INTRODUCTION

The world is changing. As in any other field, changes keep appearing in the arena of politics. Initiated by the collapse of colonial order and the accompanying wave of successful national liberations, new states continue to appear and old ones keep changing. These powerful changes and shifts in world socio-political reality bring in problems and challenges that seem to outweigh the imagination of statesmen and social scientists and capacities of institutions. To be sure, inspired by the continuing changes in the political structure, new approaches, new methods, new tools and new theories keep on emerging to facilitate the comprehension of the dynamics of this process of change. But, the needs of innovation are so enormous, so diverse and so complex in nature as to render the available paradigms inadequate in meeting some of the new challenges.

One such area of disquieting challenges of contemporary history is that of bridging the tremendous gap between the assertion of nationalism and national independence and actual building of a nation-state. Of course, concepts like 'nation building', 'state
building' and 'national integration' have emerged and theories on them do provide answers to problems faced by many of new states. In many other cases, however, problems are so indigenous and so specific in nature that they appear to be outside, or at the best only partially within, the range of plausible comprehension in terms of available stock of knowledge. The challenge of nation building in Bangladesh is a case in point.

The immediate problems of Bangladesh, a new nation-state credited with "an unprecedented success story of national liberation movement waged against internal colonialism"1 are manifold: over-population, lack of resources, inadequate social, educational and technological infrastructure and level of modernisation, undeveloped political, social and economic institutions and hence, a grossly inadequate level and means of human and non-human resource mobilisation for development. The problems are enormous, not insurmountable though. When the "traumatic" independence came to Bangladesh, it came in the wake of a revolution of "rising expectations"2 and hence it was generally believed that the new country should look to the future with reasonable optimism backed by the strength of the successfully asserted nationalism and aroused will of the people, if not for anything else. The shocking fact, however, has been that all those who cherished such aspirations and optimism were soon deeply disillusioned. The trend here has been toward a socio-politico-economic stagnation, ceaseless conflicts of group-interests, lack of national consensus and socio-political stability. Consequently very little has been achieved in terms of nation

building. The substance of a thousand and one questions that Bangladesh faces today is obviously: what went wrong and what should be done? Needless to stress, the questions are more easily posed than answered. Indeed, it would be only in the actual process of nation building itself that they would be answered. One way to attempt answers to them, in the meantime, would be to try to comprehend what really is meant by nation building in the context of Bangladesh. What are the problems of nation building in Bangladesh? Does a crisis of identity pose a serious challenge? Is it also a problem of national value consensus? Is it a problem of institution building? How important is the problem of class-cleavages and elite-mass gap? And above all what is the nature of institutional group conflicts? These are some of the questions that would be dealt with in the present paper. An attempt is first made to examine briefly the prevailing theoretical perspectives on the concept of nation building. The paper then goes on to define nation building in the context of Bangladesh and to analyse the underlying problems. An attempt is finally made to explore a suggestive approach to facing the challenge of nation building.

Nation Building: Theoretical Perspective

‘Nation building’ as a concept has assumed prominence as well as a new dimension following the changes and shifts in the post-World War II period. It has since been a subject of crucial concern in political development. In the current literature, the term ‘nation building’ is most often used interchangeably with ‘national integration’. National integration generally implies bringing together the disparate elements of a society into a more integrated whole, or to make out of many small and diverse societies a closer approximation of one nation. Nation building is now widely used

to cover an extraordinarily wide range of physical, social, economic and political phenomena also. Theoretically, the term has been interpreted in architectural and mechanical sense. "As a house can be built from timber, bricks and mortar in different patterns, quickly or slowly, through different sequences of assembly, in partial independence from its setting, and according to the choice, will and power of its builders, so, a nation can be built according to different plans, from various materials rapidly or gradually, by different sequences of steps, and in partial independence from its environment." Thus the components, design, shape, speed and process involved in building a nation reflect the specific conditions obtained at a particular time period. They also depend upon the content and quality of resources, both human and non-human, and their psycho-social composition.

Nation building in the applied sense is essentially a multi-dimensional and continuing process. It involves, according to one theory, a five-fold task: the creation of a sense of territorial nationality; the establishing of a national central authority; the bridging of the elite-mass gap; the creation of a minimum value consensus; and the devising of integrative institutions and behaviour. This definition places emphasis on the integration aspect of the problem which in most cases is reflected by serious attitudinal and aspirational divergence amongst different sub-national groups—ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and even socio-political and economic.

The term 'nation building', thus, covers a vast range of human relationships, attitudes, activities and social processes: the integration of diverse and discrete cultural loyalties and the development of a sense of nationality; the integration of political units into a common territorial framework with a government which can exercise authority;

the integration of the rulers and the ruled; the integration of the citizen and various social groups into a common political process; and finally, the integration of individuals into organizations for purposive activities. It may be noted here that nation building is sometimes used synonymously with ‘state building’ also. The two terms are, however, different from each other in the sense that while state building implies the creation and consolidation of authority and emphasizes on the role of government in the social process, nation building calls for dispersal of power and stresses on responsiveness and participation. In fact, the two are potentially complementary to each other while nation building in essence has wider connotation compared to statebuilding.

