Bangladesh

Democracy and good Governance

Emajuddin Ahamed

Bangladesh :
Democracy and Good Governance

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To

My daughter Dr. Dilroushan Jinnat
Ara Nazneen and my son Dr. Tanvir
Iqbal Ibn Ahamed

Preface

Bangladesh : Democracy and Good Governance is a collection of some articles and short essays written during the last few years. Development, both political, economic and cultural, has remained the main thread that runs through these write-ups. Good governance is the main engine for shaping the society and bringing it up to the desired level. Good governance however, becomes meaningful only if democratic order stikes its roots deeper into the social soil. A stable democratic culture then finds itself manifested at all layers of the polity.

The vision, capacity and commitment of the society in setting goals and priorities constitutes the beginning of good governance. There must be a vision, a dream, backed up effectively by a clearly articulated development agenda and a strong commitment to make the dream come true. Environment for these creative steps is provided in a democratic system. All public policies must be transparent, open and clearly intelligible to the people. The soical forces should have autonomous growth. If these forces thrive, an alert civil society may be lively. The free press in conjunction with an alert civil society may work like miracle in this area. Over and above, there must be a broadbased consensus in the polity.

Most of these articles have been written for specific purposes. "Democracy and Good Governance : Bangladesh Perspective"; "Religion and Ethnicity in Democratic Order" and "Democratic Use of the Military Power" were written for, and presented to, the senior military officers in the Bangladesh Defense Services Command and Staff College in 2001, 2002 and 2003 respectively. " The Military and Democracy in Bangladesh" was written a few years ago as a chapter of The Military and Democracy in Asia and The Pacific edited by R. J May & Viberto Selochan, published in 1998, London, C. Hurst & co. The article titled " How Bangladesh is Facing the Challenges", was presented in an international seminar in Hamburg, Germany, organized by Bangladesh Samity in October 2002. The article, " The Muslim World and Thoughts of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan", was the foundation lecture of 2003 commemorating the First Aligarh Old Boys Association in Bangladesh. "Concord Through Dialogue : A South Asian View of the West" was the keynote paper for an international seminar organized by Helsinki Forum under the auspices of the University of Helsinki, Finland in September 2002. Other short essays were occasional papers.

For bringing the book into being the author is grateful to many, especially to the publisher, Ln. A. N. M Mizanur Rahman Patwary, whose eagerness, sincerity and keen efforts are acknowledged with thanks.

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Introduction :

Governance and by implication good governance have become the main themes of discussions and deliberations these days both at the local, national and international levels. This is mainly because of the fact that problems of development are becoming more and more complex, the search for happy solutions has turned out to be a continuous exercise both for national government and international development community, and a close nexus is believed to exist between development and governance. This has become more demanding because the economic and social development, achieved during the last few decades all over the globe, has led to a process of largescale global interconnections, commonly known as globalization. Globalization has not only interlinked markets but also intensified worldwide social relations mediated by new information technologies and increasingly growing telecommunication linkages, thus creating new challenges. As we move ahead, effective participation in the global system is likely to be the key factor affecting not only the wealth of nations, but also our share in it. Much of our gain will depend on improving the capacity of the government and society to participate successfully in this era of intensely competitive but highly uncertain global system. To face the new challenges, the societies like ours must therefore re-think the ways and devise new strategies by which they can achieve their objectives. Few governments in the developing world are prepared to face these challenges. In most cases, the governments need to form new partnership with other actors in the society in order to exploit the opportunities in the midst of uncertainties. That necessitates building, and if necessary, re-building of internal capacity of the society through continuous improvement of the structures, functions and processes of governance. These are likely to be the

positive means of sustainable economic and social development in the society. From that point of view, governance constitutes the overarching process that creates an enabling environment for people-oriented development.

While government in a broad sense encompasses virtually every institution in the society, from the family to the organs of state, from the development perspective it is associated with the political, legal, financial and economic systems and their relationships to the society at large. Despite continuing uncertainties about the complex relationship between governance and development, a consensus has however emerged with regard to development from a governance perspective and to applying development approaches to governance, involving a holistic approach to development. This new focus has been in response to a narrow and compartmentalized approach.

Democratic Order and Good Governance

The concept of good governance becomes meaningful only in the context of democratic order. Democracy is viewed by most scholars as the "primary vehicle for the fulfillment of individual aspirations, articulation of interests and nurturing of civil society (Inoguchi, Newman and Keane 1998). It is believed that the political system that generates values of respect for human dignity, justice, equity, participation and accountability creates fertile field for human rights and good governance.

As a system of government, democracy is quite old, though as a concept it is as old as humanity. Robert Dahl thinks that certain rudimentary democracy probably existed in pre-historic "hunter-gatherer societies" where a kind of group identity and assumption of equality prevailed. When these societies became larger and more complex, certain kind of hierarchy emerged in governance. As a system of governance, democracy emerged not until 500 B.C. when the Greeks and Romans set up democratic system based on popular participation (Dahl 1999).

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The Greek system of governance was a kind of direct democracy in the sense that there were no intermediary structures between the people and their government, although women, slaves, under-aged ones were totally left out. The Roman system was another version of representative government, known as the republic, and in this system there was also no room for the women, slaves and others. After the fall of the Greek and Roman systems, democratic order went into a decline and did not re-emerge until early in the 7th century when the state of Medina, known as the Khilafat in the Muslim world, was established in 622 AD under the leadership of the Prophet of Islam as the classical example of a state through social contract. Not much discussion is available in the literature of governance about the contributions of the Muslims scholars in this field. In the words of Adel Safty, and I think he has rightly put it : "The European thinkers of the Enlightenment were not the only, indeed not the first, source of the values that came to be associated with democratic governance. Long before Rousseau and Locke, Arab social philosopher Al-Farabi spoke of liberty, equality and rule based on the consent of the governed" (Safty 2000)

One thing needs to be clarified here that those early systems differed from one another and differed fundamentally from the modern conception of representative democracy. All these systems were limited by many conditions. Moreover, these were "incomplete, unsustainable or rudimentary in terms of representation". The structures and functions of the modern democratic system came up step by step in the evolving institutions and revolutions of the 18th century Europe and North America. Such representative national and local institutions as the British House of Commons and local councils in the Scandinavian countries or such popular uprisings as the American War of Independence of 1776 and French Revolution of 1789 were responsible for the growth of such ideals as equality, inalienable rights and government by consent of the governed.

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Out of these historical events, over a longer period of time, came up such institutions as the law-making legislatures, autonomous local governing bodies, political parties and such processes as periodical elections, separation of powers and so on. These are in fact the identifiable pre-requisites of a modern representative democracy. If we look at the forms of democratic government, we can discern three main systems— Parliamentary, Presidential and mixed models of government. Parliamentary system, often referred to as the Westminster model of the British version, is characterized by a strong parliament, sometimes unicameral and sometimes bicameral, wherefrom a prime minister is chosen as the chief executive of the nation. Presidential system, the most well-known example of which is the US system, has a popularly elected president as its chief executive. A legislature, may be unicameral or bicameral, exists in this system as the counterweight of the executive. The mixed system, of which France is an example, features a strong popularly elected president who chooses a prime minister from amongst the members of parliament, having either a single house or two houses. Each of these models rests firmly on the base of party politics, having at least two political parties, though some such countries as Uganda have now begun experiments with party-less politics, basing on an alert and intelligent civil society only.

Democracy, in short, indicates a system of government as encompassing "not only a civilian, constitutional, multiparty regime, with regular, free and fair elections and universal suffrage, but organizational and informational pluralism; extensive civil liberties (freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations); effective power for elected officials; and functional autonomy for legislative, executive and judicial organs of government"(Diamond 1995). Democratization, on the other hand, means the process whereby democratic institutions, practices and beliefs are built and strengthened in the society.

In this connection, it may be argued that there are four reasons why democratic government is believed to represent the interests of the people—public spirit of those who work for the society, use of vote for selecting candidates with identical interests, use of vote to discard those with different interests, and an in-built system of checks and balances.

How should we conceptualize good governance?

Good governance or good government is an issue which has agitated the minds of many for quite a long time. English poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744), in a poetic couplet stated his notion of good government in the later part of 17th century thus :

> For forms of government let fools contest;
> Whate'er is best administered is best.

Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of the USA wrote the following in the later part of the 18th century :

> Energy in the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government. It is essential to the protection of the community against foreign attacks; it is not less essential to the steady administration of the laws; to the protection of property against those irregular and high-handed combinations which sometimes interrupt the ordinary course of justice; to the security of liberty against enterprises and assaults of ambition, of faction, and of anarchy.

Writing in the later part of the 19th century Woodrow Wilson, who was one of the successful Presidents of the US, conveyed that a good government is one which "can properly and successfully do .... with the utmost efficiency and at the least possible cost of either money or of energy"

In the later part of the 20th century, in its governance and Development Report (1992) the World Bank has maintained that :

> Governance, in general, has three distinct aspects : (a) the form of a political regime [parliamentary or presidential, military or civilian, and authoritarian or democratic]; (b) the processes by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources; and (c) the capacity of government to design, formulate, and implement policies, and, in general, to discharge governmental functions.

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Even in its report in May 1994, the World Bank has re-iterated the same notion. The UNDP in its report (1997) has defined governance as :

The exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs at all levels. It is the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations, and mediate their differences.

The UNESCO in a report (1997) has also maintained that governance is :

> A process whereby citizens' needs and interests are articulated for the positive social and economic development of the entire society and in the light of a perceived common good. Governance means more than government; it refers to a political process that encompasses the whole society and contributes to the making of citizens active contributors to the social contract that binds them together. This sense of political efficacy is one of the indicators of democratic governance.

If we analyze these definitions, we find that there are three, though interconnected, spheres of governance : (a) political, (b) economic, and (c) administrative. Governance relates to a country or society as a whole. It is moreover about institutions as well as processes. Finally it is the exercise of power and authority in pursuit of a society's present and future welfare and derived from the interests of citizens. Good governance in fact is ensuring a better to-day and a brighter to-morrow for all the citizens.

It should also be noted that governance is wider than government although government continues to be the major element of any system of governance, because it is the most powerful and coercive institution. If it is accepted that government is "of the people, by the people and for the people" then it is the people who become the central focus of governance.

Governance thus encompasses a wide range of issues from efficiency of government, including accountability and transparency, to issues of rights, social cohesion, equity (gender, poor), democracy, participation, corruption, military expenditures, and political ideas, culture and discourse. The number of institutions and organizations which have an impact upon or are associated with governance is equally broad, extending from public sector (government bodies, civil service, local government, public enterprises), the legal framework, governing institutions (legislature and judiciary), to the democratic process (elections), civil society organizations (NGOs, Political parties, labour unions), and the private sector (business organizations). Thus governance, being a neutral concept, comprises the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. Governance is characterized by the principles of participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness, equity and strategic vision.

These principles, in fact, get translated in a democratic polity into such practices as free, fair and frequent elections; a representative legislature that legislates and oversees the activities of those who matter in the society; an independent judiciary that interprets laws. They also translate into the safeguard of human rights and the rule of law, and transparent and accountable social institutions. Good governance demands decentralization of authority and resources to local governments for providing citizens a bigger role in the management of affairs. It also ensures that civil society plays an active role in setting priorities and making the needs of the most vulnerable people in society obvious. In fine, good governance supports a society in which people can have their choices expanded, promotes freedom from poverty, deprivation, fear and violence and sustains the environment and advancement of the womenfolk. In this sense, good governance and democratic order go hand in hand and get merged into the sea of justice, fair play and human welfare which constitute the basic elements of good life of the citizens.

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Bangladesh Perspective

Governance, as we observe all around, has not changed for the better for the vast majority of people in Bangladesh during the rule of the successive regimes since independence. Those in the helm of affairs at various levels have, barring a few honourable exceptions, continued their daily routine of intrigue, corruption, theft and plunder, ignoring the rising demands for transparency, accountability, fairness and equity. What is more, this trend is likely to continue because the cancer of poor governance has penetrated deep into the soul of the nation, with very little of it being changed or even challenged. The tyranny of poor governance thus continues at every level, involving lack of vision, bad judgement, bad conduct and bad action on the people. Those who are in charge of governance do not seem to understand where they should stop and what would be the limit to enduring bad governance. **Frederick Douglass has pointed out** : "The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of whom they suppress". In Bangladesh, that limit is not in sight. In other words, those in charge of governance or the governors must be properly dressed up to meet such basic needs of the people as food, shelter, health, education, employment, a safe environment and so on. If they fail to do so under peaceful conditions, voluntarily, at a substantially high speed, they may be forced to do it in conditions of cataclysmic change.

It is true that Bangladesh has done quite well against all odds and ordeals during the last two decades. Life expectancy (61 years since 1999) and literacy (more than 56 per cent now) have improved. There have been substantial reductions in fertility (now less than 1.5 per cent) and infant mortality (now 60 deaths out of 100 live births) rates. The days of routine famines are gone now. Bangladesh has attained near-self-sufficiency in food. Gone are the days of massive casualties due to cyclones and floods. More children are immunized and such diseases as polio, small pox are banished from the land. More girls are educated, and many more are enrolled in primary schools. The pace of economic growth has been

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steady and there is a downward trend in poverty. Even then the situation is alarming. The state of malnutrition is among the worst in the world. Fertility is down, but stuck at a level that remains high. By 2015, the population of Bangladesh is likely to be 165 million. The maternal mortality is agonizingly high. The poverty trend is down, but practically half of the population is still poor. The international commitment on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), of which Bangladesh is a signatory, is known to all of us. If these goals are fulfilled by 2015, its impact will be salutary in Bangladesh.

   (i)   The number of people who suffer from hunger will be substantially reduced.

   (ii)   Primary schooling will be completed by all boys and girls alike.

   (iii) Under-five mortality rate will be reduced by two-thirds.

   (iv) Maternal mortality ratio will be reduced by three quarters.

   (v)   Sustainable development will be integrated into country policies.

   (vi) Loss of environmental resources will be reversed.

   (vii) The lives of slum dwellers will be improved.

The realization of these Millennium Development Goals will depend on enormous resources, both domestic and foreign. Apart from all these, what is needed most in this regard is the political will, and it will be best demonstrated in the resolve to establish good governance. In the words of Mieko Nishimizu, Vice-President, South Asia Region of the World Bank, "Poor governance stood in the way of a much faster growth and poverty reduction, corroding the nation's economy, finances and institutions. The sorry state of governance pulled Bangladesh down and away from the true potential of her hard-working people, threatening the social justice, harmony, and security they deserve (13 March 2002).

One public administration expert opines that governance has not to be complicated if its object is to serve the people. He has suggested a seven-step approach to be a good start :

(a) Understanding what people need and want.

(b) Setting goals and priorities in a grand but realistic vision which covers the wishes of the people.

(c) Determining measurable criteria to assess the success.

(d) Assigning the right people to the right task domain.

(e) Holding each task leader responsible and accountable for the achievement of measurable success.

(f) Assessing accomplishment in a given time frame.

(g) Taking appropriate measures where accomplishments are not up to standard.

This seven-step approach to good governance demands that persons in the apex body must be responsible and accountable to the nation. They must remind the nation periodically of the tasks assigned to them along with progress and accomplishment. In turn, these individuals ought to successively apply the seven-step approach to programs and projects in their ambit, assigning defined tasks to those in lower rungs to achieve smaller goals tied to the grand design. Such a simple but professional approach to governance is seriously lacking in Bangladesh. In its place, we see all around us a state of continuing chaos, turmoil, intrigue, duplicity, pettiness, ill-will, corruption and the use of terror and past ties of the political leadership to retain the right to be govern.

Without being extensive and lengthy, even without any philosophical jargon or text book cliche, we can specify, in the light of this seven-step approach some areas which need to be addressed in various domains of good governance.

Needs of the People

Good governance is committed to determine faithfully what people need and want. A basic need of the people in Bangladesh, among others, is that of security - whether it pertains to security of life and health, food, income and employment, financial well-being, property and investments or just the security of going outdoor. This need of the people continues to be ignored, Going out into the streets is a security issue. One can be robbed, shot or run over by a killer truck. Going to schools or colleges or universities is another security issue. One may get embroiled in strife, in so-called students, politics or even killing spree, because educational institutions unfortunately are not tranquil places for learning, and some of the teachers are more like low-level political workers than ones motivated to teach full time and most of the students, party fellow travellers. Going to the doctors is a security issue, as one can never he sure whether one will return home safely after having proper treatment. Investing money is a security issue, because there is no guarantee of what will happen to that resources invested in face of insider's manipulation and trade union's extortionist rent in this uncertain law and order situation. Even the drinking water has become a security issue because the users do not know what hidden poisons are waiting for them.

Goals and Priorities

Good governance may be viewed from the perspective of capacity and commitment of the state in setting goals and priorities reflecting the needs of people. Successive governments in Bangladesh, for instance, have made commitments to eliminate poverty. No government however, has translated their declaration into a coherent program. There are of course programs at work for poverty alleviation, but most of these do not appear to be adequately backed up by strong political commitment. In the absence of any developmental vision and strong commitment to realize a clearly articulated developmental mission, capacity to implement the development agenda remains weak.

Administrative capacity has already been eroded through social and personalized financial and other ties with those in power. The instances of rich businessmen buying nominations from the political parties and spending large sums of money in violation of electoral expenditure laws for buying electoral victories or high level of partisanship of the civil servants sparked generally by their power-oriented moves have been undermining the autonomy of the state. The bureaucrats are caught up in the process in the operational agencies that deal with the private sector. They get into their own collusive transactions with business houses while in office or promise to join business houses on retirement allured by "lucrative compensation packages". Moreover, the "style of politics" remaining mainly confrontational in the country, where consensus on developmental issues is practically impossible, the state not only has lost the capacity to realize developmental goals and set priorities but also have been indifferent to the needs of the people at the lowest rung of the society.

Instruments for Regulation and Scrutiny

Good governance is generally characterized by transparency and accountability. These are some of the instruments which make the state exposed to regulation and scrutiny. A system of accountability to the people, reinforced by top-down accountability, is most likely to ensure that policy reforms will be implemented and malfeasance, if any, will be discouraged through exposure to public scrutiny. Moreover, transparency in all public transactions, through full public disclosure before the parliament and in the press will work as a check against any excess and serve as another instrument of accountability.

In Bangladesh, accountability of the executive to the legislative branch and beyond, to the citizens, has always remained weak. This is due in part to the colonial legacy when during the imperial rule, the government of India was accountable to Whitehall and not to the people of India, and

in part to the long years of autocratic rule where the chief executive functioned without being answerable to any body or bodies. Even during the period of electoral democracy, the tradition of all powerful chief executive, with little civic accountability to parliament has continued. This is one of the reasons why weak capacity of the state to implement development programs has resulted in insignificant developmental outcomes. The virtual absence of executive accountability either to the people or to their elected representatives has thus led in the end to the fact that no one really remains accountable to anyone for anything but to oneself. This process itself is responsible for perpetuating inefficiency, irresponsibility and corruption.

Where weak accountability exists, transparency is most likely to be a mere pious wish, because the governors get away with all their failings. In a democratic system, parliament is the ultimate "pressure point" on the government to remain transparent. In Bangladesh, the Jatiya Sangsad (the House of the Nation), which is supposed to be the centre-piece in national politics, has not been able to play its due role in pressurizing the executive to be transparent. The weak capacity of the members of parliament, due mainly to their total dependence on the party leadership and the manipulating skills of administration in withholding information to the members of parliament, have further weakened the role of the Sangsad in promoting transparency. The best instrument for ensuring transparency in such a situation is a free media serving an alert civil society. In Bangladesh the press is relatively free, but most of the newspapers, owned and managed by big business houses, have their own political and policy agendas. Most of the electronic media have remained subservient to the state, which has forced them to compromise both their independence of judgement as well as quality. The institution of private television is however a welcome step in this regard and occasionally this helps expose mis-governance and bring out transparency. To promote a process of transparency is in need

of an alert civil society, and in Bangladesh the civil society, fractured and weak as it is, is yet to rise up to that height, and to that extent, transparency has been weakened.

Democratic Order and Democratic Culture

Good governance can be operative is a society which is gifted with healthy politics and democratic culture and these are the proud possessions of the democratic order. Now, for the first time in history, there are more democratic states in the world. The 2001-2002 survey of Freedom House reports that about 65 per cent of the world population live in free or partly free states. It has shown that of the world's 192 countries 121 (63 per cent) are "electoral democracies", while in 1987 only 66 out of 167 countries (40 per cent) were in this category (Freedom House 2001). According to one estimate of the United Nations, 81 countries of the world have taken significant steps in democratization of their political systems since 1980, with 53 military regimes replaced by civilian governments (UNDP 2002;13). There have been largescale replacements of military dictatorships in Latin America such as in Ecuador and Peru, emergence of "new democracies" in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of Berlin Wall and establishment of democratic regimes in Africa and Asia including those in Mali, Malawi and the Philippines. The progress in democratization has however been slowest in the Arab World—with only 4 out of 17 countries with multiparty electoral systems, although there have been enough opportunities for people's participation in Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco. The growth of democracy is however not unilinear in the sense that it goes on developing; in the 1990's some such new democracies as Sierra Leone, Belarus, Cameroon, Uzbekistan have, instead of having stabilized democracy, reverted to authoritarianism. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have argued that five inter-related conditions exist in democraitc societies : (a) free and lively civil society, (b) a relatively autonomous poltical society, (c) the rule of law to guarantee citizens' freedom and independent associational

life, (d) functioning state bureaucracy, and (e) an institutionalized economic society. Democracy is, therefore, a form of governance of a state and becomes consolidated in political situations where "those competing for power play by its rules" (Linz and Stepan 1996).

When we speak of the quality of governance in a country, we mean the degree to which its institutions such as parliament, processes such as the role of political parties in elections and actions such as the decisions taken by ministers or civil servants are transparent, accountable to the people and allow them to participate in decisions that affect them. Good governance exists when the authority of the government is based on the will of the people and is responsive to them. When open, the democratic institutions allow the people full participation in political affairs. When the human rights are guaranteed, the people feel free to speak, assmeble and dissent. When the governmental institutions are pro-poor, they promote human development of all citizens. Professor Dahl points out that democratic process is superior in three different ways :

(a) it promotes individual and collective freedom better than any other system; (b) it promotes human development, generates moral autonomy and enhances personal responsibility for one's choices; (c) the democratic process, though not perfect, is the best way to protect and advance people's interests and goods (Dahl 1989).

