

The
Political History of
Muslim Bengal

An Unfinished Battle of Faith

Mahmudur Rahman



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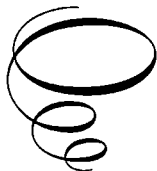
The Political History of Muslim Bengal:

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By

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This book is dedicated to the memory of the ascetic Sufis who travelled to a distant and alien Bengal to preach the monotheist and egalitarian message of Islam to the people of the delta.

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PROLOGUE

The first draft of this book was written in a prison cell at Kashimpur Central Jail during a ten-month period from December 2015 to October 2016. Why I was interned there will be narrated a little later. I wish to start my story by giving a short geographic, demographic and cultural description of Bangladesh.

The country gained independence in 1971 after a nine-month liberation war aided by neighbouring India against brutal Pakistani forces. As the eastern wing of Pakistan, this land of 54,000 square miles was known as East Pakistan. Under British colonial occupation, East Pakistan was called East Bengal. The English word 'Bengal' was derived from the word 'Bangalah' used during the Muslim Sultanate and Mughal period. In ancient times, a few south-eastern districts in India at the mouth of the great river Ganges were called 'Banga' or, in Sanskrit, 'Vanga'. Historians generally accept that Bengal in English originated from Persian 'Bangalah' through Portuguese 'Bengalah' or 'Pengala'. The land boundary of modern Bangladesh is much longer than that of ancient Banga. Other parts of eastern India prior to the Muslim conquest in 1203 AD were known as Barendra or Pundra, Samatata, Chandradwip, Harikel, and so forth. All those regions in addition to the original 'Banga' constitute the present geographical boundary of Bangladesh. I am generally leaving out the ancient names of Radha, Gaud, Lakhnawati, Satgaon, Tamralipti and Hougli from the subject of this book as those parts presently constitute neighbouring West Bengal, an Indian state.

Although the Turkish general Ikhtiyar al-Din defeated the last Sena ruler, Lakshmana Sena, in 1203 AD and established Muslim rule in Bengal, it took nearly another hundred and fifty years to bring the whole of Bengal under a single command. Sultan Shams-al-Din Ilyas Shah brought all of Bengal – north, south, east and west – under unified administration for the first time in the middle of the 14th century. The independent Muslim Sultanate in Bengal survived for nearly two centuries until Afghan general Sher Shah Suri became the ruler for a brief period in the 16th century. Emperor Akbar of the great Mughal dynasty later made the region, Subah Bangalah, a province of the Mughal-Indian kingdom after defeating the last independent Afghan ruler in Bengal in the late 16th century. Dhaka was

made the capital of Bengal in 1611 by the Mughal general Islam Khan Chishti during the reign of Emperor Jahangir, son of Akbar.

Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy, a leading Hindu Bengali historian concedes the above facts with a touch of sadness in his well-respected work, *Bangalir Itihas: Adiparba* (History of the Bengali: Early period, first published in 1949). He writes:

“Attempts of Sasanka, Pala and Sena kings to unite all the regions of Bengal under the name Gaud did not succeed. That good fortune went to the name Banga, the same Banga that was viewed with contempt and remained largely obscured in Aryan civilization and culture; and even to the Pala and Sena kings, association and identity of Banga was considered less noble and therefore, unacceptable. Land boundaries of Bengal in its entirety could not be united under the name Banga during Hindu reign, it was achieved by the so-called Pathan (Afghan) rule and culminated to its final shape at the time of Akbar when the entire Bengal was given the status of Subah Bangalah. Thereafter, Bengal got proper recognition and identity under British rule although Bangladesh of today is smaller in size than Akbar’s Subah Bangalah.” (Roy, 1949: 124)

We find the oldest official reference to ‘Bang’ on a coin minted in 1291 bearing the legend: “This silver coin has been minted at Lakhnawati out of the land revenue of ‘Bang’ in the year six hundred ninety.” The year mentioned here is that of Hijra, i.e. the Muslim calendar year. Sultan Rukn-al-Din Kaikaus was the ruler of Lakhnawati (present-day West Bengal) at the time the coin was minted. The inscription on the coin clearly indicates that the incorporation of ‘Bang’ or eastern Bengal was completed before the coin was minted. Sultan Rukn-al-Din was the grandson of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Balban, the powerful ruler of Delhi. Bengal remained under Muslim rule until 1757, when Robert Clive of the the East India Company defeated Nawab Siraj al-Doulah at the fateful battle of Plassey. The subjugation of Bengal by the British forces paved the way for the ultimate colonization of the Indian subcontinent. India regained independence in 1947 with the birth of the two separate nations, India and Pakistan.

Now to religion and language. Buddhism had remained the most dominant Aryan offshoot religion in East Bengal from the earliest days of its founding by Gautama Buddha till the ultimate absorption of the faith by Brahmanism across greater India. It is a great puzzle how a world religion which had enjoyed majority followings in the region for nearly two millennia could almost disappear. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister, in his famous book entitled, *The Discovery of India*, writing about the process of pushing the well-entrenched Buddhism out of India and into oblivion notes:

“Some degraded forms of Buddhism continued in East Bengal and in Sind in the North West. Otherwise Buddhism gradually vanished from India as a widespread religion.” (Nehru, 2002: 180)

Chinese Buddhist traveller monks Fa-Hien and Hsuan Tsang or Yuan-Chwang in the 4th and 7th centuries respectively found Pundra (present-day Bogra) and Samatata (present-day Comilla) to be full of Buddhist temples and monasteries. It is also claimed in some Buddhist mythological literature that Gautama Buddha himself travelled to Pundra in the 5th century BC and lived there for about six months. If this supposed myth is, in fact, true then we have to accept that the people of eastern Bengal were attracted to Buddhism long before the birth of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the other dominant Aryan religion, Brahmanism, did not arrive in the region before the 3rd or 4th century AD according to the historical evidence. Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy says:

“Prior to the Gupta era, although some evidence of the spread of Jainism (faith founded by Mahavira, contemporary of Buddha), Ajibik (faith founded by Gosala, contemporary of Mahavira) and Buddhism are available, no reliable evidence of Brahmanism has been found. There is no mention of Bangladesh at all in Ved-Samhita. Although there is some reference in Oiteriyo Aranyaka literature, but that too in negative and critical terms.” (Roy, 1949:495).

However, at the time of the Muslim conquest of Bengal by Ikhtiyar Khalji, Buddhism was not only under severe persecution by the Khatriya-Brahman Sena ruler, but was also suffering from philosophical and moral decay. There were clear signs that Brahmanism had succeeded in giving a mortal and decisive blow to Buddhism in the long history of struggle between the two religions in Bengal.

Islam as a religion probably made its entry to south-eastern Bengal in the 8th or 9th century through Arab merchants and seafarers. Eminent Arab Muslim historians and geographers of the time, such as Abu-al-Qasim Ubaid Allah ibn Khurdadhbih (died 912 AD), Abu Abd Allah al-Idrisi (died 1164 AD) and the more famous Al-Musudi (died 956 AD), describe the coastal regions of ancient Noakhali, Chittagong and Arakan in their scholarly works. Some scholars believe that Arab Muslims settled somewhere near the coastal region of Chittagong during the very early period. There is a strong possibility that those settlements later became the nucleus for the gradual growth in the Muslim settler population. Commercial relations between early Arab Muslims and the people of Bengal are also corroborated by archaeological evidence. In excavations at Paharpur (Bogra) and Mainamati (Comilla) Abbasid coins were found

including those of the period of the famous Caliph Harun-al-Rashid (786–809 AD) to give credence to the theory that Muslim traders and preachers travelled to eastern Bengal during the 8th century AD or even earlier.

The arrival of political Islam at the beginning of the 13th century paved the way for the arrival of large numbers of Muslim immigrants including mystic Sufis from Persia, Central Asia and Arab countries. Dr. Abdul Karim, eminent Bangladeshi historian comments in his *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal*:

“Bakhtiyar Khalji’s capture of Nadia and establishment of a kingdom, with Lakhnauti as capital, inaugurated a new age for Bengal. Politically it sowed the seeds of Muslim rule but socially it planted a Muslim society, opening the gates of Bengal to numerous immigrant foreigners from the Muslim world which enormously affected the existing society and culture.” (Karim, 2007: 48).

The epic rise of Islam that took place in East Bengal thereafter has always baffled historians and scholars around the world. Richard M. Eaton, Professor of History at the University of Arizona, USA has correctly raised the following questions in his widely read book, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*:

“How can one explain this development? More particularly why did such a large population emerge in Bengal ... so distant from the Middle East, from which Islam historically expanded ... and not in other regions of India? And within Bengal, why did Islamization occur at so much greater a rate in the east than west? Who converted and why? At what time? What, if anything, did “conversion” mean to contemporary Bengalis? And finally, between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, in what ways did different generations and different social classes of Muslims in Bengal understand, construe, or even construct, Islamic civilization?” (Eaton, 2013: Introduction-xxiii)

Prior to the Muslim victory, the Bengali language had been totally neglected by the Brahman ruling class as it was considered a language of ordinary peasants and fishermen. Only Sanskrit was venerated as the pure Aryan Vedic language and awarded all sorts of royal patronage. According to Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy, 12th century Bengal, under the Sena dynasty, witnessed the golden era of Sanskrit literature. Buddhist monks used to write verses in some spoken dialects of ancient Bengali in the 9th and 10th centuries in their attempt to communicate more effectively with the masses in an attempt to propagate the faith. But, in the hostile environment of the 12th century, even those monasteries were forced to encourage study in

Sanskrit only. It was the later Muslim rulers who provided the necessary support and royal patronage for the development of Bengali language and literature. Dr. Muhammad Mohar Ali, Professor of History of Islam at Ibn Saud Islamic University in Saudi Arabia writes in his extensive research work, ‘History of the Muslims of Bengal’:

“Properly speaking, literary activities in Bengali started with the Muslim period. The language was evolved, according to the latest view, not out of Sanskrit but of a spoken dialect called Magadha Prakrit or Gaudiya Apabhramsa. Nonetheless it is generally classed with the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages. No written specimen of early Bengali is, however available prior to the 10th–12th century, that is almost till the coming of the Muslims to Bengal. In 1907, the late Haraprasad Sastri discovered in Nepal a collection of 47 Buddhist mystical and didactic poems composed by 24 persons and entitled Charya-Charya-Binischaya, now generally referred to as the Charya Padas...

These poems were published for the first time by their discoverer in 1916 under caption Hajar Bachorer Purana Bangla Bhasar Gan O Doha (Buddhist song in thousand-year-old Bengali). Since then, scholars of Bengali language have regarded these poems as the earliest available specimen of Bengali language and have generally assigned them a period between the 10th and the 12th century. No other writing in Bengali till the 15th century has, however, come to light. Whatever might be the exact date of the Charya Padas it is generally recognized by scholars that no vernacular language could have found a scope for free literary expression under the Brahmanical system which preceded the coming of the Muslims and which interdicted the study of any but the Sanskrit Language.” (Ali, 1985: 854–855)

Another Bengali journalist and researcher, Ghulam Murshid, in his book, *Hajar Bachorer Bangla Samskriti* (One thousand years of Bengali culture) notes:

“We can find from the above discussion that Bengali language in true form did not develop before 13th–14th century. United Bengal was also not formed until the 14th century. And the people of this region were not even identified as ‘Bengali’ before the 18th century.” (Murshid, 2016: 26)

Unfortunately, the great contributions made by the Muslim rulers in shaping the political identity of Bangladesh and in the development of the Bengali language remain mostly unrecognized in a country of 90 per cent Bengali Muslims. Why this apathy towards such rich heritage? Is it ignorance or the result of long cultural aggression? Can a blind nation unaware of its roots and cultural history remain politically and intellectually

independent? The principal reason for my writing this book is to seek answers to these questions.

In my sixty-three years, I have been through many ups and downs in life, possibly in equal proportion. The present authoritarian secularist government of Bangladesh and their patrons in New Delhi and Washington consider me an undesirable Islamist. Interestingly, I am neither a theologian nor member of any Islamic party. In fact, I have never been a member of any political party. I am just a modern-day Muslim who practises the religion in personal life. I have not grown a beard and I like to wear Western dresses. But I am definitely very proud of my Islamic heritage and am a strong believer in religious freedom for every citizen in this country as part of their fundamental right.

This is the second occasion that I have been in prison. My problem with the authorities is associated with the publication of critical reports regarding human rights abuses, corruption among the ruling coterie, miscarriages of justice and Indian aggression against Bangladesh in the newspaper of which I was the editor until my arrest on 11 April 2013. I was arrested at my newspaper office on the morning of that fateful day. Prior to my formal arrest, the police had kept me under unofficial house arrest for exactly four months from 12 December 2012 in the same newspaper office. My last offence was to publish an investigative news item exposing an act of grave misconduct by a High Court Judge.

A Skype conversation was leaked to the press in which Justice Nizamul Haq Nasim was heard conspiring with a Belgium-based Bangladeshi government agent to decide, in advance, sentences against the leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami on charges of alleged war crimes in 1971, while the case was still on trial before the bench of the offending judge. Appalled by such a miscarriage of justice, I decided to print the story in *Amar Desh*, the second largest vernacular daily newspaper in Bangladesh. The *Economist* in London also published the story almost simultaneously, releasing the story online on 8 December 2012 under the heading: “Bangladesh, Discrepancy in Dhaka, The War Crimes Court in Bangladesh has some explaining to do.” The story said:

“On 6th December 2012 the presiding judge of Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal, Muhammad Nizamul Huq, passed an order requiring two members of *The Economist* to appear before the court, demanding that they explain how we have come by e-mails and conversations between himself and Ahmed Ziauddin, a lawyer of Bangladeshi origin based in Belgium. The tribunal was established in 2010 to consider accusations of war crimes committed in 1971, during Bangladesh’s war of independence from Pakistan. *The Economist* has heard 17 hours of recorded telephone conversations and

seen over 230 e-mails between the two men. This material is confidential and we are bound by law and the British press's code of conduct not to reveal such information except in matters of the most serious public interest. We did not solicit the material, nor pay for it, nor commit ourselves to publish it. These e-mails, if genuine, would indeed raise questions about the workings of the court and we are bound to investigate them as fully as we can." (Economist, Discrepancy in Dhaka, <https://www.economist.com>>2012/12)

One week later, The Economist published the full story in the print edition of 15 December 2012: "Trying war crimes in Bangladesh, The trial of the birth of a nation." Three significant paragraphs from the story are quoted here to give a picture of the sorry state of Bangladesh's dysfunctional judiciary:

"At the last moment, however, the presiding judge, Muhammad Nizamul Huq, resigned as chairman of the tribunal, following questions put to him by *The Economist* and the publication in Bangladesh of private e-mails which cast doubt upon his role and upon the court proceedings. Recordings of him speaking by telephone were also available on YouTube. *The Economist* has seen these, and other materials, and has been investigating their accuracy and significance. This week, we publish the results of these investigations. The e-mails and phone conversations we have seen raise profound questions about the trial. The material suggests the government tried to put pressure on Mr. Nizamul, albeit he seems to have resisted it. It seems to show he worked improperly with a lawyer based in Brussels, and that the lawyer co-operated with the prosecution – raising questions about conflicts of interest. And in Mr Sayeedi's case it points to the possibility that, even before the court had finished hearing testimony from the defence witnesses, Mr Nizamul was already expecting a guilty verdict. These concerns are so serious that there is a risk not only of a miscarriage of justice affecting the individual defendants, but also that the wrongs which Bangladesh has already suffered will be aggravated by the flawed process of the tribunal. That would not heal the country's wounds, but deepen them." (*The Economist*, Trying war crimes in Bangladesh)

Indeed, Bangladesh today is an extremely polarized and wounded nation. The country under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is no better than a personal fiefdom. Instead of losing his job for a blatant miscarriage of justice as reported in *The Economist* and the *Amar Desh* daily, the offending judge has since been promoted to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. As expected, Mr Sayeedi was given the death sentence by the so-called International Crimes Tribunal which triggered widespread and violent street protests all over the country. Sheikh Hasina's government responded with unprecedented force and violence. More than one hundred

and fifty protesters were shot dead by the police. On the other hand, on 11 April 2012, a huge contingent of police was sent to the Amar Desh offices and printing press to arrest the editor. They then evicted journalists and other employees from the premises and padlocked the main door. Authoritarian secularist rulers in Bangladesh do not like to fight thoughts with thoughts although 'freedom of thought' is guaranteed in the country's Constitution. Nor do they want to engage in healthy debate as practised in free and democratic countries. The methods employed by the current rulers in Bangladesh are much simpler and more direct. They choke press freedom, resort to extrajudicial killings, practise enforced disappearances without any remorse and imprison dissidents for indefinite periods without trial. India takes care on behalf of her client in Bangladesh to assuage any misgivings in Washington and other Western capitals at this blatant disregard for human rights and democratic norms. Western politicians all know very well when to turn a blind eye to achieve their strategic and political goals. Let us forget, the US foreign policy establishment once staunchly supported the Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein in Iraq in spite of their brutal and inhuman records in suppressing dissent. A dying Shah, after his fall from power, was later denied entry to the USA for treatment of his cancer. Saddam was hanged on the morning of a Muslim religious festival by cronies of the US occupying forces in Iraq. The present Prime Minister in Bangladesh is another Shah or Saddam in the making, with active support from India and tacit support from Washington.

As the year 2015 was drawing to a close, I thought of the practical possibility of spending the rest of my life in prison. Since India became the cornerstone of US diplomacy in South Asia, the status of independent Bangladesh has been downgraded to that of a vassal of its giant neighbour. In such an adverse geopolitical situation, the chances of a known critic of the Bangladeshi government's Indo-centric policy being released from prison seemed minimal. I then decided to embark on this paean to my nation's heritage as my swansong. As I am not a historian, nor any type of scholar, I have tried to examine the issues as any moderately knowledgeable citizen searching for his identity would do. I knew from the beginning that the project would be both difficult and dangerous.

The difficulty part relates to the serious dearth of research materials available in prison. There is a small library and a reading room in Kashimpur Jail where one can work with permission from the authorities. But the books they have were of little use for my specific requirement. If it was possible, I would have used the internet for access to information. Unfortunately, in Bangladeshi prisons, inmates are not allowed access to the internet, even for academic purposes. The use of typewriters is also

forbidden. All writing has to be done longhand, as in the old days. I discussed the problem with my wife and she took it upon herself to supply the necessary books and other reference materials. But that is easier said than done. Before starting to write a chapter, I did not know my exact requirements. So, it has been an annoying experience of writing a section and waiting for my wife to come on her weekly visit so that I could give her a list of books and reference materials for which I would then have to wait at least a couple of weeks more. It was her patience and encouragement that prodded me into action. The prison authorities also assisted to some extent by, at least, not obstructing the flow of books.

Now the dangerous part. Bangladesh is currently ruled by a constitutionally illegal Prime Minister who likes to project herself as a liberal secularist. In reality, Sheikh Hasina is a classical fascist in secular garb. The government she heads has choked civil society, the free press and democracy. They do not allow any space for opposition political parties. Any criticism of the government is considered a criminal offence, punishable with life imprisonment. This authoritarian secularism has usurped all fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens of Bangladesh. Opportunities to peacefully change the government through democratic means no longer exist in a country formerly hailed as a beacon of hope in the Muslim world for its rare adherence to a democratic political system.

Even in the worst autocracy, a decree, ordinance or legal instrument in some form is at least required for the state to function. But in Bangladesh, the mere expression of a wish from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is all the law-enforcement agencies need to commit wholesale atrocities on citizens. The constitution in this country is amended at will to provide legal cover for the unchecked authoritarian rule of an individual. The judiciary is largely dysfunctional. In the world today, I am not aware of any other head of a government who wields more power than Sheikh Hasina. Even North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un, on occasions, is publicly censured by China, the principal source of North Korea's military power. In the case of Bangladesh's strong-woman, she has been given *carte blanche* by India to persecute the hapless people of Bangladesh in any way she wishes. India, being the USA's appointed guardian for South Asia (except for Pakistan, for being another nuclear power), has the power to decide whether democracy will ever return to this country. Bangladesh is now an unfortunate country of 160 million depressed, demoralized and persecuted people, living under constant fear of either uniformed or plain-clothed policemen banging on their doors late at night. Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances have become everyday events. Yet she is admired by the USA and other Western countries precisely for committing such

atrocities. In the name of fighting so-called Islamic terrorism, Bangladesh has been turned into a ruthless police state with the blessing of both the USA and India.

The habit of getting used to it is a clear sign of surrender to the oppression of any fascist regime. It happened in Hitler's Germany, Pinochet's Chile and Saddam's Iraq. Even Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), a human rights body known for its pro-Indian, secularist bias in Bangladesh provided chilling statistics in their October 2016 report. In the first nine months of that year, one hundred and fifty people were killed by law-enforcement agencies in custody, seventy-five persons were picked up by plain-clothed policemen and disappeared without trace, fifty-seven inmates died in jail, and ninety-five journalists were tortured, harassed, arrested or threatened by police and ruling party cadres. The Indo-US strategic alliance has turned Bangladesh into an Orwellian state. People cannot survive as human beings without some hope and comfort; they become soulless robots in the face of naked despair. I, however, refuse to sell my soul to the Lucifer in power in Bangladesh. I sincerely believe that, ultimately, strong faith can lead us onwards along the path of eternity.

The subject of my book and the findings therein may intensify the wrath of authoritarian secularist rulers in Bangladesh. I may not find any publisher in this country to touch my draft under the current regime even if I am released from prison by some unforeseen intervention. Barring a change of government, the book will probably be published posthumously. The other alternative is for my family to leave Bangladesh and publish it in a foreign country where they may genuinely practise the philosophy of freedom of thought.

If and when my work is published, I expect differences of opinion and even criticism from readers. My comments and findings may appear controversial to some. But I humbly submit that in the narration of history I have not deviated from well-established facts and respected scholarship. I take full responsibility for the conclusions that I have reached from those facts and my research work.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE DAWN OF ISLAM IN EASTERN BENGAL: THE HISTORY OF THE PAST MILLENNIUM

“Muslim Sovereigns ruled over most of the Indian subcontinent. What was exceptional, was that among India’s interior provinces only in Bengal, a region approximately the size of England and Scotland combined, did a majority of the indigenous population adopt the religion of the ruling class, Islam.” (Eaton, 2013: Introduction-xxii)

I find the above quotation from ‘The rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760’ written by Richard M. Eaton, Professor of History at the University of Arizona, USA and published in 1993, very pertinent to begin this particular chapter. In 2016, at the time of writing this book, the total population of Bengali speaking Muslims living in independent Bangladesh and neighbouring West Bengal, an Indian state, was more than two hundred million. A sizeable diaspora of Bengali Muslims also lives in America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia and South-East Asia. Nearly 90 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh practise Islam, whereas only 30 per cent of West Bengal’s population is estimated to be Muslim. Bengali Muslims are the second largest ethnic population of the Islamic faith in the world, next only to the Arabs, fellow countrymen of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the quote above, Richard Eaton finds the adoption of Islam to be exceptional on account of the massive conversion of the indigenous population in Bengal as a whole. But there is an additional mystery in the remarkable story of the spread of Islam in Eastern India. The people of the comparatively more remote and downstream part of Bengal converted in much greater numbers to the new monotheist religion than the Bengalis of western part of the delta! Therefore, to be precise, the spectacular growth of Islam actually took place in the region of eastern Bengal which constitutes today’s independent Bangladesh, the most densely populated country in the world and the subject of my book. Richard Eaton, in his work, continues to raise a series of issues including this one that I have just raised:

“How can one explain this development? More particularly, why did such a large Muslim population emerge in Bengal so distant from the Middle East, from which Islam historically expanded and not in other regions of India? And within Bengal, why did an Islamic nation occur at so much greater a rate in the east than in the west? Who converted and why? At what time?” (Eaton, 2013: Introduction-xxii)

As a historian and researcher, Richard Eaton has sought answers to many other related questions to complete his excellent work. However, I am attempting a different project where the story of the spread of Islam in Bengal will cover only a single chapter instead of my whole book. I have attempted to write mostly on the past and present of political Islam in eastern Bengal. In my endeavours, I have sought help from the works of many eminent historians and authors including the already mentioned Richard Eaton.

There is no denying the fact that political Islam first set foot on the soil of Gaud, Pundra and Lakhnawati (Bangalah or Bengal was named later by Muslim and British rulers) with the victorious Turkish army led by Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1203 AD. But that does not mean there was no communication or contact between the people of Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan or Anatolia with the indigenous people of Eastern India prior to Ikhtiyar’s conquest. In fact, coins issued by Abbasid Caliphs have been discovered in excavations at Paharpur in Rajshahi and at Mainamati in Comilla. The coin discovered in Paharpur is dated 788 AD when the great Harun-al-Rashid was the Caliph in Baghdad. The coin found in Mainamati was issued by the Abbasid Caliph Muntasir Billah who ruled the Muslim world in 861 AD. It should be noted that Arab general Muhammad Ibn Qasim conquered Sind in 714 AD, nearly four centuries before Ikhtiyar Khalji marched practically unopposed to Nadia, the then temporary capital of Lakshmana Sena, the last ruler of the Sena dynasty in larger Bengal. Unable to defend against the onslaught of the Turkish cavalry, Raja Lakshmana Sena fled to the more remote, eastern and river-girtted region of Vikrampur in the vicinity of Dhaka, part of ancient ‘Bang’. Descendants of the Sena dynasty ruled that much smaller part of Bengal for another half century before the Muslim general Mugith al-Din Tughral conquered East Bengal from lingering Sena rulers and incorporated it into the Muslim dominion. The acquisition of Mugith facilitated the gradual expansion of Islam and the establishment of Muslim political power in other parts of India adjacent to Bengal.

Historians are nearly unanimous in their view that Arabs, being seafaring and maritime people from ancient times, had established commercial and religious contact with the coastal regions of southern and

eastern India long before the arrival of political Islam in India. Thomas Arnold, in his 'The preaching of Islam', notes the popular belief among the people of Malabar Coast that a Hindu king who is said to have embraced Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, Arnold also added that there is no historical evidence to support this tradition. But there is no doubt that an indigenous community in that region converted to the monotheist religion during the very early period of Islam and it was from that southern coast of India, Islam crossed over to the Maldives and Laccadive. Thomas Arnold writes:

"We undoubtedly find that Islam has gained its greatest and most lasting missionary triumphs in times, and places in which its political power has been weakest, as in Southern India and Eastern Bengal ... the first advent of Islam in South India dates as far back as the eighth century, when a band of refugees, to whom the Mapillas trace their descent, came from Iraq and settled in the country. The trade in spices, ivory, gems, etc. between India and Europe, which for many hundreds of years was conducted by the Arabs and Persians, caused a continual stream of Muhammadan influence to flow in upon the west coast of Southern India." (Arnold, 1968: 266)

Abdul Mannan Talib, noted writer of Islamic history in Bangladesh makes the following claim in his book, *Bangladeshe Islam* (Islam in Bangladesh):

"Proselytization of Islam commenced in the Indian west coastal region of Malabar (presently Kerala) during early 7th century through the Muslim merchants. Cherumal Perumal, the Hindu King of Malabar left his throne to travel to Mecca to convert to Islam. Shayikh Jainuddin has described the King's meeting with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his eventual conversion to Islam in his book, *Tuhfatul Mujahideen Fee Bajje Ah-walil Bartakaleen*. Many Hindus of Malabar converted to Islam around the same time." (Talib, 2002: 33)

Many historians consider the story of Cherumal Perumal to be merely myth given the absence of reliable or authentic supporting evidence. However, nobody disputes the fact that Islam arrived in India along the Malabar Coast in the early days of the religion. A recent discovery of an ancient mosque in the northern region of Bangladesh gives another twist to the established history of the arrival of Islam in eastern India.

“Ancient mosque unearthed in Bangladesh in a remote village in northern Bangladesh: an amateur archaeologist has discovered the remains of a mosque believed to be built in the 7th century. Villagers initially stumbled on the site where they found ancient treasure and artifacts of Islamic history, including a stone with Quranic scripture, buried underground. Further investigation into the findings could prove the site to be the earliest mosque built in South Asia. Al Jazeera’s Nicolas Haque reports from Rangpur in northern Bangladesh.”

(Source: Aljazeera, www.aljazeera.com/asia/2012/08)

Let us now, look into the political and economic situation of Eastern India in a period when Islam, as the new and latest monotheist religion, had already established its foothold in Sind and Multan in the north and the Malabar Coast in the south of India. Dr. Muhammad Mohar Ali writes in ‘History of the Muslims of Bengal’:

“So far as Bengal is concerned, our knowledge about the early Muslim traders’ contact with it is derived from stray and indirect references by the Arab geographers. Some of them speak about flourishing ports and valuable commodities in that part of the world, which are clearly identifiable with the coastal region of Bengal and its products. Thus, Abu al-Qasim Ubaid Allah ibn Khurdadhbih (d. 912 AD) while discussing the places of trade interest on the coast of the Indian Ocean after ‘Sarandip’ (Ceylon) and the river ‘Kudafarid’ (the Godavari on the east Indian coast), refers to a port called ‘Samandar’ where rice was produced in abundance and to which aloe-wood was brought down for export from a distance of 15 or 20 days through sweet water (i.e. through inland river) from a territory named ‘Kamrun’ and other places. This place of Samandar is also mentioned by the famous twelfth century Arab geographer, Abu Abd Allah al-Idrisi (d.1164 AD). “Samandar is a large town, commercial and rich,” he says, “where there are good profits to be made. It is a port dependent upon Kanauj, king of this country. The city of Samandar is situated on an inlet which comes from the country of Kashmir. It was built upon the back of a large river which falls into the river Musala, called by the ‘author of the book of marvels the river of perfumes’. Al-Idrisi also mentions that the chief produce of Samandar was rice and that aloe-wood was brought there from Kamrut, 15 days’ distance through sweet water.” (Ali, 1985: 30)

On analysing the description of Samandar given by the Arab geographers, modern-day historians have come to the conclusion that the port of Samandar was situated in south-eastern Bengal. The large rivers that Arab geographers have mentioned are the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. There are possibly a couple of discrepancies in the above description: first, Kamrut is clearly Kamrup and, secondly, the reference of Kanauj as the king of Samandar is confusing. Kanauj is the name of a

place in northern India and no king by that name can be found in Indian history. Furthermore, the period about which al-Idrisi writes was the 8th century and the great Dharma Pala of the famous Pala dynasty was ruling Bengal at that time. About the present name of Samandar, there are two schools of thought among historians. It could either be the island of Sandwip or the famous port of Chittagong. There is also reference to Jazirat-al-Rami in the records of Arab geographers. Some scholars like to think that present-day Ramu of Cox's Bazar is the ancient Jazirat-al-Rami. Dr. Mohar Ali further adds on the subject:

“The English traveler Ralph Fitch, who visited Bengal in 1585–86, also refers to this kingdom of Rame. As it was situated on the sea coast, it is very likely that the Arab merchants were acquainted with it. It may be pointed out that the word Jazirah was used not only to denote islands, but also riparian lands. Sulaiman, the merchant who lived in the middle of the 9th century mentions that the king of Rami was a powerful ruler with 50,000 elephants and an army of 15,000. Elephants are even now-a-days found in large numbers in the hilly region of the Chittagong district. On the whole, therefore, it may be assumed that the Jazirat al-Rami of the Arab geographers were either the state of Rami on the Chittagong coast or a land not very far from it.” (Ali, 1985: 35)

On the identification of the city of Samandar, the findings of Prof. Abdul Karim do not substantially contradict Dr. Mohar Ali's research. According to Prof. Karim:

“Having found that Samandar of Arab geographers lay in the Bengal coast, we now try to find out its exact location. In the map of Joao de Barros, dated 1550 AD, we find that the Ganges on entering into Bengal is bifurcated at a place called Fatiabas (Fathabad?) and flowed into two main streams, the western one flowing through what may now be identified with the Bhagirathi channel and the eastern and the wider one i.e. the Padma channel going down to the sea at Chittagong. According to Abul Fazal, ‘Its (Bengal's) rivers are countless and the first of them in this province is the Ganges: its source cannot be traced ... Rising in the mountains towards the north, it passes through the province of Delhi, and imperial Agra, and Alhabad and Bihar into the province of Bengal, and near Qazihattah in the Sarkar of Barbakabad, it divides into two streams, one of them flowing eastwards, falls into the sea at the port of Chattagong.’ Ibn Battutah visiting Bengal in the middle of the 14th century gives similar information. He says, ‘The first town of Bengal which we entered, was Sudkawan, it was a great city, situated on the shore of a vast ocean. The river Ganges to which the Hindus go on pilgrimage, and the river Jun (Jumna) have united near it before falling into the sea.’ Ibn Battutah's Sudkawan is identified with Chittagong. Ptolemy writing his geography in about 150 AD gives an

account of the lower Ganges, its branches, and the country which they traversed. He refers to its five branches, the western most, the Kambyson mouth at longitude 144.30' and latitude 18.15' and the eastern most called Antibole at longitude 148.30' and latitude 18.15'. The Kambyson mouth has been identified with the Bhagirathi channel at Tamralipti or modern Tamluk and the eastern most Antibole mouth with the Sandwip channel between Sandwip and Chittagong. Scholars have also shown that the eastern most course was also the principal course of the Ganges in the days of Ptolemy." (Karim, 2007: 42)

Prof. Karim concludes by saying: "It is probable, therefore, that the Samandar of the Arab geographers may also be identified with Chittagong and the island opposite Samandar with Sandwip."