The problems of nation building are not only related to the new states of Asia and Africa. Several European states also faced, and even now are facing analogous problems, although there are important differences between the two. In developed countries, where there is a pre-existent, well-formed, national ideology, a national elite and national institutions, the problem essentially is one of integrating one or more alienated groups into the already existing system. In the developing countries, on the other hand, there is often no such pre-existing “sovereign” system, and the task of nation building is thus two-fold: first, to create a national ideology, a national elite and national institutions, second, to integrate, the various groups into the newly created national system.9

As many states in the Third World are made up of diverse regional groups or nationalities which do not necessarily give their first loyalty to the nation state, the very process of nation building often leads to severe political conflicts. Nation building, in these countries, thus relates, to a large extent, to the relationship between a central govern-

ment and regional groups or nationalities. Recent theories on nation building have made use of this relationship in the framework of the centre-periphery model. One of them points out that both the processes—internal consolidation and external linkages—can be explored with the help of these centre-periphery concepts. With regard to external linkages, the suggested operative model in this theory is one in which “the centre (or super-centre) is located in the territory of a dominant political power, the sub-centre in the national capital, and all the rest is reduced to a vast periphery”. With respect to the national level it is held that “first there is the need for institutionalizing the state in terms of a national community, the establishment of a centre, its outward thrust of permeating the periphery, and its handling of the issue of legitimacy through the processes of democratic participation, political conflict, the intellectual dissent and the response of the periphery to processes by progressively mobilising its own social structure and moving centre-ward through both struggle and coalition-making. The resulting structure of power and decision-making entails a whole line of political and cultural centres and sub-centres built out of the erstwhile periphery with a corresponding set of elites and counter-elites”. The main concerns in this theory are the relationship between the state authority and the masses and the problem of communication between the two through participation.

It would be possible to identify two main features of the existing theories of nation building. Firstly, the term has been used in a very wide and loose fashion to suggest different meanings to different people at different times. And secondly, from operational perspective, one or other specific aspect of the problem has been emphasized indicating

12. ibid, pp. 12-13
13. ibid,
that there may be different ways to nation building. The main reason for this dialectic is that every nation is the creation of its own history which is in turn influenced by a host of factors that are similar only by name but divergent in content. Culture, religion, language, social values and norms, politico-economic indicators and behaviours, all are essential inputs to the nation building process. But these are so diverse from case to case that there can hardly be any single blueprint of nation building. As we have pointed out earlier, many states in the Third World are made of different nationalities, and there exist differences in ethnicity, language, race, caste, assumed blood ties, customs or territory. So, after the attainment of independence, many of these states face the problem of alienation of one or more nationality groups from the country’s political system. The main problem of nation building in these countries is, how to maintain the unity and stability of the new political system and to create a cohesive society from the discrete groups linked by the system. Even in cases where divergences in ethnicity, language, religion and culture are not acute, the problems of nation building do remain. Nation building in those states of Asia and Africa is further complicated by the fact that in addition to ensuring national integration, these states have to face the challenge of socio-economic upliftment which suffered tremendous setback during the pre-independence period. Before independence the heterogeneous socio-political groups were united for a single cause of national liberation. Divergent group interests and orientations were then swayed by the wave of the common cause. When after independence the nationalist leaders faced the specific task of dealing with the welter of socio-politico-economic issues they found the process of self-transformation from the status of leaders of movement to those of nation building much more challenging.

Defining Nation Building in Bangladesh

It will appear from the foregoing analysis that ‘territorial nationality’, ‘establishment of a national central authority’, ‘creation of value
consensus', 'the establishment of integrative institutions for continued socio-politico-economic development' are integrals to nation building. A host of physical, social, political, cultural and economic factors are associated with the nation building process. In order to define nation building in the context of Bangladesh it is necessary to make a review of the socio-demographic profile of the country.

In general terms, the socio-demographic features of Bangladesh are akin to those found in most other new nations of Asia and Africa. Despite these commonalities, Bangladesh stands out almost strikingly with its ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity in the comity of the "nations in hope." All but only two percent of the population are ethnic Bangalee. "Bangla" is not only the universal mother-tongue here but also historically a dominant source of strength of nationalism. The miniature peripheral ethno-linguistic and cultural groups live in tribal areas. To be fair, there has been some degree of tribal dissent which continues to be a cause of concern. And all indications suggest that although the armed struggle of the Shanti Bahini appears to be at least temporarily subdued after the recent surrender of arms by a large section of the rebels, the problem may continue to demand special attention in the task of nation building. The usual deprived psychosis of any minority community coupled with the geographical location where these minorities inhabit accounts for this. What shape the problem will take in the future would depend not only on the way the Dhaka government would handle it but also on its international dimension. However, it may be argued that the

15. 'Shanti Bahini' is the major dissident armed tribal group involved in disruptive guerrilla insurrections in the tribal areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.
problem does not by any calculation seem to pose any really substantive threat to Bangladesh from the point of view of national integration.

Religion is another source of potential cleavage in Bangladesh. With about 12 percent\(^\text{18}\) of the total population, the Hindus form the largest minority group in the country. Although they are all ethnic Bangalees religious difference has historically been the source of separate social and electoral identity\(^\text{19}\). Moreover, there is the legacy of age-old mutual distrust between the Muslims and Hindus which holds the potential of playing "a dysfunctional role in the nation building process"\(^\text{20}\). In the post-1971 Bangladesh, however, the distrust has remained within limits and no recurrence of violence between the two communities has been observed. Moreover, although they are the larger minority compared to the tribals, the Hindus have never organised any dissident movement. The most important cause was the general environment of moderation, amity and harmony in which different religious communities lived in Bangladesh. This environment was again the product of the pervading sense of nationalism found among all communities. Moreover, unlike the tribals, the Hindu population is dispersed all over the country rendering organisation of dissident movement less viable.

Regarding the prospect of any regional disparity fostering intraregional hostility in the country, there is also hardly any threat to the integral status of Bangladesh. There has indeed been some uneven regional growth between the Northwestern (Rajshahi and Khulna) and Eastern (Dhaka and Chittagong) regions in favour of the latter. This has, however, been the result more of geo-economic realities including nearness to the seat of government and existing industrial base,

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18. The share of Hindu community in the total population of Bangladesh was 33% in 1901, 28% in 1941, 22% in 1951, 18.5% in 1961, 13.5% in 1974 which came down to 12.1% in 1982. See, Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 1982, p. 91.
better communication and a better transport system, than any deliberate government policy of inter-regional discrimination. The country's geographical contiguity, linguistic and cultural identity, common history, intra-regional mobility are likely to keep any prospect of inter-regional hostility below the mark.