Having all these in view, we have no hesitation to state that Bangladesh does not have many of these pre-conditions and to that extent good governance suffers miserably though it is one of the electoral democracies. Democratic culture is yet to strike deep roots into the social soil. In consequence, politics has been confrontational, instead of being consensual. The politically relevant sectors of the society, especially the social forces have remained fragmented and divided, thus making it very very difficult for any government to build a consensus behind its developmental agenda. In

such a system, opposition for the sake of opposition is commonplace in the political process. Thus, political parties, which have themselves initiated a development project or economic reform program do not hesitate to oppose it when out of power. In turn, no government has shown little enthusiasm in including the opposition in a process of consensual policy-making. When politics becomes confrontational, partisanship becomes intense. That leads to immunity for the party followers even for their worst excesses and corrupt practices, and vengeance to the opponents.

Good governance is not going to drop from the blue like a manna dew. It has to be achieved. Since it relates to the society as a whole and its institutions and institutional processes along with the orientation of those who exercise authority, it demands a policy package involving three axes of the orbit of good governance.

— The vision, capacity and commitment of the society in setting goals and priorities reflecting needs of the people constitute the beginning of good governance. There must be a vision, a dream, backed up adequately by a clearly articulated development agenda and a strong commitment to make the dream come true. Political will of the society is what is needed most. ·

— Environment for these creative steps is provided only in democratic system. Those who initiate and implement public policies must be accountable to the people. A system of accountability of the policy makers, re-inforced by top-down accountability of those two implement policies at all levels, is in order.

— Democratic system to be developmental should be happily married with democratic culture. Unless democratic culture is nurtured and nourished in the polity, decisions by the political elite have very little chance of being consensual. In its absence, national politics is bound to be confrontational and partisan. Developmental issues in that case may turn out to be a mere pious wish.

— The institutional framework from the national to the local level have to be devised in such a manner that might help involve maximum number of people, because popular involvement is the key to success of the pro-people actions in the society.

— All public policies have to be transparent. Transparency in all a public transactions through full public disclosure in the Jatiya Sangsad and in the Press may serve as a positive check against any abuse or misuse of power.

— The processes of the institutions must be transparent, open and easily intelligible to all.

— The social forces should have autonomous growth, must have vibrant role and should not be fragmented. If these forces are allowed to thrive unhindered they may lead to an alert civil society. The free press in conjunction with an alert civil society is likely to achieve wonders in the area.

— Over and above, there must be a broadbased consensus in the polity. The apex body of the decision makers must be gifted with development orientation, who in turn may instill the sense of dedication in those who are mainly responsible for implementation of the development agenda across the four corners of the country.

Conclusion

In sum, governance in Bangladesh is yet to be good, not to speak of its being dynamic and development-oriented. The successive governments are suffering from lack of vision and commitment. The political capacity of the government to direct the course of development agendas is neither strong nor stable. The bureaucrats, who are mainly responsible for implementing these projects, are highly polticized; this high level of politicization has lowered down the quality of administration. Transparency in governance has become poor and accountability, weak. The growing role of the "development partners" in policy-making and the increasing tendency of the government to accommodate special interest

groups in the interest of regime stability have considerably eroded the autonomy of the state over policy-making and strengthened the state-business nexus, leading to inefficiency, violence and corruption. In the absence of a broadbased consensus in the polity, confrontational politics, which in turn has bred intense partisanship, governance quite often loses sight of the positive direction. The relatively free press and gradually emerging civil society are helping the democratic process though, they are not strong enough to counter the malfeasance of governance as yet. The society at the moment is eagerly looking to the different social forces to come out more positively with their overriding influence to set things right, especially in regard to governance, by making it not only good but dynamic and vibrant. That is however possible if the society becomes determined to have the democratic order firmly established both in form and spirit.

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Democratic Order in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, though an old society, is one of the new states, born only three decades ago, in 1971, through the heroic Liberation War. They gory details of the war, the terrible ordeal that the entire nation had to pass through and the sufferings and sacrfices the people of this part of the world had to undergo are two well known to be recounted here. The spirit and ideals that inspired the people during the historic Liberation War have been the motive force to Bangladesh's march forward.

It has been evident on many occasions that Bangladesh has an innate orientation to democratic order. It started its political journey with the Westminster-type parliamentary democracy since 1972. It could not sustain it for long, however. Slowly but steadily it degenerated into an authoritarian system in the mid-1970s and became locked up in a one-party BKSAL-ite [Bangladesh Krishak-Sramik Awami League-BKSAL] monolith. It was followed by a period of uncertainty. A series of coup and counter coup by "men on horseback" rocked the polity. Bangladesh had to experience martial law for sometime till the major political parties of the country fought unitedly for the restoration of democracy and won in early 1990s. The parliamentary system of government was finally re-introduced in 1991 under the able leadership of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. The political parties, despite their failures on many fronts, have arrived visibly by now at a consensus on the nature of political system in the country. Nothing short of representative parliament is acceptable. The government must be accountable to the parliament. The judicial branch must be independent as the bulwark of basic human rights. The press must be free.

The politically relevant sector of the society in Bangladesh has assumed that democratic process is superior in many ways: It promotes individual and collective freedom better than any other system. It promotes human development. It generates moral autonomy and enhances

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personal responsibility for building better choices. The democratic process, though not absolutely perfect, is the best way to protect and promote people's interest and goods.

Moreover, this is an era of democratic order. Now, for the first time in history there are more democratic states in the world. The 2001– 2002 survey of Freedom House reports that more than 65 per cent of the world population live in free and partly free states. Of the world's 192 states (members of the United Nations), 121 (63 per cent) are electoral democracies, while in 1987 only 66 out of 167 countries (40 per cent) were in this category. According to one estimate of the United Nations, 81 countries of the world have taken significant steps in democratization of their political systems since 1980, with 53 military regimes replaced by civilian governments.

Though Bangladesh has yet to build a political system based on consensus and compromise, it has covered a long distance in that direction. It has institutionalized electoral process as the tangible mode of peaceful power transfer by evolving the system of Non-Party Caretaker Government through Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution.

The political parties, which get defeated in the general election, often complain of irregularities but ultimately accept the verdict of the people. The Jatiya Sangsad (House of the Nation) comprising the directly elected representatives, has become the nucleus of national polity. A cabinet, consisting of the leaders of the majority party or a group of parties, has been accountable to the Jatiya Sangsad. The Prime Minister, the *Primus inter pares*, is the head of Government. The constitutional head of the state is the President, elected indirectly by the Jatiya Sangsad. Steps are already a foot to institutionalize an independent judicial system by separating it from the executive. The press has become freer than ever before. The five inter-related conditions, which are supposed to exist in a democratic society are developing slowly but steadily in Bangladesh. A free and lively civil society is making its headway. The rule of law for guaranteeing citizens' freedom and independent associational life is getting stronger and stronger everyday. A

functioning state bureaucracy is gradually becoming more and more institutionalized. It is emerging as an autonomous political society. The economy is being more stabilized. It is expected that democratic order is going to strike its roots deep into the political soil of Bangladesh. It may accelerate if the political parties decide to operate within the framework of consensus and compromise politics.

There are some problems, however. These must be addressed properly. The nascent democratic culture should be nurtured carefully by the political elite so that it can blossom forth. The fragmented social forces should be handled with care and caution so that they might serve as the base for consensual politics. The confrontational stance of the major political partices should make room for understanding and compromise. Moreover, the political parties should be more and more innovative and dynamic. Instead of living in the past they should focus their attention mostly to the present and future.

It is heartening to note that the people of Bangladesh are more united now than ever before. The concept of Bangladeshi nationalism has taken shape as a unifying force with its emphasis on national unity and integration of all citizens and social groups irrespective of caste, creed, gender, culture and religion. It reflects the broad-based cultural and intellectual, more so spiritual, cravings of the people. Transcending the ethnic and religious barriers it has also served to unify the people of Bangladesh into a solid national community with its ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and economic and social justice. As a democratic state Bangladesh pursues the policy of national unity as one of its cardinal prinicples.

In its external dimension, Bangladesh is committed to consolidating its image abroad as an independent, politically stable and economically viable country and enhancing its role as a contributing member in the community of states. At the regional level, it has developed a pattern of mutuality with such neighbours as Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives along with India. Everybody knows it that it was Bangladesh which took initiative in the forging of regional

co-operation in South Asia, and South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SARC) came off the ground in Dhaka through the summit meet of heads of state/government in 1985. Bangladesh firmly believes in the efficacy of SAARC and Bangladesh's South Asian identity.

At the international level, a cardinal priority for Bangladesh has been to play a leading role through concrete initiatives, mixed with moderation and pragmatism, in all socio-economic fora to project and promote the causes of developing countries. In this respect three goals appear paramount. In the first place, it is to bolster self-reliance and move away from aid-centricity to more defined development co-operation. Secondly, it is to seek closer North-South dialogue for the creation of a conducive external environment for revitalizing growth and eliminate poverty. The third goal is to intensify South-South co-operation towards collective self-reliance and target in particular such areas as food production, man-power planning, trade and investment and joint ventures. Another fundamental priority consistent with the constitution has been to strengthen the role of the United Nations as the central organ for co-operative management of the world's problem. Bangladesh's membership of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference), the Commonwealth and NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) has enhanced its representative capacity and increased its ability to contribute to the goals of peace, security, development and rule of law. It continues to actively contribute to the peaceful settlement of disputes, bolster collective security and peace-keeping. Bangladesh's commitment to peace-keeping has seen its military and police contingents participate at one point of time in thirteen simultaneous areas of conflict.

Democratic Bangladesh has fabricated its economic system in line with its political goal. The exploitative and wasteful system of economy, the so-called socialism, introduced in the early 1970s, made room for a humane and production-oriented system involving the interplay of market forces and dynamic private entrepreneurship, thanks to the creative genius of late President Ziaur Rahman. Through structural adjustments, effected of late by adroit

handling, it has been linked with the global economy. In consequence, Bangladesh has been an abode of adequate investment, both from home and abroad. Bangladesh economy has thus gone past the era of stagnation.

A three-decade period is neither long nor spacious for the realization of full potential of a nation. For Bangladesh, however, it has been crucial not only for its vibrant present but also for its bright future. Bangladesh is much stronger to-day than it was in the 1970s. In terms of population, it has become the eighth largest country in the world. In this era of globalization, its market of 135 million people is taking more and more attractive hue. Its newly found gas reserve has made it an object of warm wooing by many. Its strategic location, standing as it does, between South Asia and South-East Asia, in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean, the probable theater of big power confrontation in the days to come, is also quite significant. If the international relations of Bangladesh are re-drawn along the axes of national interest and if the webs of diplomacy are creatively woven, Bangladesh may turn out to be one of the key actors in the region, both in poltical and economic spheres.

At the moment Bangladesh is one of the poor countries in the world, although its efforts to face the challenges squarely are obvious. It is gratifying to note that Bangladesh has made significant progress in expanding coverage and access to basic education with a view to building a knowledge-based society. For the first time in its history more than 98 per cent of the children have started going to school. Gender parity in primary enrollment is almost a reality now. Moreover, it has succeeded in setting up an extensive network of non-formal education centres for adult education. Bangladesh has done better than other South Asian nations in enrolling students from poor families.

During the last decade Bangladesh has achieved good progress in the health sector by reducing fertility reduction, child survival, communicable disease control and developing community nutrition interventions. During the 1990s life expectancy increased by 5 years. Bangladesh has eradicated polio and eliminated leprosy as public health hazards. The

nutritional status of children has improved. The annual population growth has declined from 3.5 per cent in the mid-1970s to less than 1.5 per cent to-day. Fertility has declined from 6.5 live births to 3.3 in the same period.

During the 1990s Bangladesh has done quite well in the economic sector too. It has maintained reasonable macro-economic stability. It has achieved near self-sufficiency in food production. During this period Bangladesh was the 10th most rapidly growing economy out of 31 large developing countries. In 1999 Bangladesh's per capita income, adjusted for purchasing power parity, was the 22nd highest among the 53 low-income countires. During this period, sizable foreign direct investment flows have also been started in infrastructure, energy and export-oriented manufacturing. The country has also seen an emergence of forward looking entrepreneurs. Good macro-economic management has kept inflation in the single digit. The objectives Bangladesh has taken in this regard are the following :

1. Maintenance of macro-economic stability.
2. Rapid development of human resources, including the empowerment of women.
3. Broadly based economic growth that enhances the economic opportunities for , and empowerment of, the poor.

Reduction of vulnerability of the poor to economic shocks, inequitable socio-economic systems and natural disaster.

In sum, democratic Bangladesh has rejected Henry Kissinger's cruel epithet of "an international basket case" -"a bottomless basket" by its innate strength. Bangladesh has won its fateful war by liberating itself from the clutches of marauding occupation forces in 1971 when it turned out to be a people's war. Now another war, the war against poverty and underdevelopment is on. The progress so far achieved indicates that Bangladesh will surely win it provided the political will is there, sound policies are initiated and strong commitment to pursue these policies are generated at the societal level through maximum involvement of people. Democratic order, which has been instituted in Bangladesh, stands as the key to its success.

Democratic Use of the Military Power

Introduction :

How should the military power be used in a democratic society? What should be the optimal uses of military power in a free society? Should the military play political role? What should be the nature of civil-military relations in a country like Bangladesh? How this may be conceptualized? These are some of the questions that are analyzed very briefly in this write up.

In the developed capitalist countries, especially in western Europe, Britain, North America, Australia, New Zealand, supremacy of the civilian authorities has been the order of the day. Civilian rule has also remained predominant in the centrally planned societies of the communist World. Both the capitalist and socialist countries have had two important societal characteristics in common. One is the presence of a broadbased consensus among the politically relevant sections of population on the nature of political power, mode of its exercise, procedure for transferring power, nature of incumbents and so on. Where this consensus is developed, there develops a corresponding belief that exercise of military power by the civil government is only legitimate, and thus acceptable. In the developed western countries this consensus has been brought about mainly by fabricating strong mutuality of interests of the various social forces, generated over a longer period of times, though in the communist countries this was achieved within a shorter period, quite often with a tincture of coercion.

The other characteristic is the depth and width of organizational cohesiveness that bind the social groups in such associations as trade unions, political parties, churches and other professional groups. The politics of a society has been, in these cases, the struggle for the definition and exercise of power in that society. Political power has thus become more and more broadbased, spread out almost equitably to all sectors of the society through a network of organizations. The broadbased societal consensus accords legitimacy to the civilian authorities, and organizational alacrity strengthens political institutions. The armed forces, under the circumstances, become used to their prescribed role

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and thus become professionalized in the art of defending the country and not lording over it (Ahamed, 1988 : 26).

In the developing world the situation is different, however. The military elite have been playing crucial political roles in most of these states. In fact, more than two -thirds of these states have experienced military intervention already , and many more than two-thirds of these states have experienced military intervention already, and many more are likely to do so in the future. The military elite do it either directly by displacing civil authorities or indirectly through them.

Bangladesh has also been affected by this malfeasance. The pre-down coup of 15 August 1975 by a handful of junior officers, with the help of two battalions of the armoured corps of the Bangladesh Army, was the first indication of their overt intention to take over. The August coup of 1975, which resulted in the violent death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the constitutional head of the state, was closely followed by a series of coup and counter-coups until 30 May 1981 when General Ziaur Rahman, another constitutional head of Bangladesh, was killed brutally by a group of 20 to 22 military officers at Chittagong in another abortive coup. Bangladesh was under Martial Law under General H.M. Ershad from 24 March 1982 to the end of 1986. If we look at the history of Bangladesh, we find that the military elite ruled it over for more than 9 years. Another period of 4 years passed through under the shadow of Martial Law, with the men-in-uniform at the background. What is more significant is that the military elite not only assumed a political role in Bangladesh, but they also claimed that they should have the right to do so. Before the formal assumption of power in March 1982, General Ershad demanded that the military in Bangladesh should be accorded a constitutional role to ensure protection of the political system (NewYork Times, 14 November 1981). All these tend to take us to the gray zone of the extent of military intervention and reasons for such intervention especially in the context of Bangladesh politics.

Extent of Military Intervention

Military intervention in politics is not a recent phenomenon. In fact, independent political activities by the military have been widespread and of long standing. There were 48 independent states in the world at the beginning of the twentieth century. Three more states emerged between 1900

and 1917. 32 of these states underwent some form of military intervention in their politics. Of the 28 independent states that came into being during the period 1917-1955, 13 of them had to undergo military rule (S E Finer 1975 : 2). In June 1987 the United Nations Organizations (UNO) had 159 member states and 82 of them (50%) had been under military rule at one stage or the other.

Military intervention in politics increased all over the Third World, but it became endemic in four regions : Latin America, South and South-East Asia, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. 13 of the 20 Latin American states (62%), 21 of the 42 African states (50%) and 9 of the 22 South and South-East Asian states (41%) experienced military rule during the period 1958–1973. Even Europe was not free from it and 3 of the 28 states (11%) underwent this experience during that period. Taking a longer time frame Gavin Kennedy has shown that as many as 53 successful *coup d' etat* took place in Latin America involving 16 of the 20 states (80%), and 22, 42 and 32 successful coups took place in South and South-East Asia, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa respectively involving 9, 14 and 25 states during the period 1945-1972 (Gavin Kennedy, 1974 : 337–344). According to his estimate, there were more than 200 military *coup d' etat* in those four regions since 1960. The number of coups since 1945 amounted to over 280. There were at least 42 coups in Asia, 86 in Latin America, 62 in the Middle East and 76 in Sub-Saharan Africa.

If we look at the incidence of such coups year-wise, we find that 12% of all independent states in the world were under military rule in 1961. It rose to 19% in 1966, 27% in 1973 and 29% in 1975 (F D Margiotta, in C E Welch, ed. 1976 : 214). There was a slight decline of such incidence in the 1980s; however, the percentage of states remained under military rule in 1980 being a little less that 24 and in 1984 being 23.

There were as many as 316 successful coups during 1945–1984, and including the unsuccessful ones, the total number of coups and coup-attempts were 615 during the period (Table 2.1 and 2.2). Of these, 203 took place in Africa, 208 in Latin America, 113 in Asia, 73 in the Middle East and the rest in Europe. The events of military coup was the highest in the

1950s and 1960s. The trend is faithfully reflected in the incidence in Latin America where coups began to increase in frequency from the second quarter of the 20th century. The amount of time that the presidency in 20 Latin American countries was occupied by the military rose markedly form 28.7% in the decade 1917–1927 to 38.5% in 1927–1937, 49% in 1937–1947% and 45% in 1947–1957% (S.P. Huntington, 1962 : 33).

The depth of military intervention however varies from country to country and from region to region, and no generalization is possible about its impact. There are states which were subjected to it time and again, and the whole fabric of society was permeated by the military ethos. Iraq , for instance, experienced 7 coups between 1936 and 1951 and 6 more in 1952, 1958, 1959, 1965, 1966 and 1968 (S E Finer, 1975). Syria experienced 4 coups between 1949 and 1952, and another two in 1961 and 1970, excluding another 6 abortive coups in 1962, 1963 and 1966. Sudan also experienced coups in 1958, 1959, 1969 and 1984 and two more abortive coups in 1971. In South-East Asia, Thailand is unique in that it underwent 8 coups between 1932 and 1971. In Latin America, however, its incidence was the highest. Kennedy has shown that 4 of the 20 Latin American countries i.e. Bolivia, Paraguay, Honduras and Equador, accounted for almost 50% of military interventions in the region during the period 1960–1972 (Gavin Kennedy, 1974 : 30). A study of Sub-Saharan Africa between 1960 and 1982 alone recorded 90 plots to overthrow governments, 60 attempted coups, and 50 successful coups (Orkand Corporation quoted in Seitz 1991 : 65

Table 1.0 : Number of Successful coups during 1945-1984

Region	1945-1950	1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1970	1971-1975	1976-1978	1979-1984
Europe	—	—	3	—	1	4	—	—
Africa	—	—	3	20	32	19	7	8
Latin America	26	15	13	21	11	12	4	4
Middle East	4	8	4	10	10	3	2	3
Asia	3	7	14	20	8	5	6	6
Total	33	30	37	71	62	43	19	21

Source : Asbjorn Eide and Marek Thee, eds.; *Problems of Contemporary Militarism*, London, Groom Helm, 1985, p 385 quoted in Emajuddin Ahamed, *Military Rule and the Myth of Democracy*, Dhaka, University Press Ltd. 1988, p 2.

Table 2.0 : Number of Abortive Coups during 1945-1984

Region	1945-1950	1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1970	1971-1975	1976-1978	1979-1984
Europe	3	—	1	3	1	3	—	—
Africa	—	2	5	25	41	17	10	14
Latin America	20	14	31	20	7	9	1	—
Middle East	1	1	5	9	9	4	—	—
Asia	10	3	7	13	4	1	2	4
Total	**34**	**20**	**49**	**70**	**62**	**34**	**13**	**18**

Source : As in Table 1.0

Having all these in view Joseph LaPalombara commented in 1977 : "Military coups are now so frequent and widespread that they must be considered as significant as elections" (Foreword" in Nordlinger 1977 : X). Janowitz's statement, some seven years ago almost in the same vein, speaks of the same thing. He wrote : "The intervention of the military in the domestic politics (of non-Western states) is the norm; persistent patterns of civil supremacy are the deviant cases that require special exploration" (Janowitz, 1971 : 306).

Looking at the level of intervention we can conclude that the military constitute an independent political force. That the military have intervened in the politics of many and widely diverse countries in the world, and that they have done it in the past and are doing so at present is indicative of a political phenomenon which is "abiding, deep-seated and distinctive" (*Area handbook series*, 1985; quoted in Ahamed, 1988 : 5). That is precisely the reason why a growing literature has emerged on the military intervention in politics and its impact.

Reasons for Military Intervention

Three strands of thought reflecting three sets of crucial variables may be gleaned from the growing literature on military intervention. The first is related to the capability of the military, which is associated with the very nature of organization of the armed forces. The organizational features provide them with discipline and cohesion, hierarchy and

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centralized command and unity both at the decision-making and execution levels. These enable the military to take over political power promptly if they decide to act. The second is related to the corporate interest of the armed forces. Any threat to their corporate interest may propel them to move and capture political power at a lightening speed. The third refers to weaknesses of the political system such as fragile political institutions, chronic instability, lack of consensual leadership and legitimacy, power vacuum and low level of political culture, which in fact provide occasions for intervention to the military. Indeed, the armed forces in the developing world enjoy three significant political advantages over civilian organizations : (a) a marked superiority in organizational strength; (b) highly emotionalized symbolic status, often in relation to national independence and sovereignty; (c) a monopoly over the most modern lethal weapons.