It is beyond doubt that the Arab Muslims travelled to the coastal regions of Bangladesh during the early days of Islam as part of their global commercial activities. It is also not unlikely that some of them might have settled in the long coastal belt from Noakhali to Cox's Bazar. There are popular stories in the Arakan region that the Arab Muslims had been established on both sides of Myanmar and Bangladesh since ancient times. According to tradition, the first such settlement resulted from the capsizing of Arabian ships due to a cyclonic storm along Chittagong-Cox's Bazar coastal belt. It is highly probable that some Arab preachers and Sufis had also travelled to this part of the subcontinent long before the Turkish military expedition of the early 13th century. Touching on the issue, Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy writes in his *Bangalir Itihas*:

"Few examples can be given where people have arrived in Bangladesh from outside India. Some Arab Muslim families came to Bangladesh for commercial purpose and then settled here. People of such origin in small numbers can be found in Noakhali-Chittagong and other districts of Bengal. During a long cycle of centuries, they have merged with indigenous people through association and intercourse. Negrito blood related Habshis may also be referred. Five or six such Habshi Sultans ruled for a long period of time in Bangladesh." (Roy, 1949: 41)

However, the conquest of Ikhtiyar Khalji definitely, paved the way for the Sufis to arrive in greater numbers from Arabia, Persia and Anatolia. Readers should bear in mind that at that time this part of the subcontinent was not very hospitable due to its deltaic geographical configuration, huge rivers and dense forests. Before narrating the story of the further spread of Islam, a short summary of the social conditions and cultural geography existing at the time is needed to assist the readers in understanding the

extraordinary transformation of faith among the indigenous peoples of the delta.

The Aryans in ancient times generally viewed the inhabitants of the Ganges delta beyond the eastern bank of the mighty river with contempt and indifference. Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy, quoting from various Indian mythological classics, states that the Aryans considered the people of Vanga, Pundra and Magadha to be barbarians. Mahabharata, the much-venerated Aryan epic denigrates the people living along the coastal belt of eastern Bengal as '*Mleccha*' or untouchables. There was a strict custom among the Aryans that any member of the community who crossed the river Ganga and set foot on the eastern bank would lose sanctity. Anyone doing so had to perform various tough purification rituals before being allowed to return to the clan and commence community life.

Around 500 AD, we find Pundrabardhan, the northern part of Bengal, to be a flourishing autonomous province of the Gupta dynasty. However, this region has an even older history of civilization. According to Buddhist myth, Gautama Buddha himself travelled to Pundra to preach his faith. Buddhist theological universities were built at Paharpur and Mahasthangarh in the 3rd century BC and their fame spread even to China. Mainamati at Comilla was another famous monastery built at the early stage of Buddhism in eastern Bengal. Chinese monks used to travel regularly for study in these institutions during the Gupta period. Those monks wrote books on their travels, stays and studies. There are records that the monks had actually travelled to northern Bangladesh even a few centuries earlier than the 6th century. Except during the brief reign of Hindu king Shashanka in the 7th century, Buddhism enjoyed uninterrupted royal patronage in Bengal throughout the first millennium. Also, in the other parts of India, many of the powerful rulers were followers of Buddhism. Asoka, Kushans, Guptas and Harshavardhana are notables among them. In Bengal, the Pala dynasty who ruled for nearly 500 years after the death of Shashanka were followers of Buddhism. However, the Pala kings used to patronize both Buddhism and Brahmanism during their reign out of political necessity. Many of their Chief Ministers were Brahmins. Dr. Abdul Mumin Chowdhury, a professor of University College London writes on Buddhism in South Asia:

“There was a boost in Brahmanical strength in certain parts of Bengal around this period. Even then, the adherents of Brahmanism were mainly confined to the upper stratum. They remained so during the next four and a half centuries of the Pal and Sen rule. As Hiuen Tsang’s account shows, Bengal was primarily Buddhist. Of the Buddhists, the Mahayanists accounted only a fourth of the total. These demographic facts as well as

remoteness spared Bengal from the anti-Buddhist ‘disorder’ in North India. This however did not stop the Brahman landed potentates, the samantas that had been implanted in the main under the Guptas, from asserting themselves in north and west Bengal.” (Chowdhury, 2008: 214)

The Hindu King Shashanka of Bengal is historically known for his strong anti-Buddhist bias. His bitter enmity with the famous King of Kanauj, Harshavardhana, an ardent Buddhist, is the subject of much literature and myth. There are stories of severe persecution against the followers of Buddha during Shashanka’s reign. However, with the advent of the Pala dynasty in the 8th century, the Buddhists once again regained their advantageous position. At the period when Arab traders were settling in small numbers along the coastal belt of south Bengal during the reign of Dharma Pala, the most famous king of the Pala dynasty, the dominant religion was definitely Buddhism. Four centuries later there was significant change in the cultural and religious geography of the region and, by the time Ikhtiyar Khalji forced the last Sena ruler to flee from his capital at Nadia, Brahmanism reigned supreme. It should be noted that Buddhism lost its vibrancy and basic character gradually over this period. It was greatly influenced by Brahmanism and their practice of idol worship seeped into the once non-ceremonial religion. Jawaharlal Nehru writes about the decay of Buddhism in ‘Discovery of India’:

“The rational ethical doctrine had become overlaid with so much verbiage, so much ceremonial, canon law, so much, in spite of the Buddha, metaphysical doctrine and even magic. Despite Buddha’s warning, they had deified him, and his huge images, in the temples and elsewhere, looked down upon me and I wondered what he would have thought.” (Nehru, 2002: 131)

Senas replaced the Pala dynasty in the 11th century. Senas were Karnataka Khatriyas and migrated to Bengal from south India to serve in the army of the Pala dynasty. By the end of the 11th century the Pala dynasty had decayed to insignificance and Vijaysena, the patriarch of the Senas ended the Pala regime and became ruler of Gaud and Lakhnawati. During nearly one hundred years of Sena rule, the Brahmans and other higher caste Hindus gradually became powerful at the expense of the previously dominant Buddhist community. All the Sena kings were faithful to their Karnataka Khatriya tradition and there was an accompanying shift of royal patronage in favour of Brahmans and Khatriyas. Simmering discontent among the Buddhists and other indigenous people due to the pro-Brahmin and pro-Khatriya bias of the Sena dynasty enabled political Islam to take root in the newly acquired

territory within a short space of time. The persecuted Buddhist population generally welcomed egalitarian Islam. Richard Eaton provides an excellent insight in his description of Bengal before the Turkish conquest regarding inter-mixing between Arabs and the people of Bengal:

“Under the patronage of the palas and various dynasties in Samatata (today’s Bangladesh), Buddhism received a tremendous lift in its international fortunes, expanding throughout maritime Asia as India’s imperial cult par excellence. Dharma Pala himself patronized the construction of two monumental shrine-monastery complexes Vikramsila in eastern Bihar, and Paharpur in Bengal’s Rajshahi district and between the sixth and eleventh centuries, royal patrons in Samatata supported another one, the Salban Vihara at Lalmai (today’s Comilla in Bangladesh). As commercially expansive states rose in eastern India from the eighth century on, Buddhism as a state cult spread into neighbouring lands—in particular to Tibet, Burma, Cambodia, and Java where monumental Buddhist shrines appeared to have been modeled on prototypes developed in Bengal and Bihar. At the same time, Pala control over Magadha, the land of the historical Buddha, served to enhance that dynasty’s prestige as the supreme patrons of the Buddhist religion. Masudi’s (Arab geographer) remark about Muslims residing in Pala domains is significant in the context of these commercially and politically expansive Buddhist states, for by the tenth century, when Bengali textiles were being absorbed into wider Indian Ocean commercial networks, two trade diasporas overlapped one another in the delta region. One, extending eastward from the Arabian Sea, was dominated by Muslim Arabs or Persians; the other, extending eastward from the Bay of Bengal, by Buddhist Bengalis. The earliest presence of Islamic civilization in Bengal resulted from the overlapping of these two diasporas.” (Eaton, 2013: 12)

A Bengali writer’s book, *Hajar Bachorer Bangla Samskriti* (One Thousand Years of the Bengali Culture) also provides an interesting picture of the cultural geography of ancient Bengal. Ghulam Murshid in his effort to find the root of Bengali culture writes:

“Now we need to see, the region which gave rise to Bengali culture; since when that region had become known as Bengal. The wide area which is now called Bangladesh, was separated among various regions even seven to eight hundred years ago. In the second half of the 14th century, Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah united the different parts under a single command. Till that time, this region was not recognized as a united region or state. There were various small states in the region. Names of the states also changed over time. But, generally a few names were considered authentic at different stages. Those are, Gaud, Rarh, Banga, Shumma, Barendri, Pundra, Harikel, Samatata, etc. (2016: 18) ... In the beginning of the 13th

century, at the end of Sena rule, when the Turks conquered this country, it was still not known as Bangladesh. The area which the Turks conquered was called Gaud, not Bengal.” (Murshid, 2016: 19)

Bakhtiyar Khalji lived for only two years after his famous victory that ended Sena rule in Bengal. He undertook an ambitious expedition to Tibet which was a military failure. On the eve of the expedition, Bakhtiyar divided his domain into three strategic regions and appointed his lieutenants as their governors. Muhammad Shiran, Husam al-Din and Ali Mardan Khalji were appointed to govern Lakhnour (Birbhum), Tirhut, and Oudh and present-day Rangpur respectively. Ikhtiyar al-Din with a ten-thousand-strong army reached the foothills of the Himalayas after two weeks of marching through the very difficult terrain of Kamrup in his attempt to capture the Himalayan kingdom. Tibetan forces put up fierce resistance and, having failed to breach the defence of the opposing forces, Ikhtiyar al-Din attempted to retreat. But during what became a long retreat, his forces were continuously ambushed and harassed by the army of the hostile Kamrup ruler. At the end of the long and perilous journey, he made it back to his cantonment at Deokot near present-day Dinajpur with only a handful of soldiers. Devastated and heart-broken, he died soon after. Ikhtiyar’s death sparked a long succession battle among his three governors which lasted for seven years. After a series of ups and downs in the ensuing battles, Husam al-Din ultimately came out victorious and ascended to power taking the name Ghiyath al-Din Iwad Khalji. He was the first Muslim ruler in Bengal to mint coins in his name. Iwad’s rule of nearly fifteen years witnessed both expansion and consolidation in Muslim rule. He retained Lakhnawati (Gaud) as his capital and refused to accept the suzerainty of Delhi Sultan. His refusal to accept Delhi’s domination irked the powerful Sultan Iltutmish. Delhi Sultan dispatched a huge army under the command of his son, Prince Nasir al Din, to defeat the ruler of Gaud. Iwad was finally killed by the forces of Sultan Iltutmish in 1227 AD.

By the time Prince Nasir al-Din defeated and killed Iwad, Sufi preachers from central Asia had started arriving in Bengal in significant numbers. According to Richard Eaton, the earliest known inscription concerning such immigrant Sufis is to be found in the Birbhum district of West Bengal. The inscription, dated 29 July 1221, records the construction of a Sufi lodge and specifically refers to a Sufi from Maragha, Iran. However, the most famous Sufi during the early period of political Islam’s expansion in Bengal was Shaikh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi (d. 1244). He travelled to India after the death of his teacher, Shaikh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardy, the renowned mystic in Baghdad in 1235 AD. Shaikh Jalal-al-

Din Tabrizi settled in Lakhnawati and remained there until his death. It can be assumed with considerable certainty that the Sufis dedicated themselves to their task of preaching the new faith among the masses while Muslim rulers contrived a military push deeper into the other parts of the delta.

The first reference to 'Bang' was found on a coin dated 1291 bearing the legend: "This silver coin has been minted at Lakhnawati out of the land revenue of Bang in the year six hundred ninety." The year mentioned on the coin is that of Hijra, i.e. the Arabic Muslim calendar. Sultan Rukn al-Din Kaikaus was the ruler of Lakhnawati at the time the coin was minted. The inscription also indicates that the incorporation of Eastern Bengal, i.e. Bang, within the Muslim domain had already been completed before the coin was minted in 1291. The year of the incorporation of eastern Bengal should be during the rule of Mugith-al-Din Tughral between the years of 1272 and 1280. Dr. Mohar Ali writes:

"Tughral's greatest achievement was the conquest of East Bengal from the hands of the lingering Sena dynasty and its incorporation into the Muslim dominion. According to Barani, Tughral led several expeditions in eastern Bengal and for consolidating his authority there built a strong fort, most probably at Laricol, about 25 miles due south of Dacca. It is referred to by the historian as Qila-i-Tughral. No details of Tughral's expeditions are however, mentioned; but it is clear from subsequent events that he succeeded in bringing under his effective control the Dacca-Faridpur region." (Ali, 1985: 99)

However, the Muslim ruler who ultimately succeeded in combining all the regions of the delta – Gaud, Pundrabardhan or Barendra, Satgaon, Samatata, Harikela and Banga – under one administrative authority was Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah (1339–1358). In 1352, Sultan Ilyas Shah captured Sonargaon and by doing so gave birth to a new and unified political entity in Eastern India. He took the title, Sultan-i-Bangalah for the first time. This was the beginning of the subsequent creation of Akbar's Subah Bangalah and British Bengal. Ilyas Shah waited until the death of Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah, the ruler of Sonargaon, before marching his army to the then capital of eastern Bengal to complete its annexation. Although the nature of the relationship between Fakhr al-Din, a very capable ruler, and Ilyas Shah is shrouded in mystery, many believe that they not only shared mutual respect but were also good friends. Fakhr al-Din ruled eastern Bengal until 1349 during which time he extended his dominion up to Chittagong, driving out Portuguese pirates and Arakan forces from the region. He is also credited with constructing a road from

Chandpur to Chittagong. A famous middle-aged Moroccan traveller, Ibn Batuta, visited Bangladesh during Fakhr al-Din Mubarak's rule. He was very impressed to see the economic prosperity of the land under Fakhr al-Din. Ibn Batuta noted that textiles were one of the main items of export of Bengal during Fakhr al-Din's reign. Commodity prices were also very low at the time of Batuta's travel. Common people were also generally happy. The Moroccan traveller had the opportunity to meet the most famous Sufi of East Bengal, Shayikh Shah Jalal in Sylhet although he mistook the identity of the holy man with Shayikh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi who died in Lakhnawati (West Bengal) nearly a century before Ibn Batuta's visit to Bengal. Dr. Mohar Ali writes from Ibn Batuta's narration:

"Ibn Batuta narrates a number of miraculous deeds of the Shaikh. One of which was that when Ibn Batuta approached the territory of Assam the Shaikh could intuitively know of his presence and sent four men to welcome him. These men met him at a distance of four days' journey from the Shaikh's abode and told him they had come there at the latter's order to receive him. When Ibn Batuta arrived with them in the presence of the Shaikh, the latter stood up and embraced him, and asked about his country and travels and then bade the men to honor and entertain him. Accordingly, they took him to the hospice and entertained him there for three days." (Ali, 1985: 128)

In the description of the physical feature of Shah Jalal, Ibn Batuta narrates: "He was tall and slim, with lean cheeks." Two other contemporary Sufis had great influence on the people of Bengal irrespective of their religious divide. They were Shaikh Akhi Siraj al-Din and Shaikh Ala al-Haq. Akhi Siraj al-Din was based in Lakhnawati and died in 1357. Shaikh Ala al-Haq lived in Pandua and died in 1398. There were a host of other Sufis actively preaching Islam in Bengal whose life histories are mostly undocumented. Sufi Nur Qutb al-Alam, a disciple of Shaikh Ala al-Haq played a pivotal role in bringing back Muslim rule to Bengal after the brief rise of Raja Kans or Ganesh, a Hindu chieftain, in 1414 AD. He personally invited the Muslim ruler of Jaunpur to defeat Raja Kans and restore Muslim rule in Bengal. As the powerful army of Ibrahim Sharqi, the ruler of Jaunpur, advanced towards Bengal, the Hindu Raja, as part of the compromise formula devised by Sufi Qutb, decided to abdicate in favour of his son after agreeing to convert the son to Islam in 1418. Sultan Jalaluddin, the converted son of Raja Kans was an able administrator and ruled Bengal for nearly two decades.

Ashraf Jahangir Simmani, another revered saint and a disciple of Shaikh Ala al-Haq lived in Pandua around the late 14th and early 15th

centuries. He wrote a famous letter to the aforementioned Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi describing the glorious efforts of Muslim saints to propagate the faith of Islam in Bengal. Dr. Abdul Karim, in his book, *Social History of the Muslim in Bengal*, has quoted the following portion of Simnani's letter:

“God be praised! What a good land is that of Bengal where numerous saints and ascetics came from many directions and made it their habitation and home. For example, at Devgaon seventy leading disciples of the Shaikh of Shaikh, Hazrat Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardy are taking their eternal rest. Several saints of the Suhrawardy order are lying buried in Mahisun and this is the case with the saints of Jalila order in Deotala. In Narkoti some of the best companions of Shaikh of Shaikhs, Shaikh Ahmed Damishqi are found. Hazrat Shaikh Sharf-ud-Din Abu Tawwama, one of the twelve of the Qadarkhani order whose chief pupil was Hazrat Sheikh Sharf-ud-Din Maneri is laying buried at Sonargaon. And then there was Hazrat Bad Alam and Badar Alam Zahedi. In short, in the country of Bengal what to speak of the cities there is no town and no village where holy saints did not come and settle down. Many of the saints of the Suhrawardy order are dead and gone under earth but those still alive are also in fairly large number.” (Karim, 2007: 112)

Richard Eaton starts the third chapter of his scholarly work by quoting a small section from the same letter in which Ashraf Simnani expresses his respectful astonishment: “In the country of Bengal, not to speak of the cities, there is no town and no village where holy saints did not come and settle down.” As mentioned earlier, there is also acknowledgement of the success of missionary works by the Sufis in Bengal in the book entitled ‘The preaching of Islam’ written by T.W. Arnold. He writes:

“We undoubtedly find that Islam has gained its greatest and most lasting missionary triumphs in times and places in which its political power has been weakest, as in southern India and eastern Bengal ... It is in Bengal, however, that the Muhammadan Missionaries in India have achieved their greatest success, as far as numbers are concerned.” (Arnold, 1968: 266)

We now return to the subject of the progression and consolidation of political Islam in the region. Bengal enjoyed virtual independence under the Muslim Sultanate until the capture of Gaud by Sher Khan, the future Afghan Emperor of Delhi in 1538. After the glorious success of Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah in uniting Bengal, the most notable dynasties to rule Bengal were Ilyas Shahi, the second Ilyas Shahi and Ala al-Din Hussain Shahi respectively. The last Hussain Shahi ruler, Mahmud Shah, lost to the

Afghan general, Sher Khan at a time when India was witnessing a Mughal–Afghan military contest and independent Bengal rulers could not keep the region out of the wider conflict.

During nearly two centuries of independent rule after the establishment of the Bengal sultanate by Ilyas Shah, the Muslim rulers established diplomatic relations with many other countries. Dr. Mohar Ali states: “According to Chinese accounts, ambassadors were sent from Bengal in 1405, 1408, 1409 and 1412 during Azam Shah’s reign, and also afterwards in 1414 and 1438–39. The Chinese Emperor Yong Lo reciprocated by sending several missions to Bengal between 1406 and 1413.”

Jawaharlal Nehru also confirms the exchange of diplomatic niceties between the Bengal Sultan and the Chinese Emperor in his ‘Discovery of India’. He writes:

“Bengal had at that time shaken off the suzerainty of Delhi and became an independent sultanate. In the middle of the fourteenth century the Chinese court sent two ambassadors, Hu-Shien and Fin-Shien, to the Bengal Sultan. This led to a succession of ambassadors being sent from Bengal to China during Sultan Ghias-ud Dins reign. This was the period of the Ming Emperors in China. One of the later embassies, sent in 1414 by Saif-ud Din, carried valuable presents, among them a live giraffe. How a giraffe managed to reach India is a mystery: probably it came as a gift from Africa and was sent on to the Ming Emperor as a rarity which would be appreciated. It was indeed greatly appreciated in China where a giraffe is considered an auspicious symbol by the followers of Confucius. There is no doubt that the animal was a giraffe for, apart from a long account of it, there is also a Chinese picture of it on silk. The court artist, who made this picture, has written a long account in praise of it and of the good fortune that flows from it. ‘The ministers and the people all gathered to gaze at it and their joy knows no end’.” (Nehru, 2002: 198–199)

Muslim Sultans of Bengal used to send regular gifts to the inhabitants of the holy cities of Makka and Madina. Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Azam Shah had two madrasas built in the two holy cities. The Sultan also had great respect for the contemporary Sufis in Bengal. It is said that he and the great saint Shaikh Nur Qutb al-Alam studied under another greatly respected saint, Shaikh Hamid al-Din. The sultan used to receive guidance from Shaikh Nur Qutb al-Alam in running the administration. Another Sultan Jalal al-Din used to send regular gifts to the people of the Islamic holy cities. He established diplomatic relations with Sultan Shah Rukh of Herat and Mamluks of Egypt. Muslim rulers of Bengal were also great patrons of learning and literature. Sultan Ghiyath al-Din was himself a poet of considerable fame. He used to compose verses in both Arabic and

Persian. According to popular myth, the Sultan send a request to the famous Persian poet, Hafiz, to complete a Persian couplet written by him. The Sultan also invited the great poet to visit Bengal. Hafiz completed the verse but politely declined the Bengal Sultan's offer to visit his kingdom.

The development of the Bengali language also owes a great deal to the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal. There was no scope to use a vernacular language in literary expression under the Brahmanical system prior to the coming of Muslims to Bengal. The Karnata Khatriya rulers of the Sena dynasty not only patronized Sanskrit, they also strictly forbade the use of the vernacular language in education and literature. Senas and powerful Brahman Pundits ruthlessly suppressed any attempt to use the vernacular language in literary expression declaring that it was scurrilous to write or read Hindu religious books and Puranas in Bengali. A well-known Sanskrit sloka (couplet) threatens that any person hearing Ramayana or Mahabharata in the Bengali language would be thrown into the violent hell called Raurava. Muslim conquest freed the indigenous people from the Brahmanical monopoly of knowledge. The shackles were broken by the entry of political Islam into Bengal. Even Bengali Hindus zealously undertook literary activities in Bengali with generous patronage from Muslim Sultans. The first notable production in Bengali was a translation of Ramayana by the poet Krittivas during the reign of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah (1415–1431). A great Hindu educationist and researcher of Bengali folklore, and a faculty member of Calcutta University, Dineshchandra Sen wrote in 1896:

“How could Bengali language enter into such a rich royal court? It has already been mentioned how the Brahmins used to view the language with total contempt. Under this circumstance why did they become suddenly kind to the language?

We believe the Muslim conquest of Bengal is the reason for the good fortune of the Bengali language. Muslims coming from Iran or Turan (modern Azarbaijan) or other places became Bengali after arriving in this country. They started living alongside with Hindu subjects. Hindu temple bells rang beside Muslim mosques. Muharram, Eid, Sab-e barat etc. were performed along with Hindu festivals like Puja of Durga deity, Ras, Holi etc. Muslim Sultans observed the great influence of Ramayana and Mahabharata on the indigenous people. On the other hand, Bengali became their mother tongue due to a long stay in the region. They became curious to know about Hindu rituals and culture. Bengali translation of Hindu theological books commenced with the patronage from the Sultans of Gaud. Sultan Nasrat Shah commissioned one translation of Mahabharata. We could not find the copy of that Mahabharata. But, there is reference of this

earlier translation in the Mahabharata translated later by the order of Paragal Khan. The famous poet Biddapati also profusely praised Nasrat Shah and 'Lord Ghiyath al-Din, the Sultan of Gaud'. There is indication in Biddapati's couplets that Sultan Nasrat Shah was fond of love songs ... As such, the poor Bengali language received first invitation from royal court to satisfy the curiosity of Muslim Sultans and their Courtiers. Under the situation, Hindu kings could no longer ignore the language patronized by the powerful Gaud Sultans. Rural Zamindars also followed the examples of the Sultans. Thus, Bengali got access and recognition in Hindu royal courts. Finding no other alternative, Brahman Pundits also started nursing the language." (Sen, 1991: 129–131)

Another eminent linguist, Sukumar Sen, finds Muslim influence as the principal reason for the evolution of the Bengali language in its present form. He writes in his scholarly work, *Bangalah Sahitter Itihas* (History of Bengali Literature):

"Between the period 1200–1450 not only no evidence of Bengali literature can be found, there is no trace of Bengali even as a language. Books and songs written in Bengali are available only from the last part of 15th century and it may be assumed that 16th century standard form of Bengali was reached by the beginning of 15th century. There is major difference between 16th century Bengali with that of pre-12th century language. There are couple of reasons for this. One is time related. Change in the language over long period of time is inevitable. Language may significantly change over two hundred and fifty years. But, changes in Bengali language is considerably more than other Indo-Aryan languages in this two hundred and fifty years. Even pronunciation has also changed. Second reason is mainly responsible for all these radical changes. Gradual increase of intimate influence of Persian language over Bengali is the second cause. Muslim rule had been established and consolidated by 13th century. Many of the Muslim rulers were Turks by origin. Whether they were Turks or not, their everyday language was Persian. Over the administrative process, Persian slowly replaced Sanskrit. Hindu employees of royal administration also started using Persian. But more important was that the Muslims initially less in number but highly influential, and were equally influential among both locals and foreigners, were conversant in both Persian and Bengali languages. Persian was used initially more, but Bengali became more popular at the end. Through the practices of bilingual local Muslims and Hindu employees, Bengali language got transformed into popular form around mid-15th century or may be even earlier." (Sen, 2002: 81–82)

Rakhal Das Bandopadhaya, also a respected Bengali Hindu historian, is quite generous in his praise of Sultan Ala al-Din Hussain Shah for his patronization of Bengali literature and overall administrative success.

Bandopadhaya wrote *Bangalahr Itihas* (History of Bengal) in the early 20th century. In his scholarship, Bandopadhaya says:

“Great number of books were written during the reign of Hussain Shah ... Hussain Shah gave land grants in Chittagong to his general, Paragal Khan. This Paragal Khan commissioned Kabindra Parameswar to translate Mahabharata from Adi Parba (first part) to Stree Parba (Women part or Book of the Women) ... It is said that Hussain Shah awarded the title ‘Gunoraj Khan’ to Maladhar Basu for his literary works ... The period of Ala al-Din Hussain Shah and his descendants was the most glorious Muslim era in Gaud-Bengal. Muslim kingdom achieved maximum expansion during this period. The kingdom of Gaud expanded up to Kamrup or Kamtapur in the North, Tripura in South-East, and eastern border of united Province in the West. Sultan Sikandar Lodhi of Delhi and first Mughal Emperor, Babur even signed treaty with the Sultan of Bengal.” (Bandopadhaya, (1998: 145, 156)

Ghulam Murshid also notes the contribution of Muslim Sultans in the development of the Bengali language in *Hajar Bachorer Bangla Samskriti* (One thousand years of the Bengali Culture):

“At an era when to read or listen to Ramayana, Mahabharata and eighteen Puranas in vernacular language was considered a grave sin, it is doubtful whether those poets would have dared to translate those into Bengali without the blessings of the Sultans. There is no doubt that they were highly encouraged by the then rulers. In fact, new horizons opened for Bengali Literature with the patronage of Sultans. Foreign travelers inform that although Arabic and Persian was the official lingua franca, Bengali was more widely practiced from royal court to common places.” (Murshid, 2016: 40)

Muslim rulers made no distinction between Hindu and Muslim poets when providing encouragement and royal patronage. Therefore, we find that poets from both communities had remained active in composing Bengali verses and writing other books even in prose form during the Middle Ages. Notable among the poets are Krittivas, Maladhar Basu, Vijayagupta, Vipradas Piplai, Yasoraj Khan, Kabindra Parameswar, Srikara Nandi, Dvija Sridhara, Shah Muhammad Saghbir, Amir Zain al-Din, Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan, Sabirid Khan, Muhammad Kabir, Sayyid Sultan, Krishnadas Kaviraj, Jayananda etc. The famous Daulat Qazi, Alaol, and Magan Siddiqui (Thakur) of the Arakan court were mostly 17th century poets. The great works of these people contributed immensely to the evolution of modern Bengali. Strangely, it was the foreign Muslim conquerors who created the helpful environment in Bengal for the

development of the language of the common people which was long neglected and despised by the Brahmanical ruling class. Eventually, Persian, Turkish and Arabic speaking Muslim rulers provided the necessary support to develop Bengali as a major language in India.

Unfortunately, Bengal Sultans are rarely given the recognition they deserve either in Bangladesh or West Bengal for their great support. One reason for this apathy may arise from the fact that, we have inherited our education system from British India. During one hundred and ninety years of British colonial administration every attempt had been made to distort the history of the Muslim period in India because of its hatred of the Muslim rulers whom British forces defeated in 1757. The colonial rulers also wanted to appease the majority Hindu population at the expense of minority Muslims. A section of powerful Hindu generals and traders conspired with the the East India Company to defeat Nawab Siraj al-Doulah in the fateful battle of Plassey. Those Hindus and their descendants played a major part in distorting the history of Bengal's glorious Muslim era.

After independence in 1947, Pakistani rulers equally neglected the people and culture of East Pakistan and never attempted either to understand or discover the glorious history and rich Islamic heritage of Bengal. Since 1971, we Bangladeshis have been continuously struggling to find our roots and heritage in the face of fierce cultural aggression from regional powers and our big neighbour, India.

The great era of the independent Bengal sultanate ended in 1538 with Sher Shah's conquest of Gaud. Sher Shah later became the Emperor of Delhi by defeating Mughal Emperor Humayun. The reign of Emperor Sher Shah lasted only five years. He was accidentally killed by an explosion in the armoury in the midst of a battle. Humayun later defeated his son and regained the throne in Delhi. The thirty-eight years that followed were a history of continuous struggle between Afghan and Mughal powers in Bengal. The first phase of the power struggle ended with the defeat and killing of Daud Shah, the last Afghan king of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by Mughal general Khan Jahan in 1576 in the famous battle at Rajmahal. The Mughal Emperor Akbar was on the throne of Delhi at that time. Bengal thereafter became 'Subah Bangalah' of the Mughal Empire. However, Afghan resistance in Bengal did not totally end with the fall of Daud. Afghan amirs and jagirdars who were scattered around Bengal continued their resistance until the early part of the 17th century. Resistance was led by the legendary Isa Khan and the famous Bara Bhuiyans (Twelve Zamindars). Isa Khan did not submit to the Mughals till his death in 1599. At last, the Mughal general Islam Khan succeeded in defeating Musa

Khan, the son of Isa Khan, in 1611 and formally took over Sonargaon, the then capital. By that time Akbar had died and his son Jahangir was on the throne of the Mughal empire. The Afghan forces of Musa Khan were absorbed into the Mughal army. Proper respect was given to the defeated ruler of Sonargaon and at a later date Musa Khan was also given command by the emperor to fight against the Hindu king of Kamrup.