It would be clear then that problems of national integration understood from religious, cultural, linguistic and regional perspectives are of peripheral significance for nation building in Bangladesh. The crucial elements here, as the discussion in the subsequent chapters would show, include creation of value consensus and establishment of integrative institutions and establishment of viable national authority. From such a perspective, although the country's near homogeneity in ethnic, linguistic, cultural and even religious terms renders its nation building problems *prima facie* simpler, in reality they are of extremely delicate nature. Nation building here as a functional concept has to be perceived as the totality of a continuous and endless process through which the country, by holding a national value consensus overarching the values and expectations of different sections of the society, would so develop as a cohesive socio-politico-economic entity that it would continuously inspire maximum allegiance of its constituents, would strengthen itself from their strength mobilized in concertive participation. In order to comprehend the underlying logic of this definition, it is considered necessary to examine the problems of nation building in Bangladesh.

**Problems of Nation Building in Bangladesh**

**Bangladesh Nationalism: Crisis of Identity?**

Does Bangladeshi nationalism suffer from an identity crisis? Fifteen years after attaining independence through a bloody national independence struggle this is a question that appears to be only partially answered. The glorious story of national revolution rightfully suggested that the country would not have any difficulty in the task
of building and consolidating a national identity. The reality, however, has been otherwise. The search for national identity that began in Bangladesh immediately after its independence continues and the controversies also surface time and again.

In the 1972 constitution the citizenship of Bangladesh was defined as "Bangalee," and the "Bangalee nationalism" was defined as the "unity and solidarity of the Bangalee nation, which deriving its identity from its language and culture attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence". It is obvious that "in asserting its national identity a community may adopt a number of symbols like language, religion, territory or colour". In actual practice, for the sake of creating and upholding national cohesion one or a combination of a number of such symbols may be brought into central focus depending on the prevailing circumstances. Thus language and culture which formed the nucleus of an identity separate from Pakistan were chosen the way religion was picked up by the same community during the forties as at that time, religious differentiation was perceived to be the crucial variable.

In course of developing events the choice of culture and language as the crucial factors appeared inadequate at the both elite and mass level of perception. Doubts were raised as to the criterion of a separate identity as distinct from the millions of Bengali speaking people living across the border with undistinguishable culture. Obviously, the choice was again the religious factor. Thus the secularistic approach was abandoned, and Islamic identity became not only the instrument of differentiation from Hindu Bangalees of West Bengal but also the core-value of resistance against Indian predominance in Bangladesh politics. "Islamic" component in national identity blurred at the initial stages received a clear recognition. Thus "secularism" which formed one of the four state principles was

replaced under the constitutional amendment of 1977 by "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah" to be the "basis of all actions."22

The Zia regime changed the national identity from "Bangalee" to "Bangladeshi."23 Although specific justification was not provided in the constitutional amendment it was clear that the insertion of Islamic provisions was the rationale. Whether or not such symbolism in effect presages the building of an "Islamic" state will be judged by the future course of events. The point in the meantime is that whether or not we call it a "Bangalee" or a "Bangladeshi" nationalism, one way to overcome the controversy is to add the symbol of 'territory'. Thus a multi-symbol identity may be highlighted in terms of culture, language and territory to define the distinguishable national identity and to differentiate it from those of both Pakistan and India.

Erosion of Nationalistic Values

As already mentioned, unlike most other new nations Bangladesh began its march for nation building with certain advantages in terms of cultural, linguistic and religious homogeneity. Most important of all, the country's assertion of nationhood preceded its achievement of statehood. By the time the new state was founded a strong sense of nationhood took deep roots. Indeed, Bangladesh may rightly be called an 'old nation in a new state'. And congruence between Bangladeshi nationalism and Bangladeshi state with effect from December 1971 was therefore, hoped to be "one strong element that ensures the survival of Bangladesh as a consolidated entity".24 The people's liberation war of 1971 that glorified the nation, created heroes, myths and vision of Golden Bengal, could itself be expected to provide the basis for continuity of the revolution in terms of value orientation.

22. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (As modified up to 28th February 1979), Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Govt. of Bangladesh p. 5. Also see Appendix XVII, pp. 152-4.
23. ibid, p. 152.
24. T. Maniruzzaman, op. cit. p. 217
in both leadership and cadre. This did not happen. What indeed was witnessed subsequently was a considerable erosion of this value orientation. The fact that the courage demonstrated during the liberation struggle and the supreme sacrifices that were made may not be enough to shield the leadership and cadres from the advent of corruption and subsequent regression of values was overlooked.

Thus, one of the most important missing links in the nation building efforts of Bangladesh is undoubtedly the national value consensus. The cause of national liberation was the unifying force for the millions before the country achieved its independence. The vision of Sonar Bangla apparently bridged the gap between the social, political and economic groups, between the elite and the mass, between the vertical and horizontal divergences and between institutional group interests. Inequalities and cleavages did exist, divergent groups did also represent divergent interests which could be kept apart by strength of the greater cause — the cause of a glorifying national liberation. What then was the national value consensus? Was it the independence itself? In operational terms, certainly so. But what in the ultimate analysis? Independence was surely a means to a greater end as were the other operational values including democracy, social equity and justice. In any human society these operational values do get influenced by group interests. The success of the totality of these group interests does indeed depend on the way divergences in them are kept to a tolerable limit so that the glue that binds the elements of the totality together is strong enough to prevail, as it was during the days of our liberation struggle. What was that overarching bond? Was it not the strength of the feeling of belonging to Bangladesh? Was it not cause of identifying with Bangladeshi nationalism? Was it not the urge for participating in and contributing to the building of the new nation? Certainly so, and these were indeed the elements of value consensus.

