of 24th March 1982.

## CONCLUSION

If ever a country deserved a period of stability it is Bangladesh. It is one of the poorest nations on earth, and yet most populous, and the eleven years since it ceased to be the eastern wing of Pakistan have been an era of political violence economic chaos and uncertainty. It is short of food, badly in need of foreign exchange

and suffering from a deep-seated political malaise, which awaits the practical effects of military rule. Without economic emancipation political freedom is meaningless.

During these twelve years, the country underwent fundamental changes both in state policies and structure of governments, yet the country drifted away from achieving economic emancipation. The trouble is that the governments that have succeeded each other in Bangladesh—governments which have been largely sustained by foreign aid—have not appeared to be particularly interested in using the assistance to promote a more equitable distribution of wealth. Besides, they also failed to establish a system free from individual or group interest, the element which has plagued the country's political life is the lack of institution development. Things could have been settled down had the politicians who became the rulers provided a reasonably honest and welfare oriented government instead of devoting most of their energies to self-aggrandisement and indulging in intrigues. A part of the present malady is ascribable to the constitution itself. The constitution in the present form could work only in a situation when the President was a strongman like Zia who wielded the actual powers and firm grip on his partymen to turn them any way he liked. But with his death, this centripetal tendency gave away to centrifugalism.

Nourishment of politico-commercial classes and landed groups by successive regimes had led to a pathological concentration of economic resources. Translated into human term, the impact of this phenomenon is a frightening burden of misery imposed upon the mass of the people. In fact, the catalogue of inequality has been enlarged, and state policies to reverse present patterns have yet to be implemented effectively. The social and economic challenges confronting the nation have an enormous political dimension. The mess in which the country has been left by the one-man government of the past is indeed baffling. The scars are deep and lacerating. The problem of economic stagnation and massive unemployment has been compounded by all pervasive corruption, administrative incompetence and erosion of norms and values.<sup>49</sup>



This cumulative legacy of the earlier government cannot be solved in a day, or by a stroke.<sup>50</sup> Past corruption no doubt must be probed into but what is more worth while in the long run is to evolve ways of deterring future corruption.<sup>51</sup> Because of the mismanagement of past regimes reforms and reorganisations are needed in many spheres. But we would caution because reforms and reorganisation need time, study and expert knowledge.<sup>52</sup> Besides, it must be noted that in the implementation of the particular policies or programmes the bureaucracy has the ultimate power to delay or frustrate the policy proposals of the government. It may be due to a wilful opposition or obstruction by the bureaucracy but also due to a lack of enthusiasm or support for policies or programmes. The motivation of the officials in charge of administration is important. Sincere, determined and persistent efforts are required to bail out Bangladesh from the remarks 'that Bangladesh's international significance is usually described by foreign diplomats in terms of aid, and rarely in terms of stability, ideology or strategic advantage'.<sup>53</sup>

It is true that no regime can alter the country's debt-ridden inflation and stagnated economy in the short-run. Besides, to establish credibility and carry the people with its programme, the regime has to bring about visible improvements in its economic performances, alleviate deepening social crisis through fundamental land reforms and establish some kind of participatory structures for channeling political grievances. To conclude, country's new President, in one of his first public speeches, declared that Bangladesh must begin to be responsible for its own development. "Bangladesh need not have been poor", he said, "It is not because we are poor in resources. It is only because we could not manage our affairs honestly and efficiently."<sup>54</sup>

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50. Ibid, p. 5

51. Ibid, p. 5

52. Ibid, p. 5

53. Colin Campbell in *The New York Times*, March 29, 1982

54. Ann Crittenden in *The New York Times*, June 6, 1982