The Afghan-Mughal battle for supremacy in India caused significant changes in the demographic situation in Bengal. With each expansion of the Mughal Empire in northern India at the cost of the Afghans, more Afghan refugees entered Bengal. They were generally welcomed by the Afghan amirs and jagirdars already established in the region. This process of endless immigration naturally swelled the numbers of foreign-origin Muslims in Bengal. During the brief period of Afghan rule in Bengal, Afghan-origin soldiers, traders, craftsmen, and royal employees also settled in greater numbers. This influx was similar to the arrival of Turks in large numbers after Bakhtiyar Khalji's initial conquest of Gaud in 1203. In fact, settlement of foreign-origin Muslims continued unabated during the entire period of Muslim rule in Bengal. On the subject of Muslim settlements in Bengal, Khandaker Fuzli Rubbee, Diwan of Murshidabad wrote a book in 1895 entitled, '*Haqiqate Musalman-i-Bengalah*' (The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal). He says:

“We may now proceed to trace the reasons for the large Musalman population of Bengal proper. During the very long period that Bengal remained under the Musalman sway, it enjoyed a greater degree of peace and security than any other part of Hindustan or indeed than any Musalman country throughout the world. Moreover, the Musalmans had here an independent government of their own. Again, on account of the natural defences by which the country is protected, it has always enjoyed immunity from foreign invasions, and consequently it formed a great asylum for the Musalmans. Furthermore, the richness of its soil and the abundance of its productions attracted men from other countries to settle in it. For all these reasons, the population of the country was ever on the increase, and thus it was that this province became inhabited by larger numbers of Musalmans than any other part of India. From 1204 AD to 1765 AD, that is to say, during a period of 561 years, 76 Musalman Governors, Kings and Nazims successively ruled Bengal. Out of these, 16 Governors held their appointments from the Ghoris and Khalji Emperors, 26 were independent Sovereigns, including the rulers who were contemporaneous with the reign of Sher Shah, and the remaining 34 were Nazims under the Mughal Emperors. The 76 rulers, who governed this country during these 562 years, were all either Afghan, Mughal, Iranian or Arab origin, except Kans, Jalal-ud-Din Shah, Ahmed Shah and Raja Todermal and Mansingh. Owing to this foreign origin of its Sovereigns, numerous Musalmans of all classes and

conditions came from Afghanistan, Turkistan, Iran, Arabia, distant parts of India and other countries, and settled in Bengal. Some of these Musalmans came with the conquerors of Bengal, others came on account of disturbances and revolutions in their own native lands, and some came merely in search of employment or livelihood.” (Rubbee: 22–23, Kessinger Legacy Reprints)

Dr. Mohar Ali has a similar opinion on the largescale migration and settlement of foreign Muslims in Bengal. He writes:

“The process of immigration and settlement continued during the periods of Afghan and Mughal rule as well. Sher Shah, the Afghan hero, divided Bengal into a number of units and settled his trusted men with their retinues over them. It has been very reasonably suggested that ‘the jagirs created by Sher became the nucleus of those petty principalities that waged stubborn warfare against the Mughals, during Akbar’s and Jahangir’s reign.’ The ‘settlement of Pathan jagirdars, before and after the time of Sher Shah, as a standing militia against the inroads of the tribes of Jharkhand (Chutia Nagpur)’, writes Blochmann, ‘led to the formation of the great Muhammadan zamindari of Birbhum, which gave the E.I. Company some trouble.’ Daud Shah, the last Afghan ruler in Bengal, had a very large retinue of followers and servants, besides an army consisting of 40,000 well-mounted cavalry, 3,300 elephants and 140,000 infantry. After their submissions to the Mughals, most of the Afghans were allowed to settle in Bengal, though the extent and number of their jagirs and rent-free holdings were reduced or subjected to nominal rents.” (Ali, 1985: 769)

Bengal was under effective Mughal rule for over a century. With the death of last great Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal dynasty established by Babur started to crumble. Murshid Quli Khan was the Nazim (Viceroy) of Bengal at the time of Aurangzeb’s death. He was an able administrator and a cunning politician. Murshid Quli was also very adept in managing the war of succession in Delhi. The political situation in India was then extremely volatile. With the waning of Mughal power, Marathas and Sikhs were becoming a more dominant military force inside India. On the other hand, the English, Portuguese and French were also flexing their muscles. The three foreign powers were contesting supremacy in the subcontinent. In Bengal, Portuguese pirates were creating havoc by indulging in wholesale looting, raping, murder and slave trafficking. However, militarily the English were the most powerful. Under a very difficult situation, Murshid Quli succeeded in maintaining a rather uneasy peace in Bengal until his death in 1727. He also kept Bengal as semi-independent in the absence of any effective central command from

Delhi. Muslim rule survived in Bengal for only thirty more years after the death of Murshid Quli.

By the time effective Mughal rule terminated in Bengal at the beginning of the 18th century, the province probably had the largest number of Muslims among all the provinces in the empire. Surprisingly, this surge in the Muslim population was not noticed until the 1872 population survey conducted by the then British colonial administration. The census showed that the Muslim population in Bengal proper was 16,370,967 as against a total population of 36,769,735. The rest of the population were Hindu, Buddhist, Animist and tribal. A couple of subsequent censuses in 1881 and 1891 revealed more startling data. Both confirmed that Muslims were a clear majority in the province. The author of the 1891 census C.J. O'Donnel made a surprising claim that more local people had converted to Islam during the period 1881–1891. He further commented that Islam would become the universal religion of East Bengal within the next six hundred years if the demographic trends of the 1890s continued. James Wise, a British colonial official later wrote: “The most interesting fact revealed by the census of 1872 was the enormous host of Muhammadans resident in Lower Bengal.” Today, only one hundred and twenty-five years after the 1891 census, 90 per cent of the population of Bangladesh are Muslims. How and when did this miracle happen? Scholars, of course, have different theories for this remarkable growth of Islam in eastern Bengal. Prof. Abdul Karim commenting on the issue writes:

“The building up of the Muslim society in Bengal is a long process of gradual growth. The composition of the society quite naturally also differed from century to century. Two factors were mainly responsible for swelling the ranks of the Muslims in Bengal: (i) the immigration of the foreign Muslim populace, and (ii) the merging of the local populace in the Muslim society after their conversion.” (Karim, 2007: 172)

In the process of mass conversion that took place during Muslim rule, the Sufis in Bengal played a very significant role. The Sufis were not local people. They mostly came from Central Asia, Arabia, Iran and Turkey. According to popular myth, some of them arrived in Bengal even before the Muslim conquest. Names like Baba Adam Shahid in Vikrampur, Shah Sultan Rumi in Netrokona, Shah Sultan Mahisawar in Bogra, and Makhdum Shah Daulah Shahid in Pabna are associated with this myth. However, there is no historical evidence to identify the exact period of their coming to East Bengal. But that is beside the point. There is absolutely no doubt that the Sufis came in large numbers at various times

and their influence over the indigenous people was enormous. The general attitude of the Muslim rulers towards the Sufis was also one of great veneration. On many occasions the Sufis gave advice to the Sultans on running their administration. The Sufis not only imparted religious education to the common people and ruling class alike, but also assisted in the expansion of Muslim political power. As Richard Eaton has narrated: “The principal carriers of the Islamic literary and intellectual tradition in the Bengal sultanate were groups of distinguished and influential Sufis who resided in the successive capital cities of Lakhnauti (from 1204), Pandua (from ca.1342), and Gaur (from ca.1432).”

However, according to Eaton, the real cause of the Islamization of Bengal was the agrarian revolution that occurred in eastern Bengal, especially after the Mughal conquest. It should be noted here that the Mughal rulers had no special role in this rise of Islam. There is also no historic evidence of any additional zeal shown by the Mughal administration to promote conversion. On the contrary, secular Mughals remained mostly aloof on this issue. This remarkable growth of Islam was rather more a cultural evolution. Eaton summarizes by writing:

“By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the dominant carriers of Islamic civilization in Bengal were not the urban ashraf, but peasant cultivators of the eastern frontier, who in extraordinary ways assimilated Islam in their agrarian worldview. These two interrelated themes of Bengal’s pre-modern period—agrarian growth and Islamization—were products of various forces. Certainly, the cultural accommodation achieved during the two and half centuries between 1342 and 1599 contributed to the ultimate Islamization of the delta. This period opened with Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah’s founding of Bengal’s first independent Muslim dynasty and closed with the death of Isa Khan, the delta’s last effective independent ruler prior to the Mughal age.” (Eaton, 2013: 306)

From all the above writings and research of eminent historians, we can identify the following major causes of the spectacular spread of Islam in eastern India:

1. The indigenous Buddhist and other populations were severely persecuted by the Sena Brahmin-Khatriya rulers during one hundred years of their rule in the 12th century and they found shelter in the egalitarian philosophy of Islam.
2. Great numbers of Sufi preachers were successful in their missionary activities because of their exemplary simple and ascetic lifestyle.

3. The continuous influx of immigrant Muslims from Central Asia, Iran and Arab lands. These immigrants settled in Bengal and gradually became part of the community by means of inter-marriage.
4. The agrarian revolution facilitated the spread of the egalitarian religion. Community life associated with village mosques helped the conversion process of the local population. Mughal administrators, although secular in their state functions, gave generous land grants for the establishment of mosques and other Islamic institutions.

Let me now go back to political developments in Bengal. The death of Emperor Aurangazeb in 1707 and Murshid Quli in 1727 hastened the demise of Muslim rule in India. A power struggle commenced between Sarfaraz Khan, the grandson of Murshid Quli and Shuja al-Din, his son-in-law, for the Bengal (Murshidabad) throne, with the father eventually emerging victorious. The son gracefully accepted defeat. He was rewarded for his patience as Shuja al-Din nominated him crown prince before his death in 1738. Unfortunately, Sarfaraz Khan failed to get the allegiance of the royal court after his father's death. Alivardi Khan, a powerful and wily general rose up against the new Nawab. In the ensuing battle Nawab Sarfaraz Khan lost both his life and kingdom. Alivardi became the Nawab and ruled Bengal for the next sixteen years. He was an able general and administrator. But Bengal was in chaos by then. Alivardi spent the entire period of his reign constantly fighting against the three enemies: the Marathas, the Portuguese and the English. By the time the elderly Alivardi died in 1756, the English were already conspiring to take political control of the relatively prosperous province in India. It was the beginning of the end. The twenty-three-year-old grandson of Alivardi and heir apparent, Siraj al-Daulah, ascended to the throne of Bengal in April 1756. The English decided to ignore the new Nawab and even refused to pay the customary diplomatic visit. William Tooke, one of the English factors writes: "I have already observed by which means Siraj al-Doulah came to the Nabobship, upon which it is usual according to an old Eastern custom on being appointed prince of the country to be visited by the different foreign nations and proper presents made to him. This in the first place we neglected doing."

From the ancient times of empire building, it had been a diplomatic norm in all the countries of the world for foreigners to pay respects to the new Sovereign. It could not be only an Eastern custom as noted above by William Tooke. Even in modern times, diplomats pay respect to the head of state or government of their host countries. The English actually

intended their action as a public rebuke to provoke the young Nawab into starting a military offensive early in his rule. The reign of Siraj lasted only fourteen months. The English conspired with Mir Jafar, the military chief of Nawab, Jagat Seth, the fabulously wealthy banker and other influential court officials to topple and kill the last independent ruler of Bengal.

A meeting among the conspirators was held at Fort William on 1 May 1757 to adopt a resolution to oust Siraj. At the meeting the Bengal Nawab was falsely accused of: (i) oppression against the English; (ii) intriguing with the French against English interests; and (iii) becoming unpopular among his subjects because of misrule. The drama is similar to the present-day policy of so-called regime change in Islamic countries by Western powers. The final battle was fought at Plassey on 23 June 1757. Siraj al-Doulah lost in the battle mainly because of the treachery of his own military. Troops under the command of Mir Jafar, Rai Durlabh Ram and other treacherous commanders did not participate in the battle. They watched the exchanges in silence from the sidelines. Only Mir Madan and Mohanlal, the two junior generals fought with utmost bravery and patriotism. In the end, it was an unequal battle with the bulk of Nawab's army remaining passive in the battlefield and thus aiding the British forces in defeating the Nawab. Siraj al-Doulah managed to escape the battlefield with his wife and daughter only to be captured by a partisan of Mir Jafar. The ill-fated Nawab was brought back to Murshidabad and brutally murdered while in the custody of Mir Jafar's army on the orders of Robert Clive and his puppet, Mir Jafar, on 2 July 1757. Five and a half centuries of Muslim rule in Bengal thus ended with the tragic death of the last independent Nawab. Dr. Mohar Ali writes the epilogue of Muslim rule in his 'History of The Muslims of Bengal':

“With the defeat and murder of Siraj al-Doulah and the installation of the puppet Nawab Mir Jafar under Clive's superintendence English political authority was established in Bengal. It was the combined result of the gradual weakening and disintegration of the Mughal empire, the worldwide commercial and colonial rivalry among the European nations consequent upon the geographical discoveries of the previous centuries, the emergence of a wealthy and influential Hindu mercantile class in Bengal who had practically assumed the role of king-makers since the death of Murshid Quli Khan in 1727, and the determination and enterprise of the English East India Company's agents for gaining commercial and colonial supremacy over the South Asian subcontinent. Siraj al-Doulah fell a victim to these circumstances.” (Ali, 1985: 676)

Jawaharlal Nehru also touches on the tragic subject of the fall of Bengal by English treachery in his *Discovery of India*. He writes:

“In Bengal, Clive, by promoting treason and forgery and with very little fighting, had won the Battle of Plassey in 1757, a date which is sometimes said to mark the beginning of the British Empire in India. It was an unsavoury beginning and something of that bitter taste has clung to it ever since.”

Muslim rule in Bengal lasted for 550 years until the defeat of Nawab Siraj al-Doulah at Plassey in 1757. During this period, Bengal was united under a single administrative unit for the first time by Sultan Ilyas Shah and was later named Subah Bangalah by the Mughals. Dhaka was made the Capital of Subah Bangalah in 1611 by Islam Khan Chishti, the Mughal general and subedar. Numerous numbers of Sufis arrived and settled in eastern Bengal from Central Asia, Iran, and Arabia to preach Islam. Historians and researchers are all of the opinion that Islam has gained its greatest triumphs in India through the missionary activities of the Sufis in eastern Bengal. The mosque-centric community life of Muslims had also played an important role in the overall Islamization in the rural areas of the region. Eaton writes:

“As the focus of public prayer, the mosque has always been the principal public institution in Islamic civilization. Whether a grand edifice or a humble thatched hut, the mosque conceptually conflates Islam’s macrocommunity of the Umma—the worldwide body of believers—into a microcommunity of fellow villagers or fellow city dwellers, affording them the physical space to articulate their collective response to the word of God. As such the mosque is the physical embodiment of the social reality of Islam, and hence the paramount institution by which community identity and solidarity are expressed... Why and how were such institutions built? We have seen that in the empire generally, Mughal policy aimed at expanding the agrarian basis upon which the state’s wealth rested, and at creating loyal constituencies among local elites and their dependents. Although these aims were manifestly economic and political in nature, a characteristic means of achieving them, especially in frontier regions where new lands were being brought into cultivation, was by promoting the establishment of durable agrarian communities focused on religious institutions. Thus, in eastern Bengal, the state oversaw the establishment of both Hindu and Muslim institutions as new lands were opened up for cultivation. Of these, the Muslim institutions proved by far the more numerous and influential, and from them Islamic values, attitudes, terminology, and rituals gradually diffused over the countryside in the course of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Contemporary state documents mention, in passing, that at such institutions new Friday assemblies or circles of believers had been established (iqamat-i halqa-yi juma).” (Eaton, 2013: 229–231)

There had been a continuous influx into eastern Bengal of other Muslim immigrants including soldiers, officials, artisans and fortune seekers since the 9th century onwards. The delta became an attractive safe haven for them after the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal in the 13th century. The process of immigration and settlement continued during Afghan and Mughal rule as well. Prof. Abdul Karim correctly points out:

“Bakhtiyar Khalji’s capture of Nadia and establishment of a kingdom, with Lakhnauti as capital, inaugurated a new age for Bengal. Politically it sowed the seeds of Muslim rule but socially it planted a Muslim society opening the gates of Bengal to numerous immigrant foreigners from the Muslim world which enormously affected the existing society and culture.” (Karim, 2007: 48)

Every single factor described above contributed to the spectacular spread of Islam among the population in the delta. There is hardly any debate that, by the time the Sena dynasty was established in Bengal in the 12th century, Buddhism in different forms had taken root as the dominant religion, competing strongly with Brahmanical, caste-based Hinduism. There is also evidence that many Buddhists had fled to the eastern lands bordering Tibet from other regions of India when resurgent Brahmanism was persecuting the followers of Buddha’s nirvana after the 8th century in northern India. The advent of Sena rule in the 12th century significantly changed the socio-religious scenario in Bengal. Being Brahmin Khatriya from southern India, the rulers started vigorously cultivating Brahminism in Bengal. Royal patronage found new clients. Land grants to settle in Bengal were now awarded more to the Brahmins than to Buddhist monks and monasteries. Furthermore, Brahminism is a strict caste-based religion. Sena rulers were keen to vigorously enforce the dictums of Brahminism. As a result, tribal people, animists and even the low-caste Hindus were viewed as lesser human beings by the upper caste Brahmins and Khatriyas. Buddhism was already a historical enemy. This hostile attitude of the Senas naturally created discontent among the majority of the population when Ikhtiyar al-Din marched into Bengal virtually unopposed. The message of egalitarian Islam was a welcome change for the oppressed people. The rapid success of Ikhtiyar al-Din in converting the Mech tribe of Kuch Bihar to Islam gives some indication of the positive attitude among the indigenous people towards the new religion. The leader of the tribe was given the name Ali after conversion and it was Ali Mech himself who acted as a guide to Ikhtiyar al-Din’s unsuccessful Tibet campaign. It should also be noted that most of the tribal people in 13th century Bengal were animists. According to Thomas Arnold: “In Bengal the Muslim

missionaries were welcomed with open arms by the aborigines and the low castes on the very outskirts of Hinduism, despised and condemned by their proud Aryan rulers.”

The development of Bengali as a rich language and medium of literature was another great achievement of Bengal Sultans. Although the rulers were not Bengali speaking themselves, but they actively patronized literary production in the vernacular language. The Brahmanical system that preceded Muslim rule was a strong barrier to the development of Bengali as a modern language. Both Sena rulers and Brahmin Pundits used to consider Bengali as the language of untouchables. Court language under Hindu rule had always been Sanskrit. Muslim conquest broke this restriction on the use of the vernacular language in the royal court. The fusion of Islamic and indigenous culture thereafter created a vibrant society in Bengal. The political and cultural environment created by the newly created dynamic society provided necessary impetus to nurture and develop the language of the common, indigenous people. This striking success of Islam in eastern Bengal is undoubtedly the basis of the emergence of Muslim-majority East Pakistan in 1947 and the subsequent birth of independent Bangladesh in 1971. Among the total population of 160 million in Bangladesh, nearly 145 million today are Muslims. They speak the Bengali language, developed during the Muslim era, and are fiercely proud of their culture.

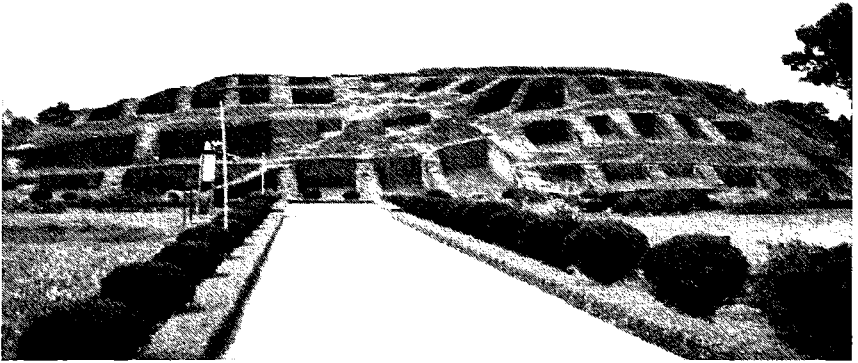
Bangladesh is a strategically located Islamic country surrounded by Buddhist Myanmar and Hindu India. However, this is not the complete picture of the magnificent rise of Islam in eastern India. Bengali Muslims are the second largest ethnic Muslim community in the world after Arab Muslims. This has happened as the result of a thousand-year-long journey of a faith in a land which is not only at a great distance from, but also different in many aspects from the desert of Hejaz where Allah’s messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) received the revelation that transformed the world in the 7th century. Bangladesh is green and swampy, while Hejaz is a sandy desert. The population here are mostly dark, of medium build and mild mannered. Arabs are fairer, stronger and known for their violent temper. Very few Bangladeshis can read or speak Arabic. The faith of Islam has overcome all those apparently insurmountable barriers. In brief the major factors in the success of political Islam in Eastern India are the following:

1. The facilitation of a spectacular rise of Islam at the eastern and farthest corner of the Indian subcontinent.

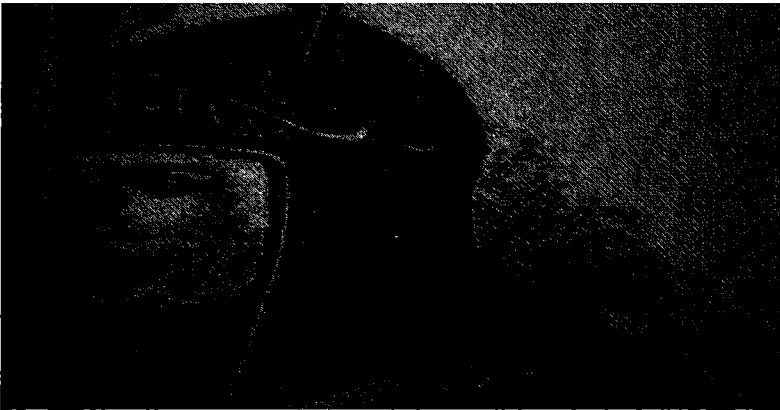
2. The unification of smaller, fragmented states into a large, powerful and prosperous political entity.
3. The giving of the name and identity of *Bangalah* to a region long neglected and despised by Aryan and *Brahman* ruling classes as the land of the '*Mleccha*' (unclean) and '*Dasyu*' (sub-human).
4. The development of an indigenous vocabulary, long neglected by Indo-Aryans, transforming it into a major global language, *Bengali*, the national language of a modern and independent Bangladesh.

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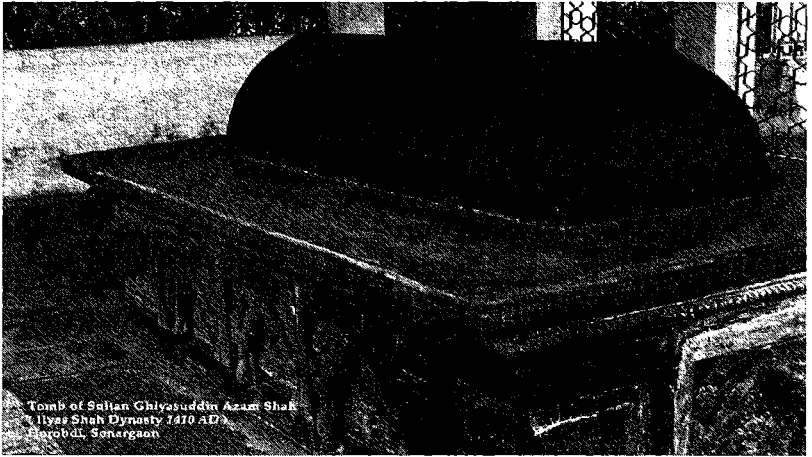
Mahasthangarh, earliest archaeological site in Bangladesh dates back to 3rd Century BC.



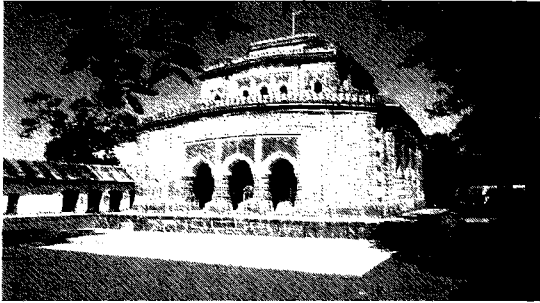
Sketch of Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, the Muslim general who conquered Bengal in 1203 AD.



Sixty dome Mosque built in 15th century, a UNESCO world heritage site.



Tomb of Sultan Gyath al Din Azam Shah, 3rd great ruler of the Ilyas Shahi Dynasty, 1410 AD at Sonargaon.



Kanta Jew temple in Dinajpur built in 1722 AD.



Nawab Siraj al Doulah, the last independent ruler of Bengal, 1757 AD.



Robert Clive of East India Company, 1757 AD.

CHAPTER TWO

BRITISH COLONIAL OCCUPATION AND THE SUBJUGATION OF MUSLIMS (1757–1947)

I begin this chapter by quoting W.W. Hunter, a British colonial civil servant from his famous report of 1871 entitled, 'The Indian Musalmans'. In his attempt to analyse the causes of the century-long Muslim rebellion against British rule, he wrote a full chapter under the heading, 'The Wrongs of the Muhammadans under British rule'. Perturbed by the historic Sipahi Mutiny of 1857 and subsequent decade-long heroic rebellion in the Pathan belt along the present-day Pakistan–Afghanistan border by the followers of Sayyid Ahmed Berelvi, the British colonial administration entrusted Hunter with finding the major causes behind the continuous revolts by the Muslim population of India whom the author describes as a 'persistently belligerent class'. Since the treacherous victory of Robert Clive that had ended the independence of Bengal, the colonial rulers of the the East India Company had considered the Muslims to be their principal enemy. The new administration did everything in its capacity to humiliate and crush the community both economically and politically. Conceding this fact, Hunter writes:

"For there is no use shutting our ears to the fact that the Indian Muhammadans arraign us on a list of charges as serious as was ever brought against a government. They accuse us of having closed every honorable walk of life to professors of their creed. They accuse us of having introduced a system of education which leaves their whole community unprovided for, and which has landed it in contempt and beggary. They accuse us of having brought misery into thousands of families, by abolishing their law officers, who gave the sanction of religion to the marriage tie, and who from time immemorial have been the depositories and administrators of the Domestic Law of Islam. They accuse us of imperilling their souls, by denying them the means of performing the duties of their faith. Above all, they charge us with deliberate malversation of their religious foundations, and with misappropriation on the largest scale of their educational funds. Besides these specific counts, which they believe

susceptible of proof, they have a host of sentimental grievances, perhaps of little weight with the unimaginative British mind, but which not less in India than in Ireland keep the popular heart in a state of soreness to their rulers. They declare that we, *who obtained our footing in Bengal as the servants of a Muhammadan Empire*, have shown no pity in the time of our triumph, and with the insolence of upstarts have trodden our former masters into the mire. In a word, the Indian Musalmans arraign the British government for its want of sympathy, for its want of magnanimity, for its mean malversation of their funds, and for great public wrongs spread over a period of one hundred years.” (Hunter, 1975: 132)

It is curious to note the acknowledgement of W.W. Hunter that the British did obtain their footing in Bengal as the servants of a Muslim empire. Indeed, the British arrived in India as a trading company under great Mughal Empire in the beginning of the 17th century. The British East India Company was founded in London on 31 December 1600. Queen Elizabeth I gave the Royal Charter to the Company to commence operations. Wealthy people of London owned the shares in the Company and initially the government had no direct control in its operation. John Mildenhall, the first representative of the East India Company arrived at the court of Emperor Akbar in 1603. However, other than establishing primary acquaintance, no concrete result to commence trade in India could be achieved by his visit. The Company received the much-coveted trading license from Emperor Jahangir six years later in 1609. It is said that a beautiful Armenian lady was instrumental in obtaining the Emperor’s special favour. W.H. Carey writes in his ‘The good old days of Honorable John Company’ in 1882:

“It was during the reign of Jehangeer, that two missions were sent from England to his court; the first by the The East India Company, conducted by captain Hawkins, for the purpose of opening up a commercial intercourse with India; the second by the celebrated Sir Thomas Roe as ambassador from King James I. Hawkins after much difficulty arrived at Agra on the 16th April 1609, and being able to speak Turkish was most favourably received by the Emperor, who subsequently insisted on his marrying a young Armenian lady. He succeeded in obtaining the royal promise for an unlimited extension of the English trade.” (Cited from <https://archive.org/details/internet.dli...>)

The East India Company built a factory in Surat in 1613 and thus future colonial power was able to rely on a firm footing in India. Thomas Roe, company ambassador, arrived in the subcontinent in 1615. He convinced Emperor Jahangir to grant a royal decree allowing the Company to engage in trade anywhere in Mughal India. The East India Company

built its first fort in Balasore in Orissa in 1624. The controversial Hugly fort was built in 1651. This site is notoriously famous for much conspiratorial activity against Muslim rule in Bengal along with Fort William at Calcutta and Kashimbazar Palace in Murshidabad. Emperor Akbar's son Jahangir and grandson Shahjahan were both very kind and friendly to the British. During the next fifty years after the first agent of the East India Company paid his respects at Akbar's court, the British trading company greatly consolidated their trading operations in the subcontinent. Thomas Roe and subsequent agents of the Company managed to become influential members of the royal court. The Company gradually extended its operations in the greater part of India, including Bengal. By this period, Subedar Azam Khan, the Mughal Governor of Bengal had given permission to the East India Company to conduct trade in the Subah. However, it was Prince Shah Shuja, the second son of Emperor Shahjahan and Governor of Bengal who first gave the East India Company the unlimited sanction to trade all over Bengal, thereby unknowingly sealing the fate of Muslim rule in India. Calcutta, the future capital of British India, was still a cluster of three small waterlogged, unhygienic villages in the middle of the 17th century when Dhaka was already the capital of Bengal and royal court of Shuja.

Relations between the East India Company and Shaista Khan, the then powerful and influential governor of Bengal soured over the non-payment of huge taxes due to the Company leading the Governor to temporarily close all British trading operations. Job Charnok, the legendary founder of Calcutta, was the Chief Agent of East Indian Company in Hugly in 1685. He was summoned to Dhaka by Nawab Shaista Khan. But, Job Charnok wisely thought caution to be the best part of valour and fled from Hugly rather than face the wrath of the Mughal Governor. He first took brief refuge at Sutanati, one of the three villages to constitute the future Calcutta, at a distance of twenty miles south of Hugly and then fled to safety in far-off Madras. He only returned to Bengal in 1690 after obtaining pardon from Ibrahim Khan, the successor of Shaista Khan. However, Charnok did not intend to return either to Hugly or Murshidabad. Instead, he managed to buy Sutanati, Govindapur and Dihi, the three small villages and gradually transformed them into a new town and a stronghold for the East India Company. This was Charnok's headquarters. Eighty-three years later, these places, once unimportant and un-strategic in the eyes of Bengal Muslim rulers, would become Calcutta, the capital of British India under colonial rule. The timing was also very opportune for the Company to start their commercial and political

activities with renewed vigour as the Mughal empire by then has passed its zenith and signs of decline was clearly visible.

Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan, a Brahmin converted to Islam and trusted governor of the last great Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, shifted the capital of Bengal from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1715, one of the many errors of later Muslim rulers that contributed in the ultimate demise of Muslim rule in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. After the change of capital, four Muslim Nawabs, Shuja al-Din (1727–1739), Sarfaraz Khan (1739–1740), Alivardi Khan (1740–1756) and Siraj al-Doulah (1756–1757) survived for the next forty-two years as de facto independent rulers of Bengal. They continued to take royal proclamations from the ineffectual Mughal emperor in Delhi as a custom, but in reality, they ruled the province independently. Among the four Nawabs, Shuja al-Din and Alivardi were effective rulers and astute military generals. However, time was against Alivardi when he assumed the throne of Bengal. Not only did he become ruler at an advanced age, but also, by the time he became Nawab at Murshidabad, Bengal was facing the menace of Portuguese and Arakani (present-day Myanmar) pirates who were ravaging the coastal zones in the south. At the same time, Marathas were making menacing raids from the north. The old general had to remain mostly busy fighting these invaders on multiple fronts. The East India Company did not miss this opportunity and not only increased their military power significantly, but also made useful political and military alliances mostly among Hindu aristocrats unhappy over the long period of Muslim rule and domination. There were also ambitious Muslim military elites who themselves nurtured the dream of occupying the throne and the British lost little time in befriending them. A strong and enthusiastic alliance among ambitious British, opportunistic Hindus and unpatriotic Muslims was thus formed against the Nawab of Bengal even before the death of Alivardi. Fort William was built in Calcutta in 1754 without even bothering to seek formal permission from the Bengal Nawab who was gradually becoming infirm in his advancing years.

After the death of Alivardi in 1756, his grandson, Nawab Siraj al-Doulah, an inexperienced twenty-three-year-old young man, became the last independent ruler of Bengal. The East India Company was just waiting for the death of the old Nawab. The short fourteen-month reign of Siraj al-Doulah was a period of continuous turmoil and pitched battles which were always initiated from the British side. The fateful day was 23 June 1757. In a drama known as the 'Battle of Plassey', a moderate force of three thousand British soldiers led by Clive and Watson defeated a sixty-thousand-strong Bengal army of Siraj. The Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal army, Mir Jafar Ali Khan and most of the Battalion Commanders

except for a few patriots like Mir Mardan and Mohanlal, were by then conspiring against the Nawab. As per the instructions of the Commander-in-Chief, the army of Siraj did not engage in the battle at all and silently watched the annihilation of a small number of patriotic forces led by Mir Mardan and Mohanlal. The defeated Nawab fled from the battlefield with his wife and other members of his family, in search of safety, only to be captured within a week by Mir Qasim, son-in-law of Mir Jafar Ali Khan. The young Nawab was promptly executed in custody. The tragedy of the unfortunate Siraj al-Doulah did not end with his execution. Mir Jafar was proclaimed Nawab by the victorious East India Company on 29 June 1757. The family of Siraj were brought to Dhaka as captives. His mother, aunt and other female relatives were killed in a stage-managed capsizing of a boat in the Buriganga river. The former Nawab's wife, Begum Lutfunnessa, and his daughter Afroz, along with the wife of Alivardi Khan, Begum Sharifunnessa were, however, spared but kept in confinement in Dhaka until 1765. They were then allowed to return to Murshidabad to pass the remaining days of their lives in despair and destitution. It is believed that Begum Lutfunnessa, wife of the last independent Muslim ruler in Bengal, was found dead one morning beside the grave of the unfortunate Nawab in Murshidabad where she used to pass most of her time in prayer. She was buried beside her beloved husband.

Robert Clive installed Mir Jafar Ali Khan as the new Nawab in Murshidabad according to the agreement reached at Fort William long before the battle at Plassey. The first job of the puppet Nawab Mir Jafar on ascending to the throne of Bengal was to empty the treasury to pay so-called reparations to the East India Company which enormously enriched Clive, Watson and other officials of the Company personally. The plunder of Bengal continued unabated for at least a century during which time what had once been the most prosperous province of Mughal India became the poorest. In one notorious man-made famine between 1769 and 1770 (the famous famine of the year 1176 on the Bengali calendar) it is estimated that fifteen million people died of starvation and other famine-related diseases. We will return to that tragic episode later. Mir Zafar's first period on the throne, appointed by the East India Company, lasted only four years. During this period, he exhausted the treasury to meet ever-rising financial demands from his foreign masters. Unable to cope with the situation, he was forced to abdicate by Clive in 1760 in favour of Mir Qasim, his son-in-law. Surprisingly, by this time, the man who had once captured the defeated Nawab Siraj al-Doulah and handed over the last independent ruler of Bengal for eventual execution had a change of heart.