With all these preponderant advantages in their bag, the military, if they decide to move and displace the civilian authorities, can do so easily. There are certain crippling weaknesses of the armed forces, however, that preclude them from taking over save in exceptional cases. Finer has identified two of them (S E Finer 1975 : 12). I have added the third one (Ahamed 1988 : 8). The first is the armed forces' inability to administer any but the most primitive community, and the second is the lack of 'their moral right to rule". The third indicates that a long period of military rule in any society may be destructive of the qualities and values for which the armed forces are so distinctive. In fact, the military themselves becomes the first casualty of military rule, and that is why the military elite are highly reluctant to prolong their political role anywhere.

Political Role of Military in Bangladesh

Having all these in view, if we analyze the 15 August coup or the *coup d' etat* of 24 March 1982, we can get at the root of motivation of the Bangladesh armed forces. In the western

countries the concept of military as a politically neutral body has emerged mainly because of the fact that the democratic institutions have evolved over a longer period with the least involvement of the military. As an apparatus of the state, the military organization in those states was designed to handle defense and external aggression. The British Indian Army, which in fact is the predecessor of armed forces in all South Asian states including Bangladesh was, in contrast, raised and trained from its very inception to be the custodian of law and order with a view to promoting imperial interests. It was thus essentially in opposition to the national interests and demands, and its organization was always subject to political considerations.

For the purpose of perpetuating colonial interests in India, the British Indian Army policy was devised to capitalize on the existing religious antagonisms between the different communities through its strategy of "divide and rule". In such an organizational format, the primary role of the British Indian Army was to maintain law and order and internal security. The colonial regime effectively realized their goal through deployment of a regiment of predominantly one religious, linguistic or regional affiliation in a region of a predominantly different religious or linguistic affiliations. Their motto was : "keep your Sikh regiments in the Punjab, and they will be ready to act against the Hindus; keep your Hindus out of the Punjab and they will be ready to act against the Sikhs" (C. H. Philip 1962 : 508).

Apart from their deployment policies, the Indian troops in the army were indoctrinated in such a fashion that they ultimately became alienated from the mainstream of national politics. Furthermore, they were imbued with an anti-political orientation. They were taught that politicians were no more than mere 'rabble rousers" and "disruptionists".

After the establishment of Pakistan, the same tradition continued. Out of 160 Muslim officers of the rank of captain and above, 4 decided to stay in India, and the rest opted their services for Pakistan. These officers, along with another 500

British officers who were attached with the operationally independent Pakistan Army, formed the nucleus of the Pakistan officer corps. Due to the origin of these officers in the landowning class, their inheritance of the ethos and organizational framework of the British Indian Army, they remained pre-disposed toward maintaining law and order rather than becoming an institution primarily for defence.

After the conclusion of the Mutual defence Assistance Agreement (MDA) with the USA in 1954, the Pakistan Army acquired a sophisticated war technology from the US. It thus enhanced not only its striking power but also its bargaining strength, and it began to penetrate into the civilian government of Pakistan. When in 1954 effective political power was assumed by the bureaucrats, the generals found it suitable to enter the political arena openly. In the words of Justice Muneer Ahmed, "quite symbolic of the significant change was the dismissal of the national government, dissolution of the national parliament and appointment of a member of the armed forces as a minister in the new government" (Muneer Ahmed 1983 : 159). This new minister was none else than General Ayub Khan who, in league with the top level military officers and civil servants, frustrated the development of a democratic system, and by staging a coup and assuming dictatorial powers in 1958, established the supremacy of the men-in-uniform in Pakistan. Most of the Bengali military officers, who played crucial roles in taking over political power in Bangladesh in the 1970s and 1980s were recruited during this period and were trained and socialized under the shadow of Ayub Khan's martial law.

Military Aid to Civil Authorities

What politicized the armed forces both of Pakistan and Bangladesh most was the long-standing traditions of aid to the civil authorities in times of crisis. When the civil authorities failed to handle any serious crisis, the army was called in to provide necessary administrative and logistic support to civil administration, and this happened at regular intervals since 1949. The Army operation in Lahore to handle

the Ahmediya crisis in 1953, at Narayangonj and Chandraghona to bring communal unrest under control in 1954, the "operation-close door" in East Pakistan in 1957 are some of the instances. This tradition continued in Bangladesh, and in the early 1970s the Awami League regime called the armed forces into action several times despite its efforts to make the party channel the key channel of control and direction. In the wake of economic downturn in 1973 the radical forces made an all-out efforts to overthrow the regime. At that time Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ordered the armed forces to move to the aid of civil authorities. In July 1973, a combined operation of the police, Rakkhi Bahini and the Army resulted in the arrest of 200 "extremists" and "miscreants", and recovery of a huge amount of arms and ammunition. Similar operations were undertaken in December 1973, April 1974 and July 1974. Every time the armed personnel successfully handled the crises, their growing role in handling the crises made them not only confident of themselves but also sensitive to political power and more importantly aware of the weaknesses of the regime. For the ambitious military officers, having a bit of idealism and a little daring, this experience turned into an invitation.

In sum, the Bangladesh Army, which was the lineal descendant of the British Indian Army and Pakistan Army, inherited not only the institutional framework of its predecessors, but also their ethos, especially their orientation against politics of the civilians and at the same time their consciousness of political power. The liberation War of 1971 broke the distance between the civilians and armed forces and made them aware of the nature of weak political leadership and fragile political institutions. Thus the armed forces of Bangladesh, going through serious trying times at different phases, emerged after the Liberation War as a highly politicized army.

For the Bangladesh Army, with that high level of politicization, the undertaking of what it did on 15 August, 3 November, 7 November 1975 was not that unlikely, especially

when the officer corps perceived that their corporate interests were not safe in the hands of the then regime and the regime was so fragile. The military resented the fact that the government did not take speedy and effective measures for reconstructing the training institutes and cantonments which were destroyed in the Liberation War, in the first place. Second, the revenue expenditures incurred on defence services was not only minimal, but it was gradually reduced. In the 1973-1974 budget, it was about 16 per cent, but in 1974–75 budget it came down to 15 per cent of the annual budget. In 1975 –76 the revenue expenditure was reduced to 13 per cent. Third, the establishment of a new militia, the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini, which was organized under the direction of the Prime Minister's office and attached to the Awami League to provide support to the government, appeared to them as a parallel organization. The military resented it because it was symbolic of the fact that the regular armed forces were replaceable. Many of them believed that the Rakkhi Bahini was designed and planned by the Indian Army for the safety of the Awami League and not the nation. Some of them believed that the Bangladesh Government-in-exile had signed a treaty with the Indian Government, which was detrimental to the sovereignty of Bangladesh and by implication to the interests of the armed forces.

The political elite, who came to power in December 1971, also became affected by internal cleavage and factionalism. The Awami League, which was a middle class-based and mainly an urban--centred political party, adopted socialistic programs after independence, but in the face of severe economic crisis it modified its socialistic programs, and to confront the challenge posed by the radical parties, ultimately opted for a one-party state in 1975 by amending the constitution. The modification of its socialist programs alienated the radical elements and the imposition of a one-party systems alienated the liberals. Naturally, the Awami League, with its apparently strong organizational base, became affected by factionalism, and ultimately fragmented.

Thus, the political leaders could neither handle the problems of economic crisis, nor could they check large-scale corruption among their ranks nor could they provide a sense of direction to the nation. The military, at that point of time, quite popular as they were, felt that the armed forces alone could save the nation and through the 15 August Coup emerged as the ruling elite in Bangladesh. Thus, we have seen that its organizational strength provides the military with capability, its corporate interests generates a strong interventionist motive, and the performance failures of civil authorities furnish suitable occasions for coups.

The Changed Situation

The situation has however changed. The popular uprising of 1990, with the direct participation of most of the political parties in Bangladesh, and subsequent events, have prepared ground for optimism. Though Bangladesh has yet to build a political system based on consensus and compromise, it has come a long distance in that direction. The political parties, despite their stunted growth and lack of institutionalization, have now arrived at a consensus on the nature of political system. Nothing short of a representative parliament is acceptable. The government must be accountable to the parliament. The judicial branch must be independent as the bulwark of basic human rights. The press must be free.

The consensus has been evident in the rejection of seven-party and five-party alliances to participate in either of the Sangsad Elections under General Ershad and also in the eight-party alliance's refusal to take part in the 1988 Sangsad Election. These demands, having been voiced from different party platforms during the last decade, became the core of the agreement reached by the three political alliances on 19 November 1990. The fabrication of the Non-Party Caretaker Government for conducting the general election in 1996 is yet another landmark in that direction. The defeated parties come up with complaints of rigging the elections, but ultimately they accept the verdict of these elections. Thus, it works as the tangible means of power transfer peacefully.

The orientation of the armed forces in Bangladesh also seems to have undergone some changes. They treated the movement against Ershad in 1990 as a political Problem and wanted it to be solved politically, General Ershad's insinuation notwithstanding. Most coups are internally generated by local cleavages and power conflicts, but external encouragement or discouragement can be crucial for their success or failure. This aspect has also undergone dramatic changes. The triumph of democratic order globally and especially in South Asia, has further deepened the changing orientation of the armed forces in Bangladesh. (Ahamed 1998 : 150-170).

How to Stabilize Democratic Use of Military Power in Bangladesh

How, then, can we stabilize the democratic use of military power by ensuring civilian control over the armed forces in Bangladesh? This issue has been discussed and debated by a large number of social scientists from different angles of vision (Dahl 1989 : 244 - 250). They have put forward a host of suggestions in this regard and that ranges from outright abolition of the armed forces to military professionalization. Some scholars have suggested that a democratic state for its civilian supremacy may eliminate the coercive capabilities of military or reduce them to virtual insignificance. In rare cases however the armed forces have actually been abolished . Today we find only a few instances where the armed forces do not exist. These are in fact exceptional cases, created out of intricate historical situations, and not applicable to most states. Even in Japan, which does not maintain land, sea and air forces through its 1947 constituation, forced on it by the US, the existence of "police reserve" and "national defence force" has compromised the situation. The national defence force is as good as its national army. Costa Rica, a small state in Latin America, disgusted with repeated military coups, thwarting democratic growths in the country, abolished its armed forces in 1948-49.

Some scholars have suggested that democratic use of the military power may be ensured if the armed forces are formed with citizen soldiers. The Swiss Federations has done it by making military service a constitutionally imposed obligation in 1848 and 1874. With the exception of the top officers who are full time professionals, the Swiss military is still composed of citizens on temporary duty. In most other

European countries since the World War II the land forces comprise troops raised by conscription for brief terms of service-civilians-in-uniform. In the east, Singapore has also adopted this process.

These two methods, elimination of armed forces or diffusion of militry power among the citizens, do not seem to answer the needs of most of the states in the developing World. In some cases, it is the military which symbolize national independence and sovereignty of the state, and in the formative phase of nation building this is highly significant. In some cases, the military strength embodies the penultimate phase of foreign policy of states striving for economic emancipation and national integration in these days of intense competition. In many other cases, the armed forces serve as the brokers of peace in different parts of the globe within the framework of the UN, the national army being the potent instrument. In all these cases, the national army stands out as representative of the state. How can we, then, think of abolishing the armed forces?

The concept of citizen army may be appealing to many, but reality is different. Even the citizen army needs a strong national army as its nucleus. Moreover, it is not likely to meet the demands of continuous rigorous training of the forces and its capability to handle the most modern and sophisticated weapons, which characterize the dynamic and innovative armed services these days. There are many other ways of getting citizens involved in the defence services other than this one.

Naturally the last option is military professionalism which tends to create and sustain trust on the regime to which the military owes loyalty and obedience and which it is obligated to defend. The military, especially its officer corps, must be indoctrinated in such a fashion that they would accept their loyalty to the regime as an article of faith. They must believe that military rule is an aberration, and never an alternative to democratic order. They must also believe that fire power is not a substitute for the mandate of the people. These, in fact, constitute the core of military professionalism. A professional army is expert in man-management, capable of handling organizational affairs, technically oriented and subordinate to political authority. Modern professionalism is also corporative in the sense that it generates group consciousness, encourages formation of corporate

professional associations and maintains clear line of demarcation between military and civilian affairs. The military should be professionalized to the art of defending their country, and reaching out to the people in times of natural calamity and other crises, if necessary.

Military professionalism in a society is enhanced if and when the civilian rulers themselves are steeped in democratic ethos. They should also be professionalized to the art of good governance and must be adept in forging the political system on the bases of consent and consensus. We must add that for the democratic use of military power in a state two conditions are absolutely necessary : (a) If the military exist, as they surely will, then they must be subject to civilian control (b) The civilians who control the military must themselves be subject to the democratic process. If the two are synthesized, there is no room for alarm, but it is indeed a very very difficult process. The success in the area demands contributory conditions both from within and without. There must be full flowering of democratic culture in the polity and a respectful recognition of democratic order at the global level. These are the two sure guarantees of success of a democratic polity.

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Religion and Ethnicity in Democratic Order

Nikita Khrushchev, while on tour in India along with Bulganin said in a speech in December 1955 in connection with Kashmir that "religious passions have been stirred up by the imperialists". He laid down the dictum that "religious beliefs have never been the main question in setting up a state:" (Quoted in Emerson, 1960, 161). It was a forthright statement, eminently satisfying to their Indian hosts; but that its historical accuracy is open to gravest question became obvious in the fatherland of Khrushchev himself some three decades later. Even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and thus formation of such Muslim majority states as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and so on, the Chechnia problem involving the issue of self-determination on the basis of religion has turned out to be a sore point to the Russian authorities themselves in the 1990's.

While formulating the core values of Non-Alignment in the 1950's Josip Broz Tito derived profound satisfactions for uniting the peoples of several ethnic groups with a view to creating a strong national community in Yugoslavia for the accomplishment of a new society- a society for the attainment of socialism via nationalism. In his own words, "we are no longer the Balkans which used to be torn by internal dissensions and used as cat's paws by everybody" (Tito, 1976, 17). He has also proved himself to be a false prophet, and probably he is undergoing violent spasms in his lifeless body in the grave to-day by observing his dear Yugoslavia torn asunder on ethnic considerations accompanied by heavy bloodbaths going on with full fury even to-day.

The advocates of democracy however go on sermonizing that the forces of democracy are the forces of religious and ethnic harmony and peace. Democratic order comes into play only when the people professing different faiths and belonging to different ethnic groups have learnt to live together in peace and amity. Mature democracies, the advocates argue, can usually accommodate ethnic and religious divides without violence.

It sounds good but not that simple. Religion and ethnicity have always remained the most potent factors for shaping the contours of global politics. During the larger part of human history religion or ethnicity, either singly or in combination with such factors as language, region or economic considerations have dominated the stage and have been doing it even to-day. Democratic order has however been the mitigating factor. In Europe, the growth of a new sense of national community in the form of nationalism, rooted in the distinct territorial dimension and accompanied by religious toleration, which again has been an offspring of enlightenment, has had the effect of smoothening the rough edges of religious antagonism since the later part of the 18th century. The wars of religion then gave way to the wars of nations. Only at that point of time it became more important that a person was a British or a Frenchman or a German than that he was a catholic or a protestant. In the 19th century all the West European countries became nation states, save perhaps Ireland, where religion became crucial for the formation of a nation and a state.

As nationalism moved into eastern and south-eastern Europe and on into Asia and Africa, the religious issues came to the forefront. Only in two instances, Pakistan and Israel, religion became the essence of national existence, but in many others religion was the driving force of national community. The Arab nationalism would have been a mirage lost to the desert without Islam. Even for the small Cyprus, the Orthodox Church served as the rallying point for the Greek Cypriots. Religion loomed larger in relation to the new nationalism than it did in those of the last century's Western Europe. Though in China religion (Confucianism) played an insignificant role, Japan used Buddhism as an important nation-building force. In Indonesia the incipient nationalism found one of its first expressions in the association of Sarekat

Islam, but in Malaysia, nationalism has been closely related to Islam. In our neighbourhood, Burma Prides itself on its Buddhist background and in Bhutan Buddhism has been the main unifying force. Nepal is expressly a Hindu state. Even in India, the nationalist movement was piloted by the Congress, and it was, in fact, despite the sprinkling of Muslims in its membership, basically a Hindu organization. The nationalist movement in India derived much of its inspiration from such feelings as expressed by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalker, a leader of a militant Hindu organization when he said : "Hindustan is the land of the Hindus and is the *terra firma* for the Hindu nation alone to flourish." (Curran, 1950, 95). Some of the behavioral aspects of such great leaders as Gandhi then and most of the Indian leaders now can be adequately explained from that standpoint. Turkey under Ataturk turned its back on the religion, although Iran stabilized itself under the banner of Islam and Pakistan found the reason for its being in Islam. In Black Africa, the native religions have been much less of a focal point for the nationalists than in Asia, but Separatist Churches, foreshadowing later nationalisms, have cropped up. The appeal of religion to the nationalists, especially in their domestic spheres, has been ably explained by Wilfred Cantwell Smith when he said : "The driving force of nationalism has become more and more religious, the more the movement has penetrated the masses "(Smith, 1957, 75).

It must also be remembered that any sweeping generalization on the role of religion is not in order. When a nation gets stabilized, quite often it does it by shedding a part of its original religious fervour through incorporation of some secular values for persons belonging to other religions. Egypt, for instance, could become a full-fledged nation when it departed enough from Islam to take the Copt, and other religious minorities in its fold. The same was true in their

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different circumstances for Syria and Lebanon. The series of upheavals which have shaken Syria and Iraq during the fifties and sixties were not based on religion. At one time Nasser of Egypt was accepted by the Arabs as the second Saladin, uniting them, overthrowing their enemies, and restoring their national pride, but Nasserism itself was very incidently religious.

Political scientists quite often distinguish between two major types of social cleavage : economic and cultural. One line of thought, emerging from the great Greek scholar Plato and attaining fruition in the writings of Karl Marx, argues that the economic differences are at the root of political conflict. Another line of thought contends that cultural or ethnic differences quite often being enmeshed with religious feelings, are more serious and more fundamental social divisions than economic ones. Be what they may, the fact remains that ethnic issues pose a totally different kind of problems. When the ethnic issues emerge in a society as really cognizable problems, they tend to engult the entire society in a couflictual zero-sum format.

The ethnic issues or problems of sub-cultures, as many scholars have described these in the literature of political studies, are politically very serious. They create a deep sense of distance between the factions. Where a strong sense of distance and difference exists, it becomes easy for real or imagined grievances to be exaggerated; the distance generates, in the ultimate analysis, fear, distrust and hostility. The distance tends to be long lasting mainly because of the fact that the language or customs associated with the particular ethnic group that are learnt in early childhood become integral to individual's sense of his own identity. A threat to these values comes up as a threat to individual's self-hood, a threat, they start believing, must be resisted at all costs.

This being so, a threatened ethnic group may not like to see democracy working because they become scared so that they would be subjected to the whims of a hostile majority group. Such fear and hostility are likely to complicate bargaining over concrete issues and make coalitions across ethnic lines difficult to organize and sustain, and perhaps increase citizens' willingness to use destructive tactics. Political leaders may also feel like putting the blames on minority scape-goats as a means of mobilizing support in times of crisis. The result may be disastrous. There may be many more violences in the ethnically divided society. Ethnic fractionalization may impede economic growth. That may also lead to political instability in society. It may lead to distrust and hostility, and finally deaths in large numbers through wars in worst cases.

The ethnic fractionalization exists practically in all the countries of the world to-day despite vain attempts by some insolent tyrants at ethnic cleansing at different times of human history. For an objective study of the impacts of ethnic fractionalization in 28 democratic societies, Taylor and Hudson in their **World Handbook** developed an index of fractionalization ranging from zero, where all citizens share the ethnic characteristics to a potential high of 1.0, where every citizen is of a different ethnic group (Table 1). In practice, ethnic fractionalization ranges from .02 in extremely homogenous Japan to .89 in extremely hetergenous India. Powell, Jr. has used it for quite different purposes. We have brought it here mainly to show that ethnicity is an endemic problem existing almost everywhere and it affects societal peace and progress in different ways.

How do religious and ethnic issues surface in a democratic society? Every one of us knows it well that democracy is not only a system of governance, it is also a balanced social order. It has also to be clearly.

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Ethnic Division in the Democratic Countries

	Country	Ethnic Fractionalization
1.	Japan	.02
2.	West Germany	.03
3.	Ireland	.04
4.	Italy	.04
5.	Jamaica	.04
6.	Norway	.04
7.	Denmark	.05
8.	Costa Rica	.07
9.	Sweden	.08
10.	Greece	.10
11.	Netherlands	.10
12.	Venezuela	.11
13.	Austria	.13
14.	Chile	.14
15.	Finland	.16
16.	Uruguay	.20
17.	Turkey	.25
18.	France	.26
19.	Australia	.32
20.	United Kingdom	.37
21.	NewZealand	.37
22.	Ceylon	.47
23.	Switzerland	.50
24.	USA	.50
25.	Belgium	.55
26.	Philippines	.74
27.	Canada	.75
28.	India	.89

Source : Taylor and Hudson, *World handbook,* quoted in Powell, Jr. Bingham, *Contemporary Democracies : Participation, Stability and Violence,* Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1982. p 45.

Rememberd that democracy is not a problem-solving device, not a panacea. It is equally true that when democratic order prevails in a society, it gives rise to less and less problems and mitigates some of the existing ones, including the religious animosity and ethnic violence.

Democracy is not responsible for generating religious toleration or bringing the diverse ethnic groups together. Democracy has rather come into play only when the people professing different faiths and belonging to different ethnic groups have learnt to live in peace in national interest. Religious toleration and ethnic harmony have been associated with the growth and development of the concept of national community. This transformation of the social ethos from the threshhold of a particularistic church or an ethnic separatism into the universalistic creed of democratic order through the highway of nationalism has been of great significance in human history.

Democratic order, by virtue of its populist creed and constitutional robe, helps maintain a serene environment in the society where the people having different faiths and belonging to different ethnic groups feel safe and confident. It aids them to get involved into the affairs of, and identified with, interest of the political community. This is what democracy does and does it only when democracy is dressed up with the twin feathers of liberalism and constitutionalism on its head.

The term democracy "marries two closely connected ideas." It is liberal because it emphasizes individual liberty. It is constitutional because it rests on the tradition of the rule of law which eventually became transformed over time into a tradition of human rights. Democratic order symbolizes the synthesis of two glorious traditions of human civilization. It draws on the philosophical strain which began with such great Greek scholars as Aristotle, Muslim populist philosophers such as Ibn Rushd and Perfected in the

continuing stream by such great minds as Rousseau and John Stuart Mill. It has also derived its life-force from another tradition, beginning with the Romans through great British Poet Milton, renowned philosopher John Locke, famed jurist Blackstone and such famous statesmen as Thomas Jefferson and Madison. In all its manifestations, democracy represents two basic tenets. Any government worth the salt must be by the people themselves or by their representatives, in the first place. Secondly, democracy pre-supposes that human beings irrespective of religious belief and ethnic affiliation have certain inalienable rights, and the justification of the government depends on its securing these rights. If any elected government fails to safeguard these rights of the citizens it remains no longer democratic. If, on the other hand, the government secures these rights without being elected it is not democratic either.

