Bangladesh
An Experience in Nation State Building

Col Mahmud ur Rahman Choudhury, psc (Retd)

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Bangladesh **DEFENCE** Journal

Bangladesh Defence Journal Publishing

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Introduction

Ever since the turn of this century, there is an ongoing international debate about "failed states" and their various implications. The primary aim of this study is to refute such concepts as being, in their entirety, fallacious and misleading because if one is to accept the authority of Toynbee, then this whole debate about failed state or government becomes irrelevant because states or governments are really not 'intelligible units of historical study'; these are but instruments whereby societies or nations delineate and regulate themselves. Society or its larger manifestation called the nation, ipso facto implies the possession of a culture by a particular society or nation. Certain nations, driven by various environmental factors and their inherent characteristics develop their cultures into civilization, the difference between a culture and a civilization being one of scale - whereas cultures are particular to societies or nations, civilizations are universal extending over many societies and nations. Indeed, civilizations are few and far between and can be counted on ones fingers to include: Egyptian, Greek, Persian, Indian, Chinese and Arabic - arguably, all other cultures spring out from these civilizations and not surprisingly, the names imply the nations, which gave rise to these civilizations.

The two-pronged progression from language to culture to civilization on the one hand and from community to society to nation on the other culminates in the creation of a largely geographical and artificial construct called the State. As is evident, this does not occur in a discrete series of easily identifiable events, but is a process extending over centuries, even millenniums. The State is a necessary construct, for it is only within the State that a culture and a nation has the security and the material wherewithal to incubate and flourish. Empire building is not a function of civilizations although "civilizing nations" have built empires as conduits for the propagation of their cultures but as soon as cultural diffusion took place, the empires collapsed. The Egyptians were satisfied with uniting the upper and lower Nile valleys; the Indians and the Chinese never felt the necessity of crossing their natural geographical boundaries for empire-building; the Muslim Arabs burst outward explosively but their empire within a century passed on to other non-Arab Muslims and the Persian empire lasted for a few centuries until destroyed by the Greeks under Alexander, whose empire lasted, in truncated form, for no more than two centuries after his death. And yet the civilizations, which these nations built, last till today. Lasting empire-building seems to be a function of non-civilizing states such as the Romans, inheritors of the Greek civilization or the British, inheritors of the Greco-Roman culture imbued with Judeo-Christian religious beliefs or today the Americans, inheritors of the British culture and religion - warts and all or if one prefers to look to the East and the Orient - the Mongol empire which was absorbed by the Sinic and Indic civilizations and the Turkish Ottoman Empire which lasted for 800 years until absorbed by the advancing British Empire in early 20th century. Thus the emphasis on states and their failures.

While it is essential for a "civilizing nation" to have a State, the structures are not permanent; they mutate, shrinking or expanding, sometimes disappearing

altogether for extended periods of time, reemerging in a different form, as long as the civilization retain the virility to diffuse itself, as is shown from the example of Greek-Rome-Britain-USA. Therefore, a secondary aim of this study is to gain new insights into the development of nation-states, taking Bangladesh as an example, identifying impediments to progress and development to a "civilizing nation" and suggesting key elements, which can overcome these impediments. The insight is provided by history and so much of this paper is taken up with history.

The Remarkable Nature Of Our People and Polity: The Land And The People

Prehistory Bengal

Physically, the Bengal delta with its massive river systems running down - north to south - to the Bay of Bengal, have always defined Bengal's ancient sub-cultural regions within the sub-continent of India. In prehistoric times, what is Bangladesh today, was defined by four geographical sub regions - Varendra included the territories now forming the districts of Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur; Vanga the central region included Dhaka, Faridpur, Jessore, Bakerganj and Khulna; Samatata included the hilly region east of Meghna corresponding to Comilla, Noakhali and Chittagong and finally Harikela referred to the north eastern areas now part of Mymensingh and Sylhet. The area had been inhabited long before the appearance of the earliest dated inscriptions in the 3rd century BC. In ancient North-Bengal, Pundranagar or the city of the Pundras, identified with Mahastan in Bogra, owned its name to a non-Aryan tribe mentioned in late vedic literature; similarly the Radha and the Suhma people gave their names to western and south-western Bengal as the Vanga people gave their name to central and east Bengal. By the 11th Century BC, people in these areas had already developed viable communities based on an economy of shifting cultivation and use of iron tools and implements. These communities were probably speakers of Proto-Munda, Austro-asiatic ancestor of the modern Munda languages. There are linguistic evidences that as early as 1500 BC Proto-Munda speakers had evolved a subsistence agriculture, which produced rice, among other cereals.

Suddenly in the 5th and 6th century BC dramatic changes began to take place in the middle Gangetic plain, changes which would permanently alter Bengal's cultural history. Shifting cultivation gave way to settled farming, first on unbounded permanent fields and later on bounded irrigated fields. Whereas earlier forms of rice production could have been managed by single families, the shift to "wet rice production" in permanent fields called for permanent settlements, large labor inputs, use of draft animals, irrigation technology and increased communal cooperation. Techniques of transplantation of rice seedlings, a decisive step from primitive to advanced rice cultivation, occurred in this region around 500 BC.

These changes were accompanied by the intrusion of the first wave of conquerors from the north and west, the Indo-Aryans who brought along with

them a vast store of a new language called Sanskrit and a new Sanskrit based religion and sacred literature. They also brought along with them a hierarchically ordered society headed by a combination of hereditary priesthood called Brahmins and warriors class called Kashtriyas. They made a cultural distinction between "clean" Indo-Aryans and "unclean" barbarians or "mlecchas" and the eastern frontier of this division was Bengal. Despite these taboos, the Aryans continued to expand up to the middle and lower Ganges region justifying each movement as pushing further eastward the frontier separating themselves from peoples they considered ritually unclean.

The Historical Age in Bengal

Today modern Bangla, an India-Aryan language is surrounded on all sides by a number of non-Aryan languages - Austro-asiatic, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan - suggesting that over the past several millennia the non Aryan speakers of the Bengal delta proper had lost their former linguistic identities, through gradual acculturation with the Indo-Aryans, while the surrounding hill people-retained their linguistic-cultural identities. Such Aryan influences include, in the present day Bangla, "a high frequency of retroflex consonants, an absence of grammatical gender and initial-syllable word stress" (M. H. Klaiman, "The Worlds Major Language", ed Bernard Comrie, New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, pages 499-511).

Meanwhile around 300 BC, the Aryans after fighting numerous wars of extinction with local tribes in northern India and between themselves settled down to forming their first Empire called the Maurya, centered in Magadh, immediately west of the Bengal delta. Contact between the Aryans and the delta region increased and coincided with the spread of Buddhism favored by the imperial state of the Mauryas. Inscriptions dating from 2nd and 3rd centuries BC in Madhya and Andhra Pradesh cite evidence of Buddhism in Bengal, considering the region as important to Buddhism. But in Bengal, it was the Brahmin priest, rather than the Buddhist, who seized the initiative in settling amongst the indigenous people of Bengal, despite Aryan taboos regarding "unclean" lands and people to the east. What made Brahmins acceptable to the non-Aryans people of Bengal was their knowledge of agriculture since the technological and social conditions necessary for the transition to peasant agriculture, already established in the north, had not yet appeared in the Bengal delta till the rise of the Maurya Empire.

The Medieval Period & the Rise of Hindu Culture in Bengal

In the middle of the eight-century AD, regionally based imperial systems emerged in Bengal, some of them patronizing Buddhism, others a revitalized Brahmanism. The first and the most powerful of these was the Pala Empire (750-1160) founded by a warrior and a fervent Buddhist named Gopala. From their core areas in Varendra and Magadh, the Palas extended their sway far into the Gangetic plains. It was about this time too that a self-contained regional economy emerged in Bengal. In Samatata in the southeast ruled the Chandras (825-1035) who were not as powerful or durable as the Palas but who nonetheless controlled trade and commerce in the Bay of Bengal and

further up into the Indian Ocean. While the Palas used cowry shells for settling commercial transactions, the Chandras were already using silver coinage, more conducive to international trade.

By the 11th Century AD, even the Palas, such enthusiastic patrons of Buddhism, had abandoned it in favor of a newly reformed Brahminism. This trend was seen most clearly in the later Bengali dynasties - the Vermans (1075-1150) and specially the Senas (1097-1223) who dominated all of Bengal at this time. The kings of Sena dynasty belonged to a warrior caste of Karnataka in South India who had migrated to Bengal and took service under the Palas.

As Pala power declined, in the 12th century AD Sena power increased until they threw away the Pala overlordship, declared independence, took control of the Pala areas and moved into the eastern hinterlands displacing the Varmans. Since the Senas had brought along with them their devotion to Hinduism, their arms were accompanied everywhere in Bengal by royally sponsored Hindu cults. By the end of the 11th Century AD, the epicenter of civilization and power had shifted from Bihar to Bengal, while royal patronage shifted from Buddhism to Hinduism.

By the 13th century AD then, most of Bengal west of Karatoya had become settled by an agrarian population well integrated with the Hindu social and political values espoused by the Senas. Here too indigenous tribes had become well assimilated into the Brahmin ordered social and economic hierarchy. Although at this time the eastern delta had certainly begun to be peasantized along the valleys of large river systems such as at Vikrampur and Lalmai, the process had not advanced there to the extent that it had in west and northwest Bengal. East of Karatoya and south of the Padma lay a vast forested and marshy hinterland, inhabited mainly by non-Aryan tribes not yet integrated into the agrarian socio-economic system that had already revolutionized Magadh and most of West Bengal. It is in this region that subsequent generations of pioneering Muslim conquerors would concentrate their energies as Bengal's economic and cultural frontiers continued to shift eastwards.

Muslim Intrusions in Bengal

Beginning of the 9th Century AD, remarkable changes were taking place simultaneously in north and south India, changes that were as durable and decisive as that of the Indo-Aryan conquests in the Pre-historic and early historic eras. Muslim Arabs had begun raiding into northern India & trading in the south through the Indian Ocean. Turks followed the Arabs & by the 11the century had established their suzerainty over most of northern India. As far as the Muslim traders were concerned, two diasporas overlapped each other in the delta region: one extending eastwards from the Arabian Sea was dominated by Muslim Arabs or Persians; the other extending eastwards from the Bay of Bengal, by Buddhist Bengalis. The earliest presence of Islam in Bengal resulted from the overlap of these two diasporas, sometimes around the 10th century. By 12th century when the Turks had their Sultanate in Delhi

the population of east Bengal was already exposed to Islam. As a result, in 1204, when Ikhtiar ud Din's Turkish cavalry captured the western Sena city of Nudiya, it was to the eastern hinterland (mentioned in the last sentence of the immediate preceding paragraph) that king Lakshmana Sena & his retainers fled. This did not save the Sena king; the Muslim blitzkrieg utterly overwhelmed the local population unaccustomed to the ruthless mounted warfare of nomadic Turkish tribesmen. Ikhtiar Uddin settled down, struck gold coins in the name of his overlord in Delhi, Sultan Mohammad Gaur. Beneath a bold emblem appeared the phrase Gauda Vijaya or the "conquest of Gaur" (Bengal) not in Arabic but in Sanskrit. But that did not set the tone for the rest of the Muslim rule in Bengal. Soon enough, religious leaders, men of charismatic character, Sufi saints began pouring into Bengal from the north and west. But this does not explain why within two centuries much of east Bengal was overwhelmingly Muslim while west Bengal remained largely Hindu. Four theories proposed by Richard. M. Eaton (The Rise of Islam & the Bengal Frontier 1204 - 1760; Oxford University Press; 1993, pages 113-134) does not singly explain this epoch-making event. We discuss these theories below.

Theories Of Islamization In East Bengal - Its Impact On Society, Economy & Culture

The Religion of the Sword Thesis

The oldest theory of Islamization in India that could be called the Religion of the Sword Thesis propagated by Europeans especially at the time of the Crusades. The theory however, does not fit the religious geography of South Asia. If Islamization had ever been a function of military or political force, one would expect that those areas exposed most intensely and over the longest periods to rule by Muslim dynasties would today contain the greatest number of Muslims. Yet the opposite is the case, as those regions where the most dramatic Islamization occurred, such as in Eastern Bengal, lay on the fringes of Indo-Muslim rule, where the "sword" was the weakest and where brute force could have exerted the least influence. In such regions the first accurate census reports, carried out by the British in 1872, put the Muslim population as between 70 to 90 percent of the population whereas in the Muslim heartland in the Upper Gangetic plains, the Muslim population ranged between 10 to 15 percent. In other words, in the sub-continent as a whole there is an inverse relationship between the degree of Muslim political penetration and the degree of Islamization. In Bengal, this principal holds even truer.

The Immigration Theory

This is not a theory of conversion at all since it views Islamization in terms of diffusion not of beliefs but of peoples. In this view the bulk of Indian Muslims are descended from other Muslims who had either emigrated overland from the Iranian plateau or sailed across the Arabian Sea. Although some such process no doubt contributed to Islamization in those areas that were geographically contiguous with the Iranian Plateau or the Arabian Sea,

this argument does not explain mass Islamization of the indigenous population of Bengal.

Religion of Royal Patronage

This is the view that Indians of the pre-modern period converted to Islam in order to receive some non-religious favor from the Muslim ruling elite in the form of relief from taxes, promotion in the administration and so forth. Although this thesis might explain the relatively low incidence of Islamization in India's political heartland, it cannot explain the massive conversions that took place along the political fringes such as in Bengal. Political patronage like the influence of the sword, would have decreased rather then increased as one moved away from the centers of that patronage.

Religion of Social Liberation

This thesis is the one most generally subscribed to by Muslim historians and intellectuals. The theory postulates a Hindu caste system that is unchanging through time and rigidly discriminatory against its own lower orders. When Islam arrived in the Indian sub-continent, carrying its message of social equality, these same oppressed castes, seeking to escape the Brahmanic oppression and aware of a social equality hitherto denied them, converted to Islam en masse. The problem however, is that no evidence can be found in support of the theory. As with the Sword & the Patronage theories, the Religion of Social Liberation theory is refuted by the facts of geography. In 1872 when the earliest reliable census was taken, the highest concentration was found in eastern Bengal. What is striking about this is not only that this area lay far from the centre of Muslim power & influence, but the indigenous population had not yet, at the time of their contact with Islam, been fully integrated in to either the Hindu or the Buddhist social system. In Bengal, Muslim converts were drawn mainly from Rajbansi, Pod, Chandal, Kuch the Pundras of North Bengal and the Vangas of central & East Bengal and other indigenous groups, that had been only lightly exposed to Hindu culture.

Towards a Viable Explanation

It was relatively late in their experiences in Bengal that the British became aware of the full extent of the province's Muslim population. They were consequently astonished when the first official census of the province, that of 1872, showed Muslim totaling 70 percent and more in Chittagong, Noakhali, Pabna, and Rajshahi districts and over 80 percent in Bogra. Writing in 1894, James Wise, a government official, said that, "The most interesting fact revealed by the census of 1872 was the enormous host of Muhammadans resident in Lower Bengal - not massed around the old capitals, but in the alluvial plains of the Delta". He further observed that, "the history of the spread of Muhammadan faith in Lower and Eastern Bengal is a subject of such vast importance at the present day as to merit a careful and minute examination".

The subject was certainly examined. None of above theories by themselves could explain the massive conversion to Islam of the indigenous population

of eastern Bengal but taken together they do provide an explanation of this massive conversion to Islam. However, each of these theories has missed out one important factor of influence - the role of Sufi preachers and religious teachers in this conversion process. By the time the Sufis followed the Turks into Bengal they and their religious philosophies were well established in Iran and Turkey; the Sufis had by then synthesized orthodox Islam with the prevailing socio-cultural norms of the areas from which they came and in which they flourished.

The Impact of Sufi Influence & Activism

The considerable number of Sufis, who came to Bengal, over a period of a century, were a charismatic lot with proselytizing zeal and absolute dedication to their religious faith. They soon built up a symbiotic relationship with the Muslim rulers of Bengal, sponsoring and legitimizing their rules through religious sanctions on their part, while the rulers, on their part, provided them with large tracts of land to settle on, cultivate and pay a portion of the produce as taxes. The lands were all on the fringes of human habitations mostly virgin jungles and marshlands in areas of present Sylhet, Comilla, Chittagong, Noakhali, Pabna and Rajshahi. The Sufis then proceeded to round up very large numbers of landless peasants, bought off considerable numbers of bonded laborers from their masters and marched off en masse with families to these jungles and marshes. It took them a number of years to clear the land, start cultivation and build homesteads; the Sufis were there all along working with the people, prodding and encouraging them and proselytizing. Consider, for example, the remarks of Ibn Batuta who traveled to Sylhet to meet the renowned Sufi saint Shah Jalal in 1345, "the inhabitants of these mountains had embraced Islam at his (Shah Jalal's) hands and for this reason he stayed amidst them".

The next foreigner who noticed Muslims in Bengal was the Chinese official Ma Huan, who reached the delta in 1433. The Chinese traveler saw a dense and prosperous population as he traveled from Chittagong to Sonargaon to Pandua. But his comments as to the people's religious identity were written in the context of Pandua, where he observed that "the king's palace and the large and small palaces of the nobility and the temples are all in the city. They are Musalmans". Along the length of the frontier areas between west Bengal & east Bengal & much into the depth of east Bengal the Sufis built up a network of mosques and madrashas in which they educated the indigenous populace in the tenets of Islam and provided shelter to whoever sought it.

In April 1599, a Jesuit missionary named Francis Fernandez traveled up the channel of East Bengal's Megna River on an evangelizing tour carefully noting the customs of the local people and evaluating the prospects of converting them to Christianity. Reaching the rural districts near Narayanganj in Dhaka, Fernandez recorded that "I started examining whether there were any chances of propagating the Christian religion, but I found that the people are all Mahometans". This is the earliest unambiguous reference to a Muslim peasantry in the heart of the delta proper. Agriculture flourished in these

virgin lands and voluntary settlements increased apace till by early 1800s East Bengal had become a major center and a virtual powerhouse of agriculture, trade, commerce and indigenous industry. With this economic rise of East Bengal came its political importance too. The cultural impact of this conversion to Islam was no less staggering then its economic and political impact.