He was not at all happy with the British plunder and secretly nurtured a dream to regain independence. Robert Clive was unaware of this change and unwittingly installed a fierce nationalist on the throne.

Upon ascending to the throne, Mir Qasim shifted his capital to Munger (present-day Bihar) in an attempt to break free from the British shackles. He changed the tax revenue system and raised an independent army. The first direct conflict with the British started when the new Nawab opposed the tax-free status of the East India Company. Soon the policy differences turned into skirmishes and battles. Mir Qasim attacked Patna and killed Ellis, the chief of the company factory. The Patna incident triggered a full-scale war between the Nawab of Bengal and the British. Mir Qasim successively lost in the battles of Katwa, Giria and Udainala. He fled to Oudh where Nawab Shuja-ud-Doula welcomed him warmly. The British reinstated Mir Jafar as puppet Nawab of Bengal in 1763. Mir Qasim approached Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II for military help. The combined forces of Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Oudh and the Emperor engaged the British and Mir Jafar's army in the historic battle of Buxar in 1764. Mir Qasim lost in the decisive battle and with that final defeat any lingering hope of ousting the British colonial forces from the soil of Bengal perished. Mir Qasim fled to Delhi with the hope of raising another army in the Mughal capital to fight against the Company, but this never materialized. Politically, financially and militarily weak, the Mughal Emperor had neither the strength nor the courage to renew hostility against the British. In an effort to neutralize Delhi, Robert Clive went to the imperial court and received a royal farman appointing the East India Company as the Diwan of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under the Mughal Empire. Clive, of course, gave a huge amount of money to Emperor Shah Alam II as gifts and a visiting fee. Mir Qasim was snubbed in Delhi and died a defeated, broken-hearted man. According to popular legend, Mir Qasim was found dead unattended beside a road in Delhi. It was an unrecognized corpse until someone eventually identified him as the Nawab of Bengal from one piece of cloth he was wearing which had an inscription bearing his name and title. Although he is said to have been buried according to Muslim custom, the burial place is unknown today. However, it was Nawab Mir Qasim who actually started the liberation struggle against the colonial forces of the East India Company in 1763 and this was the beginning of a hundred-year-long rebellion by the mostly Muslim population of India.

Mir Zafar died of leprosy in 1765 and during the next seven years, three of his sons: Nazmud-dowlah, Saifud-dowla and Mubarak-ud-dowlah were put on the ceremonial throne in Murshidabad by the Company.

Warren Hastings finally abolished this dual system of governance in 1772 and the East India Company became both de facto and de jure ruler of Bengal. Although Murshidabad remained the administrative capital of Bengal until 1773, all commercial activities were shifted to Calcutta to profit the Company. Calcutta ultimately became both administrative and commercial capital of British Bengal in 1773. When the construction of the new capital was in full swing, other parts of Bengal were reeling under the most tragic famine the world had ever seen. The once relatively prosperous part of Bengal was actually the most affected by the famine. Desperate, hungry people even attempted to sell their children in an attempt to save their own lives. But there were no buyers. It was nothing but wholesale manslaughter by starvation enforced by the colonial power. The assumption of Diwani by the Company was the root cause of this disaster. In their attempt to create a system of permanent exploitation, the East India Company destroyed the social and economic structure of both urban and rural Bengal. Bengal's famous weaving industry was made the principal target. The textile industry was systematically dismantled to establish a commercial monopoly for the Company. Bengal had been known for its textile products since ancient times. One of the most precious gifts that went to the rulers in Delhi from Bengal was the textiles of Dhaka, the crown jewel of which was a super fine fabric called Muslin. The Company and their 'gomosthas', mostly Hindus, not only determined the quantity that each weaver could produce, but also fixed the buying price well below that of the market. The ultimate goal of the Company was to reduce Bengal to a supplier of cotton and raw silk only by destroying its ability to produce finished fabrics. British policy pushed the mostly Muslim weaver community to complete destitution as they had no land to fall back on to at least try to begin a new life as farmers.

On the other hand, the cash revenue payment system which replaced the age-old system of crop sharing affected the peasant population. As a result of a two-pronged assault, the entire cottage industry of Bengal collapsed. The colonial ruler showed no sympathy. They forced the starving people either to sell all their belongings to pay increased taxes or to flee en masse. Once well-off weavers, artisans, traders and peasants were forced to beg. The Company's system of awarding revenue collection contracts to the highest bidders created a group of heartless, voracious sharks whose only aim was to plunder all before them to make the Company happy and also to enrich themselves. Revenue collection operations were so ruthless that even when the people were dying in hordes at the height of the famine during 1770 and 1771, net collection of revenue was significantly greater than in previous years. The ceremonial

Nawab of Murshidabad, a descendant of Mir Jafar, acted as an accomplice of East India Company in its merciless money-making operations. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, the plunder of Bengal actually assisted the industrial revolution in England. He writes:

“Bengal had the first full experience of British rule in India. That rule began with outright plunder, and a land revenue system which extracted the uttermost farthing not only from the living but also from the dead cultivators. The English historians of India, Edward Thompson and G.T. Garrett, tell us that ‘a gold-lust unequalled since the hysteria that took hold of the Spaniards of Cortes and Pizarro’s age filled the English mind. Bengal in particular was not to know peace again until she has been bled white.’ ‘For the monstrous financial immorality of the English conduct in India for many a year after this, Clive was largely responsible.’ ... it was pure loot. The ‘Pagoda tree’ was shaken again and again till the most terrible famines ravaged Bengal.” (Nehru, 2002: 297)

William Hunter writing on the Bengal famine in June 1770 remarked, “every six persons out of 16 were dead.” A Bangladeshi academic, Azizur Rahman Mallick has drawn an appropriate picture of the time in his research work entitled, British policy and the Muslims in Bengal. He writes:

“The battles of Plassey and Buxar put an end to the independence of Bengal. The grant of Diwani in 1765 gave a legal sanction to what had already taken place. The Company, already the controlling military power in Bengal, now procured for itself the financial control of the country. The effects of this change followed closely the loss of political authority were for the Muslims many and important. The wants and demands of the Company at home seemed to grow with this immense acquisition. Their servants in India were suspicious that all the sources of revenue might not be fairly disclosed to them and they were alarmed lest the income from new possessions should decline under their management. The native collectors of revenue wanted to gratify the eager views of the Company and conciliate the general favour of the English. All parties in the revenue department, English or Indian, thus concurred in the urgency of keeping up the standard of the public income. The land revenue, levied perhaps as severely as before the days of the Diwani, had never been so rigorously collected. During Muslim rule the income of the State, spent in the country, directly or indirectly, benefited the people. With the assumption of the Diwani, however, a large portion of the revenue began to be transmitted to England.” (Mallick, 1977: 31)

This policy devastated the economic life of Bengal and created a situation in which starvation and famine were inevitable. It should,

however, be mentioned that the Bengali Muslims were more affected than the Hindus by the famine. Even during Mughal rule, indigenous Bengali Muslims were mostly farmers and artisans. Trade and commerce were controlled either by the Hindu community or by Muslim settlers from the northern and western parts of India. Although Muslims used to get priority in employment in the royal court and administration during the Muslim rule of Bengal of nearly five hundred and fifty years, again the local Bengali Muslims were mostly neglected. The banking service was totally controlled by Hindu Marwari settlers. Towards the end of Muslim rule in 1756–1757, banker Jagathseth and Diwan of Dhaka Rajballabh were the two richest financial operators in Bengal. Both of them were settlers from the Hindu community. Now, after the Company's conquest, the British targeted the whole Muslim community as the potential enemy and undertook a policy of economically crushing even the poor farmers and artisans. Hindus were considered to be not only submissive to Company rule but also allies against the Muslims, the common enemy. In their eagerness to reward the Hindu community for their support, the British policymakers introduced changes which, in fact, gave Hindus proprietary rights over the land. The cooperation of the Hindus with the Company was closest in trade and commerce and it also had a historic dimension. Even during the period under Alivardi Khan, the Company used to conduct all its commercial activities in both Calcutta and Kasimbazar through Hindu agents. This Hindu–Company nexus had worked more diligently against the interest of Bengali Muslims after 1757. William Hunter, in his *Indian Mussalman*, while mainly focusing on demise of Muslim aristocracy wrote:

“The English obtained Bengal simply as the chief revenue officer of the Delhi Emperor. Instead of buying the appointment by a fat bribe, we won it by the sword. But our legal title was simply that of the Emperor's Diwan or Chief revenue officer. As such, the Mussalman's hold that we were bound to carry out the Muhammadan system which we then undertook to administer. There can be little doubt, I think, that both parties to the treaty at the time understood this, although the grants and treaties do not in my opinion bind us down. For some years the English maintained the Muhammadan officers in their posts; and when they began to venture upon reforms, they did so with a caution bordering upon timidity. The greatest blow which we dealt to the old system was in one sense an underhand one, for neither the English nor the Muhammadans foresaw its effects. This was the series of changes introduced by Lord Cornwallis and John Shore, ending in the Permanent Settlement of 1793. By it we usurped the functions of those higher Musalman officers who had formerly subsisted between the actual collector and the government, and whose dragoons were the

recognized machinery for enforcing the Land-Tax. Instead of Musalman revenue-farmers with their troopers and spearmen, we placed an English Collector in each district, with an unarmed fiscal-police attached like common bailiffs to his court. The Muhammadan nobility either lost their former connection with the Land-Tax, or became mere landholders, with an inelastic title to a part of the profits of the soil. The Permanent Settlement however consummated rather than introduced this change. It was in another respect that it most seriously damaged the position of the great Muhammadan Houses. For the whole tendency of the settlement was to acknowledge as the land holders the subordinate Hindu officers who dealt directly with husband-men. I have carefully gone over the Settlement Report of 1788-90; and notwithstanding the clauses touching intermediate holders in the code of 1793, it is quite clear to me that our revenue officers of those days had an eye to only three links of the previous system the state, the local agent or land holder who collected direct from the peasantry, and the husbandman who tilled the soil. Those were the three features of the former administration requisite to our new plan, and by degrees all the other links of the Muhammadan revenue system were either extruded or allowed to drop out. For example, the provisions respecting the separation of independent Talukdars of subordinate tenure holders, who held from the superior Musalman lord by a perpetual lease, and paid their Land Tax direct to the state, were in themselves fatal to the greatness of many a Muhammadan House. Such a family, although it might grant away part of its territory in permanent farm, always exercised a sort of jurisdiction over its subordinate holders, and, when occasion demanded, managed to extract cesses, or benevolences, in short, money in one form or another, from them. The officer who has studied the Permanent Settlement most minutely in connection with the present Muhammadan disaffection writes thus: 'It elevated the Hindu Collectors, who up to that time had held but unimportant posts, to the position of landholders, gave them a proprietary right in the soil, and allowed them to accumulate wealth which would have gone to the Musalmans under their own rule.'" (Hunter, 1975: 144-145)

From the above analysis by William Hunter, it is clear that the Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis not only created hordes of Hindu Zamindars overnight, but the source of wealth was most radically transferred from the Muslim to the Hindu community. This not only changed the economic equilibrium but also created drastic social and cultural tension. Islam, being an egalitarian religion, has no place for caste divides among its members. But, with the rise of the Hindu Zamindars, the everyday life of the majority Muslim farmers in Bengal became more degrading with the additional element of having to face the hostile reaction of the caste-conscious landlords. To these fanatically caste-conscious nouveau riche Zamindars, Muslims were doubly untouchable because of their poverty and religion. They were not allowed to sit in front of them

nor share water from the same pond. In extreme cases, even the shadow of a poor Muslim farmer was considered filthy and impure. Under such a situation, rebellion was inevitable and the Muslims in India in fact fought continually and viciously against British rulers for another hundred years.

In Bengal, the Muslims had to fight on two fronts, one against the British colonial forces and another against the Hindu Zamindars. The central policy of British rule during these hundred years was to distribute patronage to the Hindu population and ruthlessly crush the Muslim rebellion.

The people's war against British occupation started around the same time as Mir Qasim was fighting against the Company forces in 1763. The first man to lead this people's war is popularly known as Fakir Majnu Shah. However, knowledge of him only comes through word of mouth and his actual name and identity have always been shrouded in mystery. The rebellion which lasted for nearly four decades is also known as the Fakir Rebellion. Fakirs are generally regarded as ascetic religious people. The rebellion was mostly led by this section of people supported by the general population, especially Muslim peasants who suffered simultaneously from Company rule and severe oppression by Hindu Zamindars. This oppression was both economic and religious in nature. Krishna Rai, a notorious Zamindar, even imposed a capitation tax on each of his peasants who had embraced Islam. Because of the mass participation in the rebellion, historians also call it the Peasants Movement. The most famous leader of the Fakir Revolt, Fakir Majnu Shah, resorted to armed struggle against the forces of Company and Zamindars. He was injured in a battle against British forces led by Captain Brennan in December 1786 and, although he avoided capture, died a fugitive. After the death of Majnu Shah, his followers continued the resistance struggle. Notable leaders of Fakir movements are Musa Shah, Cherag Ali Shah, Paragal Shah, Muther Bux, Karim Shah and Jari Shah. The other Muslim heroes who resisted colonial occupation during this period were Shamsher-Gazi in Tripura (1767–1768), Abu Torab in Swandip (1769), Fakir Karam Shah in Mymensing (1775), Nurul-Din in North Bengal (1783) and Fakir Bolaki Shah in Bakerganj (1792). A few Hindu Sannyasins also fought alongside Muslim Fakirs against the colonial rulers. The Sannyasi leadership mainly came from Bhavani Pathak and Devi Chaudhurani, a Zamindar herself. The Chakmas of Chittagong Hill also revolted around the same time against the British. Fakirs and peasants continued their resistance until the end of the 18th century. The first phase of the freedom struggle ended with the death and capture of resistance leaders.

However, the defeat of this first batch of freedom fighters did not bring peace for the British rulers as the Faraizi movement gathered momentum from 1818 onwards. Haji Shariatullah and Dudu Miah led the movement in South and East Bengal for the next fifty years. Followers of the more famous Sayyid Ahmed Berelvi fought on the North and West Bengal fronts. Nisar Ali of Chandpur and Barasat, who was more popularly known as Titumir, led another peasant rebellion during the same period until being martyred at his headquarters in the Nadia district of West Bengal in 1831. Titumir was an ardent disciple of Sayyid Ahmed. William Hunter had to acknowledge the heroic anti-colonial liberation struggle of Titumir, albeit somewhat disparagingly as follows:

“Among the disciples of the prophet in Calcutta, was a certain professional wrestler and bully, by name Titu Miyan. This man had started life as the son of a respectable husbandman, and bettered his position by marrying into the family of a small landowner. But his violent and turbulent disposition threw away these advantages. For some time, he earned an ignominious livelihood as a boxer in Calcutta, and afterwards enlisted in one of the bands of clubmen with which the country gentlemen of Bengal were at that time wont to adjust their family differences and boundary disputes. This occupation finally landed him in jail. After his release, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca, met Sayyid Ahmed in the Holy City, and returned to India a powerful preacher of the faith. He itinerated in the districts north and east of Calcutta, making multitudes of converts, and preparing in secret God’s vengeance against the Infidel. The capture of Peshawar in 1830 by the Fanatic Host emboldened Titu Miyan to throw off all disguise; and the petty oppressions to which the Hindu land lords subjected his followers, placed him at the head of an infuriated peasant rising. A series of agrarian outrages followed, ending in the insurgents entrenching themselves in a fortified camp, and defying and beating back the English Authorities with some slaughter. The whole of the country north and east of Calcutta, including three entire districts (24 paragons, Naddea and Faridpur) lay at the mercy of insurgent bands between three and four thousand strong.” (Hunter, 1975: 34–35)

William Hunter’s imagination of the final battle in which Titumir was martyred reflects the disdain of a colonial mind. He writes:

“After some ineffectual efforts by the District Authorities, a detachment of the Calcutta Militia was sent out on the 14th November, 1831 against the rebels. The fanatics, however, refused all parley, and the officer in command, being anxious to save bloodshed, ordered his men to load with blank cartridge. The insurgents poured out upon us, received a harmless volley, and instantly cut our soldiers to pieces. All this took place within a couple of hours ride from Calcutta. On the 17th, the magistrate got together

some reinforcements, the Europeans being mounted on elephants. But the insurgents met them, drawn up in battle array a thousand strong, and chased the party to their boats on the river, cutting down those who were slowest in the retreat. It now became necessary to deal with the rebels by means of regular troops. A body of native infantry, with some Horse Artillery, and a detachment from the Body Guard, hurried out from Calcutta. The insurgents, disdainful of the safety of their stockade, met the troops upon the open plain, with the mangled remains of a European, who had been killed the previous day, suspended in front of their line. A stubborn engagement decided their fate. They were driven back pell-mell into their entrenchment, and the fortified camp was taken by storm. Titu Miyan, the leader, fell in the action. Of the survivors (350 in number), 140 were sentenced by the Court to various terms of imprisonment; and one of them, Titu's lieutenant, was condemned to death." (Hunter, 1975: 36-37)

The prophet referred to in Hunter's narration is actually Sayyid Ahmed Berelvi, the famous religious and military leader of the 'Wahabis' and 'Faraizis' in India. If one reads between the lines from the writings of Hunter, it will be clear that, Titumir's peasant army actually defeated the British Army, including their Elephant battalion, twice. They lost eventually in the face of the superior fire power (Horse Artillery) of the regular infantry of the colonial forces. That only three hundred and fifty survived from Titumir's three to four thousand-strong freedom fighters demonstrates the intensity of the battle and the supreme sacrifice made by mostly Bengali Muslim peasants for their motherland. Long-suffering ordinary peasants and the working class enthusiastically joined Titumir's Islamic nationalist movement because they were encouraged by his message of social equality, his repudiation of the Brahmanical caste system and his call for national independence. The defeat of Titumir and the nearly four-decade-long Fakir Movement could not extinguish the urge for liberation from the heart of the Indian Muslims. A deep hatred of the British colonial rulers was also brewing over the years irrespective of religion among many Indians. A sense of fierce nationalism was slowly spreading. The stage was set for a spontaneous, powerful and widespread revolt. And that revolt was the famous Sipahi Mutiny of 1857.

The first bullet of the Sipahi Mutiny was fired at the Barrackpore army camp in Calcutta, West Bengal. An Indian soldier of the British Indian Army, Mangal Pandey, fired at his superior British officer. Although he missed the target, the famous rebellion started with that single shot. This was the beginning of a widespread liberation war in which both Muslim and Hindu soldiers joined ranks in their shared dream to defeat the colonial power. The last titular Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Jafar was declared the leader of this armed battle in the cause of regaining Indian

independence. Unfortunately, a majority of Bengali Hindus took the side of the British, fearing a return of Muslim rule in India. This should not be a surprise to any serious reader of history, given the hundred years of total patronization of Bengali Hindus in every sphere of life by the British masters. During this period, Calcutta emerged from the swamps and forests to be the capital of British India at the expense of the once more prosperous and developed Dhaka or Murshidabad. East Bengal was systematically turned into a hinterland, only good for supplying raw materials for industries around Calcutta and to bankroll non-resident Zamindars living in Calcutta with cash to enable them to enjoy a lifestyle of extreme pomp and grandeur. Most of the Zamindars were obviously Hindus. They were also rewarded with most government jobs at all levels. William Hunter while preparing a report for the British government on the status of the Indian Muslim population made up a table of the gazetted appointments for which Englishman, Muslims and Hindus were equally eligible. The following table depicts the extremely sorry state of India Muslims in Bengal, with a share of less than 5 per cent of government jobs, whereas Hindus got about 33 per cent, the rest of the civil servants were of course Englishmen:

Distribution of State Patronage in Bengal, April 1871

	Europeans	Hindus	Musalmans	Total
Convenanted Civil Service (appointed in England by the Crown)	260	0	0	260
Judicial Officers in the Non- Regulation Districts 1	47	0	0	47
Extra Assistant Commissioners	26	7	0	33
Deputy-Magistrates & Deputy-Collectors	53	113	30	196
Income-Tax Assessors	11	43	6	60
Registration Department	33	25	2	60
Judges of Small Cause Court and Subordinate Judges	14	25	8	47
Munsifs		178	37	216
Police Department, Gazetted Officers of all grades	106	3	0	109
Public Works Dept. Engineer Establishment	154	19	0	173
Public Works Dept. Subordinate Establishment	72	125	4	201

Public Works Dept. Account Establishment	22	54	0	76
Medical Dept. Officers attached to Medical College, Jails, Charitable Dispensaries, Sanitation and Vaccination Establishments and Medical Officers in charge of Districts, etc.	89	65	4	158
Department of Public Instruction	38	14	1	53
Other Departments, such as Customs, Marine, Survey, Opium, 2 etc.	412	10	0	422
Total	1,338	681	92	2,111

(Source: W.W. Hunter, The Indian Musalmans, 1975: 152)

In East Bengal, the mutiny was started by Habildar Rajab Ali at Chittagong parade ground on 18 November 1857. A small contingent of a few dozen soldiers under Rajab Ali attacked and captured the armoury and treasury in the port city. The group then crossed Feni River and moved towards Sitakund with the aim of reaching Dhaka. To avoid meeting superior Company forces in Noakhali and Comilla en route to Dhaka, Rajab Ali decided to take a tortuous hilly route through the state of Tripura. On the way, he was continuously engaged in pitched battles with the British army and forces of the Hindu King of Tripura who was aiding the British. Being surrounded by enemy forces, Rajab Ali was last reported to have tried to move his comrades in arms towards more distant and mountainous Manipur. His end is not known with certainty. It may be assumed either that this small band of the patriotic Bengal army were killed by the enemy or that they perished due to starvation and fatigue in an extremely inhospitable region.

In the meantime, Sipahis of Dhaka Lalbagh Fort revolted on 21 November only to be crushed after a few skirmishes. All the soldiers who participated in the revolt were either killed, injured or captured. The injured and captured soldiers were then condemned without trial to be hanged from the trees of the ground called 'Maidan of Antaghar'. This place was named after Queen Victoria in 1858 and ultimately changed to Bahadur Shah Park in 1957 at the centennial commemoration ceremony of the great mutiny. By that time, East Bengal had, of course, become East Pakistan, the eastern wing of independent Pakistan. It should be noted that the then Muslim Nawab of Dhaka supported the British in the mutiny. His family was handsomely rewarded for this cowardly and unpatriotic act by

the colonial masters. I will now briefly describe the story of the revolt elsewhere in India.

A major revolt started in Meerut on 10 May. Indian soldiers killed all the British officers and captured the city. Without making any effort to consolidate their gain, the Indian soldiers marched to Delhi and joined their comrades in the Mughal capital. The British forces stationed there were defeated and many of them were killed. Mutineers declared Bahadur Shah Jafar, eighty-two years of age and the last titular Mughal Emperor, as the sovereign. Although he was initially reluctant to assume the grave responsibility, the revolutionary command succeeded in convincing him that without the blessings of the Emperor they would not be able to defeat the British imperialist forces. After Delhi, Lucknow became another principal centre of revolution. Begum Hazrat Mahal, the Queen of Oudh, assumed leadership of the revolution. Lakshmi Bai, the Queen of Jhansi, was another leading character in the nationalist resistance. Tatyasaheb, Maulvi Ahmedullah, Bakht Khan, Nana Saheb, Azimullah Khan and Mughal Prince Feroze Shah fought heroically in the revolt. However, the great mutiny faltered within six months due to the lack of able military commanders, indiscipline in the revolutionary army and inadequate armaments. British forces recaptured Delhi in the middle of September. Unable to face the superior artillery attack of the Company forces, Bahadur Shah left Red Fort and took refuge with a section of his family members at Humayun's tomb. He finally surrendered on 20 September to Major Hodson after receiving a guarantee that he would be spared and would suffer no dishonour or personal indignity. However, the British commanders were just waiting to take revenge. The actions of the victors following the surrender of the Emperor were brutal and inhuman. Major William Hudson personally shot and killed the Emperor's two sons, Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khizr Sultan, and his grandson Mirza Abu Bakr. Many male members of royal family were killed indiscriminately by Company soldiers. Nor were innocent civilians shown any mercy. Surviving members of the royal family, including Emperor Bahadur Shah Jafar, were either exiled, hanged or imprisoned. Five years later, the last Mughal Emperor died in Rangoon in exile on 7 November 1862 at the age of eighty-seven. William Dalrymple has given a vivid description of the brutality of the British officers in his 'The Last Mughal', the book written with meticulous research. He writes:

“What happened next is disputed. According to Hodson, when they finally caught up with the princes, three miles away, close to the walls of Delhi, and near an archway known ever after as the Khuni Darwaza, or Bloody Gate, a large and threatening crowd was closing in on the princes and

looked to be on the verge of rescuing them. According to other accounts, including that of Macdowell, it was only a small crowd and was not in any way threatening. But there is no doubt as to what Hodson did next. Stopping the cart, he ordered the three princes to get out, and to strip naked. Then taking a Colt revolver, he shot them dead, in cold blood and at point blank range, one after another. He then stripped the corpses of their signet rings and turquoise bazubands (armlets), which he pocketed, and seized their bejewelled swords. (2007: 397) ... The bodies were taken away and left out naked in front of the Kotwali, where the British troops queued up to see them. 'I saw them there lying stark and stiff,' wrote Fred Maisey, 'and I must say I was glad to see them, for of their guilt there never was a doubt, and I really believe the king was, to a great extent, a puppet in their hands.' (2007: 398) ... When, the same evening, a young officer, Henry Ouvry, saw the princes' bodies lying naked at the Kotwali, he wrote in his diary that this was just the beginning of the work of retribution for which the British had so long planned: though 'sick of blood' he wrote that he had no doubt that 'we shall have to execute a vast number before we are done'. Little time was lost before this self-fulfilling prophecy began to be realised. Gallows were erected throughout the gutted city—'they say there is not a neighbourhood of Delhi without its own place of execution', wrote one Delhiwallah—and the hangings began. The largest was 'right in the centre of Chandni Chowk, a hideous erection of wood that was the only new and uninjured structure in the entire street. On a trip to take the air down the Chowk shortly afterwards, the twenty-three-year-old Lieutenant Edward Ommaney casually noted in his diary that he saw '19 men hanged opposite the Kotwali on one gallow, and 9 on the other'." (Dalrymple, 2007: 401)

Jawaharlal Nehru's narration of British brutality on their victory against Indian nationalist army in 1857 is similar to that of Dalrymple. The first Indian Prime Minister writes in 'The Discovery of India':

"The accounts given in Kaye and Malleon's 'Rise and Fulfilment of British rule in India' make one sick with horror. 'Every Indian who was not actually fighting for the British became a 'murderer of women and children'—a general massacre of the inhabitants of Delhi, a large number of whom were known to wish us success, was openly proclaimed.' The days of Timur and Nadir Shah were remembered, but their exploits were eclipsed by the new terror, both in extent and the length of time it lasted. Looting was officially allowed for a week, but it actually lasted for a month, and it was accompanied by wholesale massacre.

"In my own city and district of Allahabad and in the neighbourhood, General Neill held his 'Bloody Assizes'. 'Soldiers and civilians alike were holding Bloody Assize, or slaying natives without any assize at all, regardless of age or sex. It is on the records of our British Parliament, in

papers sent home by the Governor General in Council, that 'the aged, women, and children are sacrificed as well as those guilty of rebellion.' They were not deliberately hanged, but burnt to death in villages—perhaps now and then accidentally shot. Volunteer hanging parties went into the districts and amateur executioners were not wanting to the occasion. One gentleman boasted of the numbers he had finished off quite 'in an artistic manner', with mango trees as gibbets and elephants for drops, the victims of this wild justice being strung up, as though for pastime, in the form of figures of eight. And so, in Cawnpore and Lucknow and all over the place." (Nehru, 2002: 325)

The British did not fight alone. They received military support from Sikhs, Gurkhas, and a number of rulers of semi-independent principalities. Bengali Hindus gave moral support to their colonial masters although they did not take part in the actual fighting. There was probably a lack of nationalistic feeling among them. The Bengali Hindus were generally happy under Company rule. The first century of British rule was undoubtedly to the great advantage of the Hindu community. They cooperated closely with the Company. The Sipahi mutiny was the appropriate opportunity for the Bengali Hindus to prove their gratefulness and repay their debt to colonial rulers. The British were not disappointed. The principal target of British hatred and retribution after the revolt was, therefore, the Indian Muslims. With this defeat in the Sipahi Mutiny, a century-long heroic battle waged mostly by the Muslims of India to regain independence came to an end. A small section of the Muslim community continued to fight sporadically until the mid-1860s against the British and the Sikhs, especially in Punjab and on the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Surprisingly, a sizeable contingent of Bengali Muslims also travelled a great distance to join in what they called a Holy War against the infidels. Substantial financial assistance for the freedom fighters was also arranged from Bengal through public donations. Those fights ultimately proved to be ineffectual although Hunter marvelled at their 'extraordinary vitality'. Most of the fighters were eventually killed in battle. However, by this period both the British monarchy and parliamentarians in UK were becoming exasperated with the East India Company's misrule in India. Finally, in 1876, India was officially proclaimed a British colony transferring the administration away from East India Company. At the same time, Queen Victoria was declared the Sovereign Empress of India.

Defeated Muslim subjects of the British Indian colony now became hapless targets of both the British rulers and their Hindu accomplices. One hundred years of non-stop rebellion and non-cooperation against the

colonial power had resulted in isolation and extreme poverty for the community. Bengali Hindus in particular were the greatest beneficiaries:

“The Revolt of 1857–1858 flared up and was crushed, but Bengal was hardly touched by it. Throughout the nineteenth century the new English-educated class, mainly Hindu, looked up with admiration towards England and hoped to advance with her help and in cooperation with her.” (Nehru, 2002: 320)

After the Mutiny, British hostility towards the Muslims increased significantly. The colonial administration increased its favouritism towards Hindus, especially in Bengal, and tried everything in its power to crush the Muslim community. The policy of earlier Muslim leaders to refuse to learn English, the administrative language of colonial India, also relegated the Indian Muslims to a status even lower than that of second-class citizens. The conditions of the Bengali Muslims were very difficult. This was the time for so-called Bengali Renaissance.