At this point of time in history 124 of the 191 countries in the world, which are members of the UN, have the kind of governments which are generally termed democratic, but by the standard set forth in this paper, in terms of liberalism and constitutionalism, most of these are "illiberal democracies" and not fullfledged, well-balanced, mature democracies (Zakaria, 1997, 22-35). That speaks why in most of these 'democratic' countries problems centering on religion and ethnicity have remained not only critical but also challenging.

It is already stated that religious and ethnic divisions are generally accommodated in mature liberal democracies because these contain some inbuilt mechanisms for absorbing conflict situations. In the new democracies, however, especially in the post-colonial and post-socialist countries, there are some loopholes which detract them from attaining the desired height. The system of election is there, but they have not yet been soaked with the essence of

constitutional liberalism. Rule of law remains absent. The system of rights is often abused. In consequence, the introduction of the system of election in these religiously and ethnically divided societies has, instead of cementing these divisions, fomented sub-nationalism, sub-regionalism, ethnic conflicts, and in some cases, resulted in wars. The results of the spate of elections introduced in such societies, having no solid background in constitutional liberalism and bound together mainly by force, as the erstwhile Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovikia and so on have been obvious. In the elections in these countries, the political leaders have found it convenient to harp on ethnic or religious or racial sentiments for mobilizing support. Thus, once a leader of an ethnic or racial group is in power, he has, with all enthusiasms, excluded other groups from the fruits of political power. The consequences are foregone. This has been true also in Africa. The movements of the opposition, armed rebellions, and occasional coups have been directed against the ethnically-based regimes, most of which came to power through elections. These incidents prove beyond any doubt that religious and ethnic fractionalizations are not accommodated in these new democracies, and these new democracies standing only on the platform of elective system have not yet been immersed in constitutional liberalism, upholiding rights to life, liberty and property, and freedom of religion and speech on the one hand, and emphasizing checks on the power of each organ of government, ensuring equality under law, providing impartial judiciary and separating church and mosque from the state, on the other.

In sum, democracy started its faltering and hesitant journey at the beginning of this century in a conflict-ridden world due mostly to religious, ethnic or racial divisions,

occasionally tintured with ideological animosity. By the end of the century however democracy emerged not only as the widely accepted system of government but also as the universally acknowledged social order. For its more profound appeal to the world in this century, especially for being able to absorb the shocks of division arising out of diverse elements in the society, democracy is really in need of being perfected from within, both as political and social system with an adequate background in constitutional liberalism. Having that in view Farid Zakaria has exclaimed that the twentieth century challenge has been to make the world safe for democracy; the challenge of the next century is however to make democracy safe for the world.

Note :

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The Military And Democracy In Bangladesh

Bangladesh is at a crossroads in its march towards democratic order. Though it started its political journey with a parliamentary system after independence, it failed to sustain it; slowly but steadily the parliamentary governments degenerated into an authoritarian system. As Bangladesh completes its twenty years of independence it also completes thirteen years of military dominated by the military.

In late 1990, however, the political situation altered dramatically. Autocratic rule was ultimately defeated by a popular uprising, and General Ershad had to resign. Under the close supervision of a caretaker government headed by Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, installed after the resignation of General Ershad, a free, fair and neutral general election was held on 27 February 1991. A truly representative *Jatiya Sangsad* (House of the Nation) thus came into being. In a bid to democratize the polity in Bangladesh the *Sangsad* substantially amended the constitution. A parliamentary system of government was proposed in the *Twelfth Amendment Act* in August and this was ratified by a constitutional referendum on 15 September 1991.

In sum, the institutional framework for parliamentary democracy has been set up in Bangladesh. The *Jatiya Sangsad*, comprising directly-elected representatives of the people. has been the centre-piece of national politics; a cabinet, consisting of the leaders of the majority party, has been made accountable to the *Sangsad*. The prime minister, the *primus inter pares*, is head of the government. The constitutional head of state is the president, who is elected by the *Sangsad*. Steps have also been taken to institutionalize an independent judicial system.

Is the institutional framewok good enough for sustaining democratic order in Bangladesh? How will the military react? In the face of the highly politicized armed forces, what is the future of democracy in Bangladesh?

The Nature of the Political System at Independence

Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state on 16 December 1971 after a bloodbath. The Awami League leaders, who led the independence movement, came to power. They had always favoured parliamentary democracy with real power vested in cabinet, collectively responsible to the legislature. A parliamentary form of government was introduced in Bangladesh according to the Provisional Constitution Order of 1972, and the political elite became the supreme policy makers. The 1972 constitution, which was passed by the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1972, essentially continued the process. The major aspect of the 1972 constitution is the supremacy of the *Jatiya Sangsad*, comprising the directly— elected representatives of the people, and a cabinet directly responsible to the *Sangsad* for its actions and policies.

The Awami League. which had massive popular support, became the ruling party. Although it was mainly a middle-class and urban-centred party, it had well-organized student and labor fronts, and within a short period a number of groups oriented to the Awami League, such as the Jatiya Krishak League (National Peasants League) and the Jatiya Jubo League (National Youth League), were organized. These groups canvassed and mobilized support for the party and supplied policy and program inputs (Ahamed 1980:148-156).

An important trend under the Awami League regime was the gradual strengthening of political infrastructure at the administrative level. The senior advisers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were all political leaders. Those who accompanied him on tours both within and outside the country were mostly from the Awami League and party-affiliated interest groups. In the government. the party tried to consolidate its position. The office of the prime minister became the most powerful one in the government. In addition to having head offices and

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ministries for which the prime minister had specific responsibility, the prime minister's secretariat comprised offices of the principal secretary, political secretary, economic secretary and invigilation director. The overall coordination of government activities at the administrative level was left to the principal secretary. To cap it all, the prime minister was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the President of the Awami League, a great charismatic leader, the symbol of Bengali nationalism, a formidable "*Bangabandhu*" (Friend of Bengal). Many observers felt that real power would remain concentrated in the hands of the political elite for a long time to come in Bangladesh.

The Awami League. despite its political approach and the use of party channels of control and direction, failed to handle the problems of increasing economic crisis, social and political instability, and deteriorating security and order in the country. As its failure became manifest, the regime began to turn to the bureaucrats. The bureaucrats who seemed to have lost their position of influence and power between 1972 and 1974 came to the forefront in the early months of 1975 and emerged as the ruling elite after August.

During the first few years after independence, the Awami League regime performed fairly well. It was able to avert a major economic crisis, mainly with the help of massive relief operations carried out by the United Nations Relief Operations in Bangladesh and other international agencies. Compared to the anarchic conditions of 1971 and early 1972, the law and order situation improved considerably. Indian troops were withdrawn by March 1972. The constitution was passed by the Constituent Assembly within nine months of independence, and general election were held after only six months, according to the provisions of the new constitution. The Planning Commission brought out the First Five Year Plan within a year and a half. In all these matters the legend and charisma of Sheikh Mujib played a vital role (Ahamed 1980: 149).

From January 1974, however, the economic situation in the country became critical. This was due partly to global inflation in 1972, and partly to the inefficiency and corruption of the leaders of the ruling party. Though 86 per cent of industries and 87 per cent of foreign trade were nationalized, distribution was conducted by private traders who were issued permits and licenses. A substantial number of these permits and licenses were issued to Awami League workers, who, in turn, sold them to traders, and consequently became the owners of large sums of "unearned income". Most of the administrators of the nationalized industries were recruited from amongst party leaders and workers who had very little knowledge of management or administration. Production, as a result, declined to an unusually low level. While production declined, the smuggling of jute and food grains to India reached alarming proportions, thus draining agricultural products out of the country. In the process, the economy was virtually in a state of collapse, and the situation was aggravated by the worst floods in Bangladesh history in July and August 1974. During the floods the price of consumer goods rose rapidly, and by September 1974 the rise was about 600 per cent over the 1969-70 price level. Sheikh Mujib declared that there was a "near famine condition" in the country (Ahamed 1980: 151-52).

The economic crisis in Bangladesh was compounded by political problems. Class conflicts, which had for so long been subjugated by the demand for regional autonomy, emerged as the crucial problem. The real threat to political and social stability in Bangladesh during the Awami League regime came from the radical forces. They attempted to bring about a "second revolution" through armed struggle. There were several radical revolutionary parties in Bangladesh. Most of these had been working as underground organizations during the Ayub era (1958-1969). Some surfaced after independence.

They argued that the Bangladesh Revolution of 1971 was an "unfinished one". When the War of Independence was being transformed into a truly people's liberation war and the radical forces were coming to the forefront, the "land-based bourgeois government of India" in league with the "Soviet Social Imperialist Power" interfered, and the Awami League leadership, which represented the exploiting classes in Bangladesh, came to power. Their strategy was to replace the puppet regime by force (Maniruzzaman 1976).

The revolutionary parties trained armed cadres to overthrow the Awami League regime through guerrilla warfare, and started sabotaging communication links and killing Awami League leaders and other " enemies" of the revolution. The exact number of secret political killings during that period is not known. One government estimate put the figure at over 6000, including four Awami League MPs. Along with secret killings, there was a sharp rise in armed robberies from private houses, looting of banks and shops and attacks on police stations (Ahamed 1980.157).

The regime's initial response to the increasing violence consisted of threats, appeals and normal police action. In its attempts to combat radical political parties the Awami League relied mainly on party channels of control and direction, but this had limited success because the Awami League itself was plagued by factional strife. Soon after independence, the Awami League's student and labor fronts were divided over the question of whether to introduce "pure socialism" or a mixed economy. Senior leaders also became involved in the controversy, and the effectiveness of the party suffered greatly.

The factional strife was exacerbated first by Mujib's political approach to economic management, which ied to the speedy growth of a new class of rich compradors, who were divorced from the forces of production. Further, Mujib's

pragmatic approach to socialistic principles practically immobilized the party. To overcome this ineffectiveness, the Awami League formed an alliance with such less-radical parties as the National Awami Party (M) and the Pro-Soviet Bangladesh Communist Party. This alliance too proved ineffective, and Bangladesh slowly but steadily turned into a praetorian polity (Nordlinger 1977:7-8, 75-76).

The revolutionary forces could have been confronted by ideological clarity at the poitical level and by governmental performance at the societal level. The Awami League regime, however, failed on both counts. The political ideology of *Mujibism*.[1] which was initiated to counteract the radical forces, was not intellectually refreshing; its performance, especially after the famine of 1974, fell below expectations. For survival, the regime had to resort to repressive measures. That, however, proved counterproductive. As a last resort, the government declared a state of emergency on 28 December 1974 and suspended the fundamental rights granted by the constitution for an indefinite period. The emergency provided for special powers of arrest, curtailed the powers of the judiciary, and muzzled the press. In January 1975, on the initiative of Sheikh Mujib and reportedly against the wishes of most of the members of the *Jatiya Sangsad*, the constitution was amended to provide for a presidential form of government. Sheikh Mujib was subsequently vested with executive powers and authorized to declare Bangladesh a one-party state. Later Sheikh Mujib closed all but four newspapers, two English language and two Bengali. He also founded the national party, the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL). patterned on Nyerere's *Ujama* (African Socialism).

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[1] Formulated by Sheikh Mujib's nephew, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, Mujibism implied a variant of socialism with anti-imperialist but democratic overtones.

In fact, this final act not only considerably reduced the support base of Mujib in Bangladesh but removed much of the legitimacy of his rule. The banning of the communal parties such as the Muslim League, Nizam-i-Islam and Jamat-i-Islam for their negative and anti-people role during the War of Independence alienated the rightist elements. The liberals favoured a Western-style parliamentary democracy. They were alienated when the Awami League regime adopted socialistic principles. When in the face of an acute economic crisis Mujib adopted a pragmatic approach, which considerably watered down his brand of socialism, the radical forces became antagonized. Even the young radicals of his own party left and formed a new party. The formation of BAKSAL was resented by both the liberals and radicals.

The precipitating factor for military intervention was, as suggested by several scholars, the personal grievances of the coup leaders, some of whom were dismissed by Mujib for performing duties ordered by him. The pre-dawn coup, which was staged on 15 August 1975 and eliminated most members of Mujib's family, except his two daughters, was masterminded by three majors who had developed bitter personal enmity against him. They captured power and declared on national radio "the end of an era of tyranny" (Ahamed 1990).

The Emergence of Military as the Ruling Elite

In a post-colonial state like Bangladesh the military tends to be dominant not only because these states have inherited an overdeveloped bureaucratic structure and its institutionalized practices, but also because of the nature of its institutional framework (Ahamed 1988:49-50). Organization provides the armed forces with discipline and cohesion, hierarchy and centralized command; the institutional structure gives them power. It is no wonder therefore that the military became a dominant force in Bangladesh.

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The armed forces of Bangladesh were not a well-knit establishment in the beginning, however, and could not emerge as a decisive factor in Bangladesh politics during the early years. This was due partly to the socio-political environment after independence and partly to internal schism and cleavages among the officer corps, which were effects of the bloody Independence War that continued from March to December 1971. The bureaucratic elite, both civil and military, was not held in high esteem in the society because of its association with military rule in Pakistan during the previous twelve years. Bureaucracy was in fact a much hated word in the political lexicon of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujib often became livid with arger when he denounced bureaucracy. Moulana Bhasani, another prominent Bengali leader, did not complete a public speech without making a stinging attack on the bureaucracy.

Yet a large number of civil servants and military officers played a key role in the political struggle in the 1960s and in the Independence War. Many of them were aligned with the Awami League and personally remained on good terms with Sheikh Mujib during the Ayub era. Some of them supplied secret information to the Awami League leadership and provided data which helped Mujib to sharpen his case for regional autonomy. The Agartala Case,[2] which was believed to have been staged in 1968 mainly to defame Mujib, implicated a number of civil servants and military officers.

Civil servants and military officers willingly lent their full support to Mujib's call for civil disobedience and non-co-operation, which paralyzed the entire administration in East

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2   The Agartala Conspiracy Case, in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was charged along with thirty-four other Bengali politicians, civil servants and military officers with conspiring to bring about East Pakistan's secession in collusion with India, was initiated by the Pakistan Home Ministry on 6 January 1968.

Pakistan in March 1971. When the Pakistan army launched its brutal attack on the night of 25 March, the Bengali military officers took responsibility for training the *Mukti Bahini* (Freedom Fighters) at various training centres both within and outside Bangladesh, and they themselves fought against the Pakistan army.

Despite this political role, the military could not consolidate its position after independence and did not emerge as a cohesive force for several reasons. In the first place, the size of the armed forces was quite small. In 1975 there were about 36,000 men in the defence services in Bangladesh, of whom 30,000 were in the army, 500 in the navy and 5,500 in the air force. In addition, there were 30,000 men in the Bangladesh Rifles and 16,000 in the *Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini* (National Security Force), which were paramilitary forces. Of those 36,000 men, about 28,000 (including 1000 officers) were "repatriates" from West Pakistan; the remainder belonged to the former East Bengal Regiment and the new group recruited from amongst the *Mukti Bahini*. Though the number of officers was above 1200 in 1975, the number of officers above the rank of major was not more than 250 (Ahamed 1980: 141).

While the size of the armed forces was small, the level of internal rivalry and cleavage was high. Conflicts between the Bangladesh Rifles and regular defence forces (former East Bengal Regiment) had continued since independence, and it assumed alarming proportions in 1972. Even the regular forces became involved in internecine conflicts. Some of the repatriate officers were either unceremoniously retired, or were placed under officers who were junior to them in the Pakistan defence forces but had been promoted for participating in the Independence War. The officers who took part in the Independence War were offered two years' seniority and treated preferentially. This differential treatment caused animosity among the freedom fighters and repatriates.

The repatriates regarded most of the freedom fighters as basically secularists, socialists and pro-Indian, while the freedom fighters stereotyped the repatriates as opportunitists and pro-Pakistanis. To the repatriates the War of Independence was fought with Indian resources and the victory was served by Indians to the Bengalis on a silver platter; to the freedom fighters, the repatriates basked in the Pakistani sun while the whole Bengali nation was locked in a life and death struggle. The freedom fighters, on the other hand, complained that repatriates were greedy enough to enjoy the fruits of independence without suffering for, and contributing to, it (Ahamed 1988: 52-56).

The numerical superiority of the repatriates also made the freedom fighters feel insecure. The repatriates complained that they were not given full pay for the twenty-month period that they had to remain in the Pakistan concentration camps before being repatriated to Bangladesh in September 1973. This feeling of being discriminated against on the part of the repatriates, and consequent acrimony between the two groups, badly affected the morale of the military officers, accelerated the process of polarization, and strained the command structure of the defense services. The armed forces in Bangladesh were also divided at the initial stage in terms of ideology. The repatriates retained much of the conservative outlook that characterized the armed forces in Pakistan, while the bulk of the freedom fighters were highly politicized and somewhat radical in their views. The two groups also held distinct views with regard to the institutional framework the armed forces should take in the future. One group favored the retention of the conventional army on the pattern of British India or the Pakistan armed forces. The other group advocated that the armed forces be transformed into a kind of productive army on the pattern of the Chinese People's Army. A few officers, advocating this view, joined the underground

wing of a political party, the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and organized cells of the Biplobi Shainik Sangstha (the Revolutionary Soldiers Association) on the model of the Soviet of Soldiers which developed in the Tsarist army before the Communist Revolution in 1917. The two best-known advocates of the concept of productive army were the two valiant freedom fighters, Colonel Abu Taher and colonel Ziauddin. These factors suggest that the armed forces in Bangladesh could not emerge as a decisive factor in politics at the beginning because of internal rivalry, ideological conflicts and intra-group feuds (Lifschulz 1979:85-88).

While the armed forces could not take advantage of their organizational strength, they could clearly perceive that their corporate interests were not safe in the hands of Awami League regime. The military elite resented the fact that the government did not take quick and effective measures for the reconstruction of the training institutes and cantonments destroyed during the Independence War. Consequently the defence services remained poorly equipped. Expenditure on defence services was not only minimal but was gradually reduced. In the 1973-74 budget, expenditure on defence was little more than 16 per cent; in 1974-75 it was reduced to 15 per cent, and in 1975-76 it was less than 13 per cent.

The establishment of a new militia, the *Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini* (National Security Force), organized under the direction of the prime minister's office and attached to the Awami League, introduced a parallel organization to the regular armed forces. The government seemed to be more interested in the development of the militia than the armed forces. It was planned that this militia would be increased annually so that by the end of 1980 its strength would be 20,000. It was also planned that one regiment of the *Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini* would be placed under the command of each district governor.

Most of the groups in the defense services in Bangladesh shared a common anti-Indian orientation. This was so for several reasons. First, most of the members of the armed forces who fought during the War of Independence strongly believed that the Indian Army just walked in when the war was nearly over at the end of 1971, thereby robbing the Bangladesh military of the glory of liberating their motherland. Second, many senior military officers believed that the government-in-exile at Mujibnagar signed a secret treaty with the Indian government, which was detrimental to the sovereignty of Bangladesh. They also believed that Sheikh Mujib became less interested in the development of the defence forces because of that treaty. Third, many senior army personnel felt that the *Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini* was planned and designed by the Indian Army for the safety of the Awami League regime. The poorly-equipped defense services were also bitter about the fact that the Indian Army took away all the sophisticated weapons left by the Pakistan Army. This anti-Indian feeling gradualy developed into an anti-Mujib feeling because of Mujib's pro-Indian foreign policy.

Despite their grievances against the Awami League regime, the defence services in Bangladesh remained practically immobilized because of the schism and cleavages that affected them during the early years. When they were asked by the prime minister to go to the aid of the civil authorities, and conducted a number of successful operations, they not only regained their sense of unity and cohesion but also came to believe that their services were indispensable. From July 1973 to July 1974 there was a number of combined military operations between the *Rakkhi Bahini* and the police, such as checking for smuggling at the border, handling "extremists", and maintaining law and order. As internal threats mounted, and were successfully managed, the military officers began to believe that only the Bangladesh Army could

save the country. Officers' growing participation in the day-to-day affairs of the state made them not only sensitive to political power but also aware of the basic weaknesses of the regime, particularly the corrupt practices of some top ranking leaders, and of their unpopularity. Thus when a pre-dawn coup was staged on 15 August 1975 by a handful of junior officers (twenty to twenty-five majors and captains) with the help of two battalions of the armored corps and 1500 soldiers, it came as no great surprise.

The August 1975 coup paved the way for the emergence of the military as the ruling elite. The Zia regime (1975-1981) helped them, albeit unwittingly, to attain a new height of maturity. The Ershad regime turned out to be a period of consolidation. The August coup may be regarded as a pacesetter in that it was closely followed by a series of counter coups or coup attempts. The seeds of all those were sown in the August putsch.

The 3 November coup was essentially a pre-emptive bid to prevent the radical forces from taking over control of the armed forces. It, however, failed to take roots. Khaled Mosharraf and the other ringleaders were overwhelmed by the 7 November Soldiers' Uprising, which in effect catapulted Major General Ziaur Rahman to political power.

General Zia, having assumed power by default rather than by design, was confronted by serious problems from his own constituency: the highly politicized army. Though before the 7 November uprising Zia was the recognized leader of the freedom fighters and as such was highly respected and loved by his comrades -in-arms, he had something of a falling out with them after the death of Colonel Taher (who was arrested, subjected to a prison trial and hanged on Zia's orders), because Taher was mainly instrumental in organizing what happened on 7 November. Then Zia turned to the repatriates and managed to strike a balance between the freedom fighters and repatriate officers of the defence services.

As a soldier, Zia's loyalty to, and reliance on, the military was deep. Unlike his predecessor, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who kept political elements separate from the military, Zia pursued a policy of welding these together and tried to incorporate military personnel into different sectors of national life. The salary of both the *jawans* (privates) and officers was enhanced. The system of rent payment for accommodation was modified to their benefit; and Zia created openings for the assignment of retired military officers to lucrative jobs in other sectors.

On 1 March 1979, 25 of the 625 officers in the senior policy pool, responsible for policy-making in the secretariate, were military officers. Of 101 chairmen or managing directors of public corporations in June 1980, 42 were military officers or retired serviceman. In January 1981, 22 of the 40 district superintendents and additional superintendents of police were army officers. Moreover, 500 retired military officers were employed in industry, indenting business, foreign trade, and supply and contracts under the patronage of the government. Quite a few military officers were allotted residential plots in the developed areas of the city, and were even granted liberal loans for building houses by the House Building Finance Corporaton. With all of these actions, Zia's critics argued, he was consciously following the Indonesian model of partnership between the military and civilian sectors : civilians being the junior partners (Ahamed 1988 : 124-25).