Once independence—one of the operational value instruments—was at hand, willy or nilly, this value consensus was, however, swayed by the tremendous job of dealing with the rest of the operational value
instruments. In the milieu of controversy over the type of democracy, nature of socialism, extent of secularism, pattern of social justice, type of institutional group role and the like, the underlying value consensus has been torn apart. The tremendous psychic relief and satisfaction at the success of the revolution of "rising expectations" overwhelmed not only the unaware masses but also many of those who could be the cadres and leaders for nation building. The latter by all indications failed to ask themselves: was the struggle of independence only to grab power or was it achieved to undertake even more difficult ventures ahead? This in effect brought in an eclipse of national value-orientation which was swayed by the wave of self-interest-oriented socio-political behaviour (to this we will return a little later). In the absence of measures to inculcate in the people, specially the cadres and elite, the perspective of the struggle and sacrifice for the greater cause resulted in the erosion of integrity and prudence. The zeal with which the freedom fighters fought to liberate the country, for example, could be employed to build the nation. Any such prospect, however, turned into ashes because of the lack of any philosophical concept or approach in engaging them for nation building. What followed was a failure of transforming the force and strength of national liberation into that of nation building. The zeal and enthusiasm of masses and cadres and the enhanced national value-perspective that could be transformed into vibrant under-current of new institutions was grossly underutilised and even misappropriated. The loss has been undoubtedly enormous. It is the contention of this paper that the longer it will take to revive the value consensus, the greater will be the painful gestation period of nation building in this country.

Undeveloped Political Institutions and Factionalism in Politics

The nature and extent of development of political institutions in general and political parties in particular determine in great measure

the nature of the polity in any country. The emerging political pattern in Bangladesh has been the creation, however, more of political figures than institutions which the country has been conspicuously lacking. Bangladesh emerged independent with weak institution. Political parties with weak organizations suffer from factionalism because of non-ideological orientation and self-interest. Some of these in effect depended on charismatic leadership to hold the factions together. Bangladesh society is unfortunate in that though there are scores of political parties, only a handful of these parties are institutionalised, well-knit and organised up to the grass root levels having definite policies and programmes of action. Intense factionalism and clique among social groups and classes—a creation of inequitable distribution in the midst of acute poverty—coupled with the existing network of patron-client relationship pervading the whole society have resulted in a system devoid of institutional virtues. Decisions, big or small, are taken on the basis of factional relationship rather than under the directives of any institutional chain of command and authority. Factionalism indeed has given rise to a vicious circle; because of factions, political loyalty rests on the individuals and factions get multiplied as an impact of prevalence of non-institutional chain of command.

Political affiliation and loyalty is more to individuals and patronage than to political thoughts and ideologies. There is a conspicuous trend towards perpetuation of patronage by virtue of kinship, social relation, class and group interest. “All these are indicative of the fact that stable political parties have not yet developed in Bangladesh. To that extent the political parties are less politicised and sensitive to political power.”

29. ibid.
Party politics is characterised by endemic factionalism which also has its origin more to personal animosity and cliques than to ideological differences. Hence decisions made at the personal level determine the outlines of political postures and relationship. Moreover, whether in the government or in the opposition the leadership caters for the maximisation of the interests of the members and the party power-bases at the cost of those of particular political programme. More so, because it is easier to maintain loyalty in the party or groups through decisions promoting intra-group or intra-party relations and interests than by decisions on political postures. Hence concern for maintaining of harmonious relations within the group or party often prevails over the concern for political strategy.

Factionalism in Bengal politics has been historically contributing to poor political institutionalisation. “The factional character of Muslim politicians revealed itself more clearly in the parliamentary politics of united Bengal from 1937 to 1945. The various groups of Muslim legislators failed to accommodate each other. Several ministries were formed and broken up and the assembly ended in an uproarier scene”. Intra-party cleavages continued first in the erstwhile East Pakistan and then in Bangladesh in the same pattern with rather enhanced intensity. Political parties mushroom and factionalism grows irrespective of commitments to a defined ideological posture. Even Awami League, the largest political organization of the country despite Sheikh Mujib’s charisma and personality backed by the nationalistic euphoria could not hold the party together. And even before his killing the party succumbed to factionalism. There is indeed hardly any political party which has risen above the curse of factionalism.

In the above backdrop, the pattern of political culture and behaviour is largely determined by narrow individual or group interests.

Political postures, activities and performances tend to be guided not by political issues and alternatives but in great measure by factors of personalities, influence, patronage and prestige.

Thus the glue that bind the components of the ruling elite together are more non-political than political. Beneath the commonalities that form a temporary and fragile bond of elite interest, the components of the group itself are divided into sub-groups each of which hold divergent interests, orientations, passions and habits peculiar to it.

The class character of the state-elite of the country is constituted by a constellation of rural-urban classes who do not necessarily have the skill or desire to create a supra-group national consensus capable of creating a strong and viable nation-state. It is the socio-economic status of the individuals and their personal ties that largely determine their political behaviour and programme. This in effect also condition the behaviour and performance pattern of the peripheral participants of politico-administrative machinery, be they agents of administration or of political party.