We have already pointed out earlier, that the indigenous Bangla language had lost most of its originality after a few centuries of contact with the Indo-Aryan language, much the same thing happened as the language came in contact with Turkish, Iranian and Arabic; a large number of words, phrases and idioms were incorporated into the language although much of the grammar remained Indo-Aryan. The folklore changed to a considerable extent blending the local with the nomadic folklore of the conquerors. The Muslim thus created a flourishing agricultural economy where none existed before, converted the local populace to Islam and created a rural-based folk culture over a period of 3 to 4 centuries.

The Mughal Period & Geographical Changes In Bengal

The Mughals in Bengal

The Mughal conquest of Bengal did not occur at once. Although the entry of imperial forces into the Bengal capital, on 25 September 1574, was decisive, the conquest actually commenced as far back as 1537 and continued till 1612.Having seized the capital Tanda, the Mughals pursued the Afghans in four directions: north to Ghoraghat, south to Satgaon and southeast to Fatehabad (present day Faridpur city). The Afghan resistance shifted to East Bengal, which the Mughals termed as "Bhati". As used by the Mughals, "Bhati" included the entire delta east of the Bhagirati-Hoogly corridor. Since its western boundary extended from Tanda down to present day Khulna district, the frontier between Mughal "Bhati" and "Bangala" approximated the present frontier between Bangladesh & West Bengal. So the distinction between East and West Bengal dates from at least the early Mughal times.

Anti-Mughal resistance now coalesced now around a remarkable Bengali Muslim chieftain, Isa Khan, along with a dozen other subordinate chieftains collectively given the Bangla acronym of "Bara Bhuiyans". These included besides Isa Khan, who controlled present-day Comilla, half of Dhaka, western Mymensingh and perhaps portions of Rangpur, Bogra and Pabna; Uthman Khan of Bokainnagar (Mymensingh town); Masum Khan Kabuli of Chatmohar in Pabna; Madhu Ray of Khalsi in western Dhaka; Raja Ray of Shahzadpur in eastern Paban; Madan Ray of Chandrapratap in Manikganj; Bhadur Ghazi, Sona Ghazi & Anwar Ghazi of Bhowal in Dhaka; Pahlawan of Matang in southwestern Sylhet; Ram Chandra of Bakla in southwest Bakerganj and Majlis Kutub of Fatehabad(Faridpur).

Resistance continued till the time of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605-27) when he sent a remarkable Governor to Bengal, Alauddin Islam Khan. The first thing the new Governor did was to shift the provincial capital from Rajmahal in the far northwest to Dhaka, deep in the Bengal hinterland. In this

way, regions that had so far remained beyond the reach of north Indian rulers, and had only lightly been touched by sultans of Gaur, were now directly exposed to the epicenter of Mughal culture and authority. From 1610 till the end of Mughal rule in India, the Mughals would use Dhaka as a base for integrating diverse peoples into their social and bureaucratic system and for transforming into arable land the vast stretches of forests that still covered most of "bhati". Moreover, as Dhaka was still connected to the Padma-Ganges river system, the city would serve as the ideal entrepot for riverine trade between East and West Bengal, between Bengal and upper India and between Bengal and the wider world beyond the Bay of Bengal. Since Mughal influence in East Bengal occurred just as the European commercial interests entered the region from overseas, this formerly isolated backwater was now simultaneously integrated into two expanding and cosmopolitan political economies, the Mughal and the European. Little could Islam Khan visualize the long-term implications of his planting the provincial capital in the heart of East Bengal?

Geographical Changes & Economic Growth

The distinguishing feature of east Bengal during the Mughal period was its far greater agricultural productivity and population growth relative to West Bengal. This arose from the long-term eastward movement of Bengal's major river systems, which deposited the rich silt that made wet-rice cultivation possible. But the great rivers could not move fast enough to flush out to the sea the sediments they carried and instead deposited much of it in their own beds. When such sedimentations caused riverbeds to attain higher levels then the surrounding countryside, water spilled out and moved into adjoining channels. In this way, the main course of the Ganges, which had flown down the Bhagarati-Hoogly channel in west Bengal, was replaced in turn by the Bhairab, the Mathabhanga, the Garai-Madhumati, the Arialkha and finally the present day Padma-Meghna system. As the delta's active portion gravitated eastwards, the regions in the west which received less and less waters, gradually becoming moribund. Cities & habitations along the banks of abandoned channels declined as diseases associated with stagnant waters ate into the local populace.

Thus the delta experienced a gradual eastward movement of civilization as pioneers cut virgin forests, throwing open a widening zone of agriculture. As a result, East Bengal attained agricultural and demographic growth at a level no longer possible in West Bengal. These changes are reflected in the Mughal government's share of the land revenue demand. Population density increased much more in the eastern half of Bengal, averaging a staggering 323 percent, than it did in the western half, where it averaged 169 percent. Land fertility, rice cultivation and population density, all grew at a faster rate in the east than in the west.

As a result already by late 16th century, south and east Bengal were producing so much surplus grain that for the first time rice emerged as an important export item. From two principal seaports, Chittagong in the east

and Satgaon in the west, rice was exported throughout the Indian Ocean region. The most impressive evidence in this regard comes from Francois Pyrard. After spending the spring of 1607 in Chittagong, the Frenchman wrote: "There is such a quantity of rice that besides supplying the whole country, it is exported to all parts of India.... as to Sumatra, the Moluccas and all the islands of Sunda, to all of which lands Bengal is the very nursing mother, who supplies them their entire subsistence and food. Thus one sees on arriving there, everyday an infinite number of vessels from all parts of India for these provisions". Finally, Bengal's rice boom coincided in both time and place - the eastern delta between the late 16th and early 18th centuries - with the emergence of a Muslim peasantry. Such a correlation between economic change and religious change is remarkable to say the least.

The advance of wet-rice agriculture into formerly forested regions is one of the oldest themes of Bengali history. Wang Ta-yuan, a Chinese merchant who visited the delta in 1349-50, observed that the Bengalis: "owe all their tranquility and prosperity to themselves, for its source lies in their devotion to agriculture, whereby a land originally covered with jungle has been reclaimed by their unremitting toil in tilling and planting... The riches and integrity of its people surpass, perhaps those of Ch'iu-chiang (Palembang - Indonesia) and equal those of Chao-wa (Java)".

The Advent of the British

The British conquest of Bengal and then of India and their suzerainty of it for some 250 years was a brief interregnum in the entire history of the Indian sub-continent but an interregnum of impact equal to that of the Indo-Aryan and later Muslim conquests. The British occupation of Bengal and of India was qualitatively different from all past conquests. The Indo-Aryans, the Turks, Afghans, Arabs, the Mughals were nomads without a "homeland"; they conquered and settled wherever the environment suited them and India and Bengal did suit them to an extent that they considered it to be their homeland. Not so, the British whose interests were commercial and economic and they remained so from beginning to the end; the British had their symbiotic links with their homeland and everything they exploited in cash and kind were rapidly transported to that homeland. The British did not have an easy time of it in their bid to conquer the whole of India; there were constant resistances and revolts throughout the British period of suzerainty. Nonetheless, their earlier conquests of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa provided them with a firm political & economic base from where they pursued their bid at all-India conquest. Therefore, it was in Bengal that the British first set up an administrative system, replicated later all over India, which aimed at control and direction of the maximum exploitation of resources from the land and the people with not the minimum of cost but no cost at all. This the British did by first changing the economy, then the society and finally the politics of Bengal.

The Economic Changes

By the time Bengal and India were conquered, Britain's Industrial Revolution was in full swing and the base of that revolution was the cotton industry. "It

was not five or ten percent", a later English politician was to say, "but 100 percents and 1000 percents that made the fortunes of Lancashire". In 1789 and ex-draper's assistant like Robert Owen could start with a borrowed Pound 100 in Manchester; by 1809 he bought out his partners in the New Lanark Mills for Pound 84,000 in cash. There were 39 new patents in cotton spinning in 1800-19, 51 in 1820s, 86 in 1830s and a 156 in the 1840s. By 1848, England was producing 2 million yards of cotton per year, an astronomical figure at that time.

This was possible because of the forced replacement of existing cereal crops with cotton throughout northern & central India. Bengal though, was unsuitable for cotton plantation but it was eminently suitable for Indigo, which was a product essential for dyeing the cotton and sugarcane plantations, which was essential for production of natural sweetener. Much of the north of East Bengal was forcibly converted to these crops. As a result, by the mid-1850s, east Bengal was facing severe shortages of rice, which was the staple food of the people. Coupled with natural disasters, food production fell drastically and famines became frequent occurrences. Production-relationships also changed drastically. During the Mughal and earlier periods, farmers freely cultivated the land and were allowed to keep a part of the produce for themselves, although the land belonged either to the State or to feudal Lords. During the British rule, most lands were converted to "zamindaris" which frequently changed hands at the whim of the rulers and some lands were appropriated by British planters; farmers were converted to bonded labor tied to the land with no rights on the produce. Additionally British taxation on agriculture reached exorbitant limits rising as much as 80 percent of the produce; the 20 percent, which remained, were appropriated by the zamindars and their tax collectors leaving the peasantry to starve. Consequently, what had been a century back a prosperous people and a rich land were converted into a starving population and a land increasingly unsuitable for cereal cultivation. The entire British administration, including laws and law-enforcement, was set up to ensure efficient collection of taxes. For example, the British District Commissioner was the chief tax collector in the district as well as a district magistrate and the Thana's chief administrative officer was the Deputy Collector.

Social Changes

The forced economic changes were simultaneously accompanied by manipulated social changes. A few hundred and later a few thousand Britishers could not by themselves carry out this massive task of exploitation of resources from an entire sub-continent; they needed local collaborators. It was in Bengal first that a "comprador" or collaborator class was built up. These were the zamindars, the revenue collectors to whom the zamindars leased out tax collection in cash & kind, the traders who helped the British store, transport and exchange goods for cash or export to Britain. The zamindars were merely interested in extorting as much as possible to satisfy the ever-increasing greed of their British masters; so they rarely visited or even saw their zamindaries giving rise to the term "absentee landlords".

The British also ensured that a selective lot from among the sons of this comprador class received education in England or in English run schools in India thereby ensuring that the future higher-middle and middle classes in Bengal were imbued with British economic, social and ultimately political ideal, philosophies and thoughts. This had the effect that these classes so long intimately connected with the land and the people in an agricultural based society were now totally divorced from that society. As for the great masses of peasantry, they were reduced to servitude, penury and periodic famines, which killed off large numbers of them. The peasantry, so long the motive force behind Bengal's prosperity was no more to play a leading role in its history.

Political Changes

The British played a game of divide and rule. Starting off with providing an increasingly greater role to the comprador class in the lower tiers of administration, the Police and the British-Indian army, the British ensured that the most aware and literate classes in Bengal firmly remained loyal to and supportive of the British Raj. This participation in the Raj gave the rising comprador middle class a prestige and status in the society, they never had before and they came to increasingly "control" the society and its politics. Secondly, the British took a policy of enhancing religious differences between the East Bengal Muslims and West Bengal Hindus to the extent that they attempted to form two separate administrative units in Bengal which the Bengalis vehemently resisted and which the British were forced to retract after a couple of years.

Initially, resistance to British rule came from the rural peasantry, which the British ruthlessly and bloodily suppressed each time a localized revolt occurred in one or the other part of Bengal. Gradually however, the ideas of revolts seeped even into the comprador middle class, particularly among the young, mostly students. Since the British regime was extremely intolerant of and repressive to any ideas of nationalism among the Indians, much of these political awareness's were radicalized and went underground. This remained so throughout the period of the greater Indian movements of gaining independence from the British spearheaded by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. Consider for example the case of a Bengali Indian nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose, who discarded the path of the majority of Indians and took the path of armed resistance during the Second World War against the British to the extent that he sought help and refuge from the two Fascist powers of Germany and Japan. The greater consequence of these divisions, particularly religious ones was that when the British in a hurry decided to quit India in 1947, Bengal was divided along religious lines, which till the advent of the British were never such a divisive issue.

Pakistan & Bangladesh

The rising Muslim middle class in East Bengal had a decisive role to play in the formation of East Pakistan. Political figures such as H.S. Suhrawardy, A.K. Fazlul Haq, Maulana A.H.K. Bhashani and later Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman were not much known in the greater Indian politics but were of great influence in East Bengal. All were convinced that the Muslims of East Bengal would have as hard a time under a "Hindu" dominated India as under the British and they strived to take their East Bengal compatriots along with them. The only exception to this was the Tiger of Bengal A.K. Fazlul Haq who consistently maintained that Bengal was a millennium old cultural and civilizational entity and that ultimately cultural affinities outweighed any other allegiances; Bengal deserved and ought to gain a separate nation-statehood. Completely taken in by the propaganda by the Muslim League (ML) and their lobbies the majority Muslim areas in East Bengal voted overwhelmingly for East Pakistan in the referendums conducted by the British. The Indian National Congress (INC) too would have never countenanced the division of India into three parts; that would have encouraged a dozen other ethnically and culturally different peoples to claim their own independent states as well. Amidst mass population migrations and communal-riot caused bloodshed, India was divided into the two states of Pakistan and India on 14 August 1947.

The 25 years of Pakistan were traumatic for Pakistan but utterly devastating for East Pakistan. When Muhammad Ali Jinnah the chief architect of Pakistan, came to Dhaka to address a gathering at Dhaka University in 1948, he declared that "Urdu and only Urdu shall be the State language of Pakistan" and was immediately met with a deafening chorus of protests from the attending Bengalis. It then began to sink in to the middle class Muslim Bengalis who had vehemently demanded an entry into Pakistan that they were not going to get what they had expected in a unitary 'Urdu' Pakistan. Student led protest about the language issue led to the "Language Movement" and the killings in front of the Dhaka Medical College on 21 February 1952 (now observed worldwide as the UN Language Day).

Meanwhile, nation-building in Pakistan continued apace with East Pakistan being used as a resource-base for developments in West Pakistan considered the "Heartland of Pakistan". Exploitation & discriminations continued not at the same intensity as that of the British but more subtle, more low-key. The people of East Pakistan protested with increasing intensity until they organized for themselves a political party by the name of Awami League (AL) whose main architects were some of the very same people who had struggled for a Pakistan from the British. In 1968 the AL, led by the charismatic and wildly popular Sheikh Mujibur Rahman launched a major political program by the slogan of "6 Points Program"; the 6 points being a charter of demands for full political and economic rights within a loosely federated Pakistan. The Military junta then ruling Pakistan did not look kindly at this attempt of the Bengalis at asserting their cultural-nationalistic identity. The national elections of 1970 gave a clear and absolute mandate to the AL's six-point program in East Pakistan. Now with the support of a majority population in East Pakistan, the AL and Sheikh Mujib demanded the formation of the Central Government of Pakistan. The West Pakistan Military junta would have none of it and they countered with allegations of

secessionist motives on the part of East Pakistan. The Bengalis took to the streets en masse to face the increasingly repressive Pakistan administration; the situation was further aggravated by a devastating cyclone in 1970 that took away the lives of 300,000 people. Around January 1971, Pakistan deployed its Army in strength in East Pakistan to quell the massive discontents in East Pakistan. This did not help. In an historic speech in Paltan Maidan, in Dhaka on the afternoon of 7th March 1971, Sheikh Mujib virtually declared the independence of "Bangladesh" unless the Pakistani regime totally retracted and allowed the AL to form the central government. The Pakistani regime procrastinated gaining a few day more time to reinforce their military deployments in East Pakistan until they unleashed the horrendous killings, which started on the night of March 25/26, 1971. The Liberation War for Bangladesh had started; it was to last for 9 months until 16 December 1971 when the Pakistani Army surrendered to a joint Indo-Bangla high command. The war had cost Bangladesh an estimated 3 million lives - one of the worst genocides in history. The perpetrators of that genocide got away scot-free and their local collaborators survived and flourished to be part of the government of an independent Bangladesh in 2001.

The Remarkable Nature Of Our People And Our Polity: Taking Lesson From History

Max Planck, one of the world's foremost scientists, some would contend, at par with Albert Einstein, once said: "We are living in a very singular moment of history. It is a moment of crisis in the literal sense of the word. In every branch of our spiritual and material civilization, we seem to have arrived at a critical turning point. This spirit shows itself not only in the actual state of public affairs, but also in the general attitudes towards fundamental values in personal and social life..." Max Planck said this in 1933 during the period of the Great Depression and during the rise of Hitler in Germany. His saying not only reflects his times but also even more poignantly reflects the troubled times of Bangladesh at present.

"Taking Lessons from History" is a well-worn cliché with little practical utility because of the simple fact that what has gone by will never happen again; so what really is there to learn from the past? Unfortunately for us humans, our brains are wired to the past; we learn by association, we recognize things, events, landscapes, whatever because our brain's memory cells have photographs of similar things, events or landscape. We verbalize because our memories have dictionaries stored in them. So when one sees a face, one has seen many times before, one recognizes it and verbalizes the recognition by saying, for example, "Well, this is Tinku, my eldest daughter" That does something for us, we are suffused with feelings, with chemicals called adrenaline and we act or react in ways we have done many times before, in this case by hugging our daughter. That is taking lessons from history - not so much of a cliché, is it now?

Collective histories called cultures or in broader perspective civilizations are memories of a people, a conglomerate over long periods of time extending into the past over centuries, even millenniums; memories which help us to

recognize ourselves as a conglomerate called a Nation or a "people". Therefore, there is no getting away from history either as individuals or as collectives, either from its facts or from its myths. The facts and the myths both are important because history is nothing but kernels of facts surrounded by myths; the facts provide enlightenment and the myths inspire - history in that sense is "enlightened inspiration". The facts are there, will always be there but each generation modifies and updates the myths to suit its own inspirational needs - History as such is always biased, always political.