General Zia laid the foundations of a number of civilian institutions such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and *Gram Sarker* (Village government). He also initiated a number of participatory programs such as canal digging and eradicating illiteracy through literacy squads which were established in early 1979. He introduced a multi-party system in the country, and before the presidential elections in June

1978, when he was elected president of the country, Zia resigned from the post of the chief of army staff. During his time, general elections were held in February 1979 to form the Jatiya Sangsad. A process of civilianization was launched by President Zia in late 1977. One can, however, argue that the civilianization process culminated in the primacy of the military. One of the reasons why Zia was killed in the abortive coup of 30 May 1981, some scholars have argued, was his "over-democratizing" of the political system. The measures taken by Zia not only raised the expectations of the military, but gave them a stake in the polity. The military thus emerged in the 1980s as a powerful socio-economic group, much more confident than any other sector in Bangldesh.

This political consciousness of the military began to take shape at two levels during the Ershad regime. Deeply entrenched at the centre of power, they could not afford to be indifferent to the forces, shaping politics -economic decisions at the highest level, and thus became positively involved in a process which was expressly political. Second, from the early 1980s they began demanding a constitutionally- incorporated active role in the governance of the country (*New York Times* 14 November 1981) .

The military, if it had wanted, could have seized political power in the wake of the Chittagong coup of 30 May; however it refrained from doing so for good reasons. The senseless and dastardly assassination of Zia by a section of the armed forces not only endeared Zia to the nation but also created a kind of abhorrence towards men-in-uniform. The repatriate generals under the leadership of General H. M. Ershad weighed this carefully, and by way of buying time lent support to the constitutional change of government. The generals also knew that the viability of the successor government during a period of uncertainly could be ensured largely through their

support. Thus they extended liberal support to the Sattar government, ensuring continued military domination over the policy-making structure.

Justice Abdus Sattar, the 75-year old successor to Zia, in his campaign speeches for the November 1981 presidential elections, emphasized among other things, his close association with the late president and as such his enjoyment of the trust and respect of the country's armed forces (Ahamed 1988 :132). The military elite thus threw their weight behind Justice Sattar's candidature. Zia's policy of fusing the upper echelons of the bureaucracy and the military into the bedrock of a stable political system was endorsed by the military. Moreover, the structural weaknesses of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), an outcome of Zia's "open arms policy" of welcoming divergent political elements ranging from the progressive left to the fundamentalist right, were also perceived by the military as advantageous to their corporate interests. The BNP, which had been held together mainly by Zia's charismatic personality and political power, was likely to yield wider scope for bargaining to the military after the death of its leader.

Though the corporate interests of the military remained the crucial factor, internal dissension and factional cleavages within the ruling party provided the sought-after occasion for the generals. The BNP was developed rapidly by its leader. General Zia, mainly with a view to extending his power base beyond the cantonments. While he was alive, factional cleavages did not surface. His sad demise, however, seemed to have lifted the lid, leading to a sudden outburst of conflicting views and interests, and the proliferation of antagonism and dissidence within the BNP. Thus, within a year of Zia's death, the Bangladesh polity verged on the brink of praetorianism (Perlmutter 1977 : 104-107). It was anybody's guess whether the military, which emerged as a well-knit and self-confident

force after the Chittagong incident, would assume political power at an opportune moment. The generals did not have to wait long; only four months after the landslide victory of Justice Sattar in the presidential elections of 1981, Bangladesh experienced a bloodless coup. The military, under General H.M. Ershad, wielded political power from then until 6 December 1990, when a violent popular uprising forced Ershad to resign.

Politicization of the Armed Forces

A high level of politicization of the armed forces is evident in Bangladesh. The 15 August 1975 coup, by a handful of junior officers with the help of two battalions of armoured corps, was the first indication of the armed forces' overt intention to play a political role. It was followed by a series of coups and counter coups until 30 May 1981 when General Zia was brutally killed by a group of about twenty mid-level officers at Chittagong in another abortive coup. Bangladesh was placed under martial law for the second time under Lieutenant General H. M. Ershad from March 1982 to November 1986. The military dominated civilian regime remained in power until December 1990.

The military ruled Bangladesh for more than nine of the twenty years of its independent existence; another four years were under the shadow of martial law, with men-in-uniform in the background. What is more significant is that the military not only assumed a political role, but claimed that they had a right to do so. Before the assumption of power in March 1982, Major General Ershad demanded that the military be accorded a constitutional role to ensure the protection of the political system (Ershad 1981 : 12: *New York Time* 14 November 1981).

The process of politicization of the armed forces in the post-colonial state of Bangladesh is linked with the organizational framework of the military in British India

and the orientation of its officer corps. In Western countries the concept of the military as a more or less politically neutral body has emerged mainly because democratic institutions have evolved over a longer period of time with little involvement of the military. Moreover, as an apparatus of the state, military organizations were designed mainly to handle external defence. The British Indian Army, which was the predecessor of the armed forces of all the South Asian states, was by contrast trained from its very inception to be "the custodian of law and order" with a view to promoting imperial interests. It was thus essentially in opposition to the national interest and demands, and its organization was always subject to political considerations. The roots of politicization of the armed forces can therefore be traced to this peculiar conception of its role.

For the supreme purpose of securing and perpetuating colonial interests in India, the British army's policy had been to capitalize on existing religious antogonisms between the minorities through a policy of "divide and rule". The British Indian military's deployment strategy was based on the dictum : "Keep your Sikh regiments in the Punjab, and they will be ready to act against the Hindoos; keep your Hindoos out of the Punjab and they will be ready to act against the Sikhs" (Philip 1962 : 508).

With the nationalist movement gaining ground increasingly in India from the latter part of the 19th century, an intense effort was made by the colonial government to indoctrinate Indian troops in general and the officer corps in particular with an anti-political and anti-democratic orientation. They were taught that politicians were on more than "rabble rousers' and "disruptionists". and that their activities merely undermined the social order and systemic solidarity. Thus the British Indian military officers in the course of time were not only thoroughly anglicized but also rendered anti-national. anti-political and anti-democratic.

Analysing this aspect of the British Indian military, many scholars came to believe that among military officers assimilation displayed itself not merely in "the exquisitely tailored lounge suits of officers in mufti, in a penchant for under -statement, for beautiful silver, and for cavalry moustaches", but also in their belief that politicians were no more than "scallywags" (Rudolph and Rudolph 1964).

After independence, the organization of the armed forces in India, and their systems of training and recruitment, underwent profound changes; but the armed forces in Pakistan continued to be organized and trained on basically the same lines as in British India (Khan 1963 : 220-235). A general headquarters (GHQ) was set up as the central agency responsible for the administrative affairs of the various defence services. Training institutions such as the Pakistan Military Academy or Air Force Academy were established on the same lines as at Sandhurst in Britain and Dehradun in India. The new military leaders continued to be recruited from the same bases. The armed services personnel continued to remain in the cantonments, which were physically and culturally distanced from the civilian sectors, having a sense of being a part and yet apart from the society in which they lived (Alavi 1966). This duality in attitudes of the soldiers towards their society and their professional expertise created an ambivalence in their attitude towards the political institutions in Pakistan. The root causes of the martial law clamp-down in Pakistan in 1958 can be traced to the dynamics which were generated in the Pakistan Army because of training, organization and the orientation of its officer corps.

After the conclusion of the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with the US in 1954, the Pakistan Army acquired sophisticated American military technology. Acquisition of new technology enhanced not only the Pakistan military's

striking power but also its bargaining strength. Soon after, it began to penetrate the civilian government of Pakistan. Thus, ultimately by staging a coup and assuming dictatorial power in 1958, General Ayub Khan established the supremacy of the men-in-uniform in Pakistan.

Most of the Bengali Military officers, who played crucial roles in seizing political power in Bangladesh in the 1970s, were recruited during this period and were trained and socialized under the shadow of Ayub Khan's martial law regime. The proclamation of martial law in 1958 had far-reaching effects on the Bengali military officers in many ways. Officers became conscious of the role the military could play in the political system. They also became sensitive to political power. They became conscious of the regional imbalance in the armed forces too, and they began to realize that the Bengali officers in the Pakistan Army were not accorded equal treatment. Bengali officers also felt that a policy of discrimination was practised against them in matters of pay, promotion and other perquisites. These discriminatory policies made the Bengali officers not only resentful, but also vociferous in their complaints against the West Pakistani ruling elite. In the 1960's their complaints became louder when by default Bengali bureaucrats, both civil and military, became the chief spokesmen for Bengali interests in the absence of free political processes. This role politicized them further. The Agartala conspiracy case bears ample testimony (Ahmed 1991 : 91-11).

The most important factor in the intense politicization of the Bangladesh armed forces was the War of Independence in 1971. The fact that a large number of officers and *jawans*, throwing aside their professional norms and indignantly breaking the canons of military discipline and chain of command, rose against the establishment and joined the war, was itself a revolutionary step. Under normal circumstances,

all of them would have been court-martialed, but after independence they became war heroes and were greeted with warm-hearted glee and pride by the nation. Moreover, the new strategy of guerrilla warfare, devised in a conference of sector commanders at Teliapara in July 1971, had the double effect of further politicizing the armed forces and radicalizing them to a great extent (Ahamed 1988 : 43 -45).

In sum, the Bangladesh Army, which was the lineal descendant of the British Indian and Pakistan Army, inherited not only the institutional framework of its predecessores but also their orientation against civilian rule and their sensitivity to political power. The War of Independence removed the distance between the civilians and armed forces personnel, and made them aware of the nature of weak political leadership and fragile political institutions.

Popular Attitudes to Democracy

Though the armed forces in Bangladesh have been highly politicized, the people of South Asia have been deeply committed to democratic order. During the British rule in India, Bengalis were in the forefront of democratic movements in the 1920s and 1930s. The All-India National Congress and the Muslim League, which had been mainly responsible for the partition of India and Pakistan, were led by Bengali political leaders in the formative phases. The freedom movement in British India, in a sense, was a movement for a democratic polity and was deeply rooted in the democratic ethos.

The Lahore Resolution of 1940 appealed to the people of East Bengal mainly because of its democratic overtones : it espoused the principle of national self-determination; it also laid stress on internal autonomy. Pakistan came into being in 1947 on the basis of the Lahore Resolution. The continuance and full flowering of parliamentary democracy became the pet demands of the East Pakistanis after that, and most of their movements were firmly grounded in democratic

ideals. Seven of the historic twenty-one points of the United Front, a grand coalition of the opposition political parties in East Pakistan organized with a view to focusing their demands and fighting the ruling Muslim League in the 1954 provincial elections, were closely related to the proper functioning of the parliamentary system in East Pakistan (Jahan 1972 : 45 – 47).

The famous Six-Point Program, which ultimately led to a full-fledged nationalist movement among Bengalis in the late 1960s, began with a call for the establishment of a federation in Pakistan on the basis of the Lahore Resolution. It also demanded a parliamentary form of government with the supremacy of the national assembly , directly elected by the people on the basis of universal adult suffrage (Ahamed 1989 : 32–43). The main motivating force for Bengali involvement in the War of Independence in 1971 was their desire for a democratic system, a desire blatantly denied by the Pakistani ruling elite during the post-election years.

But while the people of Bangladesh are committed to a democratic order, the political parties, which are the positive instruments for a working democratic system, are not yet properly prepared for the job. Though Bangladesh has scores of political parties, only a handful of these are institutionalized, well-knit and organized at the grassroots level, and having definite policies and programs of action. This is due partly to political history and tradition and partly to the socio-economic structure of the country.

In South Asia political parties have never been decisive instruments for framing public policy or for projecting alternatives. Except for short interludes, moreover, political parties have had few opportunities for functioning openly since competitive politics has been restricted. During the colonial period political structures were merely embryonic, and their operations were mostly extra-legal. Even after independence in 1947 the ruling elite continued to maintain

many of the restrictions which had been imposed on the free flow of political activities during the colonial period. During military rule, political parties and party activities were usually the first casualties.

Democracy is essentially a system of alternative programs and policies propagated by political parties. When a particular set of programs and policies fails to command the support of the people alternative programs and policies are tried. Elections are formal procedures to choose programs and policies at a particular point in time. Bangladesh has, however, inherited a political tradition where mass movement and elections are entwined. During the last four decades there were a number of political movements, which crystallized certain issues and mobilized political forces. Elections were then held , not to choose between the alternative programs and policies, but merely to pick the winning political forces.

Though a vast majority of voters participated in these elections, they took sides not merely as party supporters but also as supporters of the crucial political movements; some of these took the form of national movements. These elections, strictly speaking, became plebiscites. The election of 1946 on the Pakistan issue, the 1954 elections on the autonomy questions, the elctions of 1970 on the basis of the Six-Point Program, and those of 1991 under the caretaker government were meant to serve these functions; they were more legitimizing plebiscites than elections. Each was unique, and had distinct appeals to the voters.

Not only is the political history and tradition not congenial to the growth of a stable party system in Bangladesh, but neither are the socio-economic conditions. The endemic poverty of the people, intense factionalism among the various social groups and classes, and a network of patron-client relationships reaching from the grassroots to the central politico-bureaucratic elites at the national level, have resulted not only in organizational weakness and a very low level of institutionalization in the polity, but also in institutional fragmentation.

Under such circumstances no political party can serve as the effective allocator of values or platforms for conflict resolution or a meaningful focus of civic loyalty. Political loyalty has been directed to persons, to the loci of patronage. Since political loyalty has been channelled towards patrons or centres of patronage, persons who can seize the principal patron roles and sustain the flow of material benefits to the clients are likely to receive the conditional allegiance and support of the client network. That explains why some of the opposition leaders change their position overnight and become staunch supporters even of a regime dominated by the military. A political party cannot retain the support of a substantial portion of the voters and remain underdeveloped.

Prospects for Democracy and the Role of the Military

Analysing all these factors, some scholars at home and abroad have suggested that the Bangladesh polity might well be on the road to persistent praetorianism with an occasional civilian-military facade (Baxter and Rahman 1991 : 59). The popular uprising of 1990, with the direct participation of most of the political parties in Bangladesh, and subsequent events, however, give grounds for optimism. Though Bangladesh has yet to build a political system based on consensus and compromise, it has come a long distance in that direction.

The political parties, despite their stunted growth and lack of institutionalization, have now arrived at a consensus on the nature of the political system in the country. Nothing short of a representative parliament is acceptable, The government must be accountable to the parliament. The press must be free. The consensus has been evident in the rejection of seven-party and five-party alliances to participate in either of the *Sangsad* elections under Ershad and also in the eight-party alliance's refusal to take part in the 1988 Sangsad election.[3]

These demand, having been repeatedly voiced from different party platforms during the last decade, became the

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[3]   Most of the political parties which were opposed to General Ershad's usurpation of political power and his autocratic rule formed two alliances in 1983: a fifteen-party alliance centred on the Awami League. and a seven-party alliance centred on the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). On the issue of participation in the 1986 general election the fifteen-party alliance broke up. forming an eight-party allinaces centred on the Awami League. and a left-leaning five-party alliance. These three alliances played a crucial role in ousting General Ershad from power December 1990.

core of the consensual agreement reached by the three political alliances on 19 November 1990. These alliances, working as the motivational force behind the popular uprising, were instrumental in bringing it to its logical conclusion on 6 December 1990. In a society characterized by endemic violence and intense factionalism, thanks to the willing co-operation of all the political parties, the general election of February 1991 turned out to be absolutely free, fair, neutral and peaceful. *The twelfth Amendment Act,* reintroducing the parliamentary system of goverment, was enacted in an environment of unprecedented cordiality among the political parties on 6 August 1991. The parliamentary committees of the fifth *Sangsad*, designed to institutionalize parliamentary control over the different ministries, have started functioning.

The orientation of the armed forces in Bangladesh also seems to have under-gone some changes. They treated the movement against Ershad from October to December 1990 as a political problem and wanted it to be solved politically, General Ershad's insinuation of a more active role for them notwithstanding. Most coups are internally generatd by local cleavages and power conflicts, but external encouragement or discouragement can be crucial to their success or failure. In Bangladesh, American assistance has been of crucial importance to the success of the post-Mujib regimes, and the 15 August 1975 coup was a turning point in the warming of Bangladesh -US relations. The triumph of democratic order globally, and especially in South Asia, may help further deepen the changing orientation of the armed forces in Bangladesh.

An alternation of military and military-dominated civilian regimes in Bangladesh thus may not be the only prospect. A democratic order is more likely to strike its roots deep into the political soil of Bangladesh if the political parties can maintain the emerging consensus and politics of compromise.

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How Bangladesh is Facing the Challenges?

Introduction

At this point of time in history we are living "in a world of deep poverty amidst plenty." In this affluent world where many a one does not know what to do with his riches, a substantial number of people are undergoing pangs of poverty almost everyday. Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion, almost half, live on less than $2 a day, and 1.2 billion - a fifth - live on less than $1 a day. Much like *The Ancient Mariner* of S. T. Coleridge, a substantial number of people in the world seem to exclaim in fear: "Water , water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink." The largest number of poor people are concentrated in South Asia. After China and India, Bangladesh has the largest number of them. The challenge of poverty reduction has thus been enormous for Bangladesh.

Birth of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, though an old society, is one of the new states, born only thirty years ago, back in 1971, through the heroic War of Liberation. The gory details of the war, the terrible ordeal that the entire nation had to pass through and the sufferings and sacrifices the people had to undergo are too well known to be recounted here. The spirit and ideals that inspired and motivated the people during the historic War of Liberation have always been the motive force to Bangladesh's march forward.

A thirty-year period is neither long nor spacious for the realization of full potential of a nation; for Bangladesh, however, it has been crucial not only for its vibrant present but also for its bright future. Bangladesh is much stronger today than it was in the 70s. In terms of population, it has become the eighth largest country in the world. In this era of globalization, its market of 130 million people is taking more and more attractive hue. Its newly found gas reserve has made it an object of warm wooing by many. Its strategic location,

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standing as it does, between South Asia and South-East and East Asia, in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean, the probable theater of big power confrontation in the days to come, is also quite significant. If the international relations are re-drawn along the axes of national interest and if the webs of diplomacy are creatively woven, Bangladesh may turn out to be one of the key actors in the region, both in political and economic spheres. At the moment Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, although its efforts to face the challenges squarely are obvious. Bangladesh has yet to build a political system based on consensus and compromise, but it has covered a long distance in that direction, and to that extent its capacity has increased manifold.

It has been obvious now that Bangladesh has an innate orientation to democratic order. Bangladesh started its political journey with the Westminster type parliamentary democracy since 1972, but it could not sustain it for long. Slowly but steadily it degenerated into an authoritarian system and became locked up in a one-party BAKSAL-ite (Bangladesh Krishak-Sramik Awami League- BAKSAL) monolith. It was followed by a period of uncertainty. A series of coup and counter-coup by "men on horse-back" rocked the polity. Bangladesh had to experience martial law for quite some time till the major political parties of the country fought unitedly for the restoration of democracy and won in the late 90s. The Parliamentary system of government was finally re-introduced in 1991. The political parties, despite their lack of institutionalization, have arrived visibly by now at a consensus on the nature of political system in the country. Nothing short of representative Parliament is acceptable. The government must be accountable to the Parliament. The judicial branch must be independent as the bulwark of basic human rights. The press must be free. The quality of life of the people must be improved, and for that poverty reduction has become the acclaimed goal of the government. Development of human resources has become the top priority.

The exploitative and wasteful system of economy, the so-called socialism, introduced in the early 70s, made room for a humane and Production-oriented system with the interplay of market forces and dynamic private intrepreneurship. Through structural adjustments, effected of late by adroit handling, it has been linked with the global economy, and in consequence, Bangladesh has been an abode of adequate investment, both from home and abroad. Bangladesh economy has gone past the era of stagnation.

Bangladesh has a Past

Though Bangladesh now is one of the poorest countries, its past performances were not that bad. The traditional image of an average Bengali has always been of a poetic, polite and propertied person. Writing in 1877, Lord Macaulay, who is well known for his hatred to the Indians, stated : "Of the provinces which had been subject to the House of Tamerlane, the wealthiest was Bengal. No part of India Possessed such natural advantages, both for agriculture and for commerce................ Distant provinces were nourished from the overflowing of its granaries, and the noble ladies of London and Paris were clothed in the delicate produce of its looms (Macaulay 1880 : 517).

After the conspiratorial victory in the battle of Plassey, when the British got their foothold in the north-eastern part of India, the process of draining Bengal's wealth began and continued at an accelerated pace till the end of the British rule in India. Lord Macaulay tells us what happened after the battle of Plassey. In his own words "the shower of wealth now fell on the company and its servants. A sum of eight hundred thousand sterling, in coined silver, was sent down the river from Murshidabad to Fort William (later Calcutta). The fleet which conveyed this treasure consisted of more than a hundred boats .... The treasury of Bengal was thrown open to Clive who walked between heaps of gold and silver crowned with rubies and diamonds and was at liberty to help himself (Macaulay 1977 : 527). During the long colonial

period, the people of Bengal were in fact reduced to a position of perpetual dependence and underdevelopment. Much of the poverty, illiteracy, squalor, even of corruption and fanaticism, which characterize South Asia to-day, is but a living testimony of the corrupt man-management system of the 200-year long debased colonial period.

Bangladesh has made great strides in imporving the quality of life of its people since independence; yet it has remained one of the poorest countries in the world. Its progress over the past three decades is proof of a great potential, but it is yet to be realized. Life expectancy (61 years since 1999) and literacy in the country (more than 56 per cent now) have improved and poverty is declining (less than 35 percent now living below poverty line). Reducing the population growth rate (now less than 1.5 per cent) and infant mortality (now 60 deaths out of 100 live births), and attaining gender parities in school enrollment are notable achievements of recent years. The country's non-government organizations (NGOs) are among the most active, and successive governments have developed effective partnerships with them to improve such services to the people as micro-credit, non-formal education and assistance with social mobilization.

Development of Human Resources – Education

It is gratifying to note that Bangladesh has made significant progress in expanding coverage and access to basic education. For the first time in its history more than 98 per cent of the children have started going to school. Gender parity in Primary enrollment is almost a reality now. Moreover, it has succeeded in establishing an extensive network of non-formal education centres for adult education. Bangladesh has done better than other South Asian nations in enrolling students from poor families.