The so-called Bengali Renaissance of the 19th century had a clear anti-Muslim character. As noted above, the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia had supported the British during the Sipahi revolution out of fear that a victory for Bahadur Shah Jafar would bring back Muslim rule in India. Iswar Gupta, the famous poet and editor of the Bengali newspaper, *Pravakar*, wrote poems in support of British rule which were highly critical of the revolution. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the most famous Bengali Hindu novelist of the 19th century was rabidly anti-Muslim and unashamedly spread communalism in his works. Hindu intellectuals almost hijacked the language that had been nourished and developed for over five hundred years in the Muslim era as if Bengali was exclusively Hindu property. They also rejected the mixed culture that was the result of Hindu–Muslim fusion over more than half a millennium and replaced it with essentially Hindu Sanskrit culture in the name of Bengali culture. They even refused to accept Muslims as Bengali. This denial of the Bengali ethnicity of Bengali Muslims is aptly demonstrated in a novel, ‘Sreekanta’, written by popular Hindu novelist, Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya. Describing a village football match, he writes: “Today there was a football match between Bengali and Mussalmans.” By the definition of Saratchandra, a Bengali is synonymous with a Hindu. According to his thesis, Bengali Muslims are a different race and Hinduness is the essential criterion for becoming a Bengali. Unfortunately, there was no such Muslim intellectual or literary figure at the time of Bengali Hindu renaissance who could have effectively countered these attempts by Hindu writers and intellectuals to denigrate Muslim culture and distort the history of Bengal. Calcutta-centric language

and Brahmanical culture were imposed on the mostly Muslim people of East Bengal in the name of a Bengali renaissance. Surprisingly, the cultural imperialism of the 19th century continues even to this day. Nirod C. Choudhuri gives a frank description of Hindu hostility and propaganda against the Muslims in his 'Autobiography of an Unknown Indian':

"In the first place, we felt a retrospective hostility towards the Muslims for their one-time domination of us, the Hindus; secondly, on the plane of thought we were utterly indifferent to the Muslims as an element in the contemporary society; thirdly, we had friendliness for the Muslims of our own economic and social status with whom we came into personal contact; our fourth feeling was mixed concern and contempt for the Muslim peasant (2010: 252) ... Our attitude to the Muslims whom we saw around us was also influenced, if not by the positive utterances, at all events by the silences, of our nineteenth century writers. In them the hatred of the Muslim was the hatred of the Muslim in history. It operated, as I have said, retrospectively. Of Muslims as contemporaries they were almost totally oblivious; and when they were not forgetful they were indifferent. British rule in itself was a factor which discouraged the cultivation of Islamic culture and sympathies by the Hindus, and to British rule was added the far stronger influence of the discovery of ancient Indian civilization. The very first result of this renaissance was a progressive de-Islamization of the Hindus of India and a corresponding revival of Hindu traditions. Throughout the nineteenth century the culture of the Hindus of India was taken back to its sanskritic foundations. The only non-Hindu influences which it recognized and tried to assimilate were European. All the thinkers and reformers of modern India from Rammohun Roy to Rabindra Nath Tagore based their life-work on the formula of a synthesis, by which they understood a synthesis of Hindu and European currents. Islamic trends and traditions did not touch even the area of their consciousness. Thus, the new Indian culture of the nineteenth century built a perimeter of its own and put specifically Muslim influences and aspirations beyond the pale. In relation to it the Muslims stood outside as an external proletariat, and if the Muslims wanted to come into its world they could come only after giving up all their Islamic values and traditions." (Chowdhury, 2010: 254)

Jawaharlal Nehru gives similar description of 19th century Bengal:

"Moslems avoided English education and, in Bengal, they were not looked upon with favour by the British rulers, who were afraid that the remnants of the old ruling class might give trouble. Bengali Hindus thus acquired almost a monopoly in the beginning in the subordinate government service and were sent to the Northern provinces. A few Moslems, relics of the old families, were later taken into this service." (Nehru, 2002: 319)

The first Prime Minister of India further adds:

“In the pre-mutiny days most of the Indian members of the subordinate services had been Bengalis. These had spread out over the upper provinces wherever the British administration needed clerks and the like in its civil or military establishments. Regular colonies of Bengalis had thus grown up at the administrative or military centres in the United Provinces, Delhi, and even in the Punjab. These Bengalis accompanied the British armies and proved faithful employees to them. They became associated in the minds of the rebels with the British power and were greatly disliked by them and given uncomplimentary titles.” (Nehru, 2002: 325)

The Bengalis referred to by Nehru as faithful servants of British colonial power were inevitably all Hindus. On this issue of Hindu–British cooperation, Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins make a rather conflicting and curious comment in ‘Freedom at Midnight’:

“The Hindus had been far swifter than the Moslems to seize the opportunities the British education and Western thought had placed before India. As a result, while the British had been socially more at ease with the Moslems, it was the Hindus who had administered for them.” (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 30)

This is an interesting observation from the authors to claim that the British were socially more at ease with the same people, i.e. Indian Muslims from whom they had captured the Crown by force and then subjected the same community to extreme humiliation and hardship. The authors then tried to qualify the above comment with the following statement:

“The Moslems had also been subtly penalized in the two or three decades after 1857 for the role their community had played in the Indian Army Mutiny.” (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 30)

Systematic destruction of Muslim economic and political power in India was neither subtle nor mild. When sympathizers with British imperialism write about Muslims being penalized and marginalized, this is sufficient to understand the plight of the Muslims under nearly two centuries of British rule. Changed circumstances and century-old repression forced a new breed of Muslim community leader like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Syed Amir Ali to review the isolationist policy. They acknowledged the necessity of studying English and Western technology. Aligarh Muslim University was set up in 1875 thanks to the unstinting

effort of Sir Syed with the aim of producing educated young Muslim professionals. The British, on the other hand, came to the conclusion that they just could not afford to continue a policy of 'ignore and oppress' towards nearly 30 per cent of the colony's population. Furthermore, these were the people who had actually ruled India from the beginning of the second millennium until the British conquest in the 18th century. They also realized that a permanently unhappy population would remain a constant source of agitation and rebellion. This change in policy is reflected in the report prepared by William Hunter for the Queen in 1871:

"The neglect and contempt with which, for half a century, the Muhammedan population of Lower Bengal has thus been treated, have left their marks deep in recent Indian literature. The former conquerors of the East are excluded from our Oriental journals and libraries as well as from the more active careers in life ... Meanwhile it remains for Government, while sternly putting down disaffection among the Bengal Muhammedans, to deprive them of every excuse for it. It has to make amends to them, not only for the decay in which our conquest and changed administration have involved their community, but also for want of sympathy which has rendered their ruin less bearable and more complete. Its dealings with the disloyal section of the Musalmans should be managed so as not only to commend themselves to public justice, but also to public opinion." (Hunter, 1975: 194)

Bengali Hindus continued their total cooperation with British rule until the year 1905. This was a watershed year, which not only witnessed the rise of fundamentalist Hindu nationalism and associated terrorism in Bengal but also decisively directed the future course of India. It all started with an administrative decision taken by Lord Curzon, the then viceroy of India to divide Bengal. He served as colonial chief of British monarchy for about five years in two separate terms. The first tenure was from 1899 to early 1904 and the second from the end of 1904 to the end of 1905. I have mentioned earlier that the British policy had been undergoing a gradual change since the 1870s towards accommodation of Muslim grievances. There was general acknowledgement of the wrongs committed especially to Bengali Muslims after British conquest. In an attempt to amend more than a century of maltreatment of the Muslim population and to facilitate effective governance of a very large province, Lord Curzon decided to divide Bengal into two provinces. The size of the Bengal presidency which included Bengal, Bihar and Orissa at the time of taking the fateful decision was nearly a hundred and ninety thousand square miles. After much consultation and debate between Calcutta and London, the new province of Muslim-majority East Bengal and Assam with Dhaka as the capital was

created in September 1905. Dhaka, Chittagong, Noakhali, Bogra, Rajshahi, Tripura, Mymensing, Pabna, Faridpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Maldah, Rangpur, Cooch Bihar, Bakerganj and Parbatya Tripura constituted the sixteen districts of the new province. The total area of East Bengal and Assam was nearly a hundred and ten square miles with a population of thirty-one million, of whom eighteen million were Muslims, twelve million were Hindus and rest comprised mainly Buddhists, Christians and animists. West Bengal, Chota Nagpur of Bihar and Orissa remained with the Bengal presidency. Dhaka became the capital again after a gap of one hundred and ninety years since the transfer of the Bengal capital in 1715 by Mughal Governor Murshid Kuli Khan to Murshidabad. Bengali Muslims felt naturally elated to receive at last a state where they were in the majority. The reaction of Bengali Hindus to this rather necessary administrative change was, on the other hand, fierce and defiant.

Not only was the idea of a Bengali Muslim majority province anathema to Hindu psyche, the Calcutta-based Hindu Zamindars and so-called caste Hindu 'bhadralok' (English-educated upper caste Hindu gentlemen) were also reluctant to lose their long economic and cultural domination over the demographic majority Muslim people in East Bengal. Most caste Bengali Hindus considered the administrative changes to be a national catastrophe and started massive demonstrations and campaigns to annul the division. Lower caste Hindus generally remained aloof during the turbulent period. At one stage in the six-year campaign, the demonstrations took on a violent character and Bengali Hindu terrorism emerged. This was the first time since 1757, the tragic year of demise of Bengal's independence, that Bengali Hindus had taken up arms in rebellion against colonial rule. Unfortunately, the rise of militant Hindu nationalism was not inspired by any hatred of foreign occupation, rather it was borne out of hatred for Muslim neighbours and to safeguard petty communal Hindu interests. Literary celebrities like Rabindranath Tagore also took part in the protest meetings organized at Calcutta against the division of Bengal. Incidentally the Tagore family owned large Zamindari (Land-holdings) in East Bengal and the protest of the internationally acclaimed poet was probably also to safeguard feudal interests. He wrote one of his famous songs, *Amar Sonar Bangla* (My golden Bengal), to eulogize the Bengali Hindu movement against the interests of the Muslim community. It is an irony of history that the same song would become the national anthem of the independent, Muslim-majority country of Bangladesh of which Dhaka is the capital today. Indian Hindus, especially those of Bengali origin, hardly ever tried to get to know their Muslim neighbours. Even Tagore ignored Muslims in his literature probably

because of the fact that he hardly ever interacted with them. The famous Indian Communist, M.N. Roy, a Bengali Hindu himself, has identified the truth about Hindu prejudice in his article entitled, 'Historic Role of Islam'. He wrote:

"No civilized people in the world is so ignorant of Islamic history and contemptuous of the Muhammadan religion as the Hindus. Spiritual imperialism is an outstanding feature of our nationalist ideology. But this nasty spirit is the most pronounced in relation to Muhammadanism ... A critical investigation of the internal as well as the external causes of the Muslim conquest of India is of practical value today. It will remove the prejudice that makes the orthodox Hindu look upon his Muslim neighbour as an inferior being. Freed from preconceived ideas, the Hindus will be in a position to appreciate the constructive consequences of the Muslim conquest of India. That will enable them to live down the hatred of the conquered for the conquerors. Unless a radical change of attitude is brought about by a sober sense of history, the communal question will never be solved. The Hindus will never be able to look upon the Muslims as integral parts of the Indian nation until they come to appreciate the contribution they made towards the emergence of Indian society out of the chaos caused by the breakdown of the antique civilization." (Roy, 2011: 76)

Within a year, the protests transformed into a fullscale terrorist movement which is more popularly known as the Swadeshi movement, targeting both British colonial officers and Muslim elites. The first communal riot in Bangladesh occurred in 1907 as a by-product of the militant Swadeshi movement. In the same year, young terrorists hurled bombs at the motorcade of the Governor General in Calcutta. The leaders of the movement announced a boycott of all British goods until the annulment of the division of Bengal and the dissolution of the new provinces were achieved. The Indian National Congress, which had been established in 1885 under the patronage of British government, passed a resolution at its twenty-second council held in Calcutta in December 1906 in support of the Bengali Hindu nationalist movement. The same Indian Congress, however, would make a complete U-turn in 1947 and demand the division of Bengal along communal lines between India and Pakistan.

As noted earlier, Bengali Muslims enthusiastically welcomed the formation of the new province of East Bengal and Assam with the hope that this would bring a Muslim renaissance at last. They were outraged to see the violent Hindu reaction and felt the need to have their own political association for self-protection. In addition, the Muslims were also in need of a common representation to bargain effectively with the colonial rulers. Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka hosted a conference of eminent Indian

Muslim leaders in December 1906. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, then a successful lawyer in Bombay and rising Muslim leader in the Indian Congress was also invited to the conference. The future President of the Muslim League and the person given credit as the main political character in carving out a homeland for the Muslims of India in 1947 declined to attend the 1906 Dhaka conference because of his Congress allegiance. Secular Jinnah even considered the initiative rather communal. The All-India Muslim League was formed in this particular conference held at the guest house of the Nawab Family (present-day Dhaka University central canteen, known more popularly as Madhu's Canteen).

Aga Khan was elected the first president of the newly formed platform for Muslims in India. The conference voiced its total support for the division of Bengal and the formation of the provinces of East Bengal and Assam. The second council of the Muslim League was held in Amritsar, Punjab in December 1908 and again unanimously passed a resolution supporting the division of Bengal. Muslim League leaders agreed that the Muslims of eastern region of India were victims of a century of exploitation and neglect. Hope of any improvement for the downtrodden peasants and weavers of Bengal rested squarely on speedy implementation of the administrative plan for the establishment of the new province. A formal resolution in support of the province of East Bengal and Assam was proposed by Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, one of the few Muslim Zamindars of the period and an influential community leader. He became very emotional while describing the plight of Bengali Muslims at the conference.

While Bengali Muslims were trying to unite under a common platform to protect Muslim interests and defend the existence of the newly earned province, militant Bengali Hindu nationalists successfully stepped up their terrorist movement. Attacks on members of the British civil service and judiciary intensified in 1907. Heroic deeds of sacrifice by young terrorists such as Khudiram, Prafulla Chaki, Binoy, Badal, Dinesh, and others were eulogized in Bengali poems, songs and dramas written by Hindu writers. They became the Hindu nationalist heroes of the early 20th century across India but especially in Bengal. However, the terrorist movement lost much of its steam by 1910. But by this time, the high command of the colonial administration in India had changed and Lord Hardinge, the new viceroy was more enthusiastic about appeasing the majority Hindu population. The then India Secretary, Lord Morley, was also biased towards Hindus in India. An excellent opportunity arose for the supporters of the Hindus in 1911.

King George and Queen Mary were visiting India in December 1911. In the public ceremony at Delhi, organized in honour of the royal couple, the King made two announcements of great consequence. The first was to shift the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi and the second, the annulment of the division of Bengal. It was easier for the British rulers to break a commitment to Indian Muslims than to risk the displeasure of Hindu community, the staunch ally in British occupation since 1757. The frustration of Bengali Muslims at this unexpected and sudden change of fortune is easily understandable. The Muslims were not even consulted about the decision which was of extreme significance to their welfare. In an attempt to compensate this terrible loss for the Bengali Muslims, Lord Hardinge proposed setting up a centre for higher education for the downtrodden people of East Bengal. Since 1905, the Muslims had been demanding the establishment of a university at Dhaka to facilitate higher education for the neglected people of the region. But, with one victory in annulling division of Bengal already under their belts, the Hindu leaders of Calcutta were in no mood to compromise with Bengali Muslims on any issue. They vehemently opposed the establishment of a university in Dhaka. According to their psyche, the Muslims of Bengal were nothing but illiterate peasants and, therefore, any idea of access to higher education for Bengali Muslims was just outrageous. Again, Rabindranath Tagore took the side of the communal Hindu Bhadrals and voiced his opposition to setting up a university at Dhaka. Tagore's change of heart about the long exploitation and neglect of Bengali Muslim community will come much later. A committee under Robert Nathan was formed in 1912 for the implementation of the Dhaka University project. However, progress was initially frustrated by vehement Hindu protests and then because of a shift in the priorities of the British government as the First World War started in 1914.

Nawab Salimullah died a broken-hearted man in 1915, burdened with the double failure of the annulment of the division of Bengal and failure to implement the proposed Dhaka University. Although the trader ancestors of Nawab Salimullah migrated from Kashmir to Bengal, he was personally very keen and sincere on the development of East Bengal and assumed the mantle of leadership on behalf of neglected Bengali Muslims. His death created a temporary vacuum which further dampened the spirit of Bengali Muslims. Nirod C. Choudhury writes quite frankly in 'Autobiography of an Unknown Indian' of how the Bengali Hindus, as a direct result of the Swadesi movement, developed a bitter hatred for Bengali Muslims in general and Nawab Salimullah in particular:

“But the change inevitably came, and came very early. It was from the end of 1906 that we became conscious of a new kind of hatred for the Muslims, which sprang out of the present and showed signs of poisoning our personal relations with our Muslim neighbours and school-fellows. If the sprouting enmity did not go to the length of inducing us to give up all intercourse with them, it made us at all events treat them with a marked decline of cordiality. We began to hear angry comment in the mouths of the elders that the Muslims were coming out quite openly in favour of partition and on the side of the English. Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, the protagonist of the Muslim League and new Muslim politics, became our particular *bête noire*—and we contemptuously called him ‘The One-eyed’. We also noticed that our Muslim school-fellows were beginning to air the fact of their being Muslims rather more consciously than before and with a touch of assertiveness.” (Chowdhury, 2010: 257)

After the death of Nawab Salimullah, a new young leader emerged who would not only provide leadership for Bengal until the end of British colonial rule in 1947, but would also be instrumental in proposing the historic nation state theory of Pakistan in 1940. A.K. Fazlul Huq, a brilliant lawyer and politician was already working with Nawab Salimullah in 1905 during the preparatory phase of forming a common platform for the Muslims in India. He was one of the thirty-five members of the Muslim delegation led by the Aga Khan that met Lord Minto at Simla in 1906 to place specific and formal socio-economic demands on behalf of the Muslims. He was also one of the joint secretaries of All Indian Muslim education conference held in Dhaka in 1906 at the initiative of Nawab Salimullah, at which the All-India Muslim League was born as a separate political party to represent Muslim interests. In 1916, A.K. Fazlul Huq, in a speech in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, strongly criticized the British India government for their negligence towards the people of East Bengal and the delay in establishing Dhaka University. He said:

“With a view to prevent a setback in the progress of education in Eastern Bengal, we are promised a university at Dacca. Ever since 1912, provisions were being made in every budget for this proposed university, and each year we were told to live on the hope that the university would soon be an accomplished fact. We are now to believe that a costly project like a university at Dacca is out of the bounds of possibilities in the near future. I can understand that a big scheme like this cannot be developed in a day; but does it really take years and years for the scheme to matter and develop, if only the will to carry the work through be not wanting?” (Mannan, 2012: 213).

As Hindu opposition to the establishment of Dhaka University continued, it took a further five years after the above speech by Fazlul Huq for the first institution of higher education in East Bengal to become a reality. It was eventually established in 1921 on the very land donated by Nawab Salimullah, now long dead. During this period of Muslim frustration and suffering, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was gradually emerging as the most influential Muslim leader in greater India.

Jinnah remained in the Indian Congress until the political situation forced him to leave the party in 1921. He had been trying since joining politics as a young barrister to forge a unity between Hindus and Muslims so that they could unite in the fight for the independence of India. He and Sarojini Naidu even represented the Indian National Congress at the sixth annual conference of the Muslim League in Lucknow. It was decided at the conference that members from both the Congress and the Muslim League would actively and regularly participate in the discussion meetings of the parties with the aim of finding a common strategy for the movement. The eighth conference of the Muslim League was held in 1915 in Bombay, where Muhammad Ali Jinnah lived and practised law, and was presided over by League President Mazharul Huq. Jinnah at that time was retaining his membership of both Indian National Congress and All-India Muslim League. He had agreed to formally join the Muslim League at the request of his friends at the end of 1913. When controversy arose regarding this unique situation of the same person representing two different political parties, his supporters had to give the following statement as quoted by Jaswant Singh, former Indian Foreign Minister, in his great work, *Jinnah, India, Partition Independence*:

“Loyalty to the Muslim League and the Muslim interest would in no way and at no time imply even the shadow of disloyalty to the larger national cause to which his (Jinnah’s) life was dedicated.” (Singh, 2009: 86)

This statement clearly reflects Jinnah’s sincere loyalty to a united India and at that time the two-nation theory had yet to emerge. It should be noted that Jinnah, the Congress leader had been earlier elected to the Viceroy’s Legislative Council from the Bombay presidency in 1910 by defeating Maulvi Rafiuddin, the Bombay Muslim League President. Jaswant Singh describes an incident of a heated debate between Jinnah and the then viceroy in the council meeting:

“In this council, just a month after his election, Jinnah entered into a heated verbal exchange with no less than the Viceroy himself, Lord Minto. This contention arose from a resolution on indentured labour for Natal. Jinnah

held that this had 'aroused the feeling of all classes in the country to the highest pitch of indignation and horror at the harsh and cruel treatment that is meted out to Indians in South Africa.' Lord Minto objected that 'cruel', was rather a strong word. Jinnah stood his ground and responded, 'I should feel inclined to use much stronger language, My lord, but I am fully aware of the constitution of this council which I do not wish to trespass for a single moment, but I do say this that the treatment that is meted out to Indians is the harshest which can possibly be imagined, and, as I said before, the feeling in this country is unanimous.' This was unusual as it was perhaps for the first time that the government was criticized so clearly, and to the face of the viceroy." (Singh, 2009: 83)

The Indian National Congress was established on 28 December 1885 with the active support of the British administration. Even the founder, Allan Octavian Hume, was a retired British civil servant. The British colonial government had thought that, by creating an outlet in which the natives could voice their concerns, they would be able to pacify them and administer the colony peacefully. Dadabhai Naoroji, a widely respected Parsi intellectual and politician, played a significant role in the formation of Congress. He was the first Indian to become a British MP. The same man persuaded Gandhi to give up the legal profession in South Africa and return to his homeland in India. Curiously, Dadabhai was mentor to both Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the two most important 20th century political characters of the Indian subcontinent.

Gandhi eventually returned to India from South Africa in 1915. Jinnah, Gokhale and other prominent Congress leaders welcomed Gandhi and his wife in 1915 at Bombay harbour. It was a warm welcome and Jinnah had to cancel attending the Madras Congress meeting to be able to remain in Bombay for this special occasion. According to Jaswant Singh, Jinnah was already an all-India leader and was committed to national unity, 'not just between the Muslims and the Hindus, extremists and moderates, but also among various classes of India'. Due to his superior stature at the Congress, Jinnah was invited to preside over a reception party in honour of Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi in Bombay. However, by 1920, the relationship between Gandhi and Jinnah had soured to a near breaking point. Although initially Gandhi needed support from Jinnah, Gokhale, Tilok and others, by the end of the decade he was the most influential voice in the Indian Congress, successfully securing the full support of the colonial government. During this period of change in national leadership in both Congress and the Muslim League, the momentous Lucknow pact of 1916 temporarily provided a unique opportunity for Hindu-Muslim unity in India. The pact was basically a formulation of principle for sharing power between the two communities represented by the Indian Congress and the

Muslim League. Unfortunately, the next decade witnessed not only a widening gap between Gandhi and Jinnah, but also nationwide incidents of Hindu–Muslim conflict.

On the Bengal front, the caste Hindu leadership with the exception of the great moderator, Desh Bandhu C.R. Das continued its policy of treating the Muslims as untouchables and an unreliable foe. Although Rabindranath Tagore stood out like a real *Rabi* (Sun in Bengali) in the literary world of Bengal, it was Bankim Chandra's virulent, anti-Muslim writings that actually aroused narrow Hindu Bengali nationalism and extreme bitterness against Muslims. Six years (1905–1911) of agitation of Bengali Hindus against the partition of Bengal, actually hardened their anti-Muslim attitude. Hindu conservatism ultimately won this battle when the partition was annulled by the colonial rulers in 1911. This unexpected victory made the Hindus more communal. Nirod C. Chaudhuri in his 'Autobiography of an unknown Indian' describes the enmity between the communities with his usual nonchalance and forthrightness:

“When living in Calcutta, as I have done for the greater part of my life, I hardly met any Muslims and become intimate with none. There I found an arrogant contempt for the Muslims and a deep-seated hostility towards them. (2010: 256) ... Although open clashes were avoided, the year left a permanent legacy of estrangement. A cold dislike for the Muslim settled down in our hearts, putting an end to all real intimacy of relationship. Curiously enough, with us, the boys of Kishoreganj, it found visible expression in the division of our class into two sections, one composed purely of Hindus and the other of Muslims. We never came to know all the circumstances of this division. Whether or not the Muslim boys had also expressed unwillingness to sit with us, for some times past we, the Hindu boys, had been clamoring that we did not want to sit with the Muslim boys because they smelt of onions.” (Chowdhury, 2010: 260)

In this period, clouded by bitter communal divide, a few Bengali Muslim and Hindu leaders like A.K. Fazlul Huque, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Maulana Akram Khan, Chittaranjan Das, Sharat Chandra Bose and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy courageously fought to reach a consensus on forging greater Hindu–Muslim unity at both political and social levels. Their untiring efforts resulted in the signing of the famous Bengal pact in December 1923. By then Chittaranjan Das, an extremely successful lawyer and senior Congress leader at national level parted with Congress because of its parochial policy and formed the more progressive 'Swaraj Party' in 1922 with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, another charismatic leader, equally popular among Hindu and Muslim communities. Quite significant numbers of Muslim leaders, including Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy,

joined Deshbandhu in his Swaraj Party. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the most prominent Muslim leader in the Congress after Jinnah's exit from the party provides a firsthand account of the formation of the Swaraj Party in his *India Wins Freedom*:

"I was in fact not released till 1 January 1923. Mr. C.R. Das was released earlier and presided over the Congress at its Gaya session. During this session, sharp differences of opinion appeared among the Congress leaders. Mr. C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru and Hakim Ajmal Khan formed the Swaraj Party and presented the council entry programme which was opposed by the orthodox followers of Gandhiji." (Azad, 1978: 20)

However, the Hindu communal elements within the Bengal Congress leadership steadfastly remained sceptical about the Bengal pact and dismissed it as a victory for Bengali Muslims. They started virulent attacks against C.R. Das, accusing him of surrendering Hindu interests for personal political gain. In hindsight, one may claim that full implementation of both the Lucknow pact of 1916 and the Bengal pact of 1923 by the dominant and majority Hindu community led by the Indian Congress could have created the foundation for a united and independent India in the future. But that was not to be. The Congress leadership succumbed to militant Hindu pressure and cancelled both the Bengal pact in 1926 and then the Lucknow pact in 1928. Jinnah was in tears at this treachery by Congress and would not trust its leaders again. Jaswant Singh, quoting Jamshed Nusserwanjee, describes Jinnah's last attempt to reach an understanding with the Congress with an apt phrase, 'the parting of the ways':

"During the Congress session at Calcutta in 1927 [All parties National Convention in December 1928] a telegram came from Mr. Jinnah who was in Delhi, saying that he and six other colleagues of the Muslim League would like to meet and discuss certain points with the Congress committee—these were their demands for a settlement with Congress. Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru was President of the Congress. Most of the leaders were against the plan, but Mahatma Gandhi prevailed upon them to invite Mr. Jinnah and his party to Calcutta. They came and Mr. Jinnah placed the demands of his party before a special committee, but they rejected them. There were eighteen against and two for; those two were Mahatma Gandhi and myself. Mr. Jinnah returned to his hotel in tears. Mahatma Gandhi went to his room, sadly at 3 am, and span on his spinning wheel until 6 o'clock in the morning. About 8.30 next morning, Mr. Jinnah and his party left for Delhi. I went to see him off at the station. He shook hands with me and these were his words, 'well, Jamshed, this is the parting of the ways.'" (Singh, 2009: 148)

The premature and unexpected death of C.R. Das in June 1925 had actually sealed the fate of the Bengal pact. The Bengal Congress and the extremely communal Hindu Mahasava leaders had been vehemently protesting against the pact since its signing and the death of C.R. Das presented them the opportunity they were searching for. On 22 May 1926, the pact was finally annulled in the Bengal Congress convention under the presidency of Subhas Chandra Bose! This was a catastrophic decision, in the particular Bengal Congress convention presided over by none other than Netaji himself, who was greatly respected by Bengali Muslims. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad writes with a sense of deep sadness about this decision of far-reaching consequence:

“In Bengal, Muslims were the majority community but for various reasons they were educationally and politically backward. They had hardly any place in public life or government service ... Mr. C.R. Das was a great realist and immediately saw that the problem was an economic one ... He announced that when Congress secured the reins of power in Bengal, it would reserve 60 per cent of all new appointments for the Muslims till such time as they achieved proper representation according to population ... Many of the Congress leaders violently opposed it and started a campaign against Mr. Das. He was accused of opportunism and even partisanship for the Muslims ... It is a matter for regret that after he died, some of his followers assailed his position and his declaration was repudiated. The result was that the Muslims of Bengal moved away from the Congress and the first seed of partition was sown.” (Azad, 1978: 20)

Praising the political sagacity of Mr. Das, Maulana Azad further writes: “Mr. Das was able to overcome the fears and apprehensions of the Muslims of Bengal and was acclaimed as their leader. The way he solved the communal problem of Bengal is memorable and should serve as an example even today.”

Abul Mansur Ahmed a rising, young Muslim leader of East Bengal in the 1920s who started his political career at the Bengal Congress before joining the Peasant's Party in 1929 under the leadership of another disillusioned former Muslim Congress leader Maulana Akram Khan, wrote in his vernacular political autobiography, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar* (Fifty years of politics as I saw it):

“All the attempts to solve Hindu–Muslim problem failed as before. In fact, enmity increased further. On the legal issue of Tenant Rights Act 1928, all Hindu members voted in favor of Hindu Landowners (Zamindars) and all Muslim members in favour of tenants. Legislative Assembly was divided clearly on communal lines. Next year, in the Congress Convention in

Krishnagar under the presidency of Subhas Babu, the party annulled Deshbandhu's Bengal pact. It was no more possible to depend on Congress either for Muslim interest or tenants' rights." (Ahmed, 2015:45).

In spite of total breakdown of the Hindu-Muslim relationship, Jinnah did continue for some time his efforts to find common ground for unity. He attempted a reconciliation at the London Roundtable conference that failed. In 1929 he again put forward a fourteen-point agenda to the Congress leadership for a future united federal government with adequate rights and protection for the minority Muslims. Rejection of his last proposal by Congress forced Jinnah to abandon his long-cherished goal of a united India solution. He decided to concentrate more on uniting the Muslims to fight for their own independent homeland. But, the name Pakistan was not even discussed until middle of the following decade.

In Bengal, A.K. Fazlul Huq was gradually emerging as the principal Muslim leader. Krishak Praja Samiti formed by Maulana Akram Khan was transformed into Krishak Praja Party under the leadership of A.K. Fazlul Huq. By the time the first general election under colonial rule was held in India in 1937, it was a formidable political party with tremendous mass appeal. The result of this election was a surprising personal failure for Jinnah as the Muslim League fared poorly, raising questions about his claim to represent all Muslims in India. A.K. Fazlul Huq in Bengal, Sikandar Hayat Khan in Punjab and Gulam Hossain Hidayatullah in Sindh did not respond to Jinnah's call for Muslim unity prior to the election. Instead of forging a coalition with Jinnah's Muslim League, each of them contested the election for their regional parties and scored surprising victories.

In Bengal, Congress, Muslim League and Krishak Praja Party won fifty-four, thirty-seven, and thirty-six seats respectively. Independent Muslim candidates won an additional ten seats. A.K. Fazlul Huq was elected Chief Minister of Bengal and the Muslim League joined as a junior partner in the coalition government. It should be noted that A.K. Fazlul Huq initially approached the Bengal Congress to join the coalition. But, the talks to form the coalition broke down on account of Congress's demands. Congress wanted the release of political prisoners who were mostly Hindus as the first priority of the government, whereas Krishak Praja leaders wanted peasant welfare at the top of the priority list. Failing to forge a coalition with Congress, Fazlul Huq reluctantly went to the Muslim League. The Muslim League failed to form a government in any province except as a junior partner in Bengal. Congress, on the other hand, was able to form a government in eight of the provinces. The election result was seen as a personal defeat for Jinnah. Surprisingly, within a year,

Jinnah like the mythological Greek Phoenix, emerged not only as the undisputed, sole spokesperson on behalf of the Muslims in India but also as their perceived saviour. How had this remarkable change of fortune happened?

Many political analysts and politicians of that era believe that the arrogance and intransigence of the Indian Congress as a whole and Jawaharlal Nehru in particular were responsible for this. In the aftermath of the 1937 election success of Congress, Nehru's position vis-à-vis the Muslim League and Jinnah became more hawkish and dismissive. His arrogance was clearly demonstrated when he made the controversial comment: "There are only two forces in India today, British imperialism and Indian nationalism as represented by the Congress." Jinnah immediately retorted: "No, there is a third party, the Mussalmans." In response to this cold shoulder shown to Jinnah and the Muslim League by the Congress, in a sudden and surprising move, both Sikandar Hayat Khan in Punjab and A.K. Fazlul Huq in Bengal announced their decision to join the Muslim League and fight together for Muslim rights. This was, in fact, a reiteration of Jinnah's political philosophy prior to the 1937 election. Both A.K. Fazlul Huq and Jinnah gave strong speeches in the Muslim League convention in Calcutta against British bias towards Congress. A.K. Fazlul Huq, in particular, was severely critical of Lord Linlithgow, the then viceroy in his speech.

According to Jaswant Singh, even after the election debacle of 1937, Jinnah was not thinking about a separate state of Pakistan. Jaswant writes in Jinnah, India, Partition, Independence:

"Writing in 1969 Shiva Rao referred to the 1937 elections and said that it was significant that even after the elections, Jinnah was not thinking of a separate state of Pakistan: 'In a public statement, shortly after the elections in 1937 he declared, nobody will welcome an honorable settlement between the Hindus and Muslims more than I and nobody will be more ready to help it' and he followed it with a public appeal to Gandhi to tackle this question. The latter's response was somewhat depressing: 'Wish I could do something, but I am utterly helpless. My faith in unity is bright as ever; only I see no daylight but impenetrable darkness and in such distress I cry out to God for light'." (Singh, 2009: 233)

After quoting Shiva Rao, Jaswant Singh adds his comment with a hint of sarcasm:

"God, it transpires was sadly not then willing to illuminate the Congress path with wisdom or light, and more than Gandhi, it is unlikely that anyone else in the Congress had a better access to the creator's ear, he was

unquestionably a devout Hindu, certainly more than Nehru whose thinking and path (sadly language and idiom too) was lit up more by imported western notions than by India's great wealth of faith, thought and wisdom." (Singh, 2009: 233)

Bengali Muslims were becoming more disillusioned about the Congress leadership and gradually looking towards Jinnah, not a practising Muslim himself, as the supreme Muslim leader in British India and champion of minority rights. Abul Mansur Ahmed writes about Bengali Hindu parochialism and his personal transformation from a believer of secular politics to supporter of political Islam:

"From personal experience and by dint of direct proof, I learned from doing politics in Bengal, how the political situation changed its course due to intransigent attitude of Hindu leadership and their short-sighted deviation from the path earlier shown by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan. Bengal politics was rather different from the politics of the rest of India. The Hindus who were in favour of unadulterated democratic process in India, did not want the same for Bengal. Bengali Hindus were against both the principle of majority rule and complete autonomy in Bengal. This was, of course, the present thinking of the Hindus. Hindu poets and political leaders championed the ideals of Bengali nationalism, Bengali uniqueness, Bengali culture, Bengali identity, etc. at the end of nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. Many of them genuinely believed in it. But, as it became clear that the state power would go into the hands of the majority Muslim population by establishing rights of franchise in the process of democratization, the Hindus stopped talking about Bengali nationalism and culture. Instead, they started talking about Indian nationalism, Indian culture, Great nation of Mahabharata, and Aryan civilization." (Ahmed, 2015: 124)

Fazlul Huq, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Akram Khan and other Bengali Muslim leaders could no longer ignore the ground realities and realpolitik in Bengal. Bengal Chief Minister, Fazlul Huq, travelled to Uttar Pradesh to provide unconditional public support to the Muslim League and gave a rather strong communal speech in the convention of the League. He even publicly threatened that for every Muslim life in Uttar Pradesh, two Hindu lives in Bengal would be in danger. Abul Mansur Ahmed, conceding this change of heart of the secular Muslim politicians in Bengal, writes candidly:

"As the solution of Hindu-Muslim problem by the way of Congress-League compromise getting delayed further, I gradually inclined towards Muslim League. As my Congress leaders were becoming more 'Hindu', I

also became more 'Muslim'. However, neither was there any communal parochialism in my Muslimness, nor any hatred for other's religion. It was only the feeling of strong sense of identity and self-respect." (Ahmed, 2015: 149)

Either sheer neglect or the abject political failure of Gandhi and Congress to accommodate genuine concerns for the rights of the Muslims left Jinnah and other Muslim leaders with no choice but to demand a separate and independent homeland for Muslim-majority provinces by partitioning India. The historic Lahore resolution was adopted in the Muslim League open session on 23 March 1940. The resolution rejected the federation scheme of a united India and demanded full autonomous and sovereign powers for Muslim-majority states in the West and the East. The relevant portion of the resolution is quoted below:

"1. While approving and endorsing the action taken by the council and the working committee of All-India Muslim League, as indicated in their resolutions dated the 27th August, 17th and 18th September and 22nd October 1939, and the 3rd February 1940 on the constitutional issue, this session of All-India Muslim League emphatically reiterates that the scheme of federation embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935 is totally unsuited and unworkable in the peculiar conditions of this country and altogether unacceptable to Muslim India.