Such a framework of political behaviour essentially guided by self-interest retard the growth of a value-consensus reflecting national aspirations. The prevalent value-orientation reflects the urge for enhancing social prestige, political power and economic status more than any love for supra-self-interests. In such a condition it is hardly proper to anticipate free exchange of ideas for working out a modicum for effective allegiance to national interest. This specific type of political behaviour also contributes to frequent change in political affiliation, politics of expediency and mushroom growth of political parties.

Class-cleavages

It goes without saying that Bangladesh is archetypical of a country facing formidable socio-economic problems. Belonging to the category of “Least Developed Countries,” by World Bank classification, Bangladesh has the eighth largest population of the world living
with one of the highest densities in a land endowed with very little natural resources. Beneath the overall scenario of dismal socio-economic plight of the populace lies a disquieting sketch of sharpening inequalities and cleavages.

In the absence of a well-developed capitalist establishment, the state power has been dominated in one form or other by an intermediate class. This intermediate constituency allied with the rich land-owners is at the helm of the state through an amalgam of mainly three institutional groupings: (i) civil bureaucracy, (ii) the military and (iii) the civilian politicians and their parties. Most of the third category have their roots in, or are allied with smaller groups of professional or small-scale entrepreneurial background and related interests. Outside this constellation is the vast "ruled universe" including the urban lower-middle and low-income working class and the unemployed, the near or total landless peasants and the disadvantaged in the rural areas. Taken together, this ruled part of the society form the potential reservoirs of political activism that may be dragged into whatever changes may occur from time to time.31

Although the baseline socio-economic condition determines the class composition and structure of the Bangladeshi society, the class character is hardly reflected in the social and political behaviour of these classes which are far from being organised on the basis of class consciousness. Indeed, precise definition of class limits is not possible. To be sure, there is acute inequity in the distribution of income and wealth in both rural and urban areas. The latest available data show that the highest quintile of population received 46.9 percent of the income in 1976-77 while their lowest counterpart received only 6.2 percent.32 Distribution of land ownership is further skewed against the disadvantaged, as in 1978 the top 10 percent the owners occupied 49 percent of the total cultivable land as against only

2 percent being owned by the bottom 10 percent of the owners.\textsuperscript{33} The richer minority of the rural population also controls the functional aspect of the access to all development allocation and deliveries in the villages. Hence income and wealth as well as power and influence in terms of both social and political parameters are in their hands who maintain an alliance with the urban elite where the major economic groups are the professionals, service holders, traders and businessmen and factory workers.

Despite the presence of objective conditions in Bangladesh there has hardly been any growth of class based organization. The single most important reason for this is the patron-client network. In the rural society there exists a very strong and well-knit patron-client relationship between the poor and the rich. At the poor's end the relationship is dictated by the question of their sheer existence. Because of the acute nature of poverty, their main concern is their immediate problems like food, shelter and a socio-economic umbrella for survival. The local landed and richer sections have traditionally satisfied the types of demand nurtured by the disadvantaged. They have done so to acquire support and create the power-base of their social, economic and political muscle. "Thus from the reciprocal needs of both the lower strata and upper classes of rural peasantry grow vertical formations undercutting the economic cleavages in the rural society".\textsuperscript{34} Family and kinship ties have also strengthened the patron-client relationship and as a result ideological or class ties have indeed taken the back seat. While the lack of class-consciousness among the disadvantaged also pervades the urban sector,\textsuperscript{35} there is increasing convergence in the political and economic interests of the urban and rural elites who in effect form the alliance of 'intermediate' class.

\textsuperscript{34} T. Maniruzzaman, \textit{op. cit.} p. 229.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.} p. 240.
The impact of such a structure of class-cleavage has been that the intermediate class dominates the state machinery of the country irrespective of whether it is under civil or military rule. That in turn indicates that in building the support base of the ruling elite, it deemphasizes the considerations for ideology. Whether it is political party, civilian bureaucracy or the military oligarchy, the platform is built not on the basis of any specific socio-politico-economic programme but on the basis of mutual patronage function.

Elite-Mass Gap and Distorted Participation

Another significant challenge in nation building is posed by the pervasive elite-mass gap in the society. Despite the fact that the ruling elite does not form a homogeneous group in itself and there are cleavages within it, as distinct from the masses it stands as an exclusive class in terms of income, wealth, privilege, influences and power. The problem is more compounded because the difference is indeed more enormous in terms of aspirations than in terms of actual status. In reality, a “winner-takes-all” game of politics is played for fulfilment of their narrow and exclusive interests which depends mechanically on the manipulation with the fate of the disadvantaged masses. This also make them dependent on measures that undermine the prospect of institutionalisation of their own authority, and the process of alienation sharpens.

The elite-mass gap is also reflected in the process of nation building itself. Decisions and policy making being the monopoly of the elites fail to cater to the needs, aspirations and perceptions of the disadvantaged masses. The result is that whatever development or growth takes place assumes a distorted pattern of distribution biased to the elites at the cost of the masses.

As already mentioned, Bangladesh features substantial and sharply increasing inequalities in distribution of wealth and income. Inequalities exist between urban and rural income distribution as the average income of the urban population is about two-thirds higher
than their rural counterparts so that urban rich are more affluent than the rural rich and the rural poor is more impoverished than the urban poor. While inequitable land distribution mainly accounts for skewed distribution of wealth and income in rural areas, urban inequality is caused by the income differential between the modern sector including the large and medium scale industry, trading and intermediary, foreign trade and services on the one hand, and the informal sector including the petty traders and manufacturers, self-employed and unemployed as well as under-employed labour force on the other. Within these two sectors themselves there are further inequalities, for example, between the wage-earners and the rest.

The implication of inequality in the distribution of wealth and income in the context of overall poverty and low per capita income is that in absolute terms the disadvantaged section of the populace is much worse off than they would have been if the pattern of distribution was less inequitable. Inequity is indeed all pervasive and includes opportunities of employment, education, health and other areas. The result of all these is almost total absence of the masses not only from the corridors of policy and decision-making but also from the process of participation in the political, administrative and economic activities.