There are problems, however. The quality of education at all levels, in terms of students outputs, is poor. About 40 per cent of those who start school do not complete primary schooling. Over 50 per cent of those who start secondary school get withered away. This is mainly due to the quality of instructions, poor learning enviromnent and families' need for children to work. There is indeed a worrying lag between the reform of economic structure and that of the education system in the country. In consequence, despite being labour abundant, Bangladesh finds itself mired in scarcity of skills needed in the productive and service sectors. The national policy makers have to concentrate more and more in these areas.

It is however true that Bangladesh has done much to reduce the vulnerability of the poor. It has developed the largest system of targeted food transfer system in the world, which is generally considered well run despite leakage and political bungling. Though Bangladesh has always been a disaster-prone country, the people have developed considerable capacity and resilience to handle such natural disasters as floods, cyclones, droughts. The facing of 1998 floods by public and private organizations, unprecedented as they were, submerging more than three-fourths of the country and remaining stagnant for about two months, is an instance. The critical problem of arsenic contamination disaster has also been confronted with courage and determination by the people.

Development in Health Sector

During the last decade Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in the health sector by reducing fertility reduction, child survival, communicable disease control and in development community nutrition interventions. During the 1990s life expectancy increased by 5 years. Bangladesh has eradicated polio and eliminated leprosy as public health hazards. The nutritional status of children has improved. The annual population growth has declined from 3.5 per cent in the mid-1970s to less than 1.5 per cent to-day Fertility has declined from 6.5 live births to 3.3 in the same period.

Despite this encouraging record, the health sector still faces a number of challenges. The present fertility rate of 3.3 children per women is too high for one of the most densely populated countries like Bangladesh and quite threatening. The existing population of 140 million in a land of only 147,570 sq. km may double before it stabilizes. Moreover, new public health hazard such as HIV/ AIDS, which has not yet been problematic in the country, and arsenic contamination of drinking water, have to be tackled in no time. For all these additional resources are in order.

Economic Growth

During the 1990s Bangladesh has done quite well in the economic sector too. It has maintained reasonable macro-economic stability. Indeed, Bangladesh has achieved near self-sufficiency in food production. During this period Bangladesh was the 10th most rapidly growing economy out of 31 large developing countries. In 1999 Bangladesh's per capita income, adjusted for purchasing power parity, was 22nd highest among the 53 low-income countries. Per capita income growth increased from 1.5 per cent in 1980-90 to over 3.5 per cent in 1990-2000. During this period, sizable foreign direct investment flows have also been started in infrastructure, energy, and export-oriented manufacturing. From a paltry amount of investment in the 1980s, inflows of private foreign direct investment rose to nearly $400 million in the fiscal year 1997-98 and came up to $780 millon a year for the next few years. The country has also seen an emergence of forward looking entrepreneurs during this period. It may also be noted that good macro-economic management has kept inflation in the single digit.

That is not adequate, however. It has to be much greater if it is to achieve its poverty reduction objectives. The Bangladesh 2020 Study, prepared by a group of leading Bangladeshi scholars, with support from the World Bank, concluded that growth rate must be at least 7-8 per cent per

annum if it is to eliminate poverty within the next two decades. This is possble and Bangladesh has the potential to achieve this. When I say this I have it in mind that whatever have been achieved is done under severe constrants, especially under a weak financial system, limited and unreliable power supply, guided by an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy, in an invironment where law and order situation has been precarious and political motivation absolutely minimal. If these problems are handled and brought to a tolerable level, there is no reason why economic growth would not reach that height.

A World Bank Study, analyzing cross-country data for the 1990s from 65 countries, on corruption indices and economic growth, has suggested that if Bangladesh could have reduced its corruption level to that in the least corrupt countries like Canada, Sweden or Finland its per capita income would have doubled by this time. The Bangladesh 2020 Study has shown that an extra 2 to 3 per cent increase in economic growth per annum could result in the reduction of extreme poverty from the present 35 percent to about 10 percent by 2020.

Conclusion

Having said all these, I think we should, having the evidence and experiences of the last decade in view, concentrate on the following four pillars as the national poverty reduction strategies (Temple and Satter 2002 : 1).

i. The maintenance of macro-economic stability;

ii. Rapid development of human resources, including the enhancement of women's capabilities;

iii. Broadly based economic growth that enhances the economic opportunities for, and empowerment of the poor;

iv. Reduction of vulnerability of the poor to economic shocks, inequitable socio-economic systems and natural disasters.

The key to success in this area however lies in good and strong governance. The constraints which have been referred to are but the malfeasance of weak governance, in fact, its vices. The system loss in the energy sector, which is no other than theft and which costs the nation nearly $1 billion of lost industrial output, is an outcome of weak governance. The banking system's problems, stemming from a long history of default arising out of politically directed loans in public banks, and other problems raising the cost of credit for business and industry are but the vices of weak governance. The uncertain law and order situation, which discourages investment both from within and outside, is also the symptom of weak governance. In other words, sound economic policies, strong institutions and good and strong governance are what Bangladesh needs so badly and these are the key to success. Bangladesh has rejected Henry Kissinger's cruel epithet of "an international basket case"– "a bottomless basket", by its innate strength. Bangladesh has won its fateful war by liberating itself from the clutches of marauding occupation forces n 1971 when it turned out to be a people's war. Now another war, the war against poverty and underdevelopment is on in Bangladesh. The progress so far achieved indicates that Bangladesh may win it provided the political will is there, good policies are initiated and strong commitment to pursue these policies are generated at the societal level through maximum involvement of people.

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The Muslim World
and
Thought of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

Introduction

The plight of nearly 1.4 bilion Muslims in the world to-day is far from satisfactory. Though they constitute majority in as many as 57 states out of 192 states (members of the UN) and sizable minority in many others, practically one fourth of the world's population, yet they account for less than ten per cent of the world trade and a little more than sixteen per cent of the world's wealth. Though these Muslim states have had the good fortune of possessing in their territories a substantial portion of the fossil fuel i.e. petroleum and natural gas, a tangible motive force of the modern civilization, yet most of the poorer people live in these states and most of the illiterate and half-educated ones inhabit these lands, In most of the Muslim states, there is very little democracy, only a few half-baked centres of academic excellence, not many homes of broad-based enlightenment, only a handful of corners where technologcal development is nourished and practically no resort for motivated high level manpower development.

In some Muslim states tradtional monarches are dictating terms to the people. In some others, military dictators are still basking in the sunshine of absolute power. Where democratic regimes are on, these are hopelessly fumbling and swinging in between immaturity, inaction to inordinate mismanagement. Islam as a religion is however the fastest growing religion. Some demographers have predicted that within next three decades the Muslims may reach some where near two billion in number. Even in the West there are Muslims substantial in number (8 million in the US, 4 million in the UK, 4 million in Germany, 5 million in France, for instance). It is good to grow in number, but it is indeed better to grow in quality as well.

The tragic events of 11 Septempber 2001 have, above everything else, brought the Muslim world and Islamic civilization face to face with the West in the format of a zero sum exercise. The recent developments, beginning from the conquest of Afghanistan in Central Asia to the blatant occupation of Iraq by sheer military force on a false pretext and giving recognition by the great powers to forcible seizure of land by Israel, have unfolded seemingly some forms of "Cultural Crusade" aganst Islam. What is more, the new geo-strategic design has evolved in such a fashion that the West and its dominant power, the United States, have taken it as their right, to shape up the Muslim World according to Western standard of humanity. The world has thus entered into a new phase of struggle for dominance much like the old hegemonic conflict on issues of religion and civilization. The on going global concerns for a dialogue and not clash, between civilizations, concerns for co-operation and not confrontation among civilizations, especially between Islam and the West have turned out to be very significant. There are many questions we need to ask: Is it possible that Islam and the West have things they can learn from each other? How do the Muslims feel about such values the West holds so dear, as civil liberty, democratic participation and gender equality? Is there anything in Islam that retards collective living in a pluralistic society in regard to different faiths, creeds and ways of life?

I believe that Islam, which has abiding influence on the world for more than 1400 years and in which one out of every four human beings finds meaning of life, has something to offer to the West. The present state of affairs, characterized more by antagonism and hostility at the worst and indiference and ambivalence at best, is due to unforgiving communication gap. That needs to be bridged. We should better think of concord through dialogue, and not of conquest or occupation through clash of civilization. But for all these the Muslims all over the world must learn something new at this point of time and unlearn a lot for being able to stand with their heads high. There lies the significance of the ennobling thoughts of great Syed Ahmad Khan and his path-breaking action in India during the later part of 19th century.

Role of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

No definitive assessment of the exact Muslim role in the Mutiny of 1857 has yet been made. All versions have however agreed on two points. Being struck by dire hostility of the Muslims to British rule in India in general and in Delhi, Oudh, Bihar and Bengal in particular, the British became determined to crush the Muslims so much so that they would not be able to rise again, in the first place. Secondly, it became obvious to the Muslim leaders in India that their political future was absolutely bleak, Defeat, humiliation and despair overtook them (Sayeed, 1968 : B). Indeed in the middle of the 19th century India wallowed in the depth of despondency after the Mutiny, and the Muslims became the worst sufferers. The political power was exterminated. Their aristocracy was totally decimated. Their economic conditions deteriorated beyond measure. All the avenues for employement under the government were closed. The landowners lost their property as a punishment for rebellion. Arts and crafts were crushed by competition of English factories and the adverse policies of the British rulers. Anyone can have a dismal picture of the Muslims of that time in Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans :* "A hundred years ago, the Musalmans monopolized all the important offices of state. The Hindus accepted with thanks such crumbs as their former conquerers dropped from the table" (1945 : 161). In fact, the Muslims, after the Mutiny, sere left high and dry and were, with practically nothing to stand on. About the Muslims in Bengal Hunter wrote : " "A hundred and seventy years ago it was almost impossible for a well-born Musalman in Bengal to become poor; at present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich." (*Ibid : 150*).

At this point of time Sir Syed Ahmad Khan appeared in India in such socio-political milieu as a savior to the Muslims, "If greatness is to be measured by the depth of the impression made on society and the extent of transformation effected in its thought and action, then without any doubt Sir Syed has the right to be reckoned among the great." (Tara Chand : 1969 : V). He realised that the kind of thought and

action the over-enthusiastic Moulvis or Mujahideen were used to, during that time, failed miserably. Their sacrifices bore neither any fruit nor could the measures they adopted resist the steady destructive forces unleashed by the foreign masters nor did their heroism and personal courage have any effect on the continuous social rot. Sir Syed thought and quite correctly that "political liberation of Islam from foreign domination must be preceded by profound regeneration of mind and thought. He believed in what he called "intellectual regeneration" as the first essential to any activity and progress of the Muslims (Aziz, 1964 : 305). Thus he initiated a two-prong attack against the walls of stagnation and degeneration pervading the Muslim society in India. He persuaded Muslims to learn English and western sciences. He began to persuade the British Government that inspite of the apparent Muslim resentment and hostility, Muslims were genuinely loyal to the government. He urged the Muslims to learn English and adopt western education not only because it was in their worldly interests to do so, but also because it was the best way of defending their religion against western attacks. His suggestion of loyalty to the British Government in India was also pragmatic in the sense that it might ensure peace and religious freedom in India and would create an environment where they could recover from the depth of defeat and despair. The Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, established in 1875 under his leadership, epitomizes what the great Syed Ahmad Khan perceived at that critical point of time and came up with a sharp response to the challenges by adapting Islamic ideas to the assumptions of nineteenth-century European empiricism. Subsequent history of British India bears eloquent testimony to the fact that he was absolutely right in his approach.

A srtong Muslim middle class, self-conscious and self-confident as it was in beliefs and morals, profound and creative as it became in thoughts and actions, began to be shaped up by this great *alma matter*. In most of the historical episodes of India during the twentieth century one can discern the foot prints of these self-confident Allumnae.

Present State of the Muslim World

Does the present sorry state of the Muslim World warrant such an intense heart-searching by some of its thinking soul? Does it demand such a dynamic leadership? Many a one in the West believes that roots of the relative decline of the Muslim world lie in its culture and religious norms. Some of them assert that Muslim societies are hopelessly retrograde, steeped in the 7th century idylls and incapable of joining the grand procession of top quality production and mass consumption of the 21st century. Nobody has however cared to link this underdevelopment with geographical, geo-political, demographic and technological dynamics, though these are in reality the basic shaping factors. In the words of Jeffrey Sachs : " Islam was both made and undone in parts by its geography. The Christian-Islamic divide is also an ecological divide, between temperate zone of Christian Europe and the encroaching aridity of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia." (Sachs 19 October 2001).

It may be noted that it was demography that worked against the Muslims. When Islam was in the ascendancy in the eighth century, the populations of the Muslim world and Christian Europe where almost equal in size, at roughly 30 million each. Of the fourteen biggest cities (with roughly 50,000 people), which were in fact the most dynamic trading centres in the world (Alexandria, Cairo, Baghdad, Mecca, for instance), 13 were in the Muslim world. Europe had only one — Rome. Over the next seven centuries demographic balance altered in favour of Europe. Population in Europe increased sharply after the first millennium, reaching 100 million by 1600 A.D. The Muslim countries, on the other hand, were hemmed in aridity and lack of resources, and population in the Muslim world remained practically unchanged. The Turkic lands in the temperate zone did better than the desert regions of Arabia and North Africa, and coincidentally political leadership of the Muslim world passed from Arabia to Ottoman Empire, and beyond it, to Central and South Asia. Thus geography and demography became, to a great extent, the determining factors.

It was however technology and scinece education which helped create practically impassable bridge between the Muslim World and West. Outnumbered, the Muslim World was outmanoevured by technological advancement of the

West. The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century and the discovery of such basic elements as coal, iron ore, hydro power and so on took the West far beyond the reach of the Muslim World. Coupled with this, came up the spirit of the Enlightenment Age — victory of reason over emotion , respect for legal norm, deep sense of identity of people with the territory they inhabit— giving birth to national aspirations and democratic urges — leading ultimately to a vibrant sense of superiority both at the individual and collective levels. The comulative effects of all these worked against the Muslim World. Thus they lost control over trade routes, primary commodities such as oil and even sovereignty itself. It became indeed very difficult to recognise that community after four or five hundred years— the community that raised such brilliant sons as Jabir Haiwan, Al-kindi, Al-Beruni, Ibn Sina, Umar Khayyam, Ave-Rose and so on, who were so many stars shinning brilliantly in the firmament of scientfic discovery and intellectual advancement.

When they regained their political independence since the middle of the 20th century, even at that stage they chose poorly. They began to treat the West as a positive threat and went along resisting all ties with it. The West, which during the period of ascendancy of the Muslims, from 750 to 1150 A.D, acepted stewardship of the Muslims and much of its success in such movements as Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment was due to their profound debt to Muslim scholarship. The Muslim leaders however turned their back and began to believe that they could restore the golden age by completing internal cleansing of their societies without concentrating on geopolitices, demography, especially scientific investigation and technology. That does not seem to be a positive approach. The situation can be altered through the creation of knowledge-based societies, through proper application of the right kind of technology and proper development of human resources. All these are in need of concord, and not confrontation.

If anyone looks at different areas of the Muslim World, he will, much to his dismay, find that not a single Muslim state has attained the height of a world class. Not even a single University in the Muslim world is properly dressed up to extend the frontiers of knowledge. Not even a single

laboratory exists in these states which can come up with a path-breaking conceptual framework. Not even a single library is there in these states which can serve as the beacon to inquisitive researchers. The entire environment pervading the Muslim world, characterized by illberality, pettiness and sectarianism as it is, is not at all propitious to forward-looking approach. True it is that the West is not friendly with the Muslim World. "At this very moment, they can", so says Mahathir Mohammad, the great leader of Malaysia, " if they (West) want to do so, wipe out the Muslim countries from the surface of the earth. If they have not done so, it is not because they care for us."

Conclusion

This is much like what the great Syed thought about the Muslims of India during the later part of 19th century. Personal heroism of the Mujahideen or exuberance of the Moulvis of that time can be compared to effluence of the Talebans or such no -state-actors as Al-Quaeda, but these are no positive answers to the misery of the Muslim World. For combating the degraded status of the Muslims what is in order is intellectual regeneration of the Muslims world over and their outright proficiency and creativity in the world of science and technology. There is no alternative to it.

It is believed by many that the West, led by the US, is busy creating a new enemy stereotype. Once it was communism; after the demise of communism, all attentions have now been focussed on fundamentalism, and much to the consternation of many Islam has been wrongly painted as closely associated with fundamentalism. The ideological "East" (the Soviet bloc) is now replaced by cultural "East" (Muslim world). In the new set up of the New World Order the enemy has been identified in the category of culture or of civilization, in fact in a particular value systems or life style. This messianic aspect of the new hegemonic discourse is evident in the most recent paradigm of globalization. The associated slogans of "liberal democracy", "free market economy:, "secular world view"— all relate to the unrivalled rule of interest groups in the name of democracy (Hans Koechler 2002). And all these have created concerns in the minds of those who are at the receiving line. Thus for many in the Third World where most of the Muslims live globalization has become the keyword for the ideological and cultural imperialism of the West (Samir Amin, 2002). The concept of politics being coached in terms of national interest and resembling more like that spirit of medieval European

Crusade seems to have been pursued by some of the self-appointed guardians of Western interests against the supposed threats to liberal life-style of the West. They have identified Eastern civilizatons such as Islam as the source of these threats (Chandra Muzaffer, 2002). What is needed in the context of the existing international constellation of forces is a paradigmatic change in the theory of inter-state relations. What is needed is to turn back from the cynicism of the so-called "realist" approach which served interests of the big powers and pursue an interdisciplinary approach to the issues of politics and culture for extending the horizon of understanding and co-operation. Having all these in view, it is advisable that solutions to the current crisis should start by re-thinking the boundaries of Islam and the West as open borders so that through mutual exchange of ideas and concepts some understandings may be arrived at and bases of co-operation and not confrontation may be strengthened. That also demands the sagacity the great Syed evinced in moments of crisis the Indian Muslims were confronted with especially by lifting the horizon of the Muslims through balanced academic attainments, especially in science and thechnology. There is no other way.

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Concord through Dialogue :
A South Asian View of the West

Introduction

The tragic events of 11 September 2001 have, above everything else, brought the Muslim world and Islamic civilization face to face with the West in a format of enemy stereotype. The recent developments have unfolded seemingly in the form of a 'Cultural Crusade' against Islam. What is more, the new geostrategic design has been evolved in such a fashion that the West and its dominant power, the United States, have taken it as their right, even duty, to shape up the Muslim world according to western standard of humanity. The world has thus entered into a new phase of struggle for dominance much like the old hegemonic conflict on issues of religion and civilization, involving limitless sufferings to humanity. The ongoing global concerns for a dialogue between civilizations, especially between Islam and the West, have thus turned out to be very significant. There are many questions we need to ask. Is it possible that Islam and the West have things they can learn from each other? How do the Muslims feel about such values the West holds so dear, as civil liberty, democratic participation and gender equality? Is there anything in Islam that retards collective living in a pluralistic society in regard to different faiths, creeds and ways of life?

I believe that Islam, which has had abiding influence on the world for more than 1400 years and in which one out of every four human beings finds meaning of life, has something to offer to the West. The present state of affairs, characterized more by antagonism and hostility at the worst and indifference and ambivalence at best, is due to unforgiving communication gap and this needs to be bridged. We should better talk of concord through dialogue, and not of conquest or chaos through clash of civilization.

Anatomy of the Muslim World

Of the nearly 1.4 billion Muslims in the world to-day, they constitute majority in as many as 57 states and sizable minority in many others. In most of these states, the heads of

government are elected and elected representatives are collectively responsible for policy-making. In some states women franchise has been recognized. In a few countries women leaders themselves have held the rein of power. True it is that the elections in some of these states have not yet reached that sophisticated height as in the West. In some Muslim states some may find, much to their chagrin, traditional monarchs dictating terms to the people. In some others, military dictators are still basking in the sunshine of absolute power. It would be a great blunder if anyone ascribes this to Islam. That democratic order has not been firmly established in the political fabric of these states is due mainly to their socio-economic conditions, lack of enlightenment, internal crises and so on, many of whose roots lie in colonial rule and exploitation by the colonial masters, not in Islam. Many of these are plural societies where people professing different faiths and creeds, different cultures and norms, are living together. Even in the West, there are Muslims substantial in number (for instance, 10 million in the U.S, 4 million in the U.K., 3.5 million in Germany, 5 million in France). Islam, in fact, is the fastest growing religion, and some demographers have predicted that within next two decades the Muslims may reach somewhere near 2.0 billion in number.

It is necessary also to dispel the erroneous notion that the Muslims are a monolithic group. They are not. There are extremists among them and they felt a certain pride in what Osama bin Laden and his cohorts were alleged to have done on 11 September. By far the largest number of Muslims all over the world were however grievously pained at the cruel deaths in NewYork and Washington like others in different parts of the globe. They also deeply resented what happened to the hapless innocents in Afghanistan in its follow-up actions.

Many a one in the West believes that roots of the relative decline of the Muslim world lie in its culture and religious norms. Some of them assert that Muslim societies are hopelessly retrograde, steeped in the 7th century idylls and

incapable of joining the grand procession of top quality production and mass consumption. Nobody has however cared to link this underdevelopment with geographical, geopolitical, demographic and technological dynamics, though these are in reality the basic shaping factors. In the words of Jeffrey Sachs: "Islam was both made and undone in parts by its geography. The Christian - Islamic divide is also an ecological divide, between temperate zone of Christian Europe and the encroaching aridity of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia"(Sachs 29 October 2001).

It may be noted that it was not only geography but also demography that worked against the Muslims. When Islam was in the ascendancy in the eighth century, the populations of the Muslim world and Christian Europe were almost equal in size, at roughly 30 million each. Of the 14 biggest cities (with roughly 50,000 people), which in fact were the most dynamic trading centres in the World (Alexandria, Cairo, Baghdad, Mecca, for instance), 13 were in the Muslim world. Europe had only one, Rome. Over the next seven centuries demographic balance altered in favour of Europe. Its population increased sharply after the first millennium, reaching 100 million by 1600 A.D. The Muslim countries, on the other hand, were hemmed in aridity and lack of resources, and their population remained practically unchanged for centuries. The temperate zone Turkic lands, did better than the desert regions of Arabia and North Africa and coincidentally political leadership of the Muslim World passed from Arabia to Ottoman Empire.