It has taken us all of 1000 years or more to reach our statehood passing through the phases of community, society and nation with a distinct language, culture and a common identity but those thousand years were also replete with horrors of mass starvation, mass revolts and death of millions with periods of exhausted calm in between the starvation, the revolts and the deaths. Those centuries were also the era of foreign conquests, dominations and subjugation of the land and its people by such diverse nations as the Turks, Afghans, the Moghuls and the British. Much before that, the Arabs who had conquered northern India had also brought along their religion and culture of Islam with them, initially imposing it on the indigenous populace. As the Muslim conquests spread southwards, so did their religion and culture until a few centuries later the Turko-Afghan-muslim conquistadors had most of, what is Bangladesh today, under their suzerainty. For the people of this land, these were times of great tribulations; a millennium or more of civilization was being modified and changed by conquest. But the one thing the people clearly understood was that these conquerors were there to stay and so it was better, if not for anything else but for mere survival, to accept some of their culture and the religion which was the leitmotif for that culture. Thus, we have the two major ingredients of our culture, which made us ultimately into a nation state - our language, which was as old as ourselves and our religion of Islam, which foreign conquerors from distant lands brought to us.

In the centuries that passed by, the people and the land were exploited mercilessly, ruthlessly by foreign masters who understood little, in fact had no desire to understand anything of the land or its people which gave them so much wealth. The people sunk in apathy, suffered in abject misery the endless cycles of periodic starvation and relative plenty; sometimes they revolted and were massacred en masse.

This gave us our individual and collective character which typifies us as Bangladeshis today: individual reticence combined with mass bravado; raucous verbalization rather than concrete action; dissatisfaction with everything combined with apathetic acceptance of the status-quo or fait accompli; dissimulation rather than uprightness; apathy towards individual suffering combined with deep empathy towards mass suffering; short bursts of intense activity combined with long periods of dejected lethargy; an impatience for quick results combined with lack of stamina and determination; acquisitiveness combined with profligacy - these and many others, some remarkable traits, some not, characterize us today.

Imposition from outside has been our lot for centuries and acceptance and assimilation has always been our way out of intolerable situations; we have always done things because it was "necessary". Once and only, once in our entire history have we done a thing out of conviction and that was our Liberation War of 1971 out of which we carved out a state for ourselves - the culmination of our long journey from community to Nationhood.

Bangladesh - From where to where

Arnold. J. Toynbee in his monumental work "The Study of History" analyses the rise and fall of civilizations. In Toynbee's introduction to his work, he identifies 'civilized societies' and not states or periods as the only intelligible unit of historical study. The definition of the words 'civilized society' as opposed to 'non-civilized society' however, remains problematic throughout his work. The importance of his work lies not in definitions but in his having created a model for the study of the rise and disintegration of societies. The importance of his work is further magnified if one uses his work as a model to study any particular society, identify factors that could cause its disintegration and perhaps suggest measures, which could revitalize and rejuvenate the society.

My attention to Toynbee's work has been drawn by ongoing debates regarding 'failed states' or states with a 'failed governments'. If one is to accept the authority of Toynbee, then this whole debate about failed state or government becomes irrelevant because state, or governments are really not 'intelligible units of historical study'; these are but instruments whereby societies or nations delineate and regulate themselves. It is therefore much more fruitful to study the 'Bengali society' and see what condition it is really in. Without going into a potentially explosive debate about the definition of Bengali society, I simply restrict and reserve my inquiry to that portion of the Bengali society presently bound by the geographical limits of the state of Bangladesh.

Toynbee has identified many factors for the rise, decline and disintegration of societies and of civilization. I will take a very limited selection of the factors to see what has happened, and what is happening to Bangladesh. I have also taken certain liberties with definitions and terms and their meanings used by Toynbee, for the purpose of simplicity and topicality. The following paragraphs contain my analysis.

■   **The Mechanicalness of Mimesis**

The word 'mimesis' means to mimic, copy or emulate. Toynbee has, in brief this to say: "The only way in which the uncreative majority can follow the leadership of the creative leaders is by mimesis, a mechanical and superficial imitation of the great and inspired originals. This unavoidable shortcut entails obvious dangers. The leaders may become infected with the mechanicalness of their followers and the result will be an arrested civilization; or they may exchange persuasion for compulsion. In that case, the 'Creative Minority' turns into a 'Dominant Minority' and the eager followers turn into an 'Alienated Proletariat'.

When this happens, the society enters on the road to disintegration. The society loses its capacity for self-determination." The following section illustrates ways in which this came about in the case of Bangladesh.

The 'Bengali' culture and nation was in the making for at least 300 years starting from the 17th century. It really came into its own in the late 19th and early 20th century when a whole plethora of a 'creative minority' emerged in both cultural and political fields, some of whom received worldwide recognition. Their appeal and their following were universal in the sense that they were acting as part of the Indic culture and politics. It is worthy of note that their Bengaliness did not prevent them from doing this. In fact, universalism provided them with a much wider field of activity and influence. Particularism emerged only after the division of the sub-continent into the states of India and Pakistan in 1947.

Soon after the Partition of 1947, a vocal 'Creative Bengali Minority' emerged in the state of Pakistan. The creative minority's appeal was comprehensive including linguistic, cultural, social, economic and political. Mimesis was instantaneous, that is, within a period of 25 years the following had coalesced into what could be termed as a 'nation-state'. The creative minority that made this possible were a dozen individual centered on the charismatic personality of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was soon to be termed 'Bangabandhu'. The period leading up to the Liberation War and its aftermath is too well documented to go into & discover any new insights. What is insightful is a study of social-psychological aspects during this period. In an attempt to create, a nation-state out of a nation Bangabandhu and his colleagues exchanged the path of Persuasion for Compulsion.

They perhaps did this to arrest the chaos following a war or were persuaded to do this by the prevailing regional geo-politics. What ever be the reasons, the creative minority had now turned into a 'Dominant Minority'. At the same time, there was an ongoing conflict within the dominant minority itself, which culminated in the murder of Bangabandhu, his family and many of his closest colleagues. The political vacuum thus created was immediately filled in by a new minority, headed by General Zia Ur Rahman, which was more dominant then creative. Mimesis of this new dominant minority was more mechanical than spontaneous. As is the case with all dominant minorities, internal conflicts also led to the murder of General Zia Ur Rahman. In both the cases, the populace in general formed a 'silent majority' perhaps because neither of the dominant minorities had time enough to be so coercive that the population turned into 'alienated proletariat'. General Ershad and his coterie did that effectively within the next 9 years.

Throughout the decade of the 1990s, the two dominant minorities of the Awami League (AL) & Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) not only pursued a policy of 'compulsion' against the followers of each other but

also employed numerous forms of coercion and violence. At the same time, the leaders themselves became infected with the mechanicalness of their followers thus arresting growth, creativity and losing the capacity for self-determination.

Meanwhile the populace was divided into two exclusive conglomerates to be employed for maintaining & expanding the narrow, limited interests of whichever dominant minority grappled its way to 'state power'. It was now possible for diverse vigilante groups to function with the active support of the state; it was now possible to speak of murder, rape and dacoity as being 'within tolerable levels'.

■ **New Wine in Old Bottles**

Toynbee had this to say: "Ideally, each new social force released by creative minority should beget new institutions through which it can work. Actually, it works more often then not through old institutions designed for other purposes. However, the old institutions often prove unsuitable or intractable. One of the two results may follow; either the breakdown of the institution (a revolution) or their survival and the consequent perversion of the new forces working through them (an enormity). A revolution may be defined as a delayed and consequently explosive act of mimesis; an enormity as a frustration of mimesis. If the adjustment of the institutions is harmonious, growth will continue; if it results in a revolution, growth becomes hazardous; if it results in an enormity, breakdown may be diagnosed."

Now let us see how Toynbee's theory of "New Wine in Old Bottles" applies to Bangladesh. The creative minorities of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries were fully aware that they were unleashing new social forces, which required new institutions to work. Therefore, they set about building these new institutions in the form of linguistic structures, cultural and social norms and behavior but above all laid the foundations for educational methods & institutions and experimented with the formation of new social and political groups. Unfortunately, all this was cut short by the partition of 1947 purely along religious lines. In the eastern part of Pakistan, the breakup of the continuity of institution building resulted, in just 25 years, in a revolution and the formation of Bangladesh. Bangladesh was therefore, from its birth, burdened with two partial sets of institutions: one, which emphasizes Bengaliness and the other, which emphasized Pakistaniness. Had the Bangabandhu and his creative minority realized these historical facts and allowed the revolution to continue, much as Lenin did in Russia, new institutions to canalize new social forces would have been formed and harmonious growth would have been possible. Unfortunately, he compelled the new social forces unleashed by the birth of Bangladesh to function through old institutions. This resulted in his death and the occurrence of another quasi-revolution which brought to the fore another not so creative but highly dominant minority. Thus, twice, mimesis was frustrated and

enormities were created. Under the circumstances, social breakdown became almost a mathematical certainty.

■ Idolization of an Ephemeral Self and Institutions

Toynbee has this to say: "History shows that the group which successfully responds to one challenge is rarely the successful respondent to the next". Idolization is a passive means of 'resting on ones oars' and is resorted to when a group has run out of steam of creativity. By repeatedly emphasizing on what has already been created, the group wants to maintain its dominant position by diverting attention away (at least temporarily) from new challenges facing society. Idolization has the added advantage that mimesis becomes more mechanical, thoughtless and automatic. In the case of Bangladesh, the AL creative minority, which was instrumental in bringing about the independence of Bangladesh, failed to meet the challenges of a post-independence Bangladesh. We have seen in earlier paragraphs how new wine was poured into old bottles. The dominant minorities that have governed Bangladesh since independence have all taken idolization to extreme levels. Thus, human institutions, created by humans for other humans such as the constitution, the parliament and courts are 'noble', 'sacred', and 'great'; leaders both dead and alive are 'noble', 'great' and 'infallible'. Today, the dominant minorities of AL and BNP have turned into nemesis of creativity by taking idolization to this extreme .

■ The Suicidalness of Militarism

Having discussed the passive form of "resting on ones oars", we now turn to the active form of aberration summarized in the term militarism. Soon after the independence of Bangladesh, the murder of the entire dominant minority of the AL sparked off a wave of militarism. The replacement dominant minority (a military junta) placed increasing emphasis on uniformity, unity, order, duty, disciple, etc in action, expression and thought. Militarism had taken the usual form of symbolizing the independence and patriotism of the nation in its armed forces little realizing that the armed forces are but a minuscule component of the society with limited utility and functions. This was a suicidal attempt at staving off the rapid disintegration of Bangladesh society. That it was suicidal can be gleaned from the fact that the gun with its power of death rules every aspect of life today.

The 'alienated proletariat' employs the gun for economic gains; the ruling 'dominant minority' employs the gun to get rid of the alienated proletariat and the competing group of dominant minority. Increasingly, social control can only be established through deadly force. The proliferation of laws passed by Parliament does not aim at providing security to or maintaining existing social norms but at justifying and excusing the use of organized violence against an alienated proletariat. Thus, militarism is not a cause but an effect of advanced social disintegration. With its emphasis on uniformity, militarism is a true nemesis of creativity.

■ **Archaism and Futurism**

Archaism is an attempt to escape from an intolerable present by reconstructing an earlier phase in the life of a disintegrating society. Archaizing movements generally either prove sterile or transform themselves into their opposite namely Futurism which is an attempt to escape the present by a leap into the future. In Bangladesh, both the dominant minorities of the AL and BNP have resorted to both Archaism and Futurism. The AL is more archaic in that it refers more to its past of a highly successful social and political movement and the "glorious" liberation war is a constant theme in it public utterances; it is also futuristic in that by evoking the past it expects to 'motivate' efforts at building a "Golden Bengal". The BNP is more `futuristic' in that it often talks of a Bangladesh as progressing toward the new millennium. At the same time in competition with the AL, it is inventing a past by re-interpreting historical facts and events. Extreme forms of archaism & futurism inhibit the flourishing of new creative ideas and the society remains either sterile or under pressure from other factors, disintegrates. When two opposing points of view are presented with a proselytizing zeal, it leads often to conflicts within social groups, which accelerate the process of disintegration. This is what seems to be happening to Bangladesh.

Having seen what is happening and why, we need to look at solutions for Bangladesh. Unfortunately, historians including Toynbee and Gibbon are wary of predicting the future. The only exception to this rule is Hegel who in his 'Philosophy of History' predicted the end of history by claiming that the rise of the Germanic civilization was the apogee of human achievement and history will no more be made because there would be nothing more to achieve. Within a century of Hegel's prediction, much of the western world lay in ruins of a devastating war and everything German came to be regarded with abhorrence. Not taking any lessons from the folly of Hegel, Francis Fukuyama in the 1980s predicted a second end of history claiming everlasting universalism for American liberal democracy and capitalism. Within two decades after Fukuyama's prediction large portions of the world in Africa, Asia and the Middle East are feeling the brunt of the American brand of the end of history.

Philosophers, starting with Plato and Aristotle, on the other hand have felt no qualms in devising formulas for perfect social systems. These utopias are beyond the reach of mortal humans who have to deal with ever-changing time-space environments. It is the perceptive, practical politicians like Lenin and Mao Tse Tung who can change existing social systems and devise new ones, which suit the times and the circumstances.

The strength of a society or civilization rests on the foundations on which it was built and on its universalism. For example, the Greek city-state civilization survived for only a few centuries but its ideals and ideas were so universal that much of these were taken over by the Romans and later transferred to Western Christian civilization, which continues to dominate the

world today. But if there is anything that history teaches, it is that no society and no civilization is everlasting, permanent. History also teaches that a particular society or civilization exists to provide the greatest amount of benefit and satisfaction to its members; when it ceases to provide that, it loses its capacity for self-determination and starts on the road to disintegration. Therefore, for Bangladesh and its society, it has to go back to its roots and start all over from there, if it is to prevent its own disintegration; from the ideal on which War of Liberation was fought.

Impediments To Nation-State Building

Lack Of Rationality And Freedom Leads To Emasculation Of The People And The State

Rationality and Freedom

Amartya Sen's "Rationality and Freedom" is difficult to read and even more difficult to understand. Nonetheless, I will freely borrow many of his ideas albeit in a simplified form to do the following: (1) Describe the meaning of Rationality & Freedom, (2) Examine the links between the two concepts, (3) Analyze how society is affected by rationality and freedom and (4) Evaluate how Bangladesh stands in terms of rationality and freedom.

Rationality, according to Sen, "is the discipline of subjecting one's choices - of actions as well as objectives, values and priorities - to reasoned scrutiny". Rationality is thus seen as the habit of acting by reason in accordance with the facts of reality. The only alternative is to act by whim, which because reality is absolute, will result in undesired consequences. One consequence is that we will not get the outcomes we expected from our actions. To understand reality, we must use reason consistently; deviations can have long-term problems, since our knowledge of the present is based on past experiences & knowledge. Therefore, once we act on whim, we continue doing so building up a "false knowledge base". This leads to the second consequence of acting irrationally, which is that it undermines our ability to act rationally in the future. By choosing to act irrationally, we are confessing our inability to reason and the more often we do this, the more we shall start believing in our irrationality - this undercuts our ability to live, since Reason is man's means of survival.

Reason is man's means of survival. Thus Rationality is foremost a method of survival. But, we say, different people and groups of people perceive reality in different ways. A poet's perception of reality is different from that of a novelist; a worker's perception of reality is different from that of a factory owner; a soldier's perception of reality of a battlefield is different from that of a politician's setting policies. Of course, each of us perceives reality differently and it is this diversity that has made culture and ultimately civilization possible. However, within each of our individual perceptions of reality, we act rationally and consistently so. It would be dangerous indeed, if all of us were to perceive reality in exactly the same way -more of this later. This brings us to the second and related concept of Freedom.

Freedom, according to Sen, "can be valued for the substantive opportunity it gives to the pursuit of our objectives and goals". Sen has identified two aspects of Freedom: (1) The Opportunity Aspect of Freedom is concerned about opportunities to achieve those things which we have reason to value and (2) The Process Aspect of Freedom is concerned about the process through which we achieve our goals & objectives. Both of these aspects have two further dimensions: (a) Personal in which individuals have preferences over opportunities and processes that occur in their own lives. Personal concerns relate to the way individuals like to make their choices, lead their lives, are helped or hindered by others and so on. (b) Systemic in which people may also have preferences over opportunities and processes that operates as general rules in the society. Systemic concerns relate to people's views about social, political & economic institutions and rules of social behavior. As T.H.Green said in 1881: "We shall probably all agree, that freedom rightly understood, is the greatest of blessings; that its attainment is the end of all our efforts as citizens" (T.H.Green, "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract", R.L. Nettleship, ed, "Works of Thomas Hill Green III", Longmans, London).

Linking Rationality to Freedom, Sen writes: An assessment of the opportunities a person has would require some understanding of what the person would want to have and have reason to value ... Thus, there is a basic use of rational assessment in appraising freedom, and in this sense freedom must depend on reasoned assessment of having different options. The same applies to the value of process to which people have reason to attach importance. Rationality as the use of reasoned scrutiny cannot but be central to the idea and assessment of freedom. The converse also holds true - rationality in its turn depends on freedom. This is not merely, because without some freedom of choice, the idea of rational choice would be quite empty, but also because the concept of choice must accommodate the diversity of reasons that may sensibly motivate choice. To deny that accommodation in favor of conformity with some pre-specified 'appropriate' motivation would involve, in effect, a basic denial of freedom of thought. Our motives are for us to choose - not of course, without reason, but unregimented by authoritarianism or by the need to conform to 'proper' objectives and values. This would have the effect of arbitrarily narrowing permissible 'reason for choice' and certainly can be the source of substantial "unfreedom' in the form of an inability to use one's reasons to decide about one's values and choices.