Institutional Group Conflicts

If one looks at the post-independence history of Bangladesh one finds that the failure of the first three years of democratic experimentation has been followed by a succession of ruling elites composed of the civil bureaucracy, the military and a section of political parties. In the vacuum created by the lack of political institutions, lack of class-conscious organisations and prevailing patron-client rules of the game, the army which is the most institutionalised group, emerged having the strongest cards. The army which grew and continues to

be highly politicised soon formed a ‘partnership of convenience’ with the civil bureaucracy which during the early years of Mujib rule was grossly alienated. Leaders of some political parties followed suit to complete the alliance and the ruling elite that emerged turned out to be a combination of soldier-turned-politicians, politician-turned barrack-associates and bureaucrat-turned-politicians.

The alliance, however, by virtue of the intrinsic weakness of expediency has remained troubled. It has been riven with clash of interests, conflicts of aspirations, odds of factionalism and discontents of sectarianism. More so because there has always been mutual mistrust and misperception of each other. Above all, sharp disagreements exist as to what should be their respective roles in state and nation building.

The Awami League (AL) which emerged as the dominant political force in the immediate post-independence period advocated the principle of politicians playing the dominant role in the decision-making process. On the other hand, bureaucrats had the expectation that in the absence of the Pakistani competitors they would take the dominant role in the power structure and policy-making of the new state. After independence, coming into power, the political elites took several measures to curb the powers and privileges of the bureaucratic elites which formed the genesis of the conflict between the two.

With the introduction of the parliamentary government the political elites became the supreme policy-makers who also controlled the

The basic premise of the government with regard to the bureaucratic elites was embodied in the First Five Year Plan. The Planning Commission wrote:

They (the bureaucrats) can, therefore, be neither innovators nor catalytic agents for a social change. It is only a political cadre with firm roots in the people and motivated by the new ideology and willing to live and work among the people as one of them can mobilize the masses and transform their pattern of behaviour.

In fact, the AL government initiated several policy measures to implement the above idea. Bureaucrats were not only denied constitutional protection guaranteeing security of tenure but were also kept off the centre of power. In the government, the party tried to consolidate its position. The top advisers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were all political leaders. Many of the key positions in the Planning Commission, public sector enterprises, corporations and agencies which were formerly held by bureaucrats were filled in by political workers, academicians and other non-bureaucrats. The government also initiated measures to abolish the existing bureaucratic elites and classes by eliminating the reservation of higher posts for any particular cadre and by slashing down the salaries of higher level bureaucrats. A Presidential Order (PO no. 9/1972) was promulgated which empowered the government to dismiss any civil servant 'in the interest of the country' and such dismissals could not be challenged in the court. A large number of civil servants were removed from service under this

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38. In the Secretariat the Awami League cadres brought pressure at the implementation stage of policies formulated by AL government. At the field-level the local AL cadres ensured that the administrative machinery was operated according to their dictates. See, U.A.B. Razia Akter Banu, "The Fall of the Sheikh Mujib Regime: An Analysis", *The Indian Political Science Review*, Vol. XV, No. 1, January 1981, p. 12.


order. 41 All these, thus, alienated the bureaucrats and the resultant lack of cooperation between the politicians and bureaucracy virtually disintegrated the administration. The process was sharpened after the introduction of BAKSAL under which the newly created district governors were to be appointed from among the BAKSAL members. This in effect made all the district level civil servants including Deputy Commissioners subordinate to the political appointees. Indeed, 19 percent of the members of the central committee of the BAKSAL were drawn from the bureaucracy and as of July 1975, 23 percent of the District Governors were bureaucrats. 42 But they were selected from among the ‘trusted section’ of the bureaucracy.

The sense of deprivation and resentment arising from these measures alienated the bureaucrats, specially the higher echelon civil servants. Mujib himself even alleged that the bureaucrats were trying “to discredit the politicians”. 43 The politicians on their part blamed the bureaucrats for administrative mismanagement and corruption.

The policy measures adopted by Mujib regime also alienated the army. The defence expenditure was not only minimal but was gradually reduced. 44 In fact, the Mujib Government had never shown any serious interest in building a strong military. Analysts attribute two main reasons for Mujib’s unwillingness to do so: (i) he never perceived any countable external threat and (ii) he never had the trust

41. Under P.O. No. 9, nine out of 180 Bengali members of erstwhile CSP and about 6000 government employees of other categories of services were dismissed. See, Talukder Maniruzzaman, Group Interesi and Political Changes: Studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1982. p. 197.
44. The Budget allocation for defence was 18.3% in 1972-73, 16% in 1973-74, 15% in 1974-75 and 12.5% in 1975-76. See, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Economic Review, 1972-73, 1973-74, 1974-75, 1975-76.
The creation of *Rakkhi Bahini*, which was considered in the regular army as a serious challenge to its professional pride and corporate self was the demonstration of Mujib's lack of trust in the military. The process of alienation also included the judiciary whose independence was destroyed as symbolised by the January 1975 amendment bill which provided, *inter alia*, that "A Judge may be removed from his office by order of the President on the ground of misbehaviour or incapacity." The bill also stripped the citizens of the right to move the Supreme Court for the enforcement of fundamental rights.