Apart from geography and demography, it was technology which helped create practically impassable bridge between the Muslim World and West. Outnumbered, the Muslim World was also outmanoeuvred by technological advancement of the West. The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, and the discovery of such basic elements as coal, iron ore, hydro power and so on took the West far beyond the reach of the Muslim world. The cumulative effects of all these worked against them. Thus they lost control over trade routes,

primary commodities such as oil and even sovereignty itself. When they regained their political independence since the middle of the 20th century, even at that stage they chose poorly. They began to treat the West as a positive threat and went along resisting all ties with it. The small number of Muslim leaders still believed that they could restore the golden age by completing internal cleasing of their societies without concentrating on geopolitics, demography and technology. That is a wrong approach. The situation can be altered through the creation of knowledge-based societies, through proper application of the right kind of technology and proper development of the human resources. All these are in need of concord, and not confrontation.

It may be noted that most of the Muslims, who are living in the West in more than 50 countries, are young, often unemployed or impoverished though educated and most often subject to growing discrimination. In their desperate search for identity, purpose and hope, many of them are likely to be won over "to the fundamentalist call for a 'Jihad' to recapture the golden age of Islam" (Jeremy Rifkin 2001), thus involving the risk of inviting an endless chain of conflictual axes in societies. This is another reason why dialogue is a necessity so that the mainstream Muslims should be encouraged to see things in proper perspectives. Islam, as we have known it, hates terrorism as the worst evil, infact, as a sin.

The West Through the Eyes of South Asian Muslims

The West, despite its liberality and enlightenment, appears to the people of South Asia, especially to its 400 million Muslim population, as a scheming group of persons, always conscious of their own interests and adept in fabricating mechanisms for their expansion by means, fair or foul. They tend to evoke the image of shrewd Robert Clive and his cohorts of the 18th century, who laid the foundation of the British Indian Empire, mainly through deceit and chicanery in conjunction with superior military technology. They were never considered superior to the Indians in terms of intellectual honesty or moral excellence or cultural

attainments save military prowess. For the perpetuation of their domination in India, they resorted to means which by any standard prevailing in Europe could be termed totally unwholesome. The people of India, especially the Musalmans who belonged to the ruling class, at that time, were reduced to ones bereft of arts and letters, hopes and confidence, professions and economic standing. They were in fact reduced to a position of perpetual dependence and underdevelopment. Much of the poverty, illiteracy, squalor, even of corruption and fanaticism, which characterize South Asia to-day, is but a living testimony of the corrupt man-management system of the 200-year long debased colonial period. Writing in 1871, W.W Hunter in his *The Indian Musalman*, stated : "it was impossible to find a Musalman who was not educated and well-to-do one hundred years ago. It is impossible to find a Musalman now who is not illiterate and poor" (W. W. Hunter 1945, P162). Even Macaulay, who is well known for his hatred to the Indians, wrote in 1877 : "Of the provinces which had been subject to the House of Tamerlane, the wealthiest was Bengal. No part of India possessed such natural advantages, both for agriculture and for commerce .... Distant provinces were nourished from the overflowing of its granaries; and the noble ladies of London and Paris were clothed in the delicate produce of its looms' (Macaulay, Lord T.B. 1880 : 517).

After the conspiratorial victory in the battle of Plassey, when the British got their foothold in the north-eastern part of India, the process of draining Bengal's wealth began and continued at an accelerated pace till the end of the British rule in India. Lord Macaulay tells us what happened after the battle of Plassey. In his own words : "The shower of wealth now fell on the company and its servants. A sum of eight hundred thousand sterling, in coined silver, was sent down the river from Murshidabad to Fort William (later Calcutta). The fleet which conveyed this treasure consisted of more than a hundred boats .... The treasury of Bengal was thrown open to Clive who walked between heaps of gold and silver, crowned with rubies and diamonds and was at liberty to help himself' (Macaulay, 1877 : 527)

The South Asian Muslims have gone past those nightmarish experiences. They are now locked up in a grim battle for the last half-century to make up their lost time and find out avenues for dignified living. The avenues are neither spacious nor smooth nor short; still they are inching ahead, sometimes faltering and sometimes stumbling in the face of insurmountable difficulties. They are more confident now than ever before. They have always felt that they can go ahead only in peaceful environment. That is why they always crave for creative co-operation under peaceful conditions and hate destructive confrontation. They feel that courage for struggle is great; but they are convinced that courage for resolution of conflicts is greater still. Islam, they believe, provides succour to the drooping hearts. It gives them courage and confidence. It inspires them to tread the thorny highways of honesty and truth.

How to Go Along with Dialogue

To talk of a dialogue between Islam and the West is easy; to undertake one is not. That needs conscious efforts both at the intellectual and social planes. At the intellectual level it demands a paradigmatic change; at the social plane, it necessitates a change of hearts. Both of them need steps and strategies creatively woven into a consociational parameter for a large hearted rational approach.

Since the middle of the last century, especially the beginning of the East-West conflict, some western scholars began defining development in terms of urbanization, industrialization, secularism and so on, implying a kind of unilinear growth model for the so-called Third World. That bracketed, quite consciously, development with Europeanization or Americanization, and took the form of an address to the developing countries (all the Muslim countries being in this category) like this : if you want to develop why don't you imitate us? Why don't you become our prototype?

After the end of the East-West conflict in the early 1990's, the same kind of Prescriptions began to be poured in. The content of "The End of History" doctrine, immediately after

the collapse of the Socialist bloc, by Francis Fukuyama, a strategist of the US State Department, is an instance. The slogan of the "New World Order" by President Bush, senior, at the beginning of the Gulf War in 1991 was propagated by them mainly with a view to giving a positive direction to the non-committed world. The "Clash of Civilization" seems to fit in the same tradition as the Western world's legitimization discourse in the post-Cold War era. Huntington's thesis is more forcefully brought to the fore on a global level after 11 September and put in the context of a new "Crusade" (George W. Bush, Junior himself used the term). This new paradigm of civilizational conflict, has not been received well by large sectors of population in the developing countries, particularly in the Muslim world. Rather this has alienated them further from the West.

It is believed by many that the West, led by the US, is creating a new enemy stereotype. Once it was communism; after the demise of communism, all attentions have now been focussed on capitalism in the form of liberal democracy. The ideological "East" is now replaced by cultural "East". In the set up of the New World Order the enemy has been identified in the category of culture or of civilization, in fact in a particular value system or life style. Religion has been brought forth in the arena in the context of revival of historical Eurocentric ideal. Capitalism in the form of liberal democracy seems to be elevated to a quasi religious level, by the former proponents of the Cold War. They have now turned into vigorous propagators of civilization struggle, as representatives of Western cultural heritage.

This messianic aspect of the new hegemonic discourse is evident in the most recent paradigm of globalization. The associated slogans of "liberal democracy", "free market economy", "secular world view" -all relate to the unrivalled rule of interest group in the name of democracy (Hans koechler, 1999). And all these have created concerns in the minds of those who are 'at the end of the receiving line". The issue of globalization" reflects the beliefs, aspirations and

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culture of those who always acted as the exporter of cultural trends, political ideologies and economic interests (Farouk Hosni 1998 : 2). Thus, for many in the Third World where most of the Muslims live, globalization has become the keyword for the ideological and cultural imperialism of the West. In these slogans, which have determined the contour of international relations since the last decade of the last century, one may discern in-built elements of the old hegemonic strategy of power politics from the era of imperialism and later colonialism (Samir Amin 1997 : 132). The concept of politics being coached in terms of national interest and resembling more like the spirit of medieval European crusade seems to have been pursued by some of the self-appointed guardians of Western interests against supposed threats to liberal life style of the West. They have identified Eastern civilizations as the sources of these threats such as Islam and Confucianism. Huntington went so far as to construe a "Confucian-Islamic military connection" challenging Western interersts, values and power (Chandra Muzaffar 1996). The massive propaganda of this thesis since 11 September appears as a strategy of re-colonization.

What is needed in the context of existing international constellation is a paradigmatic change in the theory of inter-state relations. What is needed is to turn back from the cynicism of the so-called "realist" approach which served interests of the big powers, and pursue an interdisciplinary approach to the issues of politics and civilization for extending the horizon of understanding. The dialogue can be meaningful if it is based on "a non-subjectivist philosophy" of realization of one's self, both in the individual and collective sense, through encounters with different traditions, cultural expressions, value systems and life-styles. This philosophical approach is rooted in the belief of a dialogue at the cultural, and partnership at the socio-political level.

The Muslims of South and South East Asia, who might be more than 550 million in number, see Islam as fully consistent with the ideals of democracy, civic freedom, rule of

law and above all, partnership with the West (Esposito and Voll 2001). The precise strength and ideological emphases of democratic Islam may vary in different national settings, but the fact remains that the Muslim democrats in these regions are in the field busy fabricating the structures of constitutional government and civic liberty. On the other side of the picture, one may find how deep seated are the roles of religious traditions in public life in countries like the US (Casanova 1994; Guthnow 1988).

Having all these in view, it is advisable that solutions to the current crisis should start by re-thinking the boundaries of Islam and the West as open borders (Sachs 2001), and by the US and Europe regarding the Muslim World as more than the oil in the Gulf Region, to be manipulated for economic gain and more than strategic locations in South, South-East and Central Asia to be taken care of by military means for security reasons. After all, there should be no illusion about the dominant role of economic and strategic interests shaping present and future relations among the states. In this era of globalization, scholars and philosophers should not use issues of cultural or civilizational dimension to be abused for pursuit of power politics of the yester-years, based on the notion of national interest.

Apart from its vicious influence on heightening the differences among people professing different faiths and grouped as different nations in the globe, in this era of the arms of mass destruction this divide may attain a dangerous proportion. The spread effect of this divide, if not mended in time, may engulf the social terrain in other parts of the globe. The sporadic incidents of violence in Bangladesh during the post-election days and brutalities committed at Gujarat in India recently along the religious line are but a small tip of an iceberg. This has been amply demonstrated by the recent escalation of tensions between the two nuclear powers of South Asia, India and Pakistan, and everyone knows that the tensions have grown along the axes of faith. This demands dialogue not only between Islam and the West, but also between other civilizations, for instance, between Islam and confucianism, between Islam and Hinduism, and even between Islam and Judaism.

There are indeed reactionaries in the Muslim countries who are opposed to the idea of dialogue, as there are bigots in the West who may jeer at the idea. There are extremists in the

Muslim societies as there are fundamentalists among the Hindus or chauvinists among the Confucians or militant zealots among the Jews. The overwhelmingly large majority of scientists, businessmen, artists, intellectuals and professionals and the rest who stand in between are however deeply anxious for such encounters. They believe that through such dialogues they will come up contented, with the best in both civilizations, and to that extent the world will be a better place to live in.

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SAARC : President Zia's Dream Comes True

The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), though it has been languishing for years in a dungeon of inaction and gasping for a bit of fresh breath to-day, has been a product of an air of optimism. The threat perceptions, which played crucial role in shaping such regional bodies as the European Community (EC) and Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), have practically no role in building SAARC. In this case, the enlightened concerns for handling regional problems in an environment of trust and goodwill and positively enhancing and enlarging economic gains through mutually beneficial regional transactions, have been the crucial variables. SAARC's strength and weakness stem basically from this. It is strong in so far as it covers all the regional states whereas EC or ASEAN is nothing more than a sub-regional system. It is weak since it has not been cemented by such compulsive force as a common threat perception either from within or outside. Is SAARC for all that likely to attain its desired height? Where has that air of optimism gone? These are some of the questions that agitate millions of minds in South Asia.

SAARC is the brainchild of Bangladesh. After having a searching appraisal of its desirability and viability in South Asia and having it mooted by a number of academics and analysts, President Ziaur Rahman, one of the greatest sons of Bangladesh, made a formal proposal for South Asian Regional Co-operation in May 1980. The first practical step was undertaken by Muhammad Shamsul Huq, the then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, when he sent a working paper to his colleagues in six countries on 25 November 1980. The working paper, containing conceptual framework and rationale of the proposal and identifying potential areas of co-operation, was greeted with optimism by all. It stated :

> In South Asia we have countries at different levels of development; some are relatively less developed than others .... The countries of South Asia also share many common values that are rooted in their social, ethnic, cultural and historical traditions; Perceptions about certain specific events or political situation of the world may differ, but such differences do not seem to create a gulf between them that cannot be bridged.

This is what constitutes the premise of SAARC.

The next step forward toward concrete action was taken in the first week of February 1981 when during the session of the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers' Conference in New Delhi the foreign ministers of seven South Asian nations met informally and discussed the future plan. They agreed to go ahead with the Bangladesh proposal. Accordingly, a formal meeting of the foreign secretaries was convened in Colombo in April 1981 to identify the areas of co-operation. As it could be expected, these top level officials, without adopting an over-optimistic attitude to it, achieved two fold objectives : (a) a consensus on the type of institutional framework for co-operation, and (b) identification of the areas of co-operation.

In the Colombo meeting five areas were identified for co-operation. In the Kathmandu meeting of the foreign secretaries, held in November 1981, four more areas were identified. The third and fourth foreign secretaries meeting were held in Islamabad on August 1982 and in Dhaka on March 1983. In those meetings the reports and recommendations of the Technical Committees were discussed, decisions on items of co-operation were arrived at and a broadbased agreement emerged both over the areas of co-operation and institutional framework. The Dhaka meeting was a milestone in the sense that the secretaries were in a position to announce that the South Asian Regional Co-operation would be launched in the later part of 1983 in Delhi.

In the first political meeting at foreign ministers level, held in New Delhi on 1-2 August 1983 an Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) was adopted and South Asian Regional Co-operation (SARC) came into being in a region, which Peter Lyon described in the late 1960s " a region without regionalism". Inaugurating the foreign ministers' conference on August 1983 late Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi laid emphasis on both the need for, and viability of, South Asian Regional Co-operation. She said :

> We seven, who are gathered here, are close geographical neighbours. The same monsoon governs our lives. We share experiences, aspirations, challenges. Our region is the cradle of one of the earliest human civilisations. In more recent centuries we have suffered from the political and economic consequences of colonialism. The very process of liberating our people from external rule has renewed awareness of one another's needs and potentialities. To-day our major goal is to overcome economic backwardness. As members of the Non-Aligned Movement we seek peace with development among ourselves and in the world as a whole.

Although there are similarities, we are different. Each country has its individual personality, distinctive perception and different political systems. Subscribing to non-alignment, we respect the right of every country to choose and follow its own form of government without interference from others. At the same time, we recognize the duty to resolve whatever differences there might be through discussion and in a spirit of goodwill. We have always believed in co-operation and as world events unfold, we find that co-operation in solving problems is becoming more vital and necessary to each of us and, I believe, to our region.

The Foreign Ministers' conference inaugurated the SARC on 2 August 1983 and thus made Ziaur Rahman's dream come true. In the historic summit meet of the heads of state/government in South Asia, held in Dhaka on 7-8 December 1985 South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) was established and a Charter of the Association was drawn, thus providing the existing co-operative framework a formal endorsement and practical guidance from the highest level. In the Charter the objectives of the Association were spelled out, the operative principles were formulated and a skeletal institutional framework was devised.

South Asia as a whole is a typical resource poor, less developed region where the primary sector dominates the economies. Agriculture remains extremely backward with consequent food shortage, rapid decline in land-man ratio and growing unemployment and underemployment all over these countries. Industrial growth as a whole is slow, and with the introduction of the strategy of import substitution the entire growth process has been distorted and inefficient. The contribution of manufacturing ranges from 12 to 30 per cent.

About 50 per cent of the export of the region consists of primary products, which suffer from sagging demand and relative fall in prices. In view of heavy dependence of the region on imports of capital goods, industrial and agricultural inputs and essential consumer goods including food and petroleum products, the net barter terms of trade become highly unfavourable, its import capacity decreases and the balance of payment deficit goes on increasing. The unfavourable situation tends to perpetuate the region's dependence on external assistance. Since the aid flow seems to be increasingly uncertain, even the low level of development which is continuing may be handicapped and stagnation may creep in.

The South Asian nations, being placed in such a predicament, have to devise new techniques and adopt new strategies. They have to do considerable re-thinking, and re-assess their own resources. These nations must realize that their individual efforts are not adequate for accelerating the pace of socio-economic development for their burgeoning population. It is high time they realize that the trade and aid policies of the developed nations are inadequate to meet their developmental needs.

The best option, under the circumstances, open to the less developed nations of South Asia, is to undertake development activities on a regional basis. Such a strategy as "developmental regionalism" makes available to the nations the dynamic effects of co-operation such as the economies of scale, external economies, specialization and increased economic efficiency through enlarged market and so on, and is likely to make an efficient use of resources of the region. Regional Co-operation is likely to be immensely useful from two standpoints. First, through this framework South Asian nations can enhance their bargaining power with the industrialized North, reduce their dependence on it, expand horizontal linkages with the developing world and thus create a new set of equitable relations among themselves both within and outside the region. Second, being more inward looking, South Asian nations can exploit the regional resources more efficiently in an environment of mutual trust and goodwill. In a study, Gunatilleke, a Sri Lankan scholar, has presented an optimistic scenario of development through co-operation in South Asia. The region of South Asia is much more of a single ecosystem in which India and other South Asian nations can profitably participate. The resources and environmental implications of the Himalayan Range cut across national boundaries. The hydro-electric and water resources available through harnessing of the Himalayan water system are more likely to make South Asia self-sufficient both in food and energy.

In another study, BM Abbas, a Bangladeshi water expert, has pointed out that development of the Himalayan water resources and hydel power, which have to be undertaken jointly by such countries as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Nepal, will help meet not only critical shortages of irrigation water and pollution free energy but also face scourge of recurring flood in the deltaic region squarely. This also constitutes the rational for regional co-operation in that the river system, which so profoundly influences South Asian economies, encompasses five of the seven nations and make them mutually dependent.

An air of optimism was also felt when king Birendra of Nepal was heard voicing his feelings for the bountiful water resources in the region and his anxieties for an outlet to the sea for his land-locked country. He said :

> If water constitutes one of the potent sources of Nepal's economic growth, we do not intend to look upon them from the standpoint of national interest alone. It is our conviction that if co-operation can be called for, especially co-operation of Asian countries such as Nepal, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and all other regional countries, a vast resource of bountiful nature can be tapped for the benefit of man in this region.

Additionally, the river systems can be so developed as to help land-locked countries in their search for a passage to the sea. If such countries as Austria and Switzerland can solve their problems of access to the sea, there is no reason why a similar solution can not be worked out in our part of the world.

Emphasizing the need for a regional approach in the meaningful development of the river systems in South Asia, Amera Saeed, a Pakistani scholar, writes :

> The Ganga-Brahmaputra river systems, for both of which Bangladesh forms the single deltaic outlet, connect the nations of India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan in an indivisible hydrological relationship with each other, and collectively with the People's Republic of China to their north and Burma to their east. Indirectly, because of the adjoining watershed areas, the Indus River Basin systems with that of Ganga and the Brahmaputra, and therefore Pakistan comes into the picture, through the littoral position in the Indian Ocean, the Republic of Sri Lanka with the rest.

Similarly the Indian Ocean, another part of the South Asia ecosystem can become a dynamic component in a program of joint endeavour in the region. In the prospective co-operative efforts, such South Asian nations as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka may join hands in harnessing the Indian Ocean resources. Not many studies have been undertaken on the prospects of useful gains in the Indian Ocean, but given the technology and resources available data seem to indicate that it may turn out to be an *eldorado* for the region. This kind of co-operative effort may however involve a dynamic pattern of inter-dependence from which all the South Asian nations will richly benefit.

Having got off the ground with all these promises, SAARC has moved along slowly but most often fumbling and faltering , having neither continuity nor dynamism in action. After a lot of criss crosses in talks and discussions at the regional level involving leaderships at the highest level, 11th SAARC summit was held at last in Katmandu in 2002. Many political analysts expected that things might be smooth and the next summit, scheduled to be held in Islamabad in 2003, would encounter no roadblocks. Happily for all of us in South Asia, the 12th SAARC summit was held in 2004. It is most likely to be held in Dhaka, its birth place, in 2005. Let us hope that SAARC would get fresh air from Dhaka for a fresh new start in the right direction.

There are many reasons for this unhappy state of affairs in respect of its dynamism, but one of the key factors which has impeded its growth is its elitist nature. It is, till date, represented by the ruling elite of seven South Asian nations and has not transformed itself as one where one-fifth of the humankind might have some kind of voice to determine its course of action. These elite, locked up deeply in personal prejudices and idiosyncrasies and guided by distorted views of their narrowly conceived national interests, have most often ignored the greater interests of the people in South Asia. SAARC has thus remained mired in the valley of inaction and purposelessness. Will the thinking persons in South Asia respond to this challenge?

Zia's Innovative Foreign Policy Stance

President Ziaur Rahman's Political wisdom of a very high order can well be appreciated in the context of utter helplessness of the Bangladesh Government following recent border skirmishes between the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Forces (BSF). Bangladesh Premier had to say 'sorry' three times during her twenty five minutes talk with the Prime Minister of India, although BDR jawans were right in re-taking Padua after thirty years and repelling the invading BSF from Bangladesh territory. Why? Its answer lies both in the strategic perception of Indian leadership, which has, for its own interests, fabricated a framework of dominance and dependence for its neighbours, and increasingly growing yielding nature of Bangladesh Government to Indian pressure. India treats Bangladesh as a client state and its market, a captive one. Bangladesh Government of the moment revel in living with it in peace without a ripple of demur.

Ziaur Rahman like a seasoned Statesman realized the need for peaceful borders with India. He loved to see India as a great neighbour, a friendly but honest neighbour, not an arrogant, unscrupulous and scheming big brother. Under Zia's leadership, Bangladesh however wanted to maintain its relation with India on the basis of sovereign equality. He took it to be the spiritual craving of Bangladesh, its undying ethos. But however friendly one wants to be and whatever co-operative attitude one likes to evince, peaceful relation is not possible unless certain objective conditions, which help develop the solid base of good neighbourly relation, are fulfilled. Peace does not dawn on the horizon automatically. It has to be bought. This is how President Zia reflected on the issue and undertook certain momentuous steps for stabilizing peaceful but mutually respectful relation with India.

The emergence of Bangladesh has come down, right from the beginning, as a "strategic irrelevance" to the Indian leaders both from the political and security perspectives. The long cherished dream of 'Akhand Bharat' of Patel. Nehru and Gandhi on the basis of One-Nation theory was frustrated by Jinnah's Two-Nation theory and India was partitioned in 1947. The creation of Bangladesh on the basis of linguistic nationalism struck not only at the root of the Two-Nation theory but mortally ridiculed the very base of One-Nation also. It adumbrated the growth of many nation states in India, especially in the vicinity of Bangladesh, on the basis of such forces as language, culture, ethnicity, geographical configuration, historical past and so on, leading to Balkanization of the Indian Union.