Rationality, Freedom & Society. Sen has this to say: "The idea of using reason to identify and promote better - or more acceptable - societies, and to eliminate intolerable deprivations of different kinds, has powerfully moved people in the past and continues to do so now".

Starting from the early 17th Century, the Age of Enlightenment ushered in an era of subjecting everything - in both physical and social sciences - to reason & Rationality. Hobbes, Locke, Adam Smith, Voltaire, Rousseau, Darwin & Newton are but a few of the resounding names from that Age. Concomitant in the belief of man's "innate rationality" was the belief in man's "innate

freedom" for only a man free from the "chains of his existence" could he be rational. The American War of Independence and later the French Revolution were the direct results of the call for Freedom and Rationality in all human affairs and endeavors.

Inherent in Hobbes' Social Contract Theory was the thesis that man's rationality & urge for freedom leads him to construct such as society, nation and state because it is within such constructs that man is able to be secure, free & rational. Outside such constructs life tended to be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short", a state of perpetual war of one against another. Man's innate reasonableness has thus led him to seek a way out in the creation of "Civil Society". So, this is the fundamental philosophical question that political philosophers sought to address: How can we be free and rational and yet live together? Or to put it another way, how can we live together without succumbing to the force and coercion of others?

Rousseau like Hobbes and Locke before him and countless others after them have maintained that all men are made by nature to be equals and therefore, no one has a natural right to govern others and so, the only justified authority is the authority that is generated out of agreement with others equally rational and free, that is, by submitting our individual and particular wills to the collective or general will, by our own rational choice. In the absence of such free and rational choice, a society or in the broader perspective a nation-state is given over to tyranny or dictatorships - military or otherwise.

Hannah Arendt and the Banality of Evil

An even more devastating effect occurs in tyrannies or in polities, which substantially limit freedom and that is that people come to terms with their deprivations and ultimately lose the courage to desire and seek freedom; people in fact refuse to think and to reason. Living with and accepting evil is what Hannah Arendt has termed as the "Banality of Evil".

"Eichmann in Jerusalem" was originated when Hannah Arendt went to Jerusalem to report for the "New Yorker", on the trial of Otto Adolf Eichmann who was accused of crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The trial began on 15 April 1961 and ended with a conviction entailing the death sentence. Arendt's first reaction to Eichmann was - "nicht einmal unheimlich" - not even once unusual. She tells us that the deeds were monstrous, but the doer was quite ordinary, commonplace and neither demonic nor monstrous. Actually what Arendt had detected in Eichmann was not even stupidity, in her words he portrayed something entirely negative, it was thoughtlessness "...but a curious quite authentic inability to think". Eichmann had always acted according to limits allowed by laws and ordinances. Cliches, stock phrases, adherence to standardized codes of expression and conduct - these attitudes resulted in blind obedience. In fact, it was not only Eichmann, the individual who was normal, but also a whole mass of bureaucratic men and women who were also normal but whose acts were monstrous. Richard Bernstein (in "Evil Thinking and Judging" in Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question, Cambridge: the MIT

Press, 1996) highlights this normal and ordinariness of the bureaucratic mass in not thinking of the real meaning of the rules themselves, in the sense that they would behave in the same way in manufacturing of either food or dead humans. This is the mentality that Arendt believed she was facing in Eichmann who had "such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness".

Eichmann's speech and thoughts were described by Arendt in the final moment of Eichmann's death. With such descriptions, Arendt for the first time uses the term banality of evil: "it was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us - the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought denying banality of evil".

Looking for some reason that could explain Eichmann's evil, Arendt found an absence of evil motives, self-interest, ideological conviction or even intentional evil. Arendt believed that since thinking by definition wants to reach the roots, the banality of evil, such evil without roots could be understood essentially by the resulting movement of thoughtlessness. Arendt emphasizes: "it is indeed my opinion now that evil is never radical, that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can outgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is thought-defying, as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its banality. Only the good has depth and can be radical".

According to Arendt, the moral and ethical standards based on habits & customs have shown that they can be changed just by a new set of rules of behavior dictated by the current society. In 'Personal Responsibility under Dictatorships' Arendt writes: "It was as though morality at the very moment of its collapse within an old, highly civilized nation, stood revealed in its original meaning, as a set of mores, of customs and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with no more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of a whole people". In the same article quoted above, she asks how it was possible that a few persons resisted the moral collapse & had not adhered to the regime despite severe coercion. Arendt answers: " The non-participants called irresponsible by the majority, were the only ones who dared judge by themselves, and they were capable of doing so not because they disposed of a better system of values,... but because their conscience did not function in this, as were, automatic way, ... they asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then change for the better, but because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves".

Arendt clearly attributes to the faculty of thinking the pre-supposition of this kind of judging extremely necessary in times of moral collapse of a society or an entire nation. Arendt explains: " The pre-supposition of this kind of judging is not a highly developed intelligence or sophistication in moral

matters, but merely the habit of living together with oneself, that is, of being engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which since Socrates and Plato we usually call thinking". Arendt argues: "The greatest evil doers are those who don't remember because they had never given the matter a thought; nothing can keep them back because without remembrance they are without roots".

Rationality, Freedom and Bangladesh

For ages, counted not in decades but in units of centuries, the people of the land called Bangladesh now, have been suffering social, economic and political deprivations of all sorts, the most telling of which is the deprivation of liberty or freedom. Forced to live in conditions dictated by "others" and to think in alien moral & ethical standards, the people, both as individuals and as conglomerates, have long forgotten "how, when and why" to reason. At times, they have even refused to be rational, for to be rational is to take cognizance of the harsh realities of their lives; realities, the recognition of which would make the very act of living itself unbearable. Left with no recourse but to revolt, the people have done so, time and again, often with such outbursts of violence that it defies any rational explanations.

The people deprived of their freedom & ultimately their rationalities, have passively accepted to live with "Evil", taking whatever pleasure they can in small reliefs. Tacit acceptance of evil makes it possible for people to commit crimes against humanity and still be elected Members of Parliament and be nominated as Ministers; it makes it possible for government officials to talk of murder, rape and looting to be "within acceptable limits"; It makes it possible for a home minister to criminalize the entire system of law enforcement and take bribes for the protection of murderers; it makes it possible for a Judge to be appointed to the High Court who had criminally altered the mark sheets of his law examinations; it becomes possible for Islamist extremists to indiscriminately and brutally murder people for reason of religious faith and it also becomes possible for a small coterie of people to loot away the wealth of a nation.

Sadly, it is the institutions of our state, which make it possible to deprive people of their rights to feel and to live as humans. These institutions were not made by us, are not of us and are not meant for our purposes. That is why they need to be changed, entirely so, in such a way that Amartya Sen's postulates, (Suggested in his essay on Liberty and Social Choice), as shown below, become functional:

(1)   Outcome Evaluation: X is judged a better state of affairs for the society than Y.

(2)   Normative Choice: Decision Making in the society should be so organized that Y must not be chosen when X is available.

(3)   Descriptive Choice: Social Decision Systems are so organized that Y will not be chosen when X is available.

And as Sen has pointed out: "Tyrannies operate not just by violating freedoms but often by making collaborators out of their victims. It may turn out to be difficult or even impossible for the hopelessly oppressed to bring about a change (at least acting as individuals) and under these circumstances, they may even decide that it is silly to bemoan constantly their lack of freedom and a desire for radical change that will not occur. Such passive tolerance of tyranny, which alas, has been observed across the world, can exist even when there is a clear realization that there is a genuine prospect for change that would generate strong public support".

Therefore, all of us - the government, the political parties and the people - have to remember to be rational, for without rationality we will not have freedom and without rationality and freedom we will not have a State - all we will be left with, will be a tyranny.

Abdication Of Political Responsibility Leads To Loss Of Freedom And To Tyranny Of Military Dictatorships

DATELINE: Chittagong Circuit House, Zonal Martial Law Headquarters, evening 17 March 1971. Four Bengali Army Officers namely Lt.Col M.R.Choudhury, Major Zia Ur Rahman, Captains Oli Ahmed and Amin Ahmed Choudhury, sat discussing what course of action they need to take under the circumstances then prevailing in East Pakistan. It was decided that they would execute a coordinated revolt against the Pakistan Army; the exact timing of the revolt depending on the situation. It was also decided that communication and liaison with the Awami League (AL) leadership would be established and maintained.

East Pakistan was in turmoil since January 1971. The Bangabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 7 March 1971, in a mammoth public meeting, had virtually declared the independence of Bangladesh, calling on the people to resist, to the utmost, any attempt to exert control by force by the Pakistan Government. The people were in open revolt although discussions continued between the representatives of AL and the Pakistan Government, aimed at a settlement acceptable to both parties.

After the meeting on 17 March 1971, attempts were made to establish contact with the AL leadership. At first, there was no response and then a feeble and cautious response to "to hold on as political discussions were continuing". Bengali members of the Pakistan military, engaged in Martial Law duties, were fully aware that the Pakistan military was reinforcing itself, in East Pakistan, with men, material, armaments and ammunition. They also knew fully well that the Pakistan military would soon "go into action" in East Pakistan - all these were passed to the AL through various channels and still there was no decisive response to revolt. Sure enough starting from the night of 25/26 March 1971, the Pakistan Government took the road of forceful suppression by genocide, of the people of East Pakistan. Caught totally unawares, the people, including Bengali members of Pakistan military, Police and East Pakistan Rifles were killed en masse. Left to fend for themselves, Bengali officers and men analyzed situations, took decisions and executed

the design to revolt against Pakistan. This was the first instance of abdication of political responsibility by the politicians where they failed to provide purpose, direction and control to both the Nation and its military; this was also the beginning of politicization of the Bangladesh Military.

Throughout the Liberation War, from 25 March to 16 December of 1971, the Bangladesh Military not only organized itself and fought but also organized, trained, motivated and led at least a million men and women in a brutal and ruthless war to liberate Bangladesh. Men in uniform were shoulder to shoulder with civilians, from every walk of life, fighting, bleeding and dying imbued with the same purpose and zeal and some of the same politics too. The ideal of Bangladesh was a political ideal and the liberation of Bangladesh was a tribute to the success of that political ideal - men in uniform were a part of that.

The immediate aftermath of Independence was chaos - social, economic & political. A very small Bangladesh Army, an even smaller Navy and Air Force pulled themselves back from the chaos by taking refuge in cantonments, garrisons and bases. In order to arrest the chaos, the AL Government abandoned the path of persuasion and took the path of compulsion deploying the military in "Aid of Civil Power" to disarm the many guerilla bands still roaming about the countryside, to curb militant and armed leftist movements and in general to establish and maintain law and order. Finding the military not as pliable and as responsive as they would have liked, the AL set about rapidly organizing an alternative in the form of a para-military force called the Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini or JRB with its manpower recruited from AL cadres, activists and party members. Many of the military's better officers were deputed to it to train and lead the force. The Military was not in the least bit pleased; it had initiated the armed revolt of the Liberation War, it had fought the war to a successful conclusion and it expected its classical role of National Defense to lie with it; it did not want to abdicate this role to anyone, least of all to a political upstart called the JRB.

In the meantime, the leftist movement, in the form of the Jatiyo Shamajtantrik Dal or JSD, very strong in the period 1974-1975, had infiltrated into every nook & cranny of the military, in particular its rank and file. So, when on 15 August 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with most of his family and a few of his closest colleagues were murdered by a group of Army officers, for reasons still not clear today, the Nation went into a tail spin. At the same time, the JSD instigated and initiated a "Sepahi Biplob" adding to the chaos and setting in motion a chain of coups and counter coups within the military. With great brutality and ruthlessness, chaos was controlled and Martial Law imposed. Meanwhile the politicians abandoned everything and ran for their lives; thus, for the second time abdicating political responsibility and failing to provide direction, purpose and control to the Nation and its Military.

With the imposition of Martial Law and as a response to events, quite unconsciously, the Military as a corporate body had decided not to be a party to politics but to control and direct politics itself and so for the next 5 years set about governing the state. Nation-building became a part of military

vocabulary. From 1975 to 1980, all institutions of the state were strengthened and the people were motivated and imbued with the zeal to build the nation. With the Military participating in nation building activities and firmly standing behind, politics was indeed becoming difficult just as General Zia Ur Rahman had promised.

The coup that led to the murder of General Zia Ur Rahman, the President, was short lived. The BNP, the party formed by Zia Ur Rahman, was in government but it failed to take "control of the situation" preferring to leave it to the military to "sort itself out". Consequently, the military without a pause imposed a 2nd Martial Law and assumed the "reigns of government". Not until 1990 was, a serious challenge mounted to the control & domination of the military on both politics and government.

For 15 years from 1991 to 2006, democracy or some form of it prevailed. Politics, elections and parliament became big business. Lacking leadership, foresight, abilities and acumen, politicians and political parties got themselves busy in looting both public and private wealth leaving the Nation to fend for itself. Politics became a "zero-sum game", where the party in power took everything leaving nothing for the vast majority of "others". Not surprisingly, politics became confrontational. Subjected to either neglect or manipulation every social, political and economic institution of the State simply broke down. Hectic attempts at reaching an understanding, which would pave the way for elections in January 2006, broke down. All avenues were now closed and the Military was once again called upon to fill a role that was not theirs to fill, this time in the form of an Emergency Government. For the third time politicians had failed to shoulder their responsibility in providing direction, purpose and control to the Nation and it is Military.

Carl von Clausewitz, the chief and the most famous theoretician of the Napoleonic wars (mid 18th century), in his book 'On War' states: "War is not merely a political act but also a real political instrument..." The military which fights wars, is thus by association "a real political instrument" guided and controlled by policy -when this fails the military is constrained to decide "policy". One common red thread runs throughout the 36 years (1971 - 2007) of the history of the Bangladesh Military and that is: a complete absence of political direction and control during times of crisis and "troubles". If political direction and control is to be established the Bangladesh military must be reorganized in certain aspects.

Military Dictatorships Are Debilitating To The State

The appearance of a revolutionary change

The first factor to consider is that military regimes or military backed once for that matter, do not necessarily bring about substantial changes in the prevailing social, political and economic conditions of a people or a State. This is so because the military is but one of the many institutions of a state with well-defined but narrow functions and therefore, the military, rarely if ever clearly understands the fine balance of institutions which underlie the

sustainability of a functioning state. More often than not, military interventions destroy or at best dislocate this "fine balance" giving the appearance of a revolutionary change. Ultimately, the State has to re-balance its structures if it is to continue functioning as a viable polity. This is exactly what has happened to Bangladesh as we have seen from our experience of martial-law regimes or other military backed governments. Thus, "military" is not the solution to problems of nation-state building or of national progress; at best it can be a catalyst to changes, at worst it leads to militarization and consequent atrophy of state institutions.

Ultimately, the people will demand their liberties

The second factor to take note of is that ultimately the people or the populace will demand the liberties and freedoms to define, choose and to an extent control the system of government and governance. This more often than not involves bargaining and compromises to cater to the needs of conflicting requirements of diverse interest groups within a polity. The military with its vertical structures and its culture of chains of command does not understand this or concede compromise and bargaining in an attempt to force through changes defined within the narrow parameters of what it considers to be "National Security". Consequently, it agitates, perturbs and angers every segment of the populace or the citizenry who than coalesce into a broad based front of opposition. Conflicts occur, the military loses credibility and legitimacy until such time it is forced by internal and external pressures and conditions to give in to the demands of the people for "democracy" who then in a reaction go ahead to vote to power the very forces that the military was attempting to de-legitimize. This is exactly what has been happening in Bangladesh since it became independence in 1971. The same thing has also happened to many other countries and polities within the last one decade, the most recent examples of which are Pakistan and Thailand.

Impossible to totally de-legitimize existing mass political parties

The third point to note is that for the military it is very difficult, if not impossible to totally de-legitimize and cut-out existing mass political parties. Mass political parties represent a broad cross-section of the entire populace and so they can and do mobilize public opinion and support on issues, which are of concern and interest to diverse sections of the populace. In an attempt to mobilize public opinion and support, the military either brings to the fore fringe political parties or encourages formation of a new party consisting of fringe and divisive elements of mass political parties; in either case these are unable to garner public support in favor of the military or stand the test of elections even under the shadow of military regimes. This has happened in Bangladesh more than once.

Dictators encourage foreign power interventions

The last factor to consider is that military dictatorships often have "nation-building and development" as their main agendas. Since national resources are often limited, these cannot fund the ambitious public projects taken in hand by dictatorships and so dictatorships resort to foreign powers and

international money-lending agencies to fund such projects. However, foreign powers and international money-lending agencies do not come in to fulfill wishful utopias of dictators; they come in to exploit whatever resources a particular State has to offer. Ultimately, these foreign powers and money-lending agencies grasp the entire economy creating a vested often kleptrocratic clientele of politicians, bureaucrats, senior military officers and businesspersons who then begin to consider themselves as the "ruling elite" with narrow group and personal interests as opposed to national and public interests. This gives rise to social and political divisiveness often leading to mass violence and chaos and creating a continuous cycle of revolts and counter-revolts; the revolts leading to temporary "managed democracies" and the counter-revolts leading to dictatorships. The nation-state is now struck in a rut from which it is impossible to come out without putting its very existence in jeopardy. Such foreign "interventions" have not only happened in Bangladesh but in many countries of Africa, in Thailand, Pakistan and Myanmar.

The lessons therefore are clear: military interventions either in the form of martial law or its other variant of military backed caretaker, national or emergency governments are not the solutions to nation-building or progress; that has to be left to the people of the country who will organize themselves into conglomerates called political parties which will then legitimize political power and government through the process called elections.