The event of 15 August 1975 were symptomatic of the rising discontent resulting from the process of alienation. The event marked the beginning of the period of Bangladesh being ruled by "mixed regime" of elites composed of the groups alienated so far. The new military rulers got the support from the civil bureaucracy and took some steps to the satisfaction of the latter. The Presidential Order No. 9 of 1972 was withdrawn and many of those who lost their jobs under that order during the Awami League regime were reinstated. Political workers and non-bureaucrats who were holding key positions in the nationalised enterprises and public corporations or agencies were replaced by professional bureaucrats. The constitutional provision relating to the National Party was omitted and the scheme of District Governorship was dropped, thereby restoring the authority of the civil servants as the chiefs of District and Subdivisional administration. Assuming the Presidency, General Zia took several steps to legitimise and civilianise his regime. He transformed himself as the elected President through a referendum and a subsequent Presidential election. After the election a new council of Ministers, consisting of 18 bureaucrats and 10 politicians was appointed. In April 1979 the Martial Law was lifted and a civilian govern-

45. M. Rashiduzzaman, "Changing Political Patterns..." *op. cit.*
ment was formed under President Zia. The 42-member government (as in January, 1980) consisted of 29 full Ministers and 13 State and Deputy Ministers. Out of the 29 full Ministers, 8 were former bureaucrats (6 military and 2 civil). 8 were technocrats and 13 were political leaders; of the 13 state and deputy Ministers 8 were politicians.

Although the political elites were given large representation in the council of Ministers, top advisors of the President were drawn from the bureaucrats and technocrats. Key government portfolios were hardly given to the politicians. It is however a fact that President Ziaur Rahman tried to follow a policy of balancing between the politicians and civil bureaucracy. But his policy could not function smoothly. Within a very short time the conflicts between the politicians and civil bureaucracy became clear. One of the Deputy Prime Ministers of Zia’s cabinet thus publicly complained: “A large section of administration thinks that the power of the politicians is tenuous. So they are defying the orders (of the politicians) … … At the present moment a section of the bureaucracy contemplates that if the government fails, total powers will go back to them.” He also argued for the building of strong political institutions “so that the bureaucrats can realise that under any circumstances it is the politicians who will rule and conduct the state”.

In pursuance of his politics of checks and balances, President Zia adopted the strategy of inducting the servicemen in higher positions...

48. For example, portfolio of Defence had all along been held by President Zia himself, Finance by Dr. M. N. Huda (a University Professor) for some time and then by Saifur Rahman (a Chartered Accountant), Home by Lt. Col. (Retd) A.S.M. Mustafizur Rahman, Foreign Affairs by Professor M. Shamsul Huq (a former Vice-Chancellor and educationist), Industries by Jamaluddin Ahmed (a business executive), Planning by Dr. Faziluddin Mahtab (an Engineer) and Establishment Division by Major General (Retd) Majedul Huq. See, Adul F. Huq, op. cit. p. 210.

in the Secretariat, diplomatic offices, police department and other government agencies. This militarization process of the civil administration not only threatened the position of the civil bureaucracy in the administrative hierarchy but also created considerable discontents among the higher-level civil servants. The military bureaucracy itself was also engaged in internal feuds. Due to excessive politicization and personal clashes the unity and discipline of the armed forces were affected. It was reported that there had been over a dozen of abortive coups to overthrow Zia within the 5½ years of his rule. And in the last one that occurred on May 30, 1981 in Chittagong, President Zia was killed by a group of army officers.

After the sudden death of President Zia, though the military elites expressed their support for constitutional government, they were not prepared to give up the dominating position they had enjoyed since 1975. On Nov 28, 1981, only 12 days after Justice Sattar took over as an elected President, Lt Gen H. M. Ershad, the Chief of Army Staff, in a statement given to the editors of national newspapers and news agencies pointed to “a very grave and deep-seated politico-military problem” and “called for its permanent solution in a constitutional approach”. He also

50. At the beginning of 1980 there were 41 military officers in the civil service. This number increased to 79 towards the end of that year. In June 1980 there were as many as 16 military officers holding such key posts as Joint Secretary, Additional Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Chairman or Director of public corporations. In December 1980, in 14 Districts out of the then 20 Districts the Superintendents of Police were military personnel. Establishment Minister’s statement in the Parliament. The Sangbad, 28 February, 6 June and 31 December 1980.


53. Abul F. Huq, op cit, p. 214

urged that potentials of armed forces in a poor country like ours can be effectively utilised for productive and nation building purposes in addition to its role of national defence.\(^{55}\)

To accommodate the military bureaucracy the government formed a 10 member National Security Council including the three chiefs of armed forces. But the military leaders were not satisfied with this, because the NSC was merely a counselling body rather than a policy-making authority as desired by them.\(^{56}\) On March 24, 1982, Lt Gen H. M. Ershad declared Martial Law in the country and assumed all powers of the Government as the CMLA, removing the incumbent President and his council of Ministers, dissolving the parliament and suspending the constitution. He appointed the Chiefs of Navy and Air force as DCMLAs. Under the Martial Law the country was divided into five zones and twenty sub-zones headed by military officials.

A council of advisors later redesignated as the council of Ministers was also appointed by the CMLA. In July 1982, the 16-member council of Ministers was composed of 7 military officers, 3 retired civil servants and 6 other civilian technocrats. None was from the politicians. Some political figures were, however, included later in the cabinet\(^{57}\) and it seemed that a new alliance was taking shape among these three dominant groups. But the increasing militarization of civil administration\(^{58}\) was accompanied by a policy of

55. ibid.
56. Abul F. Huq, op. cit.
57. Out of 35 Ministers the number of political leaders is 15 (10 Ministers and 5 State or Deputy Ministers).
58. Induction of the armed forces in the diplomatic, administrative, police and in other Government and semi-Government services has shown a large increase in the last three years. Out of 65 districts, 53 have military officers as Superintendents of Police. The majority of state-run corporations and even voluntary organizations have military and ex-military officers as their Chairmen. For details See, Ataur Rahman, “Bangladesh in 1983 : A Turning Point for the Military”, Asian Survey, Vol. XXIV, No 2, Feb, 1984, p, 244, also Manash Ghosh, “Ershad’s Bangladesh-II”, The Statesman, April 18, 1985.
ensuring greater military participation in the government initially through the demand for constitutional re-arrangement and later on through steps for civilianization of the military rule by the familiar method of inducting civilian ministers. On the other hand, the intensification of mass movements and discontents initiated by the political parties against the military rule only indicate that the institutional group conflicts and divergences are not yet removed. Rather the situation continues to be grave and devising an effective way for resolution of this conflict as well as defining their respective roles, appear to be the most formidable challenge to nation building in Bangladesh.