From the security perspective also the location of Bangladesh has never been propitious to Indian interest. Located as it is, at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal and standing in between Indian heartland and the disturbed north-east, Bangladesh is not far from the epicentres of growing Chinese presence in the region. What is more, Bangladesh stands on the southern front of the 20 mile long Shiliguri Corridor, a rugged land bridge between Nepal and Bangladesh. If the Shiliguri Corridor goes out of hand by any chance, with the hostile Bangladesh standing by, the entire north-eastern part of India will be detached from the mainland and eventually lost. This has always remained a great concern to Indian strategists and the question has been mooted in hundreds of fora and centres. Having all these in view, the policy planners of India wanted to put Bangladesh within an overarching framework of dominance and dependence.

It was Ziaur Rahman who realized for the first time that such a relation with India is not only agonizingly humiliating but verily suicidal. He also realized that good neighbourly relation with India was a necessity. Having these twin objectives in view, he started bringing in changes first at the internal setting through resurgence of nationalistic aspirations of the people and then by stabilizing

countervailing forces at the regional and international levels. Some fundamental changes were wrought at the domestic plateau. National unity, which is the life blood of national strength, was ingeniously fostered among the social forces. The colour of Bangladeshi nationalism became the rallying point. The wasteful and exploitative economic system, the so called socialism, was done away with. The democratic multiparty framework was revived and electoral politics was put into perspective.

The foreign policy goals devised anew, the dynamic international relations were set on with view to preventing Bangladesh from hurtling down to the abyss of dependence. At the regional level, Bangladesh developed a pattern of mutuality with such states as Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives along with India so much so that it ultimately led to the forging of regional co-operation in the region for the first time in its history.

At the international level, Bangladesh, a lonely sojourner, picked up friends from both the right, centre and left and established a kind of viable comradeship amongst them. Bangladesh was lifted from the dead end of the Indo-Soviet axis and Indian hegemonic circle. Bangladesh came closer to the Muslim world of more than fifty states, which began to take fresh look at Bangladesh and its problems. One of the superpowers of the time became a good friend of Bangladesh, though its role was not people-friendly during the Liberation War. Bangladesh developed a good working relation with China, another big neighbour within a paltry distance of only 65 miles. South-East Asian countries were drawn closer. The distant Europe remained no longer disinterested in the affairs of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is much stronger today than it was in the 1970s. In terms of population it is the eighth largest country. In this era of globalization its market of 140 million people is taking more and more an attractive hue. Its new find, gas reserve, has made it an object of warm wooing by many. Its strategic location, in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean, the prospective threatre of big power showdown in the days to come, is equally significant. Having all these in view, if the foreign policy postulation of Bangladesh is re-drawn in the line pursued by President Zia and if the diplomatic cards are creatively played, Bangladesh may turn into one of the key actors in the region both in political and economic spheres. At this moment the nation remembers President Zia with deep veneration for his innovative foreign policy stance.

Revolution and Solidarity Day

How can we characterize the 7 November Soldiers Uprising ? The Soldiers' solidarity with the people? It can neither be termed as a conventional *coup d' etat* to catapult General Ziaur Rahman to Political Power nor a *Counter-Coup* designed to liquidate the so-called "Indian lackeys", who were supposed to spread and strengthen the tentacles of the Delhi-Moscow axis over the fledgling Republic of Bangladesh. The slogans of 7 November Revolution and Solidarity Day or the vitriolic condemnation of 3 November *coup* leaders from 4 November to 7 November are not enough to blind us about the nature and significance of this event. In fact, it was a revolution, though premature and short lived, with all the characteristics of a revolution : "entirely a new story, a story never known or told before" about the organizational framework of the armed forces in Bangladesh and Bangladesh Polity (Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution, 1963* : 13). If a revolution implies "an attempt to make a radical change in the system of government", inaugurating" new order both in the society and polity" (Skocpol, 1975 : 175), we have to accept the event of 7 November as a revolution.

Disagree if you will, but 7 November's Soldiers Uprising and their solidarity with the people have, however, remained a significant political event in this part of the world on many counts. In the first instance, it marked the beginning of a movement where both the soldiers and citizenry joined hands, came out in the streets and shouted slogans for a cause they considered nationally important, in fact laying the first brick for the fabric of Bangladesh nationalism.

Secondly, this momentous event, above everything else, brought forth the sterling qualities of General Ziaur Rahman as a great statesman to the fore and paved the way for his dramatic rise in Bangladesh politics. Not only as the one who proclaimed independence of Bangladesh when, in those critical hours of the early 1971, especially after that brutal and inhuman onslaught by the Pakistan Army against the innocent civilians on 25 March, the political leaders failed miserably to give a sense of direction, but also as a celebrated war hero, General Zia has always been in the hearts of millions of people. The 7 November *Sepoy-Janata Biplob* (Soldiers-People Uprising) gave him the historic opportunity not only for consolidating his position as a great nationalist but also for projecting the image of Bangladesh across its borders since then.

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Thirdly, this uprising clearly demonstrated the crippling weaknesses of the radical political parties in general and of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) in particular, suggesting, at the same time, the urgent need for reform measures to make the Bangladesh armed forces a truly integrated and disciplined arm of the government. Finally, it constituted a forewarning to all concerned that Bangladesh, having been born through the ordeal of the gory Liberation War, must be independent of India's or anyone's tutelage and self-sustaining actor in international relations.

That 7 November Uprising was a revolution becomes obvious if we look at the changes wrought in the social and political landscape after 7 November 1975. The post-7 November Bangladesh became totally different from the pre-7 November Bangladesh, and the differences were writ large both in its domestic and international spheres. The dark cloud of BKSAL-ite eerieness began to clear off, making room for the multi-party democracy. The press began to open its eyes and ears. The judiciary started coming out of the cruel yoke of the executive tutoring. Coming out of the dead end of Indo-Soviet axis, Bangladesh began to move freely around the wider sphere of global politics. Forsaking its timid steps, Bangladesh began to play a proactive role in forging friendship in South, South-East and East Asia, Far East, the Middle East and North Africa on the basis of sovereign equality. Bangladesh also came much closer to Europe and North America. Even at the regional level it assumed a position of honour. In fact, Bangladesh began to hold its head high as an independent actor in the comity of nations since then. Far reaching changes were also initiated in the economic front. The corrupt and wasteful economic structure that was in place in the name of socialism was done away with. In place of narrow and parochial Bengali nationalism, the appeal of a liberal and more comprehensive Bangladeshi Nationalism, having a wider expanse and larger following in the society became irresistible. In brief, the course of history in Bangladesh suddenly took a new turn.

General Zia came to power on the crest of 7 November Revolution, not through any conspiratorial move or any *coup d'etat.* He responded to the call of time as a great nationalistic soldier, and by virtue of his wide vision and indefatigable energy he consolidated the nationalistic forces around him with a view to giving Bangladesh a dynamic start on its march toward prosperity as a young and energetic nation state in the theatre of the globe.

The soldiers' revolt in this part of the world is not new: *The sepoys* (soldiers) of the British Indian Army revolted against the British *raj* in 1857, and they called for the independence of India. That is why this revolt has been termed the first War of Indian Independence by many thinkers including Karl Marx. It failed because there was no organized political body to guide its course of actions for the achievement of the goal the *sepoys* had set for themselves. The feudal lords who led the revolt were mainly concerned with the recovery of their estates and interests which were lost in course of British action in India. In 1971 the Bengali soldiers of the Pakistan Army revolted and joined the Liberation War. This time the soldiers fought under the command of the Bengali military officers working under the guidance of a political party. They succeeded in 1971 because the party leadership, linked together with other national groups and bodies through a vibrant nationalistic chord, worked to guide and co-ordinate the activities of soldiers within the framework of a pre-determined goal of achieving independent Bangladesh.

The 7 November Revolution also succeeded in that the nationalistic aspirations, which were flowing side by side with the conflicting class interests and class consciousness propagated through scores of Biplobi Shainik Shangstha (Soldiers Revolutionary Organizations) in all branches and all tiers of the armed forces in Bangladesh since 1 January 1973 by some soldiers led by Colonel Taher, ultimately triumphed and emerged as the determining factor, shaping the contours and character of Bangladesh polity. The nationalistic aspirations of the soldiers suddenly overflooded the social terrain when they read a kind of seemingly ominous Pro-India stance in the staging of 3 November *Coup d'etat* by Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf.

What is of great significance is that nationalistic aspiration of the soldiers and people in general, who joined hands together during those fateful hours of 7 November 1975, have remained as vital and vibrant even now as they were. The political leaders and activists may ignore this fact of Bangladesh politics only at their peril.

Victory Day : A Catalysis for Being Big?

The Liberation War of 1971 is decidedly the most glorious chapter of our national history and the freedom fighters are indeed the greatest sons of the soil. They created history for the nation on 16 December 1971. They are the architects of 16 December, the red-letter day in our history. We remember these great ones with a profound sense of honour. They challenged the tyranny of an autocratic and torturous horde so that we may thrive in democratic order. They underwent limitless sufferings and ignoble tortures in the hands of occupation forces so that we can live in peace and dignity. Some of them laid down their lives so that we can live in a free country. We remember them on this August day as a part of our self-respecting national life. They have been a part of our elevated social being, indeed a part of our natonal soul. We cannot forget them because they have remained an integral part of ourselves. They are the creators of our glorious past which is entwined with our bright future.

President Abraham Lincoln, in a letter to Mrs. Bixby who lost her five sons in the Civil War that saved the Union, wrote on 21 November 1864 : "I pray that Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrfice upon the altar of freedom." We as a nation, much in the similar vein, join the chorus of the solemn hymn sung on such glorious occasion in honour of those immortal souls who happen to be the most precious possession of this nation. The Victory Day, for all that, has become a day both for celebration and thinking big. It has become an occasion for recalling their great feats of achievement and for showering petals of red roses on cenotaphs created in the minds of millions in the society. It has also become an occasion for our thinking big so much so that the dreams of the greatest of our greats come true through our exalted steps and elevated efforts.

The valiant sons of Bangladesh joined the Liberaton War not as leaders or workers of any political party or as upholders of interests of any group or any clannish aggregates or champions of any ideology. They joined it as the sons of the soil to free their motherland from the dirty clutches of the marauding occupation forces. They got involved as patriots to create an independent Bangladesh, free from the ugly touches of any sort of autocratism, with vibrant economy good enough for comfortable living for all of its citizens and with the kind of cultural strands motivating all of them to live free, comely, decent and dignified life in an environment of co-operaton and creativity.

They came in silence from the far-off hamlets, from rural slums as well as from urban posh habitats. They came from all strata of the society, professing different faiths and handling differing works. The students left their schools, colleges and universities. The teachers went out of their class rooms. The ploughshares of the farmers were beaten into lethal weapons. The artists and artisans came out of their grooves. The professionals left their trained orientation. In fact, the entire nation barring a few misguided blackguards became locked up in that life and death struggle and remained in the theatre of war for long nine months. The Liberation War of 1971 turned out to be a People's War. The labour took up arms. The regular armed forces and the police closed their ranks with the people. The professionals came down to join them. The deep involvement of all sectors of social life made the victory so easy and that too within nine months of trying times. The victory thus won belonged to the people. They snatched it from the jaws of death. In the entire gory exercise, the people, most of whom remained unnamed and unknown, were the main actors.

When the United Kingdom was fighting against the Nazi atrocities, there was a Churchill with his fiery motivation : "We shall fight on the beaches; we shall fight on the landing ground; we shall fight in the fields and in the streets; we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." This is one of

such exhortations of Sir Winston Churchill delivered in the House of Commons on 4 June 1940. On 18 June 1940 he came up with more resolute stance and said in the House : "We will defend every village, every town and every city. The vast mass of London itself, fought street by street, could easily devour an entire hostile army; and we would rather see London laid in ruins and ashes than that it should be tamely and abjectly enslaved." Our war heroes had none like him. The Liberation War was not of any one or of any political party. The victory thus won was of the nation.

If history is any guide, this kind of popular involvement is a sure guarantee of success. Indeed here lies the secret of success for this nation. If the people get involved, the most hazardous task becomes easier and the impediments, even of the Himalyan proportion, get swept away. In 1971 the people got into it on their own because they felt that their very existence as self-respecting self was at stake. Now is the time for the political elite, of all shades and colour, to prepare themselves by thinking big so that they may issue a call to the people to get involved in national affairs because the existence of politics as an avocation for fabricating and handling democratic polity in Bangladesh is at stake.

Even after three decades, democracy in Bangladesh exists mainly in hope rather than in reality. To most of the people democracy is still a rosy ideal, an aspiration to be cherished in the thickets of big money and strong muscle-oriented political exercises, dominated by small groups of privileged ones. The argument of force has not yet been replaced by the force of argument in the body politic.

True it is that we have achieved a great success during the last decade. We have been able to rehabilitate the institution of regular election as the mode of peaceful transfer of power to the victorious party or parties. This has been institutionalized through the Non-party Caretaker Government for conducting the general election. The press has been more or less free. Attempts are also on to institutionalize the independence of judiciary. A kind of

consensus has also been reached by the political parties that political system should be managed by the representatives of people directly elected by them and not by any other force.

Despite all these bright features, Bangladesh politics has slided downhill these days. Democratic culture is yet to strike its roots deep into the social soil. Tolerance among the political activists is conspicuous by its absence. The consensual approach involving mutual give and take, being respectful to one another's views and overriding concern of the majority party to work together with the minor ones is yet to come off the ground. The party (or parties) in power tends quite often to ignore the opposition and opposition goes on opposing everything the party-in-power undertakes or proposes. The Jatia Sangsad has not yet been the centre-piece of national politics. Politics, in consequence, comes down to the stormy streets in the forms of processions and demonstrations. Occassional hartals keep the shops, work centres, business houses, offices and educational institutions closed, thus affecting both law and order in the society and economic activities. Politics, to the chagrin of many, has thus been transformed into power-politics.

This has not happended overnight. Indications were there right from the day one after independence. The party-in-power began to usurp the credit of victory on the one hand and organize reconstruction works on party lines. The role of the people, who were the main actors in the theatre of war in 1971, became secondary. That tradition has not only continued but has rather been reinforced overtime so much so that an environment of gross inter-party confrontation has become the order of the day. To-day democracy in Bangladesh exists in form though, its spirit has been dissipated by the heavy hands of coercion and brute force, quite often orchestrated from the highest level. The poltical parties are there, but these are organized on feudal lines, thus facilitating personalization of power. Even the governmental framework is not propitious for democratic order. The omnipotent executive quite often handles the impotent legislature at will,

causually abusing its authority. The executive also finds pleasures in trampling under feet the judicial branch of the government. The parliamentarians in most cases function as their own representatives; in some cases, as the representative of the party bosses.

The consequences of all these have been disastrous. There is neither any accountability in the system nor any transparency of any policy or action of those who matter. The people who should have been the prime movers in the political system have been dragged down to the receiving end. The fundamental rights of the citizens, which are enumerated in the supreme law of the land, exists in the constitution as the dreamy, unreal and wishful concepts. The state of affairs is therefore not only undersirable but also positively contrary to the spirit of the Liberation War. The political parties of to-day should learn from the past and forget the bitterness and ferocity with an eye to the future of the people, and it is the future which above everything else motivated our valiant freedom fighters to sacrifice whatever they had. Having this in view, on this August Occasion and remembering the greatest of the greats i.e. the martyrs in the Liberation War, would the political leaders of Bangladesh acquire a positive, forward looking and humane approach to society and a democratic, suave and national approach to politics! In the name of the martyrs, should the political activitists come up with solid partriotic zeal and show respect to those immortal souls by being big and thinking big! This is how they can show respect to the architects of our freedom and the Victory Day.

Should We Think Big and Look Ahead

"We, the people of Bangladesh," so says the Preamble of the Constitution , "having proclaimed our independence on the 26th day of March, 1971 and through a historic war for national independence, established the independent sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh." 26 March 1971 is thus our Independence Day. It is indeed our National Day. A little lamp, symbolizing national aspirations for independence, was lighted on this August day. After the nine-month long gruelling gory Liberation War that little lamp took the size of a glorious sun on 16 December 1971. East Pakistan became free Bangladesh, an independent and sovereign state. How can we forget this day? One of the most brilliant chapters of this epic began to take shape from this day. Its fulfilment came up on 16 December. Both of these days are however blood-soaked. Both of those are Red Letter Day in our history. The Independence Day, for all that, has become to the nation a day for celebration, jubilation, rejoicing, on the one hand and for looking back to our history and thinking big for the bright future, on the other.

Though the union of East and West Pakistan was voluntarily entered into in 1947, most of the ingredients that generate in people a solid bond of unity as a nation were absent in Pakistan. The people of East and West Pakistan had neither any experience of living together for generations within a continuing poltical framework nor had they been united under identical political institutions which might have fostered common political perceptions, nor did they belong to a distinct cultural area. The only common bond that existed between the peoples of the two wings was a set of Islamic values and some experiences of the political movement for a separate Muslim Homeland in the Hindu-dominated India. Political prudence therefore demanded intensely pro-people and integrative policy measures for the survival of Pakistan.

The ruling elite in Pakistan, however, pursued certain policies from the very beginning, which alienated the people of East Pakistan. The policy of cultural assimilation was born out of distrust of the people. They believed that if Bengali language and literature in East Pakistan were allowed to maintain contacts with the Hindu-dominated West Bengal this might adversely affect the ideological unity of Pakistan. That is why Urdu, which was as foreign as Greek to the East Pakistanis, was imposed as the *lingua franca* of Pakistan. The policy of centralized administration and increasing monopolization of Political Power by the West Pakistanis, especially after 1958, had a deeply alienating effect on the East Pakistanis. After the military coup of 1958, the civil-military bureaucracy, where East Pakistan had the least representation, came to the forefront in Pakistan. Thus East Pakistanis lost their representation in the decision-making structure and became avidly disaffected. The strong economic growth that had emerged in Pakistan during the 1960s made the East Pakistanis conscious of their deprivation on the one hand and raised their expectations on the other. In 1971, the situation dramatically altered in favour of East Pakistan, because in the first ever general election held in Pakistan in 1970, the Awami League, representing the interests of East Pakistan, won a landslide victory and emerged as the majority party in the National Assembly of Pakistan. They expected and quite naturally that they would at last take control of the central government and would remedy some of the imbalances in the Polity within the framework of Six-Point demand. After the postponement of session of the National Assembly, scheduled to be held in Dhaka on 3 March 1971, by President Yahya Khan, the political elite in East Pakistan felt threatened, because they saw in it an excuse by the Pakistani ruling elite to deprive East Pakistanis of the benefit of electoral victory. The people of East Pakistan who were mobilized during the election campaign, became greatly agitated. The Six-Point demand after the postponement of session of the National Assembly got transformed almost

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spontaneously by the politically -relevant sectors of East Pakistan into a one-point demand i.e. independent Bangladesh. Thus, the stage was set for the Independence War. The East Pakistanis at that stage were no longer eager to save the unity of Pakistan if it were at their expense. The ruling elite in Pakistan were equally reluctant to save Pakistan with the Primacy of the East Pakistanis.

Pakistan at that point of time took the hue of a collapsed state and East Pakistan emerged as an independent Bangladesh through an excruciatingly painful process. True it is that the history of independent movement is not that short. Moving through winding ways and meandering through hundreds of lanes and by-lanes, soaked with blood, tears and sweat, the people of Bangladesh reached at this penultimate stage. The Liberation War for all that became in the ultimate analysis a People's War. That speaks why the people joined the Liberation War not in hundreds but in thousands and touched the victory stand on 16 December by sacrificing themselves not in thousands but in millions. The people, singing in the tune of Walt Whitman /have exclaimed :

"The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won."

The plight of the people in Bangladesh during the last three decades after independence has not improved considerably, though unlike other South Asian nations Bangladesh started its political journey with certain tangible advantages. The people of Bangladesh are more or less homogenous. Living in the compact Gangetic valley, practically 99 per cent of them speak the same language i.e. Bangla, and share the same cultural traits. More than 85 per cent of them are Muslims, moderate by any standard, and are living with other communities in peace and amity for centuries. The incidents of communal violence, which have violently rocked some of the neighbouring societies at regular intervals, have been few and far between in here. What is

more, there has always been a kind of equality prevailing in this society amid poverty. Even then things have not changed much and that is due mainly to the impolitic, backward-looking and unthinking nature of the political elite. A nation can not be great if it fails to think big and conquer petty-mindedness.

Democracy, for whch longings of the people in this part of the world have been limitless, exists even to-day more in the hope of the people than in reality. Good governance has always eluded them more like a will-O-the-wisp. The concept of self-government lies in their aspirations. Economy is yet to be lively. According to the Government estimate, more than 40 per cent of the people are living below the poverty line and 50 per cent of them are condemned to sub-human living. The pace of industrialization is stagnant, to say the least. Troops of unemployed and under-employed are roaming in the streets like living corpses. Arson, rent-seeking, thuggery, rape and violent death are rampant and that too by the hoodlums sheltered by those who matter politically in the society, thus affecting investment both from within and without. This state of affairs is age-old and continues since the birth of Bangladesh.

Politics has not yet been healthy or people-oriented. It has, much to the consternation of many thinking ones, turned into a convenient mode of acquisition of Personalized Power. Personal property and dominating party influnce. Even after three decades most of the political leaders are basking in the gray sunshine of personal vendetta, and some of them have remained busy, much like do-nothing-worthless prodigals, in claiming a lion's share of that great people's achievement of 1971 as their patrimony. They tend to hide their inexcusable failures of the present time by raising a furore in the name of Liberation War of the past and find childish pleasure in dividing the social forces not on the basis

of any political program or ideology but mainly on the role in those dire days of 1971. Most of them are fiercely vocal about democratic norms, but till date they have neither been able to make the Jatiya Sangsad functional nor local government operative nor popular right the centre-piece of national politics. While in position, they become determined to make use of political power in their narrow and sectarian ends; but being in the opposition, they are the ones who clamor for people's interest at the top of their voices and utilize the common people as the throughway to political power. Most of them do not care to think of the future and make the nation prepared for responding effectively to challanges of the coming days even in this era of globalization and information super highway.

On this day of days could our political leaders take a pause and think for a while of their stand and stake in the society? Would they please think of the limitless sufferings and sacrifices the people of this land underwent during those gory days? Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign entity only when Pakistan became a collapsed state. Do they realize that imperceptively, though slowly but quite steadly, the ship of Bangladesh is driven to the brink of a precipice of a failed state, and that too by them? Should they not come out in the open by breaking all the shakeles that have kept them enslaved in the dark chamber of grosser self-interest, personal idiosyncrasies and bickerings? Are we to believe what Whitman has written in his *To The States* :

"Once fully enslaved, no nation,

State, city of the earth, ever afterward resumes liberty."

This would indeed be miserable.

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