Burgeoning Population, Adverse Climate And Lack Of Water Might Pose Existential Problems

Burgeoning Population

The rapid growth of population is a major problem for Bangladesh with the burgeoning population fast outstripping the limited resources of the Country. In 1971, the population was an estimated 70 million and today in 2009, the population is around 150 million, more than doubling in 38 years. Throughout the decades of the 70s and 80s, Bangladesh had a strong program of population control and consequently the annual population growth declined from 3.4% in 1975 to 2.2% in 1991 to an estimated 1.9% in 1996. However, the growth rate is on the rise again and according to the UN, the annual population growth rate for 2000-2005 was 2.02%, with the projected population for the year 2015 at over 181 million.

The implications of this rapid population growth are manifold. Firstly, land is at a premium with considerable portions of the land being taken up for habitation, thus drastically reducing the quantity of land available for agriculture. If less land is available for agriculture then there will be less agricultural production and less food to be had inspite of technological inputs such as use of better fertilizers, better farming methods and better seeds and plants.

Secondly, with less land and lesser agricultural activities large masses of able and young population will be without work in rural areas and therefore the

population will move, in large numbers, from rural to urban areas in search of employment. It was estimated by the Population Reference Bureau that 25% of the population lived in urban areas in 2001, up from 11% in 1980; Dhaka, alone has a population of over 11.5 million and its increasing every month.

Thirdly, cities and urban areas can only absorb a limited number of people and provide them with livelihood in the various service sectors and industries, which grow up in and around major cities.

Fourthly, industrial development in Bangladesh is not yet in a stage to be able to absorb the large masses of young people who grow up every year and are available for employment. Fifthly, the rapidly growing population has already overtaken the ability of the State to provide them with education, health-care, shelter, food and employment and so we will have more and more impoverished and poverty-ridden people.

Consider, for example the conditions and problems of a huge number of people who are shifting from the rural areas to Dhaka everyday in search of employment and livelihood. Most, if not all of these people are illiterate and unskilled and the only employment they can look forward to is work as day-laborers in construction or other sectors and that too is not forthcoming with the economy in recession. Hawkers in increasing numbers are occupying city streets and creating problems for movement of people and traffic. One cannot forcibly evict these people from cities because they simply have nowhere to go and because the State has been unable to provide such large numbers of our people with the basic needs of shelter, food and employment.

Impact of Climate Change

Global climatic changes have already begun to affect Bangladesh in the following ways:

■ Weather patterns are changing with the weather becoming increasingly unpredictable; monsoon rains are not coming around when they ought to; summers are getting hotter and longer and winters are becoming shorter and severer. This has a severe effect on agriculture and cropping patterns, making it difficult for farmers to predict what crops to plant and reap at what times of the year. Besides unpredictable weather makes it impossible to plant and reap certain types of cereals, vegetables and fruits, which for centuries have been the main crops. So, agriculture is going to suffer making it difficult to get food in quantities and types that our people need.

■ Natural disasters such as cyclones, tornadoes and floods are happening more frequently and more devastatingly making it increasingly difficult both for people to cope with these and for the State to provide protection and support rehabilitations.

■ Ice caps and glaciers in the Himalayas are melting and unpredictably increasing flows in some 54 major rivers passing from India through Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal. As the ice and glaciers melt further and

faster, water flows, will suddenly rise and then decline drastically, also changing precipitation cycles and patterns. Additionally, cultural artifacts such as urbanization, habitations, dams, roads etc interfere with natural drainage systems, increasing risks of permanent flooding and water-logging on the one hand and the drying up of rivers on the other.

■ As more and more ice melts and flows through rivers into the sea, the levels of the Bay of Bengal will keep on rising till by around 2050, fully one-third of the land area of Bangladesh will sink into the sea, as many studies seem to indicate.

Lack of Adequate and Clean Waters

Climatic changes and cultural artifacts are not only affecting rivers and the waters that they contain but also underground water is being affected. Dams and barrages constructed upstream in India are drastically reducing the availability of water in Bangladesh, turning large tracts of lands into semi-arid regions unfit for habitations or cultivation.

As precipitation decreases and as rivers dry up, under-ground water is not being replenished and natural geological systems are put into disarray, throwing up minerals such as arsenic, which are extremely harmful to all living beings including plants, animals and humans.

As sea levels, rise and rivers dry up, salinity will keep on increasing, affecting both land and water and making more and more land inhabitable, jeopardizing life and living.

Effects and Apprehensions

The combined effects of over-population, negative impacts of climate change, lack of adequate and clean waters could well lead to a massive population migration from an unlivable Bangladesh fanning out towards the entire South-Asian region, destabilizing the fragile demographic, social, economic and political balance in the region and aggravating existing inter and intra State conflicts or initiating new ones.

Apprehensions are there that this population migration may not happen gradually, allowing time for their absorption into the migrated areas, but may occur in a sudden explosive outburst, initiated by man-made disasters such as famines, political conflicts and uncontrolled epidemic of diseases.

Whether Bangladesh will turn into a "demographic bomb" as outlined here, is indeed difficult to predict with any certitude but certain it is that increasing floods of Bangladeshis will need to seek habitation and livelihood outside the boundaries of Bangladesh, if for no other reason than for over-population and the inability of the land to support the population.

To a very large extent, the economic and social problems that we face today are the outcome of this rapid growth in population. We need to get back on the track of effective and efficient population control, otherwise all our economic developments and growth are never going to be able to keep up

with the rise in population and we will never be able to reduce poverty to the level we want to. This rate of population growth keeps the people poor and the country dependent on foreign aid. Population control and family planning, therefore, must once again become a top priority of our governments, NGOs and social workers.

Economic Inequalities And Poverty Give Rise To Alienation And Then Resistance

On 13 May, 2009 in a meet organized by the NBR and the FBCCI, the finance minister AMA Muhit said that unless a "revolutionary change" was brought about by the AL government in the next 5 years, it would have failed. Indeed, because over the last 10 years but particularly since 2007, more people have become poorer and poverty-stricken in this country than at anytime before.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in its report of 2008 estimates that per-capita income has reached US$ 690, which does not reflect our economic well-being or lack of it; the true picture is reflected in consumer price index, inflation rates and of income over the years. Since early 2007 annual inflation rate has been hovering around 10 percent and it is only in March 2009 that inflation has fallen to 5 percent but incomes since 2005 have been constantly declining and in January 2009 average incomes have increased by less than 01 percent compared to the corresponding period last year - all of this basically means that our incomes cannot keep up with the prices of commodities; we are all consuming lesser things, particularly food, with more money. So, since 2007, this declining "real value" of money has practically wiped out almost the entire lower-middle class, reducing something like 25 to 30 million people to poverty; as for the already poor, they are pushed to below the poverty line, earning less then Tk. 70.00 a day and surviving at near-starvation levels - nobody has counted such people but estimates range from around 50 to 80 million.

Uneven Development

Uneven Development is a phrase referring to inequalities in social, political but above all economic opportunities provided by the state. Our state institutions and their structures are so designed that they support, favor, benefit and perpetuate a very small minority, often termed the Ruling Elite, leaving the larger majority in a perpetual condition of deprivation & dependence. The core state institutions are used to enforce the will of this ruling elite in maintaining their absolute control over all social, political and economic activities of the state and a monopoly on the benefits provided by the state. For example, a government economic survey for the year 1991-92 points out that a mere top 5% of the rich in Bangladesh enjoy the benefits of 18.85% of the National Income. Eight years later, in 2000, a similar survey points out that the very same 5% of the rich now take away 30.66% of the National Income. Today, in 2009, I daresay by extrapolation that the same group of people is taking away over 50% of the national income. Although the survey does not quantify, what exactly 5% of the rich is, in number terms this perhaps means a few thousand individuals who are masters of a

significant chunk of the nation's economic resources while a population of 150 million are left in a state of extreme economic deprivation and exploitation. The economic aspect is but one aspect of a whole plethora of social and political inequalities forced upon the people by economic unempowerment.

The disparities between the haves and have-nots therefore, become starkly evident and it comes as no surprise that poverty in Bangladesh not only persists but breeds and increases. There is one single reason for this and that is: our entire structure of the State with all its institutions support the control of allocation and distribution of every resource by a miniscule minority of the "rich" - a system that is inherently unequal and unjust. The miniscule minority or the "ruling elite", as some would have it, allocate and distribute most of the resources of the State between themselves, keeping the vast mass of the populace in constant subservience, unempowered to either demand or obtain the "goods" which their labour produces.

Linkages between inequalities, poverty and terrorism

Extremism, whether of the left or right, have never been able to take root or make much headway in Bangladesh but "terrorism" as we understand it today have been persisting in this part of the world for well over 300 years, if one is to believe the history of the various peasant and other movements which took place in eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh). Without going so far back into history, one can still illustrate the phenomenon of terrorism by citing the example of the leftist movements that took place in Bangladesh from 1970 to 1975 and the separatist movement that took place in the Chittagong Hill Tracts from 1974 to 1997.

The leftist movement in Bangladesh virtually laid siege to the newly born nation of Bangladesh and at one stage in 1975, it was able to initiate an attempt at taking over the State through the so-called "Sepahi-Janata Biplob" spearheaded by the Jatiya Samajtantric Dal (JASAD) but that attempt was nullified by a combination of various factors chief among which was a lack of organization within and support of the greater mass of the populace, while the separatist movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts virtually took the form of a full-fledged insurgency from 1980 onwards, calling for the deployment of the Army in counter-insurgency operations for over 2 decades. In both of these instances, "terror" was a tactic employed by every side and party to the conflict, the State's security apparatus included.

The fact is that "terrorism" is an instrument employed by the weak, the "small man" against economic, social and political inequalities and against an unjust but powerful polity. The State for its part employs even greater violence, often adopting the same means and methods as the terrorists, in order to resolve the problem - this ofcourse does not resolve the problem but aggravates it because the State, held back by its institutions, by its laws and by public opinions and pressures, cannot organize the application of overwhelming force to once and for all root-out the structures of the "terrorists". So, a cycle of long drawn out aggravation, conflict and violence

is perpetuated.

While in the recent past "terrorism" in Bangladesh was motivated by political ideologies, supported by other "actors" (both State and non-State) which fomented those ideologies, today "terrorism" is motivated by religious beliefs with political intents, equally supported by other "actors" who subscribe to those beliefs. The "motivating forces" have changed but the methods, means and linkages remain the same, as do the grievances.

The only way for Bangladesh to get out of this "cycle of aggravation and violence", is for it to provide such education to its entire populace, which will make them, fit to seek employment which will provide them with livelihood for themselves and their families - the idea being to keep the mind and the body together. It, thus calls for a polity, which will provide equity and justice for its entire people to seek education and employment, if not in equal measure atleast not in too unequal a measure. One does not see this happening anytime soon and so "terrorism" in one or the other form will continue to take their toll, as they have over the last few centuries.

Why religious extremism?

The first step to religious extremism started from the decade of 1980s when Bangladesh started on its road to industrialization and modernization. As factories, industries & communication infrastructures developed, the populace moved, at first slowly then with increasing momentum, from the rural to the few urban & suburban areas looking for easy jobs & employment, both in the industrial & service sectors.

Coupled with this was the massive re-organization & expansion of government administrative functions. Rapidly within just a decade new districts, sub-districts, urban/suburban areas sprang up. Consequently, economy, politics & society changed; social values, which had glued the society & the polity together, perhaps for centuries, were torn apart & abandoned without being replaced by a new set of values reflecting new demands and needs. Vast masses of people were crowded into decaying slums where life was primitive & brutal. Torn away from social values & bindings, religion, in our case Islam, provided identity, meaning, and stability but above all hope, epitomized in the slogan "Islam is the solution" to this massive dislocation of the self and society.

Islamic resurgence is thus both a product and an effort to come to grips with modernization. Its underlying causes are urbanization, social mobilization, and higher levels of literacy and intensified communication and media consumption. These developments undermined traditional village and family ties and created alienation and an identity crisis. Islamist symbols, commitments and beliefs met these psychological needs.

From fundamentalism to political activism

Starting from the 1980s, a central element of Islamisation was the development of Islamic social, political and economic organizations. These

religious organizations paid particular attention both to establishing Islamic schools and to expanding Islamic influence in state schools, colleges and universities. In effect by 2003, these organizations brought into effect an Islamic "civil society" which paralled, surpassed and even supplanted in scope and activity the frequently frail institutions of secular civil society.

As with most revolutionary movements, winning control of student was the first phase in political Islamization. The Islamist appeal was particularly strong among students in technical institutes such as medicine and engineering. Over 70% of the membership of Chattra Shibir and other extremist Islamic student's organizations are from lower middle class and are the first generation in their family to get any sort of education. Islamization was greatly helped by government efforts to extend support to religious education and religious educational institutions throughout the decade of 1980 and 1990. This not only led to religious education but also to graduation of Islamic militants who went forth to work on behalf of Islamic political goals.

The next phase in political Islamization was in establishing themselves as the only viable alternative to the incumbent government that is the BNP. The ability of the Islamic groups to dominate the opposition was also greatly helped by the BNP suppression of secular opposition. Secular opposition is more vulnerable to suppression then religious opposition because the later can operate within and behind a network of mosques, educational institutions, welfare organization, and foundations which the government feels it cannot suppress but secular opposition has no such cover and hence are more easily controlled or eliminated by the government

From political activism to extremism -linkages: Political & ideological

The foremost and the most advantageous for the Islamic groups were the political and ideological linkages with the BNP prior to the election of 2001. This put the Islamic groups firmly in the seat of government and political power, a possibility, which these groups have been working for, for more, the two decades. This allowed them unprecedented influence over political processes, institutions but above all, widespread influence over the state machinery. The strategy these Islamic groups evolved and followed was simplicity itself: allow the gulf of differences to widen, beyond the point of no return, between the AL & BNP; subvert state machinery while the AL & BNP are busy tackling each other; and finally create a politically de-stabilized environment (through sabotage) whereby the state can be taken over. The tactics followed were no different than the tactics followed by revolutionary groups whether of the left or the right.

Social: The social linkages have been explained in paragraphs above. The strategy was not only to paralyze existing social institutions and break them down but also to replace it with ones supportive of religious extremism.

Out-of-State: Out-of-State linkages have been developed over long periods starting with the civil war in Afghanistan where it was possible to train people in large numbers for ideological & armed conflict. Additionally links were

maintained with foreign Islamic foundations & institutions, which provided funds for Islamic education & social services; all of these funding being criminally diverted for political purposes. Exceptionally,some foreign government organizations also got involved in various ways , even large shipments of arms were channelized by them to destabilize Bangladesh.

The present situation

Bangladesh is today antagonistically divided between two different political, social and economic cultures, perhaps even ideologies. One, led by the AL represents the ideals and the pathos on which the Liberation War was fought and the 1972 Constitution was made; the other, represented by the BNP reflects post-liberation Bangladesh with its focus on nationalism and Islamic identity. The culture and identity of the BNP and AL are so mutually exclusive that no compromise is possible; the leadership as well as the rank and file adherents of both the parties are murderously antagonistic towards each other. Thus, the nation state is torn between two conflicting ideologies. Preparing for over two decades and taking advantage of this political divide are the extreme Islamic groups, who have since 2001 launched not only into political activism but also into sabotage on a scale aimed at the overthrow of the present socio-political system of the state.

The "revolutionary change" that the finance minister AMA Muhit was talking about cannot be done within the existing structures of the State, if one considers the fact that over the last one decade PSRPs, ADPs and SSNPs have only failed to reduce poverty; on the contrary, poverty has increased. "Revolutionary change" would imply a restructuring of the State which the "ruling elite" can only permit at its peril and so, it only permits enough to stave off social and economic unrests and instabilities which the disparities invariably generate - this the "ruling elite" does to preempt the greater peril of a "political revolution". The pendulum swings but ever so slightly maintaining the delicate balance between control by the "ruling elite" on the one hand and the inert (as in "mass") subservience of the populace on the other. As long as this state of things continues, the Nation would be stymied in its attempt to progress towards the greater vision of a "Civilization".

Political Control On Bangladesh Military Necessary To Remove Impediment To Nation Building

The Bangladesh military is as structured, organized, as equipped and armed and as trained as any military can be within the limited resources available to it in a country like Bangladesh. Instead, I would like to focus on the "Higher Direction and Control" aspects of the Bangladesh Military - the whole tenor of our analysis & arguments above has led us to the consideration of this single aspect. Again, in suggesting a "Higher Direction and Control" of the military I would concentrate on the functional rather then on the structural aspects of the issue.

Higher Direction and Control ipso facto implies political control of the military at the highest levels of the government through at least a Ministry of

Defense (MOD) with the chain of control passing through the MOD to the Prime Minister (PM), thence to the President. That is what our Constitution specifies and that is what exists in theory. In practice, the MOD is moribund and all major and minor policy decisions are taken by the PM with recommendations, by the Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force, is passed on either directly or through the Armed Forces Division (AFD), to the PM. The President, who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, is not even consulted. When the Presidential system of government was in vogue, during and after the martial law regimes, the President was the fountainhead of all decisions regarding the military.

Immediately after Independence, the Awami League (AL) government did not envisage a substantial role for the military because a war, even in the distant future seemed unlikely. Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by India with a small stretch of border with Myanmar in the southeast. External threats were limited and whatever threat existed was taken care of by the 25 years Indo-Bangla Friendship Treaty. Internal threats there were but these could very well be tackled by para-military forces like the Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini (JRB). Therefore, as far as the AL was concerned there was no need for Higher Direction and Control of the military. Subsequent governments, both military and civil, personalized direction and control in the person of the PM or the President. Thus, a formal process and structure of policy and strategic decision-making was never put in place in Bangladesh.