"2. It further records its emphatic view that while the declaration dated the 18th October 1939 made by the Viceroy on behalf of His Majesty's Government in reassuring in so far as it declares that the policy and plan on which the Government of India Act 1935 is based will be reconsidered in consultation with the various parties, interests, and communities in India. Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the whole constitutional plan is reconsidered *de novo*, and that no revised plan would be acceptable to the Muslim unless it is framed with their approval and consent.

"3. Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan will be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, Viz that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign." (Mannan, 2012: 256)

It should be noted from the above resolution that, recognizing the basic requirement of geographic contiguity for a viable state, the reference is to
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Muslim-majority independent 'states' rather than a single state. Unfortunately, the single state of Pakistan which would emerge on 14 August 1947 had no such contiguity and, therefore, was not geographically viable from the day of its birth. The two wings of Pakistan were separated by more than two thousand kilometres of Indian territory.

A.K. Fazlul Huq of Bengal who by then had joined the Muslim League proposed the Lahore Resolution which was seconded by Chaudhury Khaliqzaman, President of the Uttar Pradesh Muslim League. The resolution also drastically changed the political scenario in East Bengal where the Muslim League, rallying behind a single slogan calling for the creation of an independent homeland for the Muslims, was spectacularly transformed from a general perception that it was a party of Nawabs, Zamindars and elites into a hugely popular mass party. The party finally came up with the most crucial and effective political message since its birth in 1906. Muhammad Ali Jinnah emerged as the most popular Muslim leader almost overnight, even in East Bengal. All Bengali Muslim political leaders, including A.K. Fazlul Huq, accepted Jinnah's leadership. At this critical juncture in the history of the subcontinent, I wish to conclude this chapter even though independence from British imperial rule is still seven years away. I am inclined to do this to avoid repetition of events such as the tumultuous story of the birth of Pakistan, the long-cherished homeland for Indian Muslims which will be narrated in detail in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE BIRTH OF PAKISTAN AND THE DIVISION OF BENGAL

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the official Father of the Nation (Quaid-e-Azam) of Pakistan is not the conceptual or spiritual father of the independent Muslim state that was created by partitioning India on 14 August 1947. He even dismissed the idea as absurd when it was first proposed to him in London. The Pakistan movement was actually born at Cambridge University in 1933. Jinnah was then still dreaming of establishing an independent, united and federal India with appropriate safeguards for the Muslim minority community. The idea for a two-state solution in India was initially mooted by poet and philosopher Iqbal in 1930. In his presidential speech at the Allahabad Muslim League conference, Iqbal proposed the formation of a separate Muslim state comprising Punjab, the NWFP, Sind, and Baluchistan. He said:

“Personally, I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single State. Self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.” (Cited from Allahabad Address-Wikipedia, <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allah...>)

We should note that Muslim-majority Bengal was not even mentioned in Iqbal's speech. It is difficult to know today whether he was even aware of the demographic situation of Bengal. The word Pakistan was, however, not his creation. Three years after the above speech by Iqbal, 'Pakistan' was conceptualized in Cambridge and the person who gave this name for Iqbal's cherished Muslim State is Rahmat Ali, a young student of Cambridge University. His idea of Pakistan came from the alphabets of the following Muslim-majority provinces of North-West India:

P from Punjab;

A from Afghanistan meaning North-West Frontier Province;

K from Kashmir;
S from Sind; and
Tan from Baluchistan.

Again, Bengal or 'B' had no place in the dream of Rahmat Ali. The omission was probably an act of Providence, as the later induction of East Bengal into Pakistan in 1947 would ultimately prove to be the nemesis for the the West Pakistani ruling class. Rahmat Ali had three more associates in his project for Pakistan. They were Muhammad Aslam Khan, Sheikh Muhammad Sadeq and Enayetullah Khan. The team even produced an eight-page booklet with maps for the independent homeland for Indian Muslims.

It can safely be assumed that those young students were influenced by the writings of the great Urdu and Farsi poet, Iqbal. He believed strongly in the need for a Muslim renaissance to save the community from self-inflicted destruction and wrote: "A separate Federation of Muslim provinces, reformed on the lines I have suggested above, is the only course by which we can secure a peaceful India and save Muslims from the domination of non-Muslims." The pronouncement of Iqbal caught the imagination of Rahmat Ali and company. It is widely believed that in 1933, Rahmat Ali shared his dream with Jinnah when the latter was living in London in self-imposed exile. Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins, well-known for their anti-Jinnah bias, describe the meeting between the 'dreamer' and the 'leader' held at the exclusive Waldorf Hotel in London. They write in *Freedom at Midnight*, with a novelist's dramatic tinge:

"The man who would one day be hailed as the Father of Pakistan had first been exposed to the idea at a black-tie dinner at London's Waldorf Hotel in the spring of 1933. His host was Rahmat Ali, the graduate student who set the idea on paper. Rahmat Ali had arranged a banquet with its oysters and un-Islamic Chablis at his own expense hoping to persuade Jinnah, India's leading Muslim politician, to take over his movement. He received a chilly rebuff. Pakistan, Jinnah told him, was an impossible dream.

"The man whom the unfortunate graduate student had sought to make into the leader of a Muslim separatist movement had, in fact, begun his political career by preaching Hindu-Muslim unity." (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 126)

As noted in the previous chapter, Jinnah would become finally disillusioned with the Congress leadership at a much later stage chiefly because of his antagonism towards Gandhi and arrogance on the part of Jawaharlal Nehru. He accepted the idea of Pakistan as a last resort to save

the Muslims of India from perpetual hegemony under the majority Hindus. Lapierre and Collins further add:

“A brilliantly successful lawyer, Jinnah moved naturally to politics and for a decade worked to keep the Hindus and Moslems of Congress united in a common front against the British. His disenchantment with Congress dated from Gandhi’s accession to power. (2009: 127 ... The turning point in Jinnah’s career came after the 1937 elections when Congress refused to share with him and his Moslem League the spoils of office in those Indian provinces where there was a substantial Moslem minority. Jinnah was a man of towering vanity and he took Congress’s action as a personal rebuke. It convinced him he and the Muslim League would never get a fair deal from a Congress-run India. The former apostle of Hindu–Muslim unity became the unyielding advocate of Pakistan, the project he had labeled an ‘impossible dream’ barely four years earlier.” (2009: 127)

Lapierre and Collins made a mistake by implying that by 1937 Jinnah had become an ‘unyielding advocate of Pakistan’. In reality, even in 1938, Jinnah was hoping for a solution to the Hindu–Muslim problem on the basis of a united India. Not only that, Jinnah accepted the British government’s Cabinet Mission as late as 1946 which was the last attempt by the British government to keep India united under a loose federal structure. It was actually Nehru who was responsible for the failure of the Cabinet Mission. I will come to those events little later. Rahmat Ali’s story is not finished yet. He travelled to Cairo in 1938 in an effort to convince Chaudhury Khaliqzaman, a leading figure in the Muslim League hierarchy, to accept his project. Khaliqzaman writes about the meeting in his memoir, ‘Pathway to Pakistan’:

“While waiting day after day for the arrival of the delegations, we were invited to tea one evening by Chaudhri Rahmat Ali, the originator of the word ‘Pakistan’. This was my first meeting with him and I took a sincere liking for this tall, graceful and well-cut figure. When we started talking about the scheme of Pakistan I found that not only had he thought deeply over the question but was earnest about its realization. It was very well-known to us in India that he had played his scheme before the Muslim leaders of the first Roundtable Conference but no one took any notice of it.” (Khaliqzaman, 1961: 200)

Rahmat Ali is today almost a forgotten character in Pakistan. After returning to Pakistan in April 1948, by then a barrister, he voiced dissatisfaction over the formation of a relatively smaller Muslim nation than the one he had originally conceived. His criticism landed him in serious trouble and he was forced to leave the country by the Liaquat Ali

government in October the same year. Rahmat Ali died in London in 1951 and was buried there.

Jinnah returned to India, terminating his self-imposed London exile in 1934 and took the reins of a rather fragmented and directionless Muslim League. He did not lose any time in taking practical steps for the revival of the party through a mass-consciousness programme. The League participated in the 1937 election, achieving only moderate success, much less than Jinnah had expected. The Muslim League failed to form the government in any of the provinces. The Indian Congress formed the government in eight out of eleven provinces. The three exceptions were Bengal, Punjab and Sind. Of these three, the Muslim League was a junior partner only in Bengal under Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party. Punjab and Sind had regional party governments sans Muslim League. Surprisingly, in the end, the apparent failure in the election proved to be a blessing in disguise for the Muslim League and Jinnah. While Congress remained busy in the nitty-gritty of the everyday governance of the provinces, the Muslim League undertook the strategy of revitalizing the party machinery and creating unity among the Muslim masses. It is worth reminding ourselves here, as noted in the previous chapter, that, even at this stage in 1937, Jinnah was not thinking of the creation of a separate Muslim State.

Jinnah gave a speech to the students of Aligarh Muslim University in 1938 in which he sounded very sad and remorseful for not being able to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity. He conceded that his self-exile in London had been due to this particular failure. Was Jinnah still hoping for an honourable Hindu-Muslim solution in 1938? Was the speech an olive branch to Indian Hindus in general and the Indian National Congress in particular?

The political situation deteriorated dangerously during the period Congress was in office, from 1937 to 1939. The Muslims felt further alienated as a series of communal riots ravaged many parts of India. The victims were mostly poor farmers, village artisans and small traders. The secular credentials of Congress were virtually shattered. In such a situation, the Muslim League naturally stood by the Muslim victims. This greatly strengthened the League's influence over the Muslim populace and support for Congress among the community almost eroded. Jinnah was reincarnated as the 'saviour and spokesperson' for the Muslims. According to Jaswant Singh:

"The riots took place in villages and small towns and affected artisans and peasants, mostly Muslim. This gave the League a valuable opportunity to stand up and to speak exclusively for the Muslims, win their allegiance—an especially valuable opportunity considering that the League until then had

been socially and programmatically a conservative body.” (Singh, 2009: 258)

At this critical juncture of domestic politics, India was made a combatant party in the Second World War by a formal declaration of war by Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy. The British government desperately needed support both from the Congress and the Muslim League after the declaration of war by the Viceroy. The colonial government was not in a position to alienate either Hindus or Muslims. This gave Jinnah a unique opportunity. The time had finally arrived for the British government to accord Jinnah the importance and status equal to that of Gandhi for the first time since Gandhi’s return from South Africa. Jinnah played his cards with great political finesse. While Congress chose a confrontational path on the issue of the war effort, he remained non-committal. Jinnah neither openly supported the imperial government nor opposed them in the war effort. At the same time, he remained steadfast in not allowing the Chief Ministers of Bengal, Assam and Punjab, the three nominees of the Muslim League, to join the war council. Under the prevailing tense situation, in a meeting with Lord Linlithgow in September 1939, Jinnah mentioned for the first time that the ‘Partition of India’ could be an option to escape the Hindu–Muslim impasse.

Congress ministers resigned in November 1939, further strengthening Jinnah’s position. The claims of the Indian Congress to be the only political voice on behalf of all Indians irrespective of religion in any negotiation with the British proved hollow in the absence of any administrative bargaining power. In a final attempt to reduce the political differences between the Congress and the Muslim League, Lord Linlithgow invited Gandhi, Jinnah and Rajendra Prasad for a joint discussion. Although Congress rejected the Viceroy’s proposal, they decided to meet Jinnah separately. This meeting also ended in failure as both sides stuck to their public positions. 1940 arrived in an environment of total mistrust between the Congress and the League leaders. The Indian Muslims were convinced that they would not get any justice in a Hindu Raj. They now wanted a separate country for the nation. The Lahore Resolution was adopted on the night of 23 March 1940. The most interesting and far-reaching story of the Lahore Resolution is that while there is no mention of the word ‘Pakistan’ in the document itself, most of the next morning’s newspapers carried the news with the banner heading: ‘Pakistan resolution has been passed.’ It was mainly the Hindu press which created an excellent slogan for the Indian Muslims.

The Lahore Resolution was adopted at a time when Britain was trying to absorb the initial onslaught of Hitler’s seemingly unstoppable war

machine. By then France had capitulated and British soldiers were at the mercy of Hitler on the beaches of Dunkirk, sandwiched between the rapidly advancing fearsome Germans and the English Channel, praying to God for the earliest possible evacuation. Pearl Harbor was attacked on 7 December 1941, with the Japanese Air Force almost destroying the American naval base in a single coordinated attack. Surprised, shocked and enraged, the USA immediately declared war on Japan. Suddenly India was catapulted into the battle zone. Japan was scoring breathtaking victories, one after another, just as Hitler had done during the early stages of the war. The British Army in Singapore, under General Percival surrendered to General Yamashita in 1942. The Philippines, Malaysia, Borneo, Burma all fell in quick succession in the face of a relentless onslaught from the Japanese Army. War had arrived on India's doorstep. As the Japanese army approached the India-Burma border, it seemed that the very survival of the 'Jewel in the Crown' of the British Raj was at stake. The British were desperately seeking support from the Indian people. Hastily, Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India by Winston Churchill to strike a compromise with Congress and the Muslim League as soon as possible. However, imperialist Churchill was not personally unhappy at Hindu-Muslim bitterness and enmity as it helped the colonial administration to divide and rule.

Sir Stafford Cripps arrived from London on 23 March 1942 with a proposal to provide dominion status to India with safeguard clauses to protect the rights of Muslims to run their own government in the Muslim-majority provinces under a loose federation. This offer was subject to supporting British war efforts against the Germany-Japan axis. Congress was in no mood to compromise. Gandhi publicly ridiculed the offer as a 'post-dated cheque' from a collapsing bank. The idea of conceding to some of the demands of the Muslim League which might pave the way for partition was anathema to Gandhi. Furthermore, as the Japanese were at the gates of India, he thought that the days of British rule in India were limited. The Japanese were going to be the new conquerors and it would be wise to wait until the final defeat of the British army in Asia. Although Nehru, Rajagopalachari and some other Congress leaders had private misgivings about Gandhi's assessment of the war situation, they were not in a position to voice any public opposition to the 'post-dated cheque' theory. Jinnah was initially tempted to give his conditional approval to the Cripps mission, but changed his mind once Congress rejected it outright. Jaswant Singh's narration of the event is somewhat different. He claims that the Congress ultimately changed its mind and was about to accept the proposal. But it was Churchill who denied Congress that opportunity and

withdrew the offer in haste. According to Jaswant Singh, Churchill, imperialist to the core, was not at all sincere even in offering to provide dominion status to India. It was the US President Roosevelt who had forced Churchill to take the initiative to solve the India problem and send the Cripps mission. Jaswant writes:

“Despite Gandhi’s and Patel’s opposition, the majority of the Congress Working Committee supported Nehru and would then have accepted the British government’s proposals but for sudden withdrawal by Churchill, just as they were about to be accepted. That those proposals were withdrawn was subsequently made clear in the House of Commons, in a debate on India.” (Singh, 2009: 295)

Cripps’ mission thus failed and Gandhi launched his controversial and failed ‘Quit India’ movement in August 1942. Jinnah and the Muslim League did not participate in the movement as Congress was still rejecting his demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims of India as envisaged in the Lahore Resolution. According to the general perception of the Muslims, the Quit India movement had nothing to offer the community. Furthermore, for once, Jinnah and Nehru shared the same assessment about the war situation. They believed that, with America formally joining the war, the balance of power had decidedly shifted in favour of the Allies. But Gandhi was in no mood to listen. In August 1942, the Muslim League Working Committee convened a meeting to decide on the issue of the ‘Quit India’ movement. Jaswant Singh narrates:

“A month later, in August 1942, the working committee of the Muslim League met in Bombay. This meeting followed the Congress decision to launch the Quit India movement. The leaders of the Congress had been arrested, just a few days prior to meeting of the working committee of the Muslim League. When the Working Committee of the League met, some of its members held that an opportune moment to join hands with the Congress against the British had now arrived. Raja Shaheb Mahmudbad, M.A.H. Ispahani and Jamal Miya met Jinnah on the eve of the Working Committee to express just this viewpoint, emphasizing that such an opportunity to join hands with the ‘Hindus’ against the British should not be allowed to go. Chaudhary Khaliqzaman also expressed the same opinion, but Jinnah remained fixed in his view that the Muslim League should not join this battle against the British. Tacit approval of the Cripps mission for the establishment of a separate homeland of Muslims inside or outside the federal structure of India emboldened Jinnah’s position and enhanced his stature not only within the Muslim League but also among the supporters of regional parties in Muslim-majority provinces like Bengal, Punjab and

Sindh. Response of Congress leaders to the new-found strength of Jinnah was full of surprise, anguish and outright hostility.” (Singh, 2009: 300)

Lapierre and Collins record the British government’s dominion offer through Cripps and the reason behind Gandhi’s rejection in Freedom at Midnight as follows:

“It was not until March 1942, when the Japanese Imperial Army was at India’s gate, that Churchill under pressure from Washington and his own colleagues, sent a serious offer to New Delhi. To deliver it, he selected a particularly sympathetic courier, Sir Stafford Cripps, a vegetarian and austere socialist with long, friendly relations with the Congress leadership. Considering its authors, the proposal Cripps carried was remarkably generous. It offered the Indians the most Britain could be expected to concede in the midst of a war, a solemn pledge of what amounted to independence, dominion status, after Japan’s defeat. It contained, however, in recognition of the Muslim League’s increasingly strident call for an Islamic state, a provision which could eventually accommodate their demand.

“Forty-eight hours after his arrival, Gandhi told Cripps that the offer was unacceptable because it contemplated the ‘perpetual’ vivisection of India. Besides, the British were offering India future independence to secure immediate Indian cooperation in the violent defence of Indian soil. That was not an agreement calculated to sway the apostle of non-violence. If the Japanese were to be resisted, it could be only in one way for Gandhi, non-violently.” (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 73)

Ironically, it was the very act of movement-related violence and the failure to achieve any tangible progress towards independence that finally forced Gandhi to unilaterally withdraw his ‘Quit India’ movement. Gandhi told Cripps categorically during his India visit that because of his policy of non-violence, he could not agree to send Indian citizens to war. Unfortunately, although the declared character of the ‘Quit India’ movement was non-violent, there was significant loss of life and property in the process of the movement. In its first week, two hundred and fifty railway stations had been destroyed or damaged, five hundred post offices and one hundred and fifty police stations were attacked. The repressive measures taken by the colonial administration caused the death of hundreds of protesters. In Delhi alone, seventy-six lives were lost, shot by the police, in just two days on 11 and 12 August. Much blood was shed, most of the Congress leadership had to suffer in prison and the suffering of grassroots Congress workers and the general populace who participated in the movement were incalculable. The Muslims of India, on the whole,

remained aloof as they rightly understood the Congress strategy of total Hindu domination in a future independent India. Jinnah utilized this period to reorganize the Muslim League with single-minded devotion and extreme passion. By the time Gandhi and other Congress leaders were released from prison in 1944, Jinnah, once dismissed by Gandhi and Nehru as irrelevant, had emerged as the unquestionable leader of the Muslims across India. Let us now shift our focus to the Bengal political scene.

There was always a simmering distrust between Jinnah and A.K. Fazlul Huq, the principal Muslim leader in Bengal, that lasted their entire political careers. The Lahore resolution of 1940 definitely brought the two leaders closer, but only temporarily. Fazlul Huq earlier contested the 1937 election against the Muslim League with his Krishak Praja Party and marginally defeated his more fancied opponent. Fazlul Huq was initially more eager to form a coalition government with Congress in spite of the strong urge among the Muslim electorate to remain united against Hindu domination. However, the attempt to form a coalition between the Krishak Praja Party and Congress failed because of indecision on the part of the Bengal Congress leadership, lukewarm support for such a coalition from the central Congress leaders and an overall feeling of superiority and a patronizing attitude among the Hindus towards Bengali Muslims. Rebuffed by the Congress, Fazlul Huq was forced to form the government in coalition with the Muslim League. While in government, it did not take long for the previously long and friendly relationship between Fazlul Huq and the Bengal Congress leaders to turn sour. As the relationship with Congress deteriorated, Fazlul Huq had to lean more on Muslim League support to counter the hostile opposition from former friends. He personally compiled a booklet entitled 'Muslim sufferings under Congress Rule' and travelled to other provinces of India to address political rallies organized by the Muslim League denouncing Congress politics. At one stage, it became a political imperative on the part of Fazlul Huq to formally join the League. During the same period, another Muslim barrister was gradually coming into the limelight in Bengal, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, a suave politician and brilliant organizer. However, political rapprochement between Jinnah and Fazlul Huq always remained only skin-deep. For a certain period of time they needed each other only to achieve individual goals. The ingrained mistrust finally resulted in their inevitable split.

The uneasy coalition between the Krishak Praja Party and the Muslim League came to an end in December 1941 over the issue of the formation of the Defence Council to coordinate the British war effort. Lord

Linlithgow formed the council by including, among others, the Chief Ministers of Assam, Bengal and Punjab. This he did without consulting Jinnah. As all three chief ministers were by then Muslim League nominees, Jinnah, a proud man by nature, took it as a personal slight and an interference in the affairs of the Muslim League by the viceroy. He instructed Muhammad Sadullah of Assam, Fazlul Huq of Bengal and Sikandar Hayat Khan of Punjab to resign from the Defence Council. The chief ministers of Assam and Punjab promptly complied. But Fazlul Huq, being extremely unhappy over Jinnah's somewhat autocratic directive, as a sign of protest, also resigned from the Muslim League Working Committee along with resigning from the Defence Council. The die was cast and the response from high command was swift. Muslim League members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly withdrew their support from the coalition government. Fazlul Huq remained undeterred and proceeded on a war path. He immediately formed another coalition government with, this time, most of the Hindu parties including Congress as partners. Probably out of necessity, even after joining the Muslim League, Fazlul Huq kept alive the name of his original Krishak Praja Party. But this particular decision of his to go back to the Hindu parties was the beginning of the end of his political career in British India. Mr. Harun-Or-Rashid, a professor of political science at the University of Dhaka, described the Jinnah-Huq animosity in an article entitled, 'Ministries of Bengal 1937-1947':

"Fazlul Huq never had any good relation with the central League leadership. Huq was not known to have held any desire of becoming an all-India leader. His political career centred around Bengal. He had a deep conviction and feeling that, though the Bengali Muslims always played a very special role in the India Muslim politics, their particular problems and interests did not receive due attention from the non-Bengali leadership of the central League. He knew that this relationship with them might not last long. In 1937 Jinnah's acquiescence in a coalition under the leadership of Fazlul Huq and the latter's joining the Muslim League seemed to be a marriage of convenience. Jinnah needed Huq's backing for organizing the League in Bengal and establishing its prestige throughout India. On the other hand, to sustain Congress opposition and for staying in power, Huq equally required the active support and cooperation of Jinnah and the League." (Rashid, 1992: 376)

The Second Fazlul Huq ministry not only had Congress members but strangely included the rabidly communal anti-Muslim party, Hindu Mahashabha, as well as the progressive Socialist Forward Block. It was a motley collection of parties, united only around the single issue of

resisting the Muslim League in Bengal. Jinnah was not ready to concede defeat to Fazlul Huq so easily. A strong organizational team of the Bengal Muslim League led by Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin and Tamijuddin Khan went for a province-wide mass contact tour immediately. Shyama-Huq assumed office at the ministry. Shymaprasad Mukherjee, the President of Hindu Mahashabha, was given the position of the Deputy Chief Minister with the Finance portfolio. The Muslim League mass contact drive proved a huge success. In about six months they addressed more than five hundred public meetings in Muslim-majority areas of Bengal, denouncing Fazlul Huq as a traitor in the mould of Quisling or Mir Jafar. Once the most popular Bengali Muslim leader, Fazlul Huq had overnight become the target of Muslim hatred and wrath. In the first by-election at Natore, East Bengal after formation of the second Huq ministry, held in April 1942, the coalition candidate lost miserably to the Muslim League, polling only eight hundred and forty votes as against 10,843 polled by the winner. A politician with long experience, Fazlul Huq did not fail to assess the anger of Muslim voters.

In desperation, Huq performed a volte face and, in an effort to counter the influence of Muslim League among Muslim electorates in Bengal, created a new political platform along extreme communal lines. He surprised friend and foe alike by announcing the formation of the party under the name of 'Progressive Muslim League'. The declared agenda of the party was to establish Islam in every sphere of life in Bengal with additional safeguards for the rights of minority communities. It was a curious move from the Chief Minister of a government depending on the support of non-Muslim members in the Legislative Assembly. Borrowing the name of the Muslim League was another sign of his desperation. He wrote personal letters to all the influential Muslim leaders of Bengal seeking their support for his new initiative. Shaken by the Muslim League campaign under the young, charismatic Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, he also tried a mass contact programme only to be ridiculed and insulted by Muslim voters. He was shown black flags almost everywhere he went after forming the Shayma-Huq ministry. The Muslims of Bengal had by then committed to the two-nation theory and were not prepared to allow anybody to create any division within the community. Fazlul Huq's plea did not even create a ripple in Bengal politics and his project was stillborn. His attempt to outsmart the Muslim League backfired. Finally, on 28 March 1943, the viceroy dismissed the Shyama-Huq ministry and thereby hastened the political demise of the man who had once been the most popular Muslim politician in Bengal. The forward march of Jinnah and the Muslim League in East Bengal was thereafter unstoppable. Jaswant Singh

narrates the political situation of 1942 Bengal in his book on Jinnah. He writes:

“However, even Fazl-ul-Haq, otherwise an extremely popular figure, had to experience black flags in almost every city of East Bengal when he left the Muslim League and formed a coalition government with the Mahasabha and the Congress, in the Shyama Prasad-Haq ministry (1941).” (Singh, 2009: 299)

Professor Harun-Or-Rashid writes what almost amounts to an obituary on the apparent political death of Fazlul Huq, although the grand old man of Bengal politics would return to the limelight later in Pakistan and become Chief Minister of the eastern wing:

“Fazlul Huq read in his dismissal ‘the death of his political hopes in Bengal’. In fact, the collapse of Huq’s political career took shape through the split of his formerly popular KPP and his joining the Muslim League subsequently. His failure to stay in the League, at the time when its expansive movement became rather irresistible had to be paid very dearly. He had almost all the qualities of a great leader. However, he was sadly lacking in one important element of leadership: organizing ability.” (Rashid, 1992: 388)

The viceroy, probably in an attempt to appease Jinnah, then invited the minority Muslim League to form the next government in Bengal. The leader of the Muslim League parliamentary party, Khwaja Nazimuddin, was sworn in as the Chief Minister on 24 April. Muslim parliamentarians from other parties had already started joining the Muslim League even before the fall of the Shyama-Huq ministry. Now it was an opportunistic race to change the floor and, in no time, the number of ruling party members in the Assembly rose to seventy-nine from just forty. However, all was not well within the Bengal Muslim League. A new leadership competition blossomed between Khwaja Nazimuddin, always a pro-establishment politician, and the great organizer Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, the suave populist barrister.

With the formation of Nazimuddin ministry in Bengal, let me return to all-India politics. By the time Congress had withdrawn from the ‘Quit India’ movement and Gandhi had been released from prison, Jinnah’s grip in all the provinces which would become Pakistan on 14 August 1947 was firmly in place. Punjab, Bengal, Sind and the NWFP had Muslim League ministries by then. Although Muslims were a minority in Assam, that province also had a League ministry. In 1944, neither the British government nor the Indian National Congress was in a position to ignore

Jinnah in any discussion regarding the future of India. It was only Jinnah who had the popular mandate to negotiate on behalf of the Muslims. Interestingly enough, the idea of the structure of Pakistan was still in a fluid state in 1944. The Lahore Resolution was definitely the manifestation of the two-nation philosophy of poet Iqbal and Rahmat Ali, but by no means did it initially mean a two-nation or two-state solution. It could still have been a multi-state solution in the spirit of the 1940 Lahore Resolution at that point in history. The two-state solution would come only after the 1946 elections, mainly due to Congress policy. Gandhi, who had once rejected Cripps' mission and launched the 'Quit India' movement to prevent what he termed the 'vivisection of India', would ultimately agree not only to partition India but also to divide Punjab and Bengal. In fact, it was not Jinnah, but the Congress leadership who first proposed the division of both the provinces as a price for agreeing to Jinnah's demand for the establishment of Pakistan.

On his release from detention, Gandhi took the initiative for a face-to-face meeting with Jinnah. The much-anticipated talk was held at Jinnah's residence in Bombay in September 1944. Although, on principle, Gandhi accepted the right of self-determination for the Muslims where they were in the majority, he insisted that this should be implemented after independence. Jinnah, being a brilliant lawyer, correctly raised legalistic questions about Gandhi's theory as described by Jaswant Singh: "Who, for instance, would appoint the commission for demarcating areas and who would decide the form of the plebiscite and franchise contemplated by the formula? Who would give effect to the verdict of the plebiscite?"

The plight of the Kashmiri people living under Indian occupation since 1947 has proved Jinnah's argument both logical and prophetic. India officially agreed to implement the United Nations Security Council's resolution no. 47, adopted on 21 April 1948, to arrange a plebiscite for the Kashmiris to determine the future status of Kashmir. But, the so-called largest democratic country in the world has not implemented the pledge, even after seven decades. Today, more than half a million Indian military personnel are virtually occupying the Muslim-majority state, denying the people the right to self-determination. The actions of the Indian Army in Kashmir are similar to what the Pakistani Army did in Bangladesh during the nine-month liberation war in 1971. The Gandhi-Jinnah talks failed to break the deadlock between the positions of the Congress and the Muslim League. A fresh attempt was then made by Liaquat Ali Khan and Bhulabhai Desai inside the Legislative Assembly. At the time of formulating the said pact many of the leading Congress leaders were still in jail. Bulabhai Desai took advice and guidance directly from Gandhi in

the course of the negotiations. However, after the release of all the Congress leaders in the middle of 1945, they refused to acknowledge the pact. The Congress Working Committee decided not only to repudiate the Liaquat Ali–Desai pact but also to seriously censor Bulabhai Desai, alleging that he had exceeded the authority given him by Gandhi. The initiative failed.