An Approach to Facing the Challenge

It is clear from the above discussion that the problems of nation building are complex and multi-dimensional and a miraculous achievement in nation building overnight is hardly possible. But it is too large and too rich a nation to remain in oblivion and suffer from the spirit of hopelessness. What indeed can be expected is the vision of a process which in its own course will lead definitively toward nation building. It would appear from our definition of nation building that there are in essence three preconditions for nation building. They are consensus, allegiance and participation. Experience has shown that simplistic and impositionistic approach as was followed in the past has alienated not only the masses but also different functional and institutional groups and has in effect been counterproductive. A much more objective and creative approach is called for in order to develop an over-arching ‘national consensus’, ensure increasing ‘allegiance’ and maximum ‘participation’. The problems of nation building in Bangladesh discussed earlier in the paper can indeed be dealt with through a process which would essentially hold in perspective those preconditions.

The substance of what is suggested is that on all the major issues a genuine national consensus should be established. And in order
that such a consensus is valid and represent societal view, maximum allegiance and participation is sought without which it would be impossible not only to eliminate the alienation syndrome but also to ensure stability and continuity. Take the question of institutional group conflicts. It is obvious that the basic issue here is a consensus on the respective role of the institutional groups, the nature of their participation, mode of horizontal and vertical relationships and above all, the generation of a sense of unity through a recognition of the claims of diverse groups to share power and resources as well as to shoulder responsibility. The controversy over the role of army is most obviously the one that looms large among all others. Underdeveloped political institutions, weakness of political leadership, factionalism in party politics, deterioration of law and order situation, lack of mass confidence in political leadership, alienation of professional groups as well as masses in the process of power play and above all, value perceptions of military officers are among the factors that account for intervention of the military in politics and administration. Legitimately or not, military has assumed the status of an important contender for power in the politico-administrative process.

The issue is complex. Even bypassing the controversy over the subject of the legitimacy of the claim to constitutional role, from the operational point of view one faces a number of controversial issues. What would be the nature of constitutional role of the armed forces? How would this role be determined—through amendment of the constitution by parliament or a referendum? How large will be the quota and on what basis will that be determined? What then will be the process of their election to the parliament? What will be the constituency? Is it the armed forces alone? If not, what are the other professions to share the power? If on the other hand, representatives of the armed forces would be selected, what would be the mode of selection and what would be the mode of inter-cadre and inter-forces distribution? How would the armed forces perform the constitutional role? How after
all, power sharing will be structured? Will this include both legislative and executive power? These are some of the questions that if left unanswered, would continue to have deleterious effect not only on the overall political scenario but also the environ within the armed forces.

The problem is of a nature that warrants a consensus at national level. Ideally one would prefer its solution through a referendum in order to ensure allegiance and participation. But given the nature of complexities in the questions and in the backdrop of mass illiteracy, the validity of a referendum verdict may be questionable. One possible way may be to proceed through stages. There is no denying the fact that the largest single important factor that accounts for the state of politico-economic flux and underdevelopment is the weakness of institutions. It is through the growth of stable and self-sustained institutions that a proper solution in the ultimate analysis may be found. In the meantime efforts should be made to generate a sense of unity and an overarching national value consensus under which the divergent group interests and aspirations would converge for the sake of greater objective of nation building. Under an interim arrangement for the short term all the contending institutional groups should agree to mutually concede, each yielding part of the respective group claims in favour of the others. As distinct from a winner-takes-all rule of the game, the sum-total of such a give-and-take process would not only provide some arrangement for interim state management but also reconciliation and accommodation on measures to create the crucial premise for institution-building.

The question then obviously is, what will be the length of such an interim period? The answer to this would depend on the quality and extent of commitment of the leadership which for the sake of ensuring participation and allegiance would initiate structural measures for building and developing socio-politico-economic institutions. Such institutions would aim at providing systemic stability at
the national level and diffusion of power and authority to the grassroots level. They would also create and strengthen participatory capabilities in the masses through structural changes in key areas including education, income and employment which are considered to be among the basic components of nation building.

Admittedly, much is said and written these days on the importance of structural transformation of socio-economic forces and on the need for devising mechanisms for benefit of the disadvantaged. Despite all the theories of 'poverty-oriented' strategy and 'bottom-up' method, the fact remains that in the ultimate analysis decisions continue to be taken at the elite level. We have seen that social and political organisations of this country do rarely represent their real class character. This is true more in case of the disadvantaged class which indeed have hardly any organisation of their own capable of influencing the decision and policy-making process. Under such circumstances whatever re-structuring can be expected—incremental or fundamental—would be only through the initiatives of the elites. Paradoxically, many, if not all, of those who advocate measures for socio-economic re-structuring, in one way or other enjoy the patronage of those who are in fact adversely disposed to it. Hence a consensus is to be reached on the nature, extent and modicum of restructuring itself before it may be expected to contribute to the process of nation building. The longer it will take to establish such a consensus capable of ensuring maximum allegiance and participation, the greater will be the cost of nation building in this country.