In putting in place a formal process and structure of Higher Direction & Control, one has to ensure a balance of two things: effective control of the military on the one hand and structured participation of the military in the process on the other. Having said that, I would now like to discuss, in the following paragraphs, the essential functional aspects of Higher Direction and Control in the form of a reorganized MOD:

(1) Control of Policy and Strategic Policy-making

Policy and strategic guidance provides purpose and direction to the Forces & therefore, this must be the prime function of the MOD. Policy and strategic guidance also provides guidelines for the structuring, organizing, equipping, training and employing of military forces and as such, participation of the Forces ought to be ensured through Chiefs of the three Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) within the process and structure of the MOD. Such organization as the DGFI, Doctrine and Training Command, and tri-service training institutes must be under such control as these provide information & feedback on policy & strategic issues.

(2) Control of Military Procurement

Structuring the process of procurement of military armaments and equipment ensures that Forces are equipped for the tasks and functions they are set to perform. This therefore, is an important MOD function that must be incorporated in its organization.

(3) **Budgetary Control**

This control ensures that demands for moneys by Forces are logically and practically constructed & processed. It also ensures that funds placed are utilized for purposes for which they had been demanded. Accountability and transparency is thereby ensured.

(4) **Control of Higher Commands**

Control of higher command echelons, in our case army Divisions and Independent Brigades, Naval and Air Bases, ensures that such formation react quickly and effectively to directives and situations in peace and in war. It also ensures that such Commands are always deployed and employed with explicit sanctions from the government and never for purposes for which they are not meant. In order to do that the MOD must have the prerogative to promote and position Commanders to such Commands. The process for this must be structured to ensure participation by the Chiefs of the three Forces. At the same time, it also must be ensured that the Control of the MOD in no way interferes with Operational and Tactical control exercised by Forces Headquarters when forces are deployed in the field.

(5) **Participation of Forces**

This must be ensured by placement of personnel from the three forces in every functional area of the MOD. The Chiefs as well as higher commanders of the three Forces must form part of appropriate Committees of the MOD, both permanent and temporary. The reasons for this is obvious: military functions are complex and continuous feedbacks are necessary from experts in many functional areas, if policy and strategy are to be practical, logical and executable; additionally a close understanding is necessary between those who formulate policy and strategy and those who implement them.

The Military with its legally sanctioned monopoly of organized violence is a potent instrument of politics but that must be seen in the wider context of International politics and inter-state relationships. Whenever the military is employed for purposes other than this, such as political interventions within the State, it loses both its physical and moral capacity and capability to perform its primary task of war-fighting in wars and deterrence in peace. As we have seen, the Bangladesh Military has for long been intervening, in one form or another, in politics and governance within the State. This has been possible because of the absence of structured Higher Direction and Control of the military at the highest levels of government. The function of political control of the military had been personalized in the person of the PM or the President and in the absence of strong personalities in these positions, control and direction disappeared leaving the military to do as it thought best. If we are to take lessons from history, we must tightly structure the political direction & control of the military in such a way that in peace, crisis & war, direction and control never fails.

Revitalizing Rural-Agricultural Economy - Key To Removing Impediment Of Poverty

Not too far back in the past, our rural agro-based economy used to be so vibrant and productive that the general populace enjoyed a level of comfort, which is but a far away dream now. That era of plenty brought about a sobriquet for Bangladesh, that of "Golden Bengal" which all our politicians frequently refer to but which they have been utterly unable to materialize for the last three and a half decades.

There are many reasons for this unfortunate decline in our rural economy. The first and the foremost reason is the rapid rise of our population, doubling over a thirty year period, which put a tremendous pressure on land holdings both for cultivation and homesteads have had to be divided and then further subdivided. Consequently, the amount of land, which used to be available for agriculture has greatly decreased although productivity per acreage of land has increased manifold due to modern technological inputs.

The second important factor is the rapid industrialization, which has taken place in Bangladesh over the last 25 years. New sub-urban and urban areas grew up around industrial concerns, using up lands, which were devoted to agriculture. Young and productive labour too gradually shifted to these urban areas, finding jobs in industries and in the service sectors. The rural small and cottage-based enterprises could not compete with modern industrial production and therefore, they rapidly declined.

The third important factor for the decline of rural economy is the development of roads and highway, which connected the entire country in a network of cheap and rapid automobile communication. This ate up further land and encouraged the growth of sub-urban areas at major communication nodal points. Rural markets, which were hubs of local trade and commerce, now came under pressure because produces were bought-off directly from the producers by wealthy city merchants. Therefore, these rural markets declined and combined with the collapse of local cottage and small industries as well as the paucity of agricultural lands, the "rural economy" which had developed and sustained over centuries now ceased to exist for all practical purposes.

The implications and consequences of this decline in our rural economy are serious and far reaching. The first, the most visible and the most troubling is that we are running short of food because less land and less able labour is available for agriculture whereas just a decade back, we could claim self-sufficiency in rice production. Additionally, agricultural areas are becoming more vulnerable to natural calamities, which have increased due to environmental degradation and worldwide climatic changes. The second, equally troubling consequence is the shifting of large numbers of people from rural to urban areas where they can find only part-time poorly paid employment in industries or service sectors and where they lead inhuman lives. This burgeoning population in cities creates massive socio-economic problems. The third and perhaps the most important consequence is the decline in prosperity, of standard of life and living for the rural people, who make up a good 80 percent of our population.

When Bangladesh became independent, mills and factories could be counted on the fingers of ones hands and all of these were owned by Pakistani industrialists, who fled the country after the Liberation War, forcing the Bangladeshi government to nationalize them. Bangladesh had neither the expertise nor the experience to run industries and so these nationalized industries dissolved into inefficiency and corruption and were shut down within a few years.

One remarkable thing though, about these pre-liberation era industries were that they were all based on resources and raw materials that agriculture provided such as jute, tea, tobacco, sugar etc. So, on the one hand these industries prompted diversification of agriculture into both "cash" and cereal crops and on the other hand made industries sustainable because raw materials were growing from the earth and were virtually limitless. Returns were slow in coming but finally value additions were tremendous - both to agriculture and to industries - nothing needed to be imported and everything could be exported after satisfying domestic demands. This was import substitution and value-addition at its best. That the people of Bangladesh did not benefit from all these could be laid at the doors of exploitative policies followed by the Pakistanis, who took away all the returns.

That agriculture and its related activities provided us with prosperity, lies rooted in our economic history. Consider, for example the fact that already by late 16th century, land fertility, rice cultivation and population density, all grew to such an extent that south & east Bengal were producing surplus grain for exports. From two principal seaports, Chittagong in the east & Satgaon in the west, rice was exported throughout the Indian Ocean region.

Defying so many centuries of history, in the 1980s the buzz-word in Bangladesh was industrialization and the form it took was the half-processing sweat-shops of garments. All raw materials, including packing cartons and threads were imported, quickly sewed into clothing and exported - returns and turn-around times were quick and so the government encouraged it. Gradually back-ward linkages were developed to produce threads, accessories and some fabrics but still all raw materials had to be imported. A whole host of service industries developed around these "garments" such as transportations, financial and banking enterprises, insurances, shipping and clearing agents etc. The government imposed taxes and dozens of licensing fees on all of these activities and turned a blind eye to corruption, which these activities engendered. Within just about 2 decades the whole thing had turned into a regime of loot and rapine of both public and private wealth. This was not import substitution, value-addition or even industrialization in any real sense because it gave rise to a system of exploitation as debilitating as any in the world.

The greatest damage it did was to our agriculture and agriculture based industries, destroying them to such an extent that the word "cash crop" ceased to exist in anyone's lexicon, including those of the farmers. Huge masses of people engaged in producing raw materials for industries based on agriculture were driven into unemployment and poverty - the garment

industries today claim credit to providing employment to 30 or 40 lakh people but who is going to claim the discredit of driving millions into starvation?

So, if poverty is to be staved off in any meaningful way, Bangladesh has to go back to the basics - to a system, which will allow agriculture and industries to feed on each other benefiting and sustaining both. One of the solutions suggested by some renowned economists is to carry out a thoroughgoing land reform, distributing unutilized khas or government land to landless people. The idea is eminently sound and practical - this will immediately increase cultivable land, it will pull away large number of people from overcrowded urban areas and it will provide a source of earning and living to "marginalized" people. Secondly, local industries and SMEs must be encouraged in rural areas not merely through verbalizations by politicians, government and bank officials but through structures with legal bindings, for example, banks by law must disburse 20 or 25 percent of their investments in these rural SMEs, NGOs by law must be made to devote their energies and resources to developing rural and sub-urban SMEs and lastly, we must have industries based on resources and raw materials which our land and our people can produce; only then can we have import-substitutions and value-additions which will benefit all of us as opposed to benefiting a small coterie of so called "industrialists". Through such and other measures, our rural economy ought to be revitalized and only then will large-scale poverty alleviation be possible.

Lack Of Concordance In Our Education System Does Not Encourage Nation-State Building

Literacy in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has published its Report-2008 wherein it is stated that 52.49 percent of the country's population still remain illiterate. What the BBS report does not indicate is how much of the literate population have the competence, the skills, and the training to find gainful employments or to earn livelihoods whether at home or abroad; one apprehends that the figure in that respect is not impressive. Additionally, one also apprehends that only a miniscule portion of the literate population have the "education" and the expertise to make some contribution to their and to the nation's development in various fields. So, depending on how one defines literacy, it is difficult to see where this level of literacy or conversely what this level of illiteracy is leading us to.

There is however, no denying the fact that the first step is to achieve universal national literacy, if one define literacy as an ability to read, write and do arithmetic but having achieved nearly 50 percent of it, it is time now to go beyond the "literacy rate" debate and have a deep and searching look at the "utility" aspect of mere literacy because the moral and social values of literacy lose much of their weight as soon as they come up against the hard facts of economic utility value of literacy at both the individual and the collective levels.

People have to have the ability to parley their literacy or indeed their education for employments, for earni livelihoods, for fulfilling their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter but they also need to look forward to improving their standards of living and for going up the next higher step in the economic and social ladder. Literacy and education, as it is in Bangladesh simply does not provide our people with such abilities and that is why we are unable to make much headway in a world, which is "economic".

What will in fact arm our people to lead worthwhile "economic" lives and hence also social and political lives, are competences and skills which will make them into "technicians" in every field of human activity - be it in industry, in agriculture or in services. If our State and our governments are concentrating on improving the literacy rate, they are only doing a very small part of the job; the greater part of the job lies in converting human beings into resources by providing them with "education" to be gainfully employed in economic activities. "Stomach first" may be a cliché but it holds good.

The AL's election manifesto promise of eradicating illiteracy by 2020 is worthwhile but an even more worthwhile goal would be to make the presently literate people, competent and skilled in some way to earn a living - the debate over education policy ought to be guided to looking for ways to achieving that and away from the minefields of secular-religious dichotomy.

Different Orientations - Different Societies

Clearly there are three different orientations running parallel through all four tiers - primary, secondary, tertiary and higher - of our education system. The first of these is the vernacular or Bangla medium, which caters to the need for education of the vast majority of the children of our country from the primary to the higher level, from the villages to the metropolitan cities. It is to this that the government directs its main efforts through providing funding, direction and control and yet it is the weakest of the three orientations.

The second of this orientation, which also caters, to a large extent, to the needs of the masses is religion-based education through Madrashas. It is the dispossessed, the utterly poor, the abandoned and certain section of the lower middle class who are targeted by the Madrashas providing them with not only education but also shelter. Madrasha education is neither very pragmatic nor much attuned to the practical requirements of life and living but it fulfills the important function of "socializing" the most downtrodden portion of the population, with a life long sense of belongingness and bonding to a particular social group - functions which secular education is demonstratively incapable of performing.

The third orientation is that of English medium which sees to the education of the offsprings of the affluent and higher income groups in major cities of the Country. Aligned and attuned to western, that is, British & US modes of education, this is perhaps the most rapidly growing sector of our education right from the primary level to the higher university level. Managed and operated like big business enterprises, it is open to question how much and

what education those institutions provide to produce useful citizen for our Nation attuned to the cultural and social proclivities of our people.

From even a cursory study of these three orientations it becomes clear that we are in fact dealing here with three different cultural orientations with different out looks, attitudes, beliefs, customs, traditions even language. Therefore, instead of coalescing our society and ultimately our nation, it is getting increasingly fragmented into culturally exclusive groups with little inter-group commonality but considerable areas of discordance even conflict between them. On the one side is the vast mass of the population more or less oriented towards Bangaliness in language and education; on the other, is a small coterie of young people with western oriented language and education; in the middle is the not inconsiderable number of people with Madrasha education.

Weaknesses are many, chief among which are endemic corruption in the government structures controlling the system, a lack of clear policy & direction, and lack of a formal structure for setting and reviewing policies based on consensus of the major stake holders such as educationists, teachers and government officials. The outcome of these weaknesses are an unhappy blend of poor teaching materials such as text books, poor teachers in both intellectual and monetary sense and a unsatisfactory, largely impractical education for our children. It is therefore, self-evident that such a system produces mass literacy of sorts but not education conducive to creating a productive, pragmatic, tolerant and aware citizenry so necessary for the continued prosperity and growth of our society, nation and state.

Perhaps one of the major reasons for our social and political unrest is the lack of concordance in our education system, for as we have seen, our education system has created and is now reinforcing divisive trends in our society. Unless the society and the State which regulates this society pays urgent and immediate attention to our entire education system, the troubles and tribulation of this society will reach a stage where social and its attendant political conflict will become "historically inevitable".

Inter-State Relationships In The Region Are A Drag On Bangladesh

The roller-coaster Bangladesh-India relationship

Indian warning of assassination plot

The Indian foreign secretary Mr. Shiv Shankar Menon paid an unscheduled visit to Bangladesh on 12 April 2009. The Bangladesh foreign ministry officials stated that such a "short notice" visit was unprecedented but maintained that the trip was "just part of ongoing dialogue between friends, between neighbours". The visit went almost unnoticed in the Bangladesh media until the Indian Express on 18 April published a report claiming that the visit was prompted by a need to warn Bangladesh of an assassination threat against its prime minister, Sheikh Hasina. The Indian Express further

claimed that Indian intelligence had picked up electronic communications between members of radical/ militant/terrorist groups operating "in the neighbourhood" and that these intercepts pointed to the existence of a plot to target the "new Sheikh Hasina government". "That prompted India to go ahead and warn the Bangladesh top brass of the threat", the report contended.

There are many explicit and implicit aspects to this Indian Express report. The Indian media has for long been propagating a perception and stoking its own paranoia that Bangladesh is awash with militancy and terrorism quite forgetting the fact that for the last one decade radical politics of the right or religion-based militancy and terrorism have never been able to take root in Bangladesh and have been tackled with draconian measures, reducing any organizational or structural integrity, these "militants" might have had, to impotence.

Explicit in the Indian Express report is the fact that India is so concerned about Bangladesh that it is devoting its overstretched intelligence resources to finding out what is happening here, inspite of the reality that the highly inept and corrupt Indian "intelligence" and law-enforcement agencies have been able to do next to nothing about terrorist, militancy and separatist threats which are tearing India apart. As a matter of fact Indian intelligence agencies have a long history of incompetence if one considers the fact that two Indian Prime Ministers - Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi - were assassinated without these intelligence agencies being able to get even a hint of these events happening. One could therefore, quite legitimately question the competence and acumen of the Indian intelligence in identifying threats of assassination against the prime minister of Bangladesh. This leads us to the implicit aspects of the Indian Express report.

Implicit in the Express report is the fact that India will not look upon kindly to any government in Bangladesh which will not serve the Indian purpose of establishing a monopoly on South Asia and its considerable resources and markets - and this includes the maritime-boundary demarcation in the Bay of Bengal containing energy resources, the continuous building of barrages upstream, to divert waters of 54 major rivers passing through Bangladesh and transit through Bangladesh making passage of goods, from one part of India to another, easier. Any Bangladeshi government not seeing eye-to-eye with India on these issues is likely to be tarred with the brush of "islamist radicals" and that is why the Indian media and foreign policy campaign of drumming up the extremist/terrorist threat in Bangladesh.

This is a stark warning that any Bangladeshi government inimical to Indian interests is likely to face "interventions" of various sorts and extents, physical and military encroachments included. As to how much of this threat is reality and how much bluff, is difficult to say particularly now when India is in the middle of an election which could lead to a change in government but like all things in international politics bluffs work, if the "target" is ready and willing to believe the bluffs and is unable to "call" them - Bangladesh is now in the unfortunate position of not being able to call these bluffs.

Impacts of change of government in India on Bangladesh

India has held its elections and it took a month for the results to be finalized - so vast is the country, so massive its electorate and so many its constituencies. Who forms the government in India is of concern to everyone including countries like USA, China and Russia, but smaller states of the South Asian region, including Bangladesh, are more than worried because the impact of the change is more direct and immediate.

On the surface, politics in India and Bangladesh have many similarities: both are plagued with "dynastic" politics and with corruption, divisiveness, violence and conflict. A more striking similarity is that both polities are dominated by conglomerates/coalitions of two major parties - in India, the Indian National Congress is a secular centrist party which led the Indian independence struggle and now heads a coalition called the United Progressive Alliance or UPA (comparable, in Bangladesh to the Awami League and its grand alliance); standing in opposition to the Congress and UPA is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a religious based nationalist party that fronts a loose coalition of parties dubbed the National Democratic Alliance or NDA (comparable, in Bangladesh to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its 4 party alliance).

The linkages do not end here but go much deeper. In 1971, India led by Congress with Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister actively supported the Bangladesh War of Liberation led by the Awami League with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as its undisputed leader. After that successful intervention which led to the independence of Bangladesh, India and Bangladesh signed a 25 year treaty of friendship. Since then, the Bangladesh Awami League and the Indian National Congress have a close, almost symbiotic relationship with each other; anytime both are in government in their respective states, "cooperation" between both countries increase exponentially. When the BJP is in government in India, such close relationships and cooperation are replaced with more formal inter-state interactions between Bangladesh and India. When the BNP is in government in Bangladesh and the BJP in India, relationships between India and Bangladesh take a frigid, often confrontational turn.