The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, before his departure from India, undertook one last initiative to solve the Hindu–Muslim problem. He convened a meeting of Hindu and Muslim leaders, the first Simla conference in June 1945. This, however, failed, forcing the Governor General to dissolve the Legislative Assembly and order a new election. The result of this election settled the issue of Pakistan once and for all. Before moving on to the 1946 elections, I should try to throw further light on the Liaquat Ali–Bhulabhai pact. I will quote Abul Kalam Azad, the President of Indian Congress in the 1940s and Jaswant Singh as proof of the seriousness of the discussion that took place between Liaquat and Bhulabhai in an attempt to break the Congress–League impasse with the full knowledge of both Gandhi and Jinnah. Why Gandhi did not come to the rescue of Bhulabhai at the time of his censure by the Congress Working Committee is another mystery. Abul Kalam Azad writes:

“Mutual friends approached Liaquat Ali, Deputy Leader of the Muslim League Party and Bulabhai Desai. Liaquat Ali agreed that exploratory talks should take place and there was a meeting between him and Bulabhai Desai. Bulabhai Desai was interested in the proposal but made it clear that he could not take any step without the approval of the Congress. He insisted that the understanding must be not only between the parties in the Legislature but between the two organizations. All the Congress leaders were however in jail and it was not possible to consult them. He then suggested that he would approach Gandhiji and seek his advice. Bulabhai Desai met Gandhiji and reported to him his discussions with Liaquat Ali and other friends. Gandhiji used to observe every Monday as a day of silence and since Bulabhai met him on a Monday, Gandhiji wrote out a reply in Gujarati. The purport of his advice was that Bulabhai should go ahead and, after ascertaining the details, report back to him.” (Azad, 1978: 135)

Jaswant Singh corroborates Maulana Azad in his narration:

“It was understood that Bhulabhai and Liaquat Ali had arrived at an agreement, or a plan, the basis of which was that Jinnah and Desai, the leaders of the two opposition parties in the Assembly, should form an interim government at the Centre, within the present constitutional framework and appoint all the members of the Executive Council, all of

whom, except the Governor General and the Commander-in-Chief, should be Indian. Also, that there was to be parity between the Hindus and Muslims in the Executive Council.” (Singh, 2009: 327)

Implementation of Liaquat Ali–Bhulabhai pact could have saved India from partition even as late as 1944. But that was not be. Now it was time for the warring parties to go back to their electorates to seek mandates. The effective party machine and disciplined cadre that Jinnah had created in the wake of the 1937 election failure now got the opportunity to perform in the decisive battle. Two elections were to be held. The Central Legislative election was scheduled to be held in December 1945 and a provincial election in January 1946. Congress was confident of repeating the success of 1937. However, Jinnah this time had a more effective card up his sleeve. He contested the election with the single issue of creating Pakistan, an independent homeland for Indian Muslims and, to achieve that, he appealed to all the Muslims of India for unity and to reject, in the election, any Muslim candidate other than those nominated by the Muslim League. All the regional Muslim parties, except in NWFP, were swept aside and Jinnah’s Muslim League scored a resounding victory. In the Central Legislative Assembly, the Muslim League won all thirty Muslim seats. The Muslim League achieved a similar landslide victory in the provincial assemblies as can be seen in the following chart:

Province	Muslim Seats	Muslim League
*Bengal	119	113
*Punjab	86	75
*Sindh	34	28
*NWFP	38	17
Assam	34	33
Bihar	40	34
United Province	66	54
Bombay	30	30
Madras	29	29
Central Province	14	13
Orissa	4	4
(*Future Pakistan Provinces)		

The Indian Congress failed to win a single seat in the Muslim constituencies across India, laying waste the party’s claim to represent all communities. On the other hand, the assertion of Jinnah that he was the ‘sole spokesperson’ for Indian Muslims was vindicated by his massive election victory.

The performance of the Muslim League in Bengal was astounding. In the 1937 election, the party managed to win only thirty-eight seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Conceding defeat, Jinnah had then allowed the leaders of the Bengal Muslim League to join the government as a junior partner in the first Huq coalition ministry. But, between 1937 and 1946, when the next election was held, the Pakistan movement succeeded in catching the imagination of nearly all Muslims in the province. The Bengali Muslims gave their verdict in the clearest of terms in favour of creating independent states or a state for the Muslims of India. The personal popularity of Jinnah combined with the organizational capability of Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy had transformed the Muslim League into an unstoppable political juggernaut. It was Shaheed Suhrawardy who later proposed amending the Lahore Resolution at the League conference in Delhi, paving the way for the creation of a single Muslim state of Pakistan instead of 'states'. Surprisingly, even after the 1945/1946 election, the Congress leaders refused to accept the reality and continued to stick to their old claim of being the party of all Indians, including Muslims. Joya Chatterji writes about the ostrich-like policy of the Congress in her much-acclaimed work, *Bengal Divided*:

“By the time it became clear that the British were minded to quit India, the claim of the Congress to be the rightful and sole successor had been challenged on all sides. In the general election of 1945-46 the Congress did extremely well in the ‘General’ Hindu constituencies but it failed to substantiate its claim to represent the Muslims of India. The Muslim League attracted 86.7 per cent of the total Muslim vote in the elections to the central Assembly in contrast to the miniscule number of votes the Congress attracted, a mere 1.3 per cent. In the provinces, the League won 74.7 per cent of all Muslim votes while the Congress won only 4.67 per cent. In the last election held in British India, both the Congress and the League markedly improved on their position in 1936. Both came to the negotiation table at which the endgame was to be played determined to stick to their guns. Already at the first Simla Conference in 1945 Jinnah had insisted that he should be recognized as the ‘sole spokesperson’ of the Muslims, and that Muslims, as a separate nation, should be given parity of representation in any proposed federal government. The Congress, on the other hand, held on to its old position: its leaders insisted that they spoke for the nation as a whole including Muslims.” (Chatterji, 2002: 223)

The last opportunity for a federal united India emerged in the form of the Cabinet Mission in March 1946. Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced a high-level team – comprising Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps of the failed Cripps

mission of 1942 and A.V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty – with a mandate to find a solution that would enable the bridging of the differences between the two warring communities. During the stay of the Cabinet Mission in India, Jinnah convened a joint meeting of the provincial and Central Legislative members of the Muslim League in Delhi. The meeting was held from 7 to 9 April. At this meeting, the Lahore Resolution was amended in order to establish a single state of Pakistan politically uniting geographically separated eastern and north-western parts of the Muslim-majority provinces of India in place of multiple states as was possibly envisaged in the original resolution. Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, the then Chief Minister of Bengal, tabled the following amendment to the resolution at the meeting:

“Resolved

1. That the zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North East and the Punjab, NWFP, Sind and Baluchistan in the North West of India namely Pakistan Zones where the Muslims are in dominant majority, be constituted into a sovereign independent state and an equivocal undertaking be given to implement establishment of Pakistan without delay.
2. That two, separate constitution making bodies be set up for people of Pakistan and Hindustan for the purpose of framing the respective constitution.
3. That the minorities in Pakistan and Hindustan be provided with the safe guards on the basis of All-India Muslim League resolution passed on 23rd March, 1940 at Lahore.
4. That the acceptances of the Muslim League demand of Pakistan and its implementations without delay are the *sine qua non*, for Muslim cooperation and participation in the formation of an interim government at the Centre.”

After a long, tortuous and bitter negotiation, the Cabinet Mission made public their plan through a statement on 16 May 1946. Jaswant Singh and Abul Mansur Ahmed narrate the Cabinet Mission’s Plan and the respective positions of Congress and Muslim League in their individual ways. However, one may find that an essentially similar story emerges from the two narrations. At this very important juncture of the history, I am forced to quote a rather long narration from the authors in my effort to present the readers an unbiased picture of the then prevailing political situation. Since 1947, a bitter debate has been going on in the subcontinent to apportion blame or credit to the then national leaders for the partition of India. I

would request that readers use their own judgement on reading the quotes. Jaswant Singh writes:

“Built in the Cabinet Mission’s statement of 16 May 1946 were two plans – a long- and a short-term scheme. Through these plans the mission has rejected the Pakistan demand and put forth a scheme of loose federation with one Constituent Assembly for framing a constitution for the proposed Indian Union. The long-term scheme visualized three groupings of provinces; those of Hindu majority, one of Muslim-majority and the third group of provinces of the East and North East i.e.; Bengal and Assam. Each grouping was to have its own legislature and executive with each province, or a grouping of provinces, having the right to opt out from the proposed India union. The short-term scheme proposed an interim government, to be formed immediately.

“Differences existed between the Congress and the Muslim League on the status of the proposed Constituent Assembly; on the nature and functions of these three tier groupings; and also on representation in the interim government. For the Congress, the Constituent Assembly was to be a sovereign entity to which proposal the Muslim League would not agree. To the Congress these groupings under the three tier arrangement were unacceptable, if they were made compulsory; for the Muslim League that was an essential condition. The Congress would not accept parity as a precondition to entering the interim government; the League insisted upon it.

“The Cabinet delegation had been in India since March 1946. Its plan had been built up gradually and Jinnah now had two stark choices confronting him; one, if he wanted whole of Punjab, Bengal and Assam for his Muslim sub-federations, then he must accept a federal centre, however limited its strength and power; should he instead, persist with a division of India and also demand a sovereign, independent entity then he must make do with a truncated Pakistan.

“To the statement of 16 May some important revisions had been made before it was finally issued. The most significant being the one suggested by the Bengal governor, Sir Fedrick Burrons, to paragraph 19 on the ‘Right to opt out of the Groups’. It was this which made the Congress apprehensive, that amendment would result in pre-empting Assam’s choice.” (Singh, 2009: 365)

Reluctance and uneasiness on the part of Congress to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan can be sensed even at the early stage of the proposal from the above quote. Bengal’s Abul Mansur Ahmed’s narrative provides a clearer picture regarding the bitter communal divide:

“Cabinet Mission announced the plan on 16 May 1946. My heart leapt with joy reading about it in the newspapers. This is exactly what I have dreamt. I remembered Netaji Subhas Bose. His beautiful smile-adorned face appeared in front of my eyes. Alas, if he would have been alive today. We, the grassroot workers immediately liked the plan. Our leaders did not show ready enthusiasm. Both the Muslim League and the Congress accepted the plan after much deliberation one week apart at the end of June. We were all extremely happy. I was further elated to find die-hard pro-Pakistani elements and conservative Muslim Leaguers have also accepted it. At last an impossible problem had been solved. There was a sense of relief all around.

“However, the overall situation had become so poisonous by then that when the Muslims expressed happiness at some development, immediately the Hindus resented. Nobody considered whether the thing is good or bad. In the case of the Cabinet Mission, similar situation emerged. Even those leftist friends who have been noisily campaigning in Calcutta for Gandhi-Jinnah rapprochement, suddenly became sad and sullen. The plan must have gone in favour of the Muslims. Otherwise why did Muslim League accept it? Why Congress delayed their acceptance? Why the Muslims are so delighted?

“Within ten-fifteen days new President of Indian Congress, Pundit Nehru declared in a press conference on 10 July that although Congress had accepted the Cabinet plan but, sovereign parliament would not be bound to obey the decision of the Congress. In protest to that announcement, Quaid-e-Azam justifiably withdrew his earlier acceptance of the plan. Genuine patriots were utterly distressed by the latest development.” (Abul Mansur Ahmed, Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar, Reprint 2015: 194–195)

The history of the subcontinent could have been very different had the Congress leadership in general and Pundit Nehru in particular shown more responsibility at this the most critical juncture for the nation. There was a great opportunity to form a federal Indian Union with three groups of autonomous regions without the need to divide either Punjab or Bengal and thereby avoid horrendous bloodshed and unbearable suffering for millions of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Zone A, consisting of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Orissa would have been a predominantly Hindu majority autonomous state; zone B, comprising Punjab, NWFP, Sindh and Baluchistan, a predominantly Muslim-majority autonomous state; and zone C, comprising Bengal and Assam, a marginally Muslim-majority state. The parochial thinking on the part of the Congress leadership, focusing exclusively on the Hindu interest, was clearly reflected in a letter that Maulana Azad wrote to the

Viceroy, Lord Wavel in which he stated: "We could not accept anything in the nature of 'parity' even as a temporary expedient." The cunning of the then Congress Hindu leadership is again exposed by the fact that the rejection of the principle of parity with Muslims was communicated to the Viceroy through a fellow Muslim. It is sad that a person with the stature of Maulana Azad had agreed to be used as a pawn against Muslim interests by Nehru and Patel. Maulana Azad himself blamed Nehru for the Cabinet Mission failure which, in Azad's words, "changed the course of history". He narrates the story of Nehru's all-important press conference with considerable anguish:

"Now happened one of those unfortunate events which changed the course of history. On 10 July, Jawaharlal held a Press Conference in Bombay in which he made a statement which in normal circumstances might have passed almost unnoticed, but in the existing atmosphere of suspicion and hatred, set in train a most unfortunate series of consequences. Some Press representatives asked him whether, with the passing of the Resolution by A.I.C.C., the Congress had accepted the plan in toto, including the composition of the interim Government.

"Jawaharlal stated in reply that Congress would enter the Constituent Assembly 'completely unfettered by agreements and free to meet all situations as they arise'.

"Press representatives further asked if this meant that the Cabinet Mission Plan could be modified.

"Jawaharlal replied emphatically that the Congress had agreed only to participate in the Constituent Assembly and regarded itself free to change or modify the Cabinet Mission Plan as it thought best.

"I must place on record that Jawaharlal's statement was wrong. It was not correct to say that Congress was free to modify the plan as it pleased. We had in fact agreed that the central government would be federal. There would be the compulsory list of three Central subjects while all other subjects remained in the provincial sphere. We had further agreed that there would be the three sections, viz. A, B and C, in which the provinces would be grouped. These matters could not be changed unilaterally by Congress without the consent of other parties to the agreement." (Azad, 1978: 155)

Nehru by his arrogant answers to the press, in fact, attempted to demolish the foundation of the Cabinet Plan. This was the most fundamental departure from the agreement by none other than incumbent

Congress President himself. Azad surprised us with the comment that under normal circumstances Nehru's remark 'might have passed almost unnoticed'. This was a lame attempt by Azad to save his peer. After the fateful press conference, there was no question of Jinnah trusting any Congress leader ever again. Jaswant Singh rightly questions Nehru's motives and refuses to give him any benefit of the doubt which Maulana Azad has given in his memoir. He writes:

"Under such complex circumstances, the press conference of Jawaharlal Nehru, of 10 July 1946, could not have come at a worse time. It is difficult to give the benefit of doubt to Nehru for not having known, in advance, what the fall out of such conferences or his interview could be." (Singh, 2009: 378)

The shift in Congress's position forced Jinnah to change his tactics from constitutional politics to public demonstration for the first time. He announced a 'Direct Action Day' on 16 August 1946 and urged all the Muslims in India to participate in the demonstration to voice their anger against the British Colonial Government for their pro-Congress bias. In a dangerous and communally charged atmosphere, Hindus and Muslims all over India jumped at each other's throats. However, the worst atrocities were committed in Calcutta, the Headquarters of the Bengal government. In spite of having the advantage of a Muslim League government in the province, it was the Muslims who were mostly on the receiving end. Harrowing tales from Calcutta ignited communal passions in the faraway district of Noakhali where innocent Hindus suffered through no fault of their own. Muslims suffered an even worse fate at the hands of the Hindu zealots in Bihar. The Attlee government in London, already in crisis in their efforts to tackle the severe economic hardships left by the Second World War, was no longer interested in keeping the now-troubled former Crown Jewel of the British Empire. The latest round of Hindu-Muslim communal violence prompted Prime Minister Attlee to search for a way to expedite the ultimate withdrawal of the British Raj from India. To accomplish this, he needed a fresh face as the Viceroy of India.

A much-decorated naval commander of Second World War and the cousin of the King George VI was personally selected by the Prime Minister. Lord Louis Albert Mountbatten, the former Supreme Allied Commander of South-East Asia, became the last Viceroy of India. But there is another tale of a masterstroke in political cunning and opportunism in the process of this particular selection. In fact, Nehru and Mountbatten were old friends and it was Krishna Menon, Nehru's confidant in London who manipulated the entire selection process of the last Viceroy. Lapierre

and Collins, no friend of Pakistan and Jinnah, write in *Freedom at Midnight*:

“Although Mountbatten didn’t know it, the idea of sending him to India had been suggested to Attlee by the man at the Prime Minister’s side, his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Stafford Cripps. It had come at a secret conversation in London in December, between Cripps and Krishna Menon, an outspoken Indian left-winger and intimate of the Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru. Menon had suggested to Cripps and Nehru that Congress saw little hope of progress in India so long as Wavell was Viceroy. In response to a query from the British leader, he had advanced the name of a man Nehru held in the highest regard, Louis Mountbatten. Aware that Mountbatten’s usefulness would be destroyed if India’s Muslim leaders learned of the genesis of his appointment the two men had agreed to reveal the details of their talk to no one. Menon revealed the details of his conversation with Cripps in a series of conversations with one of the authors in New Delhi in February 1973, a year before his death.” (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 8)

Nehru and Mountbatten met earlier in Singapore where the latter was still in his South-East Asia Command Headquarters at the end of the war. Mountbatten was hugely impressed by the Western-educated, warm personality of Nehru. Mountbatten’s wife added additional charm to this friendship which lasted till the death of Nehru in 1964. The authors of *Freedom at Midnight* provide additional insight:

“He was the only one of the Indian Leaders that Mountbatten already knew. The two men had met after the war when Nehru was on a visit to Singapore where Mountbatten had his SEAC headquarters. Ignoring his advisors, who’d counseled him to have nothing to do with a rebel whose shoes still bore the dust of British prison yard, Mountbatten had met the Indian leader. The two immediately sympathized with each other. Nehru rediscovered in the company of Mountbatten and his wife an England he had not known for forty years, the England his years in British jail had almost eradicated from his memory, that open and welcoming England he had known as a school boy. The Mountbattens delighted in Nehru’s charm, his culture, his quick humor. To the horror of his staff, Mountbatten had even spontaneously decided to ride through Singapore’s streets in his open car with Nehru at his side. His action, his advisors had warned, ‘would only dignify an anti-British rebel’.

“‘Dignify him?’ Mountbatten had retorted, ‘It’s he who will dignify me. One day this man will be Prime Minister of India.’” (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 104–105)

Indeed, the great friendship between the future Prime Minister of India and the Mountbattens was definitely instrumental in India's getting more than its fair share in the ultimate partition of India. At that time, Jinnah could only lament that he was handed a 'moth-eaten' Pakistan by the British.

Mountbatten mounted his viceregal throne in Delhi on 24 March 1947. Accompanied by his wife, the new Viceroy arrived in India in great style aboard a special plane, York MW 102, a converted Lancaster bomber. Immediately on assuming office, Mountbatten provided much needed urgency to the final negotiation for the peaceful termination of the British rule in India. It was never an easy task in the face of irreconcilable differences and total mistrust between the Congress and the Muslim League. Once Mountbatten was convinced that the partition of India was inevitable, he never looked back and did not waste any time in preparing his plan for the division of India. He did not suffer from any hesitancy or romanticism in this regard. Within just forty days of his landing in India, Mountbatten sent his Chief of Staff, Lord Ismay, to submit the termination plan to His Majesty's Government. The sincerity of Mountbatten regarding the speedy end to British rule was never in doubt. But his absolute loyalty to Nehru and intense dislike of Jinnah whom he considered rather cold and intransigent, eventually meant a raw deal for Pakistan. Muslim-majority Gurdaspur in Punjab was given to India in naked defiance of the majority-population principle of partition. This was not an inadvertent mistake since, without Gurdaspur, India would not have any land access to Kashmir. The eventual illegal accession of Kashmir to India by the Hindu Maharaja Hari Singh would not have been possible without strategic Gurdaspur link. Furthermore, it was the same Lord Mountbatten, in his capacity as the first Governor General of post-partition India, who not only pushed for Maharaja's quick official accession to India in spite of the overwhelming Muslim majority in Kashmir, but also used his own rich military experience to help India in the first Indo-Pakistan war over Kashmir. Again, in the case of the partition of Bengal, Karimganj was illegally given to India in spite of the fact that the people of Karimganj had opted to join Pakistan in a prior referendum. Mountbatten blatantly ignored the people's aspirations in Gurdaspur, Kashmir and Karimganj just to satisfy his friend. Abul Mansur Ahmed clearly hints at a British–Congress conspiracy in the process of demarcation to make Pakistan unviable at birth.

“Later many foreigners and neutral observers conceded that Pakistan is a victim of injustice during partition. To give Karimganj to India ignoring that the huge majority of the population voted for Pakistan, giving

Gurdaspur of Punjab to India in contrary of all accepted principles of partition, are clear examples of biasness and wilful injustice. These were done with the ulterior motive to keep contiguous land boundary of Kashmir and Tripura with the rest of India. ——— Whatever the reasons were, it is now clear and generally accepted that wilful injustice was done against Pakistan. This injustice originated from the mindset that Pakistan cannot survive and therefore, with the passage of time all acts of injustice would become irrelevant. The nature of injustice is so grave that quick demise of Pakistan would have been only be natural. Under the circumstances, it is a great surprise that Pakistan is still surviving overcoming all those obstacles. This is possibly our great fortune.”

(Abul Mansur Ahmed, Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar, Reprint 2015: 199–200)

The conspiracy theory of Abul Mansur Ahmed gets credence from the fact that, before and after the partition, both Nehru and Patel made comments that Pakistan would not survive and it would not be long before Pakistanis return to ‘mother India’. Jaswant Singh writes:

“Muhammad Ali Jinnah had left Delhi for Karachi and for the putative Pakistan on 7 August 1947. Thereafter he was never to return to India. The next day, Patel then said in the Constituent Assembly in Delhi: The poison has been removed from the body of India. We are now one and indivisible. You cannot divide the sea or the waters of the river. As for the Muslims they have their roots, their sacred places and their centres here. I do not know what they can possibly do in Pakistan. It will not be long before they return....

“Later, reflecting on this in a conversation with his nephew B.K. Nehru, Prime Minister Nehru, too, had remarked rather wistfully, ‘Let us see for how long they remain separate’.” (Singh, 2009: 464)

The worst possible act of betrayal of trust as a Governor General that Mountbatten committed against the Muslim League and Jinnah was in Simla in May 1947. Mountbatten had completed a draft plan for partition with a clause where Indian provinces reserved the right to independence from the union if the majority of both Muslim and Hindu communities so wished. This was, in particular, a great opportunity for undivided Bengal to become an independent state along with Pakistan and India in 1947. Mountbatten decided to show the draft plan to Nehru while keeping Jinnah in the dark. When he broached this idea, a blatant breach of trust, to his British colleagues they were all shocked and horrified. They reasoned with Mountbatten that it would be a complete breach of faith to Muslims in India in general and Jinnah in particular. But Mountbatten remained

unmoved. Incidentally, Nehru was enjoying the hospitality of Louis and Edwina Mountbatten at that very moment in Simla. It is said that Nehru and Edwina enjoyed a platonic relationship. Lapierre and Collins provide some hint of the nature of the relationship when they write:

“His wife’s friendship with the Indian Prime Minister had grown too. Women like Edwina Mountbatten were rare in the world and rarer still in the India of 1947. No one had been better able to draw Nehru from his shell when doubts and depression gripped him than the attractive aristocrat who radiated so much compassion, intelligence and warmth. Often, over tea, a stroll in the Mughal gardens, or a swim in the viceregal pool, she had been able to charm Nehru out of his gloom, redress a situation and subtly encourage her husband’s effort.” (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 157)

Mountbatten ignored the responsible advice of his British colleagues and arranged to show the draft plan to Nehru during his stay in Simla. The future Prime Minister of India summarily rejected the clause of possible independence for other states including Bengal. Nehru and the majority of the Congress leadership wanted to divide both Bengal and Punjab as a price for accepting the demand for a separate and independent Muslim homeland. Mountbatten was obliged to change the draft plan by removing the said clause to placate the anger of his friend. Abul Kalam Azad also tells us the story of Mountbatten’s treachery quite candidly in *India Wins Freedom*:

“Now that partition seemed generally accepted, the question of Bengal and Punjab assumed a new importance. Lord Mountbatten said that since partition was on the basis of Muslim-majority areas and since both in Bengal and Punjab there were areas where the Muslims were in a clear minority, these provinces should also be partitioned. He however advised the Congress leaders not to raise the question at this stage and assured them that he would himself raise it at the appropriate time.” (Azad, 1978: 188)

When all this conspiracy between the British and Congress was going on to force Jinnah to accept a truncated, weak and apparently unviable Pakistan, the campaign for the partition of Bengal gained momentum among the Hindu population of the province. The same so-called ‘*bhadralok*’ (gentleman) Hindus who gave birth to the terrorist movement in 1905 to annul Lord Curzon’s initiative for the division of Bengal were in the forefront of the new campaign. But this time their demand was exactly the opposite of what they had demanded four decades earlier. They now wanted the partition of Bengal on the basis of religion at any cost. Hindu *Bhadraloks* were unwilling to accept the rule of the Muslim

majority in a united Bengal. One of their propaganda materials had the following incendiary rhetoric:

“The hour has now struck, Sisters and Brothers, I appeal to you to give up soft sentimentalism and to come down from the giddy heights of dreamland to the realities of the terra firma. It is not patriotism to repeat old slogans and to be slaves of catch words. The most glorious chapter in the history of Bengal is the agitation against the partition imposed by the British imperialism. Traditionally and sentimentally the people of Bengal are against any move of dividing the province. But we shall be guilty of treason to the motherland if we merely quote old slogans without understanding their implications. The Anti-Partition movement in the Swadeshi days was a fight against imperialism which to cripple the greatest nationalist force working for the Independence of the Country by making the Bengal Hindus minorities in both the provinces. Our demand for partition today is prompted by the same ideal and the same purpose, namely, to prevent the disintegration of the nationalist element and to preserve Bengal’s culture and to secure a Homeland for the Hindus of Bengal which will constitute a Nation state as a part of India.” (Chatterji, 2002: 241)

The twisted logic and opportunism of *Bhadralok* Hindus is most evident in the construction of each sentence of their propaganda. The real motive behind their agitation in 1905 against partition and their campaign for the Bengal partition in 1946 and 1947 remained unchanged. A desire for *Bhadralok* Hindu domination over the majority Muslim peasant population in Bengal and communal hatred against them had remained the driving philosophy of all Hindu policies since the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Joya Chatterjee further adds:

“These clarion calls drew upon many of now familiar idioms of the Hindu *bhadralok*’s communal identity images of Bengal’s glorious past, claims that partition would protect Bengal’s ‘unique’ culture and would provide a secure Hindu ‘Homeland’ dreams that in the security of their new Homeland, they would cease to be a hopeless minority but rather a confident majority, restored to its rightful dominance. Couched in such terms, the appeal was irresistible.” (Chatterji, 2002: 241)

Only a few Hindu leaders stood against the Hindu communal tide and called for a united Bengal. Most prominent among them was Sarat Chandra Bose, the elder brother of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. He resigned from Congress in January 1946 in protest at the capitulation of the Bengal Congress to the communal elements. When Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy rather belatedly took the initiative on 27 April 1947 by announcing his plan, at a press conference in Delhi, to establish an

independent, sovereign, undivided Bengal, Sarat Bose enthusiastically joined him. Among the influential leaders of both the communities who actively supported the united Bengal initiative, Abul Hashim, Secretary of the Bengal Muslim League and Kiran Shankar Roy, Legislative leader of the Bengal Congress were the most prominent.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, despite amending the Lahore Resolution to pave the way for the creation of a single Muslim state, gave his tacit consent to Suhrawardy's initiative and duly intimated his flexible position on Bengal to Lord Mountbatten. There was no practical reason for Jinnah to feel possessive about Bengal. Neither the poet Iqbal nor Rahmat Ali had Bengal in their dreams of a homeland for Indian Muslims. Jinnah might have also thought that a Muslim-majority united Bengal in the east in addition to Pakistan in the north-west would serve overall Muslim interests better.

The Governor of Bengal, Sir Fredrick Burrows supported the proposal of his Chief Minister Suhrawardy with total sincerity. But Mountbatten was against it at the behest of his friend Nehru as noted already. The Congress central leadership remained adamant in their opposition to the Suhrawardy plan. According to Mountbatten, Nehru in fact believed that East Bengal would not be able to survive within Pakistan and would join India within a few years. Indeed, East Pakistan would separate from Pakistan 24 years later not to join India, but to become independent Bangladesh, a homeland for one hundred and forty-five million Muslims where I am writing this book. The second part of the Nehru doctrine, i.e. the joining of Bangladesh to India is yet to be materialized. Suhrawardy and Sarat Bose were able to conclude a five-point agreement which was signed at the Calcutta residence of Sarat Bose on 20 May 1947. Sarat Bose received some initial blessings from Gandhi. However, the initiative failed mainly due to vehement opposition from the majority of the Bengali Hindu community and the hostility of central Congress leadership, especially from Nehru and Patel. Gandhi was quickly forced to withdraw his initial support for an independent and undivided Bengal. Gandhi, in a reply to Sarat Bose's earlier letter, wrote on 8 June 1947: "I have gone through your draft. I have now discussed the scheme with Pundit Nehru and Sardar Patel. Both of them are dead against the proposal." Sarat Bose had no other option left but to stop pleading with the central Congress leadership:

"However, the united Bengal plan was never more than a pipedream. Even as Gandhi gave his conditional approval to the plan to keep Bengal united, he was forced to withdraw his support, since, as he later confessed, his colleagues on the Working Committee had 'taken him to task for supporting

Sarat Babu's move'. The Congress high command was by this time convinced of the need for strong centre and a unitary India. Cutting out the Muslim-majority areas was necessary to ensure its unity and integrity, phrases that are now the cant of politicians but in 1947 were the keys to the future independent India. Even Nehru and Patel, so often at odds, saw eye to eye on this matter. Nehru was vehemently opposed to what he described as 'Balkanization' of India and was clear that individual provinces should in no circumstances be allowed the option of opting out of the Indian Union. Patel, for his part, appears to have been determined not to allow Jinnah an inch more territory than the Congress had to concede and therefore strongly supported Bengali Hindus in their demand for Partition. He assured them that 'Bengal cannot be isolated from the Indian Union. Talk of the idea of a sovereign republic of independent Bengal is a trap to induce, the unwary and the unwise to enter the parlour of the Muslim League. The Congress Working Committee is fully aware of the situation in Bengal, and you need not be afraid at all, Bengal has got to be partitioned, if the non-Muslim population is to survive. He soon made his views clear about the plans being drawn up by Sarat Bose and Kiran Sankar Roy who until recently had been a loyal ally of the centre in Bengal, describing the 'cry for sovereign Bengal' as a trap in which even Kiran Sankar may fall with Sarat Babu.' Soon both gentlemen received a blunt warning from Patel, the party disciplinarian, who coldly advised them to stand united on the official policy of the Congress. There were precedents enough to show that his advice was not lightly to be ignored. Appeals by Bengal's few remaining Nationalist Muslims, begging Congress to prevent partition, were given equally short shrift." (Chatterji, 2002: 260)

After the expected demise of the united Bengal initiative, the countdown to partition started in earnest. Mountbatten announced publicly the date of the final transfer of power, 15 August 1947. Mountbatten then expressed his desire to become the first Governor General of both India and Pakistan. Jinnah showed little enthusiasm for this wish of the last viceroy and declared through a letter written by Liaquat Ali Khan that he would take that post in independent Pakistan. Gandhi and Nehru accepted the proposal of Mountbatten with enthusiasm and gratitude. After all, Congress and Indian Hindus had ample reason to feel grateful to both Mountbatten and Radcliffe. Jinnah left India for Karachi on 7 August 1947 never to return. Jaswant Singh's narration of the events of that fateful day is both nostalgic and reflective.

"And in this fashion, Muhammad Ali Jinnah finally departed from the land that had nurtured him. '... on 7th August, with Ahsan, the Naval ADC, Miss Jinnah, and the Quaid, we flew from Delhi to Karachi, in Mountbatten's white Dakota.' There were only a handful of people to see him off, records Hector Bolitho in his *In Quest of Jinnah*. Before leaving

the house, Jinnah had given me a cane basket full of documents to take to the aircraft. Before we took off, he went out to be photographed, but he did not speak. As we taxied out he made only one remark; he murmured, "That's the end of that," meaning, I supposed, the end of the struggle on Indian soil." (Singh, 2009: 463)

Since partition, most Indian politicians, irrespective of their left or right orientation, have actively conspired to achieve the shared dream of Patel and Nehru for the collapse of Pakistan and establishment of a so-called *Akhand Bharat* (Greater India). The two principal leaders of the Congress had very little in common except that they shared a desire to see the demise of the Muslim state. It was no surprise that Patel, immediately after the partition, illegally stopped payment of five hundred and fifty million rupees which was owed to Pakistan from the Indian treasury out of a reserve of four billion rupees under the partition agreement. The money was belatedly paid on the direct intervention of Gandhi which was one of reasons for his being assassinated by Hindu zealots in 1948. Jinnah was sworn in as the first Governor General of Pakistan on 14 August 1947 in Karachi.

What was the situation in Muslim-majority part of Bengal on that historic day? According to Lapierre and Collins, the mood was even more festive there than in the Western wing of Pakistan.

"Strangely it was in East Bengal, in those areas soon to form East Pakistan – and one day, the battle fields of the Bangladesh war – that the mood was more festive. Khwaja Mohiuddin, East Pakistan's Chief Minister-designate, left Indian soil at noon aboard a tiny steamer festooned with Moslem League banners. For hours, the steamer shunted through the monsoon-swollen waters of the Gangetic Delta en route to Nazimuddin's new capital at Dacca.

"Every time the little steamer tooted to stop at a cluster of huts of a ramshackle jetty stretching into the muddy delta, scores of tiny rowing-boats, canoes, and sailing boats poured out from the shore to greet it, their occupants shouting 'Pakistan Zindabad'." (Lapierre and Collins, 2009: 303–304)

The author's surprise here at the festive mood in East Bengal, probably resulted from a lack of knowledge about the people and history of Bengal. In all of India, the spread of Islam was most spectacular in Bengal. It was in the same Bengal where the last independent Muslim ruler had been defeated and murdered by the British colonial power and their cronies back in 1757. The occupation of India by colonial rulers also started in

Bengal. The Muslims had to wait one hundred and ninety years to be able to rule themselves again. The annulment of Lord Curzon's Bengal partition plan in 1911 and long exploitation by British imperialism and so-called Hindu *badhralok* had pushed the entire population to poverty and despair. The creation of Pakistan was like a dream come true for the downtrodden Muslims of East Bengal. On 14 August 1947, even Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then a Muslim League worker and close disciple of Suhrawardy was not dreaming of any armed liberation struggle against the Pakistan military with the direct assistance of India. That future bloody episode of 1971, when the Bangladesh liberation war would be fought in the name of Sheikh Mujib, will be another twist of history. On the historic day of 14 August 1947, Sheikh Mujib was equally happy at the realization of the Pakistani dream, like all his countrymen. He was also a foot soldier in the struggle to attain a homeland for the Indian Muslims. Lapierre also seriously erred in naming the first Chief Minister-designate. The actual person was Khwaja Najimuddin, a member of the Dhaka Nawab family and a long-time associate of Jinnah, and not Mohiuddin as mentioned in Freedom at Midnight.

Khwaja Nazimuddin defeated Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, more popular among the people, for the post of President of the Bengal Muslim League on 5 August 1947 which propelled him to become the first Prime Minister of East Bengal. This change of party leadership at a very sensitive time immediately created an atmosphere of mistrust among the leaders of the two wings of Pakistan. Probably the seed of another partition within less than a quarter century was sown even before Pakistan was born by this improper act. The decision of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy to stay back at Calcutta in protest and his refusal to join the central cabinet under Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan widened the gulf between Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Suhrawardy. Abul Mansur Ahmed writes a first-hand account of intra-party rivalry within the Bengal Muslim League in his political autobiography. He also remained in Calcutta until April 1950. As a media personality and senior politician, Abul Mansur personally witnessed many developments in the early days of Pakistan:

"But he did not accept ministry at the centre. In response to Quaid-e-Azam and Prime Minister Liaquat Ali's request he replied that he cannot leave India without arranging proper safeguard for the Indian Muslims. I saw the letters he wrote to Quaid-e-Azam on this issue. He wrote, 'There are no shortage of able people to serve Pakistan under your efficient leadership as nearly all the Muslim League leaders have migrated to Pakistan. But, there is nobody to look after the interest of hapless, left-over Indian Muslims. Please, let me serve them.' His stand was definitely idealistic. But many

people thought that Suhrawardy did not actually mean it. He refused to accept ministership due to his personal dissatisfaction. I also had similar doubts. He had the right to be unhappy with both Quaid-e-Azam and Liaquat Ali Khan. Nawabjada Liaquat was always biased against Suhrawardy. Liaquat used to support loyal and submissive Khwaja Nazimuddin more than Suhrawardy, a person with strong personality. Suhrawardy was aware of Liaquat's feeling. But, Suhrawardy never imagined that Quaid-e-Azam would also be biased. It transpired that Quaid-e-Azam failed to give Suhrawardy proper support. Both the provinces of Punjab and Bengal were partitioned. Strangely, the outcome of this division was not the same for the two provinces. On the plea of the division, the Bengal Muslim League Committee was dissolved and a new leader, i.e. the future Prime Minister of the state, was elected. But, Punjab Muslim League Committee remained unchanged. Prime Minister of Punjab also retained his old position. The moot reason for this difference was that the Bengal Prime Minister and Muslim League leadership were not submissive to Liaquat Ali Khan. He was Prime Minister of Pakistan. Everybody was naturally loyal to him. But, he was not happy with the general expression of loyalty. He wanted a yes-man as East Bengal Prime Minister and Party Chief. In the case of Bengal, he achieved his goal. He manipulated to get a yes-man in place of Suhrawardy to get elected as re-organized Muslim League leader and Prime Minister in East Bengal. The present situation is proof of where the sycophants have led East Bengal and Pakistan. We will have to see where this will finally lead." (Ahmed, 2015: 209-210)

Thus, Pakistan started its uncertain journey with the seed of division sown between the east and the west. It was only a matter of time before another parting of the ways. I will conclude this chapter by quoting Chaudhari Khaliqzaman:

"In this scheme Bengal was excluded while the whole of the Punjab, including Delhi, found mention. Among others this was also one of the reasons why I was unwilling to give the scheme of partition the name of Pakistan. I preferred the idea of having two Muslim Federations, one in the East comprising Bengal and Assam and other in North-Western India composed of Sind, Punjab, and the North-Western Frontier Province." (Khaliqzaman, 1961: 201)

Chaudhary Khaliqzaman wrote his autobiography long before the 1971 liberation war and independence of Bangladesh. His assessment was amazingly correct.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE VICTORY OF ‘BENGALI NATIONALISM’ OVER MUSLIM IDENTITY

The aircraft carrying Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan touched down at Tejgaon airport, Dhaka in the afternoon of 19 March 1948. This was the first, rather belated and only visit to the eastern wing of Pakistan by the founder of the state. He died on 11 September that same year in Karachi. Jinnah had last visited the region under British colonial rule during the election campaign of 1946 as the President of the All-India Muslim League. This time he came as the supreme leader of a newly independent nation. A huge expectant crowd eagerly awaited the arrival of Quaid-e-Azam (the Great Leader). Oli Ahad, a leading opposition politician of the Pakistan era and one of the principal organizers of the language movement, writes about the enthusiasm of the masses on the occasion of Jinnah’s visit in his memoirs:

“An unprecedented, spontaneous and historic reception was given to Quaid-e-Azam on his maiden, post-independence visit to East Bengal on 19 March. From the airport to racecourse, the entire route was filled with people, no space remained empty. Witnessing this jubilant crowd, it was impossible to imagine that only a couple of days back, the government in Dhaka was tottering in the face of tremendous anti-government protest.” (Ahad, 2004: 52)

The citizens of Dhaka organized a public reception at Race-course (Now Suhrawardy Udyan) on 21 March which was attended by a huge crowd of nearly three hundred thousand. After Nawab Habibullah, President of the Citizens Reception Committee read the Address of Honour, Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave an hour-long speech. On the issue of the state language, in an attempt to advocate in favour of Urdu, he declared that although the status of Urdu as state language at the centre remained non-negotiable, the provinces would be free to choose their own official languages:

"I want to categorically state that it is not at all true that any obstruction would be created in the use of Bengali in your daily life. You, the people of this province will decide what will be the official language in the province. But, you should be told clearly that Urdu and no other language will be the state language of Pakistan. If anyone tries to mislead you on this issue, then it should be understood that he is an enemy of the state. No nation can work unitedly without a common state language. Look into the history of other nations. Therefore, Urdu will be the state language of Pakistan." (Umar, 2012: 110–111)

According to Badruddin Umar, the huge audience listened to the speech generally peacefully. Only some sporadic and muted protests were heard when Jinnah spoke in support of Urdu. But, the students of Dhaka University were hugely disappointed at Jinnah's speech and held immediate demonstrations within the campus. The situation became tense as Jinnah was scheduled to deliver a convocation speech at the University a couple of days later. Jinnah reiterated his position on the state language in his Convocation speech on 24 March. He said:

"Let me restate my views on the question of a state language for Pakistan. For official use in the province, the people of the province can choose any language they wish. This question will be decided solely in accordance with the wishes of the people of this province alone, as freely expressed through their accredited representatives at the appropriate time and after full and dispassionate consideration. There can, however, be only one lingua franca, that is, the language for inter-communication between the various provinces of the state, and that language should be Urdu and can be no other. The state language, therefore, must obviously be Urdu, a language that has been nurtured by a hundred million of Muslims of this subcontinent, a language understood throughout the length and breadth of Pakistan and above all, a language which, more than any other provincial language embodies the best that is in Islamic culture and Muslim tradition and is nearest to the language used in other Islamic countries." (Ahad, 2004: 65–66)

As soon as Jinnah uttered this, some of the student leaders present in the Convocation Hall spontaneously protested and shouted, 'No'. This forced Jinnah to stop delivering his speech momentarily. After a pause, he continued and finished the speech. Badruddin Umar describes the situation in the hall in his famous research work on the history of the language movement in the following manner:

"At this point of Jinnah's speech, i.e. when he declared that Urdu would be the only state language, a few students in the hall started shouting, 'no, no'. The students were sure from beforehand that Jinnah will reiterate in his

convocation speech that Urdu will be the only state language. They were prepared in advance to stage the protest. Abdul Matin, A.K.M. Ahsan etc. are notable among the students who shouted in protest. Jinnah resumed his speech after giving a pause during short protest.” (Umar, 2012: 112)

Abul Mansur Ahmed, a prominent Bengali Muslim politician of Congress and Krishak Praja Party in pre-partition Bengal, who later joined Jinnah’s Muslim League writes with a feeling of frustration and a touch of sadness about the mistake that Jinnah committed in his stand on Urdu:

“The other statement of Quaid-e-Azam which hurt me was his comment on Bengali language in the course of Dhaka speech. I knew Jinnah for 25 years. Out of this period, I politically opposed him for only five years. I was his supporter for the other 20 years. I never expected such irresponsible utterance from him on a very sensitive issue. He did not know either Bengali or Urdu. But he was aware that Bengali is the language of majority of the population of Pakistan. And he also knew the importance of mother tongue in democracy. Therefore, I never understood the reason of that anti-democratic statement from Quaid-e-Azam.” (Ahmed, 2015: 200–201)

Since the deliverance of the fateful speech by Jinnah in 1948, the same question that was raised by Abul Mansur Ahmed has baffled all those who know about Jinnah’s democratic and secular credentials. Jaswant Singh has correctly said that it was Gandhi who brought religion into politics while Jinnah was the person who was consistently critical about mixing religion with politics both initially as a Congress leader and then even as the President of the All-India Muslim League. Why then did Jinnah take the language issue so seriously? As a true democrat, he should have respected the will of the Bengali speaking people, who were the majority in Pakistan.

In an effort to pacify the situation in Dhaka, Jinnah met with the leaders of the Language Action Committee in the evening of Convocation day. Shamsul Huq, Qamruddin Ahmed, Abul Kashem, Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, Muhammad Toaha and Oli Ahad among others participated in the meeting. There was intense argument in the meeting and Oli Ahad, in particular, was extremely aggressive in his deliberation. In an angry exchange, Oli Ahad told Jinnah to his face: “I also know that you are the Governor General of Pakistan whom the Queen of England can remove on our appeal!” This was definitely exuberance of youth in the extreme. The Queen had no such power to remove the leader of Pakistan, an independent country. Jinnah being a life-long democrat, gave a patient hearing and did not react to Oli Ahad’s provocatively naive utterances. There was another meeting with the student leaders on 27 March. In that

meeting also, the student leaders courageously presented their case. Jinnah participated in all the debates gracefully without taking any offence and no administrative action was taken against anybody. In the prevailing situation of Bangladesh in 2016, any young man showing similar boldness to confront the present head of the government on any issue would, at the very least, be immediately taken into custody and might even become victim of an 'enforced disappearance'. However, the language issue could not be resolved and Jinnah left Dhaka on 28 March. We do not know what the turn of history would have been had Jinnah not died so soon after his Dhaka visit.

At this stage, it is important to know how Urdu was promoted as the lingua franca in a country comprising five states where Urdu was not the language of even a single state. Bengali, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushtu and Baluch were the major languages of the people of Pakistan. Then why so much fuss about Urdu? The language is a form of Hindustani, mainly developed during the period of Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. The people of Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh and, in particular, the Muslims of that city are known to speak high quality, poetic Urdu. The most prominent Muslim leader in the Indian Congress, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was highly respected as an expert in the language. Muhammad Ali Jinnah was English and Gujarati speaking. Most of the public speeches he had delivered were in English. He could not even speak passable Urdu. There was no reason whatsoever for any personal affinity for Urdu on the part of Jinnah. Yet, this language controversy over Urdu sowed the seeds of division in Pakistan so early in its existence!

Among Muslim politicians, Chaudhury Khaliquzzaman of Uttar Pradesh had been the first person before partition to propose that Urdu ought to be the language of the new Muslim state. He said as much at a conference only a few months before independence. A couple of months later Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed, Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University wrote a piece in support of the proposal. His demand was probably a response to the Indian Government's decision to make Hindi the state language. Protest against Dr. Ziauddin's proposal was immediate in East Bengal. A renowned scholar and philologist in Bengal, Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah wrote an article in Dainik (Daily) Azad, the most widely circulated vernacular daily at the time, countering Dr. Ziauddin's logic. He said in the article that if English was not acceptable as state language because it was a foreign language, then Bengali being the language of the largest ethnic population of Pakistan should be the lingua franca of the state. He further proposed making Urdu an additional state language if more than one state language was felt to be necessary. Later, Dr. Shahidullah wrote

another article on the same issue. He was a devout Muslim. In the second article, he argued that Arabic should ultimately become the lingua franca of Pakistan. He wrote with all his religious sincerity that the birth of Pakistan as the homeland for Indian Muslims would only be meaningful on the day when Arabic finally became the state language of Pakistan. Dr. Shahidullah was a brilliant academic and world-renowned philologist. He was not particularly against any language, but rather had respect for all mediums of communication within human society. He also advocated the continued use of English as a major official language and a medium for higher education.

A cultural organization under the name of ‘Tamaddun Majlish’ was formed comprising teachers and students of Dhaka University in September 1947. They immediately became active on the issue of the state language. On 15 September, Tamaddun Majlish published their first booklet under the title, *Pakistaner Rashtra-Bhasha: Bangla na Urdu?* (State Language of Pakistan: Bengali or Urdu?). The young leadership of the new cultural movement showed surprising maturity and pragmatism. In the booklet, both Bengali and Urdu were proposed as a lingua franca for Pakistan. Acceptance of this solution at an early stage of the debate would have brought the two wings of Pakistan closer. But the then ruling Muslim League leadership in East Bengal failed dismally to recognize the seriousness of the issue and allowed the dissent to simmer and eventually reach boiling point.

By the beginning of 1948, the language movement in East Bengal had gained momentum and a Committee of Action for State Language was formed. A strike was called in Dhaka by the committee on 11 March 1948 to protest the government’s decision to impose Urdu. The provincial government responded with police action and arrests. In such a volatile situation, Jinnah visited East Bengal and gave his controversial speech. It was surprising that the language movement lost some of its steam in the wake of Jinnah’s Dhaka visit and a sort of status quo was maintained until his death in September 1948. We need to note that the overall political situation in Dhaka in fact started to deteriorate from the very early stages of independence. Muslim League leaders, both in Dhaka and Karachi, were to blame for this inauspicious start for the newly independent nation. At the time of independence, there were three principal Muslim leaders in Bengal. The elderly A.K. Fazlul Huq had been on a political sabbatical since his expulsion from the Muslim League in 1943. I have already mentioned in the previous chapter the disagreement, historic in nature, between Jinnah and Fazlul Huq. Not only had Huq repudiated Jinnah’s offer to contest the 1937 election under a united Muslim platform, he had

literally begged Congress to form a coalition with the Krishak Praja Party after the election. Humayun Kabir, in his 'Muslim Politics 1906-47 and other Essays', clearly opined that Fazlul Huq pleaded in vain for such a coalition and was in fact "forced by Congress into the arms of the Muslim League". Fazlul Huq's later joining the Muslim League was due to a political compulsion. But he never felt at ease during his rather short stay in the Muslim League. Jinnah was definitely aware of the political philosophy of Huq. Any rapprochement between the two senior leaders of the Pakistan movement after the creation of Pakistan was, therefore, incomprehensible.

Khawja Nazimuddin, a feudal, weak, yes-man politician formed a Muslim League ministry in Bengal in 1943 after the dismissal of the Shyama-Huq ministry with the full blessing of Jinnah. But Jinnah, being an astute politician, also recognized Khawaja's limitations and sought simultaneously to promote the rise in Bengal politics of the smart, Western-educated barrister, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy. At the time of partition, Suhrawardy was by far the most popular Muslim leader in Bengal. He was also a brilliant organizer. Unfortunately, relations between Jinnah and Suhrawardy turned somewhat sour during the final months of the British Raj. Taking advantage of this situation, the Nazimuddin clique was able to remove Suhrawardy from the position of Party Chief. With the blessing of Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nazimuddin took the mantle of party leadership in Bengal and was catapulted to the prime ministership of post-independence East Bengal. It was Suhrawardy's organizational genius and Jinnah's popularity that had caused the landslide victory of the Muslim League in Bengal in 1945 and 1946. Suhrawardy was sadly ignored on the victory podium. A sullen Suhrawardy refused to return to Pakistan from Calcutta after independence. He even refused to take a cabinet position in the central government. The combined result of all this was that the leadership in East Bengal at a very crucial period went to an incompetent gang of politicians whose survival depended solely on shameless sycophancy towards the centre.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, always a loner, nourished the dream of creating a homeland for Indian Muslims. For all practical purposes, he lived for this dream. Jinnah was single-minded and ruthless, and did not tolerate any dissent in the party which he presumed would place obstacles in his way. As he was suffering from a terminal disease, Jinnah was also in a hurry to create the Muslim homeland. During his struggle, he never appeared to be overenthusiastic about keeping Bengal within a federal Pakistan so long as it was assured that there would be a separate Muslim state outside the domain of India. Is it possible that he carried an

attitude of indifference towards East Bengal even after the creation of Pakistan? We do not have proof for such a conclusion. But his speeches in March 1948 definitely helped to create mistrust among the people of East Bengal. Luckily for Jinnah, he died within five months of his controversial Dhaka visit. At least he was spared any blame for the killing of the Language Martyrs on 21 February 1952. Jinnah was long dead by then. Surprisingly, a section of so-called secular politicians and intellectuals in Bangladesh still harbour intense hatred for Jinnah, the man who fought to create a homeland for the Muslims in the subcontinent against fatal disease and almost single-handedly against a British-Hindu conspiracy.

Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, President of the Assam Muslim League and a revered name among the Muslims in Assam returned to East Bengal, the land of his birth, in September 1947. He would later play a towering role in the politics of Pakistan. Bhashani was born in 1880 in Sirajganj. A born rebel, he went to Dhubri in Assam in 1926 and started a movement against the British government on behalf of the Bengali Muslim settlers. Through this movement, Bhashani became very popular among the peasant population there, most of whom were Bengali Muslims. He joined the Muslim League and became a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly in the 1937 election. He started a new movement in 1941 to demand the inclusion of Assam within the future state of Pakistan. In 1944, Maulana Bhashani became the President of the Assam Muslim League, to which he gave new life with his immense energy and relentless campaigning with the message that only Muslim unity could make the dream of Pakistan come true. Throughout his political life, Bhashani had been a popular leader. Chaudhury Khaliqzaman writes briefly about him in his memoirs, describing both his energy and simplicity as a leader:

“As I have said before, I used to go to Assam every year after 1941 and in 1943 I went again to see the damage that had been done to immigrants by the police treating them as squatters. The government supplied me with an elephant to go round the area of fourteen miles infested with high grass and bushes. I asked Maulana Bhashani to ride the elephant with me but he preferred to walk all the fourteen miles with the files of the immigrants in his armpit, making me ashamed of myself.” (Khaliqzaman, 1961: 304).

A great leader of the people indeed! Maulana Bhashani returned to the independent homeland which he had helped to create with high hopes and aspirations. Unfortunately, it did not take long for his dream to be shattered. The Muslim League, under the leadership of Khwaja Nazimuddin, had already returned to its former character of a feudal party

with no or, at best, minimal mass contact at the time of Bhasani's homecoming. Muslim League leaders were busy enjoying state power. They even went as far as to deny the party any new blood by refusing to allow any new membership in the post-independence era. The selfish aim of the short-sighted leadership was to keep a pocket organization in the name of the Muslim League so that their leadership would remain unchallenged. There was a proposal from sensible elements to change the party name from Muslim League to National League to attract minorities into the ruling party of independent Pakistan. The East Bengal Congress leaders welcomed the move and were in principle ready to merge with the proposed National League. Unfortunately, vested interests within the Muslim League successfully opposed all such reform proposals and thereby created the perfect stage for the complete annihilation of the party in the 1954 general election, the first after independence.

In February 1948, Maulana Bhashani was elected unopposed on a Muslim League ticket from a Tangail constituency when the seat had fallen vacant with the resignation of Principal Ibrahim Khan. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, he gave full support to the language movement and regularly censured various actions by the government against the people. This pro-people stance soon made him unpopular with the League leadership and he was compelled to resign from the Legislative Assembly. The by-election in the seat he had left vacant was a turning point in the political history of Pakistan. In the election, held on 26 April 1949, a formidable Muslim League candidate and local feudal lord, Khurram Khan Panni, lost to Shamsul Huq, a student leader with little exposure and even less financial means. This shocking election result was the manifestation of the people's anger against the same party which had led the Pakistan movement to victory less than two years before. Chief Minister Nurul Amin was forced to suspend by-elections in thirty-five remaining seats for fear of losing. The unlikely victory of Shamsul Huq encouraged the grassroots activists of the East Bengal Muslim League to form a new political party. Maulana Bhashani was their undisputed leader. On 23 June 1949, the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was formed with Maulana Bhashani as president. A forty-member organizing committee was formed with the following political figures:

Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani	President
Ataur Rahman Khan	Vice-President
Sakhawat Hossain	Vice-President
Ali Ahmed Khan	Vice-President
Ali Amjad Khan	Vice-President
Abdus Salam Khan	Vice-President

Shamsul Huq*	General Secretary
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**	Joint Secretary
Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed	Asstt. Secretary
A.K. M. Rafiqul Hossain	Asstt. Secretary
Yar Muhammad Khan	Treasurer

* The young student leader who defeated the Muslim League candidate in the Tangail by-election.
 ** Future leader of Liberation Movement of Bangladesh.

Although Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy had returned to Pakistan before the official formation of Awami Muslim League, he decided to settle in Karachi with his brother. He would later become the President of the All-Pakistan Awami League. The people of East Bengal, being generally disillusioned with the Muslim League, welcomed the formation of the Awami Muslim League with great enthusiasm.

Khwaja Nazimuddin who was made Governor General of Pakistan after the death of Jinnah failed miserably to provide any standard of able leadership either at state level or at the centre. As before, he functioned as a mere puppet in the hands of West Pakistani and *Mohajer* (settlers from India) leadership of the Muslim League. Khwaja Nazimuddin continued his past submissive attitude towards Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan and thereby undermined the superior status of Governor General. The person who succeeded Khwaja Nazimuddin as Chief Minister in East Pakistan also had no clue about the aspirations of the common people. Chief Minister Nurul Amin not only blindly toed the line of the powerful West Pakistani coterie but also made the situation of the province even worse by misguiding the federal leadership with misleading reports. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of independence struggle of Bangladesh twenty-two years later, was a disciple of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and a rising young popular leader at that time. In his unfinished memoir (*Ausamapta Atmajiboni*), Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wrote briefly about the failures of Muslim League leadership:

“In 1947 Muslim League received incredible mass support, why then did the candidate of the Muslim League lose in the election? Because of coterie, poor governance, repression, torture and for failure to devise any effective economic plan. The country was governed by the old and rigid British system. In a newly independent country, people hoped for change. They expected that, after the departure of the British there will be development and exploitation will end. Presently they found the reverse situation. There was widespread frustration among ordinary people. Our ruling class did not take the slightest heed. Politics of coterie and conspiracy started after the

death of Jinnah. Liaquat Ali Khan now exercises all power. He could not tolerate anybody. Although he preaches democracy, but all his acts are contrary to democratic norms. People of East Bengal used to adore and respect Jinnah.” (Rahman, 2017: 119)

A Pakistani academician, Junaid Ahmad, echoes the view of Sheikh Mujib in his recent book, 'Creation of Bangladesh: Myths exploded', published in 2016. I include a rather long quote here to prove that even Pakistani academics acknowledge the failure of the Muslim League to adjust to the situation of the post-partition independent Muslim state. Ahmad writes:

“Two limitations of the Pakistani leadership of the political parties affected the unity of Pakistan to a large extent. Firstly, in a political culture where the growth of political parties was barred for long periods of time, the development of a national political party was a neglected area that remained ineptly ignored by the Pakistani leadership. The position of the Pakistan Muslim League, the only national political party at the time of the establishment of Pakistan, had weakened in the course of time with no party emerging to fill the void. Secondly, the parties were always secondary to their leaders, proof that the political leaders of the time were very much responsible for debacle of East Pakistan.” (2016: 67)

“But the leadership of PML, in the lust of power, did not learn the principles of party organization. There can be little honest disagreement with Suhrawardy’s indictment of the PML as ‘a ruthless oligarchy in which the interests of the country, the views of the people and canons of justice and fair play were being brushed aside in the struggle of power’. The party often remained leader-centred. The party’s council remained in the state of lethargy, meeting only four times during the six important years from 1949 to 1955, and that too with little effect.” (2016: 69)

“The PML leadership quickly managed to lose mass support in East Pakistan, the most populous province of Pakistan. This misfortune germinated with the action of limiting of the PML membership there. The PML leaders disbanded the party in East Bengal excusing the division of Bengal. They formed an ad hoc committee with their own band of people and kept the membership books for the new PML under their own control. Maulana Akram Khan, the provincial organizer of the Muslim League, managed to restrict the membership of PML in East Pakistan. This has been confirmed by Mahmud Ali, who was at the time the President of the East Pakistan Youth League. Although the purpose of this is not quite clear, but it is assumed that East Pakistani membership was curtailed so as to establish the superiority of West Pakistanis, especially the Punjabis within the PML ranks.” (2016: 69–70)

Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan was assassinated in Rawalpindi while addressing a public meeting in October 1951. Khwaja Nazimuddin succeeded Liaquat Ali as Prime Minister. During his first visit to Dhaka as Prime Minister at the end of January 1952, he repeated the mistake committed by Jinnah four years back. The new Prime Minister addressed a public meeting on 27 January 1952 and proclaimed that Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan. For Khwaja Nazimuddin it was an error of monumental proportions as he himself was from East Pakistan. The language movement which had remained dormant for some time due to other developments in the country was immediately reignited by Khwaja Nazimuddin's unnecessary announcement. The baton of the movement started by Tamaddun Majlish in 1947 was in the hands of the young students, particularly those of Dhaka University, at the time of Khwaja Nazimuddin's fateful utterance. The first protest rally was organized at Dhaka University on 29 January 1952. The Dhaka University Language Movement Committee (*Dhaka Bishyabiddaloy Bhasha Sangram Committee*) called a strike at the University for the next day which almost all the students observed. On 31 January, the All-Party State Language Movement Committee was formed in a meeting presided over by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the President of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League. Kazi Golam Mahbub was elected as the convener of the Language Committee.

The East Pakistan Provincial Government acted like a senseless autocrat and attempted to suppress an extremely popular movement by the use of state power. They tried to throttle the media. The government closed down the pro-movement, English-language newspaper, *The Pakistan Observer*, on charges of sedition. Hamidul Huq Chowdhary, a former Minister and owner of the newspaper and Abdus Salam, the editor, were temporarily arrested. Pro-government newspapers and sycophant journalists, mostly from West Pakistan, surprisingly welcomed this dastardly act by the government against a fellow media house. The government then enacted section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to stop public assembly and demonstrations in Dhaka on 20 February. In protest at these administrative actions, the Language Movement Committee called a general strike in Dhaka on 21 February and also decided to defy section 144.

A large contingent of police and members of the East Pakistan Rifles encircled Dhaka University on the morning of 21 February to stop the students from coming out of the campus and breaking section 144. The students ignored this show of force and engaged the police and East Pakistan Rifles forces in pitched battles, throwing bricks from inside the

campus in an effort to break the police cordon set up that morning. Police responded with baton-charges, tear gas and finally by firing live bullets at the protesting students, killing five and injuring scores of others. The language martyrs are:

1. Abdul Jabbar, University Student.
2. Abul Barkat, University Student.
3. Abdus Salam, government clerical employee
4. Rafiquddin, teenage son of a printing press owner.
5. Shafiur Rahman, High Court employee

This cruel and foolish act by the Nurul Amin government widened the existing gulf between the two wings of Pakistan which would be widened further under successive periods of military rule culminating in the full-fledged liberation war in Bangladesh in 1971 and the second partition of the subcontinent. The tragedy of 21 February had a tremendous impact on the overall politics of East Pakistan. Bengali nationalism in East Bengal reached its pinnacle over the sacrifice of the language martyrs on 21 February 1952. From that fateful day, it was only a question of time before the inevitable break-up of Pakistan. I find it surprising that it took a further nineteen years for the ultimate victory of Bengali nationalism over Muslim identity. India could possibly have played the midwife and helped the creation of Bangladesh much earlier. Pakistan was established on the basis of a common religion. There was a physical separation of nearly two thousand kilometres between the east and the west wings. The moment the ethnicity and race of the population became of greater importance than the religion in the demographically larger province, the philosophical concept of Pakistan was already dead.

Interestingly, when Bengali Muslims were fighting to establish their Bengali identity, Bengali Hindus in West Bengal were speedily adapting to their Indian identity. They never complained against Hindi domination over Bengali culture. The logic the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* used for their actions both in 1905 (against Bengal partition) and in 1947 (in favour of Bengal partition) has been to safeguard Bengali culture. Why then did they never complain about Hinds domination? My personal opinion is that they have always taken the term 'Bengali Culture' to mean 'Hindu Culture'. Hindu Bengali culture is inevitably associated with the Brahmanical religion, Veda, Puranas, Mahabharata and associated myths. India to them is Aryavarta and Ramrajya. Once they were united with mother India after 1947, the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia probably started to consider Bengali nationalism as narrow provincialism and a hindrance to greater Indian

nation-building. Even in the 1960s, when the anti-Hindi movement was at its prime in Southern India, Bengali Hindus remained passive in West Bengal. Neither the language movement in Bangladesh nor in Southern India was able to arouse their passion. Readers are obviously free to disagree with my explanation.

A.K. Fazlul Huq who surprised everybody by accepting the job of Advocate General of the East Bengal Government in an independent Pakistan, a much lower position than his previous position as Prime Ministership of united Bengal, resigned in 1953. The wily politician correctly assessed the opportunity and decided to return to active politics. Since his expulsion from the Muslim League by Jinnah and subsequent dismissal of the Shyama-Huq ministry in 1943, Fazlul Huq had found himself rather alone in Bengali politics. His successive failed attempts to revive the moribund Krishak Praja party had pushed him into further isolation. The thumping victory of the Muslim League in the 1946 election in Bengal made him almost irrelevant in Bengali politics. The Suhrawardy-Sarat Bose initiative provided him an opportunity to return to politics and his support for a united Bengal succeeded temporarily in bringing political focus partially back onto himself. Acceptance of the position of Advocate General in the East Pakistan Provincial Government by a man who had twice been the Prime Minister of an undivided Bengal shocked many. At the time of his resignation from the government, the Awami League had become a major political party with strong, grassroots support under the joint leadership of Maulana Bhashani and Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy. Many hoped that Sher-e-Bangla would join the Awami League. But he again surprised the political pundits by forming yet another party. This time the name was the *Krishak Sramik Party* (Peasant Labour Party). And Fazlul Huq was again a factor in East Bengal politics.

A Convention of the Awami Muslim League was held in Mymensing in 1953. According to Abul Mansur Ahmed, the decision to establish a United Front (*Jukto* Front) to jointly fight the election against the Muslim League was approved by the council. Abul Mansur Ahmed also claims that as the President of the Welcome Committee, he proposed that specific resolution:

“Presently Mr. Fazlul Huq returned to politics after resigning from the post of Advocate General of East Bengal Government. The Awami League has already become a very popular organization under the leadership of Maulana Bhasani and Mr. Shaheed Suhrawardy and by the active support of youth and students. Therefore, everybody expected that Mr. Huq would join Awami League. He also indicated the same in a few public meetings and statements. But, finally he formed a separate party called Krishak Sramik

Party. Therefore, to ensure cooperation of Mr. Huq, there was no other option but to form a united front consisting of other parties. As the days passed, demand for such a front was becoming louder initially among the students and other progressive intellectuals, and ultimately it became a universal demand among the general population.

“Therefore, it was imperative to call on the Awami League council to take a stand on this. A special council meeting of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was called in Mymensing in May 1953. As the President of the Welcome Committee, I made the argument in favor of the United Front. I appealed for it. Finally, the Council gave permission to form an alliance with Krishak Sramik Party. Afterwards, Mr. Huq and Mr. Bhasani announced the formation of a United Front by means of a joint statement. I was given the responsibility of drafting the election manifesto.” (Ahmed, 2015: 251)

Sheikh Mujib's version of the formation of the United Front is somewhat different. He was evidently not so enthusiastic about the United Front and desired that the Awami League should contest the election alone. He was also sceptical about the intention of Fazlul Huq. He wrote:

“After this, the debate whether to form a United Front against Muslim League commenced. Supporters of United Front proposed the resolution. I started my speech against the resolution and asked, ‘Is there any opposition party other than Awami League? Forming such an alliance with people devoid of any ideology or policy would only result in the revival of a few politically dead characters. Many of them had already caused damage to the country. They engage in politics for their personal interest, they do not think about the welfare of the country even in their dreams’ ... Supporters of the United Front got nervous. But both Ataur Rahman Sahib and I were of the opinion that we should not propose anything official that might be interpreted as if we do not want a United Front. People may think that the Awami League does not want unity. I then wanted to know from my friends whether they have received any proposal from anybody to form the alliance, or whether they are proposing alliance in their over-zealousness? If the resolution for a United Front was put to a vote it would have been surely defeated. Finally, in consideration of the situation, Shaheed Sahib and Bhasani Sahib were authorized by the council to take an appropriate decision.” (Rahman, 2017: 248)

Seeds of mistrust and disunity were plentiful even at the formative stages of the United Front as can be seen from the memoirs of Sheikh Mujib. The Federal Government of Pakistan was already under the control of military and civil bureaucracy in 