Regardless of whether it is the BJP or the Congress in government, India would want a sympathetic, if not exactly a friendly government in Bangladesh and so, by all counts, calculations and probabilities, as far as India is concerned, the government of choice in Bangladesh is an Awami League government. Were it not for the peculiar coincidence that the Congress coalition was in government in India when elections in Bangladesh took place and now during Indian elections an Awami League government is in place in Bangladesh, Bangladesh could expect active interference, even interventions in its politics by the Indians which could lead to a severe destabilization of Bangladesh and the entire region, already riven by separatism, terrorism, conflict and violence of various types and magnitudes. Now that the Congress has won a landslide victory and has formed the government, it remains to be seen what happens next.

Elections in SAARC countries and Hopes for the Future

The SAARC is arguably one of the most volatile and trouble-torn regions in the world with each country not only facing various types and magnitudes of internal economic, social and political problems but also militancy and terrorism with region-wide and international linkages - all these besides perennial inter-state conflicts and tensions.

Government, governance, development and progress are taking a beating in each of the SAARC countries leaving the populace to bear the brunt of poverty, illiteracy, diseases, exploitation, and violation of basic human rights, conflict and violence. The populaces however, given the slightest of chances are coming back strongly against forms of government and governance which deprive, exploit and denigrate them and are putting in place governments which are relatively democratic, representative, participatory, secular and liberal, government which pursue economic, social and political justice and equity, governments which concentrate on social harmony and development. This is evident from election results in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and lately India.

This more or less "revolution by votes" has many implications not only for people in the individual states but also for the region as a whole. Firstly, people in the individual states are looking forward to a period of economic development and growth, to better standards of living, to prosperity, to stability but above all to enhanced social and political empowerment. Secondly, people are no more ready to countenance or support conflict and violence, radicalism and extremism in any form but are insistently demanding understanding, tolerance, respect for human rights and cooperation and dialogue to resolve existing economic, social or political problems. Thirdly, people are determinedly soliciting answerability, transparency and accountability of their governments, as well as more participation in government and governance at every level, thus staking a claim in their polities; a claim long denied them by authoritarianism and totalitarianism of various stripes.

Perhaps most importantly, people are expecting reduced inter-state tension and conflicts that have defined the character of states and inter-state relationships in the region over the last 6 decades. As tensions and conflicts between states reduce, expenditures on traditional military forces and armed security will decline, freeing massive resources for developments in wider security aspects of poverty reduction, water, food and environmental security, energy and power security, giving rise to cooperative ventures between states to garner all available and greater resources. Thus, in the long term, if this trend continues, one sees in SAARC, a region not divided by individual state identities and imperatives, not separated by conflicts and violence but intermeshing, engaging together in cooperative development and progress, in peace and harmony fulfilling the higher civilizing or civilisational goals. Politicians and governments of individual states may not see it that way yet but the commonality of the people has and theirs is the greater wisdom.

Thus one sees the synergy of internal development driving changes in external conditions, each reinforcing the other to bring about peace and prosperity to over 3 billion people living in some of the poorest countries in the world. And all of this is happening because people have demanded and decided to stake a claim on their destinies by votes.

Ability To Play "The Great Game" - Key To Removing Impediment On Foreign Relations

The Great Game was a term used for the strategic rivalry and conflict between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia. The classic Great Game period is generally regarded as running approximately from the Russo-Persian Treaty of 1813 to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. The term "The Great Game" is usually attributed to Arthur Conolly, an intelligence officer of the British East India Company's Sixth Bengal Light Cavalry. It was introduced into mainstream consciousness by British novelist Rudyard Kipling in his novel Kim (1901).

Today too, the Great Game denotes the rivalry, the conflict and struggles of states, with each other, for influence, for resources and for power in different regions and continents, perhaps even for control over the whole world. The word Great Power therefore, describes a state, which plays the Great Game, and the word Super Power identifies a state, which has won the Great Game and supersedes every other state in economic, social, political and military power.

In Asia, the rise of China and India has reinitiated the Great Game in the continent; both of these are Great Powers with China aspiring to be a Super Power. With the USA, the lone Super Power, in deep trouble economically, politically and militarily, China has a better-than-even chance of achieving that coveted status of Super Power within the next one decade. Not so India however, which has for too many internal contradictions and tensions economically, socially and politically to permit it to project its influence and power beyond the South-Asia region; within South-Asia its Great Power status in undeniable. And so, while China attempts to exert influence and power over the whole of Asia, India attempts to maintain its influence in South-Asia giving rise to tensions, rivalry with potentials for out right hostility and conflict in the next one decade.

Historically China and India have always been Great Powers but they have never been rivals and have rarely been in conflict over spheres of interest and influence. Also historically, right from the 17th century upto the end of World War II, both have been pawns in the Great Game of European and other powers, rather than its players. It is only in the later part of the 20th century that both China and India began to exert themselves to gain the status, they have right now. India has always been divisive and divided; in its more than 3000 years of history, has India rarely coalesced into a single state. The number of times it had formed a single entity can be counted: the Maurya empire (321-185 B.C.E.), the Mughal empire (roughly 1530 to 1700) and the British-Indian empire (1757 to 1947) and of these, twice India was cobbled together by foreign conquests.

In the South-Asia region are the states of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Myanmar - except for Bangladesh each of these states is a conglomerate of different cultures, religions, languages, ethnicities which gives rise to internal tensions and violent conflicts within these states, making the region the most trouble-torn and conflict-prone in the whole world, save the Middle-East. India alone is subject to as many as 7 insurgencies and separatist movements in its south-eastern states and in Kashmir in the north-west, besides religious extremisms - Muslim, Hindu and Sikh - and social unrests of various types and magnitudes; Afghanistan can no more be considered a state; Pakistan is tottering on the brink of collapse as a state; Sri Lanka has just ended a savage separatist conflict lasting for over 2 decades; Myanmar is under the heels of a brutal military regime following various insurgencies and separatist movements and Nepal is still destabilized from its recent political conflict between the monarchy and Maoist led populist movement.

It is only Bangladesh that is a nation-state with a single culture and with an overwhelming majority of a single people called Bengalis. Whatever problems Bangladesh faces are problems of economics, of government, governance and politics, all of which can be righted and none of which has spill-over effects in the region but the problems that other states in the region, including India, face are not only problems of economics, government, governance and politics but problems of state-building - that cannot be righted so easily and has spill-over effects in the entire region, as is evident from the conflicts in all states except Bangladesh. Even the BDR massacre of 25/26 February, aimed at destabilizing Bangladesh has had no impact on the region whatsoever. So, it is not Bangladesh, which ought to be kept on the radar as some Indian strategists and intellectuals claim, but India which must be kept on all radars. As for the Great Game, the nation-state of Bangladesh is as well placed as any other to play the game, as opposed to being a pawn.

Our Manifest Destiny

Two dates - 21 February and 25 March - are imprinted indelibly in our minds as individuals and as a collectivity. 21 February is the day we commemorate and remember with sadness the sacrifice of lives of those young, brave sons of the soil who resisted an attempt by one nation Pakistan to impose its language and culture on another nation Bangladesh, both lumped together by an accident of history, in one single state of Pakistan.

Many see in 21 February 1952 as the day from which our political movement towards an independent state entity started; that could well be true but more important is the fact that from that one particular fiery day, we collectively realized that we are culturally a separate nation. So, the Language Movement was first and foremost a social-cultural movement and it would take many more years and much blood-shed to dovetail that movement with the political movement of independent state-hood, which found its culmination on 25 March 1971, the Liberation War and independence on 16 December 1971.

Two things were happening here, in this part of the world now called Bangladesh, for well over a thousand years. First, more than a millennium

back we were a community with a spoken language to permit communication and bonding. Slowly over centuries that community progressed into a society with a distinct culture - written language, visual art, literature, religion, myths, symbolisms and history - all went to form that culture. Over more centuries that culture progressed sufficiently till the beginning of the 20th century when the Bengali society began to claim for itself a nationhood. That brought the Bengali society and the incubating nation into conflict with other entities and political constructs such as the British Empire and the greater Indian independence movement until a compromise was reached in August 1947 in the formation of a "moth-eaten Pakistan". Almost immediately the conflicts resumed, the events of 21 February 1952 took place and the Bengali "People", well conscious of their being a "Nation" decided that they needed the political construct of a "State" in order to survive, maintain and flourish their culture. That state came into being on 16 December 1971.

So the two things running parallel - the progression from language to culture and the progression from community to society to nation to nation-state - together created Bangladesh. 38 years into statehood, the Bengali culture is now poised to go to the next ultimate step of creating a "Civilization" within the political construct of the "State" of Bangladesh. No doubt that the striving for a "Civilization" will invariably generate conflict both within ourselves and with others in our geographical region of South Asia but we cannot give way in the face of those conflicts because it is our "Manifest Destiny" to build a civilization and because the history of our people has catapulted us into that path and also because we cannot walk away backwards from that history. And so, we cannot limit our culture to a simple "Bengali Nationalism" or "Bangladeshi Nationalism", as some would have it.

The Nation Seen As A Complex Adaptive System (CAS)

As we have tried to point out from our study of history of the Bangali Nation, societies/nations and cultures/civilizations do not develop in a uniform pattern but by an alternation of routs and rallies - a rout denoting times of trouble, chaos and instability and a rally being a reestablishment of equilibrium and stability, involving and entailing a restructuring.

Characteristically enough, Toynbee in his study of civilizations has identified patterns of growth too. Growth like disintegration exhibits a pattern of cyclic rhythmic movement. Growth takes place whenever a challenge evokes a successful response that, in turn, evokes a further different challenge. Toynbee finds no intrinsic reason why this process should not repeat itself indefinitely, although historical evidence, he suggests, point to the fact that more often than not, nations and civilizations finally succumb to challenges because they run out of innovative and creative responses.

In order to understand as to why societies/nations and cultures/civilizations behave the way they do and how they grow, decline and disintegrate, it is necessary to take a deep look into the very nature of nations. Scholarship and research into "systems" have brought to the fore many concepts and theories.

One of the most logical and attractive of these theories is that of a nation as a Complex Adaptive System (CAS).

The Nation as a Complex Adaptive System (CAS)

A "CAS" is an open-ended system of many heterogeneous agents who interact non-linearly over time with each other and their environment and who are capable of adapting their behaviour based on experience. Open-ended means that there are essentially limitless possibilities for variability in agent characteristics and behaviour. There are four major properties of the aggregate dynamics of CAS: Self-organization, Evolutionary Trajectories, Co-evolution and Punctuated Equilibrium. These four properties are discussed in the following paragraphs as they apply to nations:

● **Self-organization:**

This is the emergence of new entities or stable aggregate patterns of organization and behaviour arising from the interaction of agents. Each higher level of organization has its own time scale and each new level has new kinds of relationships and properties. That is a CAS at one level is made up of lower level CASs interacting and creating the higher level order. In societies we usually take the lowest organizational level as the individual, the next level up is the family, clan, city, state, nation etc. So, there are multiple levels of nested CASs in which humans operate individually and collectively. Every individual in a society is thus usually a member of several higher level entities and complex webs of interconnections between humans exist at all levels. It is of note that the higher level human organizations (other than the family) are social constructions as opposed to natural constructions. That is the entity types are creations of our collective imaginations to which we attach names such as city, industry, economy, nation etc. The rules that determine the interactions between these entities are also socially constructed and are not fixed laws or nature or of physics or mathematics.

● **Evolutionary Trajectories:**

Means that the future course of a given system from a given point in time cannot be determined by complete knowledge of the present state, even if "complete knowledge" were possible. In particular "historical accidents" - the occurrence of certain a priori low probability events - can dramatically change the outcome e.g. the majority won by the Awami League in the elections of 1970 was critical to the demand for independence of Bangladesh, as it provided the mandate that the Awami League leadership was looking for.

● **Co-evolution:**

Instead of having a stable environment to determine fitness as agents adapt and evolve, a large part of each agent's perceived environment consists of interactions with other agents, who are themselves adapting and evolving. Each agent interacts not only with other agents at the same level but also with agents at higher and lower hierarchical levels. In this regard it is highly useful to include our "artifacts" - the innate things we create and make - as well as

our organizations because our human organizations are largely organized around making and using artifacts. Thus, we should view our human agents as co-evolving with the artifacts we create. Further, the behaviour of a particular agent depends to a large degree, on the artifacts at its disposal. Consider what the computer has done to various social, economic and political structures around the world.

● **Punctuated Equilibrium:**

Is the tendency of a CAS to have stable patterns of activity for long periods of time, then have a short transition period of very rapid changes in patterns, followed by new stable patterns of activity. In open-ended CAS it is usually impossible to predict when transitions will occur or what the resulting stable patterns would be. In the "human world" this phenomenon occurs at all levels and the question of stability versus instability depends on which part of the system one is looking at, what kind of patterns one is looking for and what time-scale one is using.

Edge of Chaos

Although not a property of CAS, the concept of "chaos" has important bearings on CAS. Complexity theory is not the same as chaos theory, which is derived from mathematics. But chaos does have a place in complexity theory in that systems exist on a spectrum ranging from equilibrium to chaos. A system in equilibrium does not have the internal dynamics to enable it to respond to its environment and will slowly or quickly die. A system in chaos ceases to function as a system. The most productive state to be in is at the edge of chaos where there is maximum variety and creativity, leading to new possibilities.

Before proceeding any further with our thought process, it is necessary to summarize this section and relate it to the history of Bangladesh. We have seen that over a millennium, we have reached the highest level of Self-organization (Statehood) and that our Evolutionary trajectory has taken us to a level of Punctuated Equilibrium where our Nation has plunged into a transition period of very rapid changes in patterns. We have also contended that in an open-ended CAS (Nation), it is usually impossible to predict when transitions will take place and what the resulting pattern will be. So, Nation-state building is all about changes, i.e. staying within the Edge of Chaos, carefully maintaining the balance between equilibrium and chaos and always being in between.

Change As The Leitmotif Of Progress And Development

We have seen how constant changes have brought us from a community to a Nation-state, from a language to a culture; changes some of which were so abrupt, so radical, with such complete breaks with the past that the word "Revolution" is often used to denote those changes. These changes have two dimensions :Cognitive and Structural. By Cognitive change we mean changes in interpretation by human agents of their world; who the other agents (humans, groups) are and what they do; what artifacts (institutions)

there are and what their function and values are; and what agents interact in what ways with which other agents and with what artifacts. By Structural changes we mean the emergence of new instances of agents (new creative minority or leadership) and artifacts (new social, economic and political institutions) coupled with new and rearranged relationships between agents and artifacts (new forms of government and governance). The two dimensions are coupled with Reciprocal Causality - cognitive reinterpretation of the world, lead to new actions by agents, which lead to new relationships with other agents and artifacts and structural changes observed and experienced by agents lead to new interpretations of their world. Thus, growth, progress and developments take place.

Leadership - The Motive-Force For Change

History, of every sort, is an enumeration of the deeds & sometimes the follies of individuals and the effects of their actions on civilization in general or in particular. These individuals are what people call "Leaders", "Heroes" or to use a modern buzzword "Icons". Therefore, Leadership is one of the core state institutions, perhaps the most important one.

So, what do leaders do that makes them the subject of volumes upon volumes of books? Simply put, they bring about changes in their environment in such a radical way, that a society or civilization or certain aspects of it changes direction, more or less permanently. Such directional changes often break away completely with the past, charting out new course(s) for the present & the future.

For the more technically minded and relating it to the earlier section on CAS: Leadership brings about cascades of changes in Agents, Artifacts and their Relationships (where Agents = Humans; Artifacts = social, political and economic institutions and Relationships = human-to-human and human- to-institution interactions). This leads to new interpretations of the "World" by both the leaders & the led which is both Cognitive (psychological) and Structural (physical).

How do these individuals come about?

"Leaders are made and not created" is a well-worn cliche with half the truth in it. In fact, leaders are both born & made. And it is the social milieu or cauldron, which spews out, occasionally, such individuals. More often then not, long periods of social unrest and instability pushes these individuals to "go active" - this is so in the case of political, social, religious and military leaders. In other cases, times of peace, stability and plenty provides the environment for cultural leaders - as in the case of artistes of every genre, writers, philosophers, scientists etc. Periods of social unrest and instability leads to disintegration of social, political and economic institutions and the control they exert on individuals. Freed from all bounds, where most people feel directionless, certain individuals find their "reasons for existence" and "go for it". These individuals then, quite literally create a "new society" followed by periods of peace & stability, which then provides the

environment for other individuals to be "culturally creative". So both types of leadership -let us say "Politico-social" and "Cultural" are bound by a single thread. The society or civilization "creates" them and historic conditions "make" them.

So, what qualities do certain individuals possess that makes them leaders? The answer lies in the study of Leadership, which is what I propose to do now, taking five acknowledged leaders, representing different times and conditions, from the social milieu we call "Bangalee". In this study, I am not going to narrate their biographies; 1 am going to narrate the acts & deeds they did.

Syed Mir Nasir Ali or Titu Mir (1782 -1831)

He was born in a village in 24 Parganas (now in, West Bengal, India). He studied in a Madrasha to take up the life of a religious teacher. He did that of course, but in the process, he came in close touch of his people, seeing, understanding and empathizing with the miseries they were burdened with by the East India Company. Much of the area where he lived and worked was under "indigo farming", brutally enforced by the Company's agents. His intense involvement with an Islamic revivalist movement attracted huge numbers of "underprivileged" Bangalee Muslims and he soon became their acknowledged leader. This was not looked upon kindly by the Hindu zamindars most of whose work force consisted of these "underprivileged" Bangalee Muslims and the zamindars reacted with force and violence taking the help of British indigo Agents. Titu Mir's reply was to organize and train his people in rural guerilla warfare armed with whatever they could lay their hands on. Soon he was in control of 24 Parganas, Nadia and Faridpur, even collecting taxes from the local zamindars and British Indigo Agents. He built as his headquarters, a fort of bamboo and mud, in a place called Narkelbari. This was a direct challenge to the Company's power & it sent a force of regular soldiers to curb the rebellion. From 14 to 19 November 1831, Titu Mir held out until the British called up guns to blast away the bamboo fort. Titu Mir died with his people in the burning fort; those who survived were hanged by the British. It was tragic, but the tragedy and sacrifice aroused in his people their sense of self-respect and nationalism. The whole of British dominated India saw for the first time that the British were neither invincible nor irresistible. From 1831, resistance and rebellion against the British were sustained and continuous. Titu Mir was the pioneer of that resistance movement - and that is why 168 years later people still remember the legend of Titu Mir and his bamboo fort or "Basher Kella".

A.K. Fazulul Haq (1873 -1962)

He was born in a village in Bakerganj (now in Bangladesh). He was a brilliant student and he graduated with honors with an MSC in Mathematics from Calcutta University. But that did not satisfy him and he got a degree in Law too & started a practice, which brought him in contract with all sorts of people; he was particularly sympathetic to the "downtrodden". The miserable plight of his people under the British, soon led him to politics and he focused

on Bengal, where misery was the greatest. His articulation, his ability to immediately "connect" with people to understand them and their problems soon made him very popular throughout Bengal. He formed his own political party and won the limited elections that the British allowed successively becoming the Mayor of Calcutta and the Chief Minister of Bengal. Understanding the historic conditions of his people, he opposed the "two nation theory", the Muslim League or the Pakistan movement did not attract him at all thereby earning the enmity of the Muslim League. However, after 1947, he moved to Dhaka in East Pakistan and soon he was involved in the controversy regarding the national language of Pakistan. The Pakistan lobby wanted Urdu to be the sole State language while the people of East Pakistan wanted both Bangla and Urdu to be given the same status. Sher-E-Bangla, as he by then became known, agreed with his people and staunchly supported the ensuing Language Movement. He was deeply aggrieved that the Pakistan Government had resorted to violence, killing some students of Dhaka University on 21 February in 1956 in an attempt to stop the Language Movement. In order to challenge the Muslim League he, formed a common front with Bhashani and Shurawardy and trounced the League in election, becoming the Governor of East Pakistan and later the Home Minister of Pakistan but in 1956 the Military junta of Ayub Khan had taken over Pakistan and he was sacked from his ministerial post. He was now an old man and he retired from active politics dying in 1964. Fazlul Haq was a pioneer in many things: he was the first and perhaps the only person at that time who realized that the Bangalees were a nation and so, going entirely against the grain, he opposed the "two nation" theory standing by this conviction against all adversities. He more than any one else realized that Bengal would be permanently divided along religious lines, thus loosing all chances at ever forming a nation-state. He was the first to form a political party in Bengal, thus providing political education to his people as also showing them how to organize politically to achieve political purposes. He also realized that East Pakistan would not long remain so; the Language Movement giving him a glimpse of things to come. He was a larger than life figure and his deeds made him a legend in his own lifetime. Thus, he was & still is to the people of Bengal on both sides of the divide the Tiger of Bengal or Sher-E-Bangla.

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899 -1976)

He was born in Burdwan (presently in West Bengal, India) and he spent his childhood in the village where he was born going to a local school; he could not continue school for a very long time because his poor parents could not afford paying for it. To earn a living he enrolled in the British Army in 1917 when he was 19 years old. As a youngster, Nazrul Islam appeared to most people as an absent minded, daydreaming sort of a person; he was neither of course. As he was growing up he was also observing, learning and retaining everything he saw about his land and his people; he was often so deeply immersed in contemplation that he appeared to be daydreaming. He saw the lethargy in which his people were sunk after many centuries of oppression imposed by foreign colonizing powers; he saw the miseries that poor

economic conditions imposed on his people; he saw and understood their yearnings for change. Soon he quit the Army, having achieved his purpose of traveling all over India. From his midteen onwards he gave expression to what he and his people felt through an ever-increasing stream of stories, poems and above all songs creating new forms, words and phrases in each of these genres. Where ever people heard his songs or read his poems they were aroused out of their lethargy, imbued with a sense of resistance against oppression, energized with a fighting spirit against both natural and man made adversities. He more than anyone else, at that time and later, provided his people with hope, a sense of direction and a sense of purpose. His "creative spark" ceased when he was paralyzed in his mid-thirties but by that time he was forever immortalized in his songs & poems and he had immortalized his people in his poetry and songs - how many individuals in world history had done that? So, after the Liberation War a grateful nation made him its National Poet.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920 -1975)

He was born in a village in Gopalganj, Faridpur (now in Bangladesh). He studied Law but never practiced it, preferring instead to get involved with and devote himself to politics. In the heady atmosphere of rebellion, resistance and non-cooperation against the British, in the India of 1940s, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman joined the Muslim League (ML). His articulation, his ability to organize, his devotion and dedication, his relentless pursuit of political objectives - all these qualities caught the attention of higher ups in the ML.

Soon, under the mentorship and tutelage of Hussein Shaheed Surawardy, he began holding important positions in the party; focusing all of his attention and energies on what was then East Bengal. Although the stalwarts of Muslim Bengal politics were all for Pakistan, with the exception of A.K.Fazlul Haq, Sheikh Mujib had other ideas. So, he formed a student's wing of the ML based in Dhaka. When Pakistan came into being in 1947, Sheikh Mujib moved to Dhaka and enrolled himself in Dhaka University as a Law student. Soon he was expelled for "political agitation". When in 1948, it was declared that "Urdu & only Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan", Sheikh Mujib was well placed and organized to be able to initiate protests against it. Soon the protest turned into the "Language Movement". He was dissatisfied and disillusioned with the ML, so he engineered, with the support of Bhashani, Fazlul Haq and Surawardy a split within the ML called the Awami Muslim League (AML).

Mujib converted the AML into the main platform of the hopes, aspirations and demands of the Bangalee population of East Pakistan. Sometimes later, disagreeing with his mentors Bhashani, Fazlul Haq and Surawardy, he sought to emphasize the non-sectarian, secular leanings of the Bangalee people and engineered the dropping of the word "Muslim" from, Awami Muslim League; thenceforth it was simply known as the Awami League (AL). With the death of Hussein Shaheed Surawardy, he was elected the party General Secretary.

By now he was in and out of Pakistani jails many times but that did not prevent him from going all out to realize his long held convictions that the Bangalee people were a nation and deserved to be treated as such even within the polity of Pakistan. He understood well the aspiration of the people but more then anyone else he understood that his people were a nation and were insistently demanding recognition of that fact - he understood the historic necessity and inevitability of that demand. In 1969, he articulated that demand in a 6 Point Program. By mid 1970s, the Pakistani military junta was at its wits end, and yet they refused to allow any leeway to the demands of the people of East Bengal.

By January 1971, the agitations had turned into a total non-cooperation movement and control of everything including much of the Govt. machinery was in the hands of the Awami League. On 7 March 1971, the Awami League called a public meeting in Dhaka, attended massively. There, setting aside the written script, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, launched into a speech, remarkable for its sense of direction, purpose and clarity, declaring towards the end: "We have paid in blood, we will pay even more but in the end we will be Independent... This is our fight for Independence … resist and fight with whatever you have". This speech is one of the rarest examples in world history where a single speech led directly to the birth of a Nation-State. The Pakistan Army on March 25, 1971 launched a brutal, genocidal, punitive campaign against the people of Bangaldesh. Mujib was captured, sentenced to death in a Pakistani prison, when on 16 December 1971 Bangladesh became Independent. He was soon released and returned to Bangladesh the Father of a Nation-State. He had been absent throughout the 9 month long War of Liberation, much had changed in the minds of his people - understanding that, he set about exploring new forms of state institutions which could provide the people of a nation, with the "just society" they had suffered, fought and died for. There was much dislocation, chaos and suffering in this search at Nation-building and it led to a "Counter-revolution" by some of the elements who had opposed the very existence of Bangladesh; Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was brutally murdered along with many of his family and the closest of his friends and colleagues on 15 August 1975. Sheikh Mujib had guided and led his people to Nation-statehood, for so long, with such devotion that he could not die, not as long as the Nation-state he and his people created, survives.

General Zia Rahman (1936 - 1981)

He was born in Bogra (now in Bangladesh), got his education in West Pakistan, joined the Pakistan Army and was Commissioned as an Officer. Sometimes later he opted for and was allowed to be transferred to the East Bengal Regiment. He was one of the few Bangalee officers whom the Pakistan Army found "suitable" for training, in Pakistan and abroad, for assuming higher responsibilities in command, staff and instructional appointments. In 1970 he was posted as the Second-in-Command of the newly formed 8 East Bengal Regiment, stationed in Chittagong. Brought up, educated and trained in West Pakistan, with much of Bangalee culture alien

to him, he did not understand "politics". But the agitation throughout 1970 deeply troubled him. He realized and then understood that his people were demanding nationhood and he was a part of that nation. So, when the Pakistan Army cracked down on the entire population on 25 March 1971, he, without a moment of hesitation, revolted along with some 400 of his Bangalee officers & men. They captured a radio station in Kalurghat and Major Zia Ur Rahman declared, on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the Independence of Bangladesh, earnestly requesting his compatriots to join in the fight to liberate the nation. For the next 9 months he along with his people fought a brutal war, gallantly and bravely.

On independence of Bangladesh in December 1971, he was posted a Brigade Commander in Comilla. In a Bangladesh, he had fought, suffered and bled for, he expected his due; that was not to be and he was superseded for promotion and appointment to the position of the Chief of Army Staff. He bided his time, knowing fully well that the Revolution that was Bangladesh had not run its course. Soon enough the outburst occurred with such passion and violence that it swept along everything into chaos. Now a Major General, Zia ur Rahman was not in the least bit "phased out" by what was happening; he knew it, expected it and was prepared for it. With great coolness, patience, caution and selective ruthlessness he arrested the chaos following the murder of Sheikh Mujib and the top leadership of the Awami League in August 1975. He declared Martial Law, became the Chief Martial Law Administrator and directly assumed the reins of Government. He understood little of statecraft or government; but he learned thoroughly and quickly. He thought out a 19-point action program and went with it directly to the people, people he understood well; the response was overwhelming -the entire nation was digging canals, building roads, mills and factories, farming rice, sugar, tea and vegetables. He quickly organized the expansion of the armed forces providing employment, discipline and training to selective lots of people building the military into an effective tool of coercion when necessary but also an equally effective instrument of national integration and nation-building. In four short but hectic years he had got the nation together and stood it on its feet; the people were once again proud of themselves and their nation - that and that alone is his lasting legacy to Bangladesh. But the very contradictions, Zia ur Rahman sought to bring together and integrate, came apart costing him his life on May 30, 1981 amid great sorrow to his nation. Zia ur Rahman died as he has lived, by the sword, but he had played truly well in the drama called life; people are not apt to forget that for a very long time.

Leadership Qualities

From the study above we are able to identify certain personality traits which are common to all of them and which made them Leaders. These are: (1) All of them were born, were bred and have worked in their own social milieu - deeply understanding and empathizing with the ethos and pathos of their society. None of them were outsiders. (2) All of them were highly educated, by which I do not mean mere school going literacy. They deeply studied and

understood themselves, others and their environments. (3) All of them were exceptionally creative and innovative; they experimented with both thoughts and forms - of themselves and others. (4) All of them were exceptionally intelligent (they were born so) which allowed them to grasp situations, circumstances and environments and changes in them quickly, accurately and wholly or holistically. (5) All of them could "connect "with others easily and universally, that is, they were extroverts, articulate and they did not mind whom they mixed with or talked to - in short they had "Charisma". (6) All of them were exceptionally ambitious, that is they were risk takers - risking everything, including their lives, should an opportunity or chance present itself, to realize their goals. (7) All of them were "egoists" with a very strong sense of self-identity, that is, they considered themselves always "right" and were determined in their efforts to impose their sense of rightness on others - at great cost to themselves, their families and others. (8) All of them were "stoics", patiently bearing all and every sort of acute mental and physical discomforts throughout their lives. (9) All of them were non-materialistic; wealth as such did not mean anything to them - they were after the intangibles of "Power" and "Influence" over people and their environments. (10) All of them were visionaries, that is, they thought up ideas, which made a complete break with the history of past ideas, thoughts and structures.

The Case for Bangladesh

These then are the 10 qualities which these five leaders possessed and they all belonged to the space we call Bangladesh. Much of what has happened to Bangladesh, since the last two decades, is largely the failure of leadership in every field of human endeavor. We have politicians and chiefs of massive political parties; we have painters, poets, scientists and intellectuals; we have rich businesspersons and industrialists; we have military commanders, generals and admirals; we have even a Nobel Peace Prize laureate but we have no Leaders who can get us all together, provide us with purpose and direction and lead us towards our "Civilizational Greatness". We are going through our "times of trouble" for sometime now; perhaps the times have ripened enough for our society to throw up one more Leader of the type we have studied above.

Concluding Remarks

If the 1000-year evolution of the "Bengali people" is the backdrop against which we are to identify our struggles, then all the Bengali people rather than some of the Bengali people should have been in the frame of my study. The focus on just the Bengalis of Bangladesh is convenient but avoids the tough question of identity, which I fear is at the heart of the debate over our Bengaliness. I believe that without resolving this debate over who we are, all other efforts to move forward will be futile.

The AL-BNP dichotomy partially demonstrates the intractable nature of the debate. It will not go away, will continue to divide Bangladeshi society and is itself rooted in the asymmetry and mutual exclusivity between the founding principles of the Indian union, the Islamic republic of Pakistan and

People's Republic of Bangladesh. It is just not about Islam and Hinduism, but the incompatibility between the confessionally-based national identity and state-forming principles for Pakistan and Bangladesh and the non-confessional-founding principles of India and West Bengal. If India did not have a West Bengal state contiguous to Bangladesh, then this curious asymmetry of legitimacy would not occur. I fear Bangladesh's challenges are primarily philosophical at the elite level, masses most likely are consumed by 'basic needs'. I cannot see any easy resolution to this elemental issue.

History creates another set of potential problems, though not just for Bangladesh. Bengal and Assam saw a series of frontier changes both before and after the East India Company's occupation in 1757. In the modern era, the changes in 1905, 1911, 1947, and 1971 suggest that borders are not immutable. In fact, if history is any guide, the borders will probably change again. What seems popular and consensual at one stage is rejected at another.

Elites use historical mythologies, as I have tried to explain, to justify arrangements that serve their interests. The State is the instrument of dominant elite factions and therefore the citizens of Bangladesh should not rationally feel too optimistic that just because they vote a particular set of representatives into office, their interests will be advanced. As for historical dates around which we fashion our historiography, just check this out by going 30 kilometers away from the territory of Dhaka and ask villagers about what 21 February was all about; most will cover their ignorance by smiles and an invitation to a cup of tea. Until the ruling elites articulate national mythology effectively among the masses, the "binding narrative" will not bind. For us, the problem is deepened by the presence of atleast two contrary narratives - the AL's and the BNP's - vying for supremacy every five years or so interspaced with military governments.

What Bangladeshis need to understand and grasp is that their five core state institutions : Military and the system of security, Police and the system of law enforcement, Civil Service and the system of public administration, the Judiciary and the system of Justice and Leadership were all structured by the British Colonial power with the single aim of smooth exploitation of the economic resources of the land and the people. These structures implicitly and explicitly obstructed, mostly violently, any attempts at nation-building not only in what is Bangladesh today but throughout India. When in 1947, Pakistan was created, the ruling elite found it convenient not only to keep these structures but also to enhance their effectiveness at least in East Pakistan. The ethnically separate and largely homogenous Bengali population quickly understood this and started a 25 year long struggle, which culminated in the bloody War of Liberation in 1971 and the formation of the state of Bangladesh.

To the people of Bangladesh, liberation meant throwing off all the fetters of colonialism; fetters embodied and embedded in the structures of State institutions. In reality however, structural changes in state institutions, at least in the five core ones did not take place mainly because the political ruling

elites of an Independent Bangladesh were still the products of the British and latterly Pakistani systems. Psychologically conditioned in a certain way, the political leadership of Bangladesh thought more of governing and ruling rather than in terms of nation-building. To the people however, it was totally unacceptable that the very same deligitimized institutional structures be superimposed on a geographically and politically independent Bangladesh. Attempts at doing so have led to repeated and violent conflicts within the socio-political space of Bangladesh. From 1971 to 2007, in 36 years, all social, political and economic structures have broken down under repeated assaults by the people of this land. And yet the paradigms and metaphors of the ruling elites have not changed from one of ruling to one of leadership and nation building.

This is exactly what Bangladeshi leadership - political, military or otherwise - have failed to understand so far but which they have got to understand now if they hope and intend to remake politics and make it stick. The answer for Bangladesh lies in restructuring and not merely modifying the five core state institutions in such a way that they reflect a stated minimum of social, political and economic equality for its entire people. Metaphors such as power, rule, govern must be replaced by service, cooperate, support & create. Remaking politics would mean going back to the basics, to the very spirit and principles on which the Liberation War was fought and won.

And finally, the history of this patch of territory with its changing borders and social organization, will go on indefinitely in almost totally unpredictable fashion. Elites can set up markers to travel along - education being the most crucial of these pathways - but since Bangladeshi elites cannot even agree on the country's essential history, does anyone see a national consensus on the essentials emerging anytime soon?

We know that behind the opaque cloud of our ignorance and the uncertainties, the historical forces that shaped our Nation, are continuing to operate. We do not know where we are going but we do know how our history has brought us to this point. However, one thing is plain - if we are to have a future, we need changes in the way we perceive ourselves as individuals and as conglomerates in a polity. Changes have to be brought about voluntarily or changes will come about through violent social and political conflicts - that is the lesson of our history.

I regret that I have to end on this pessimistic note but that's about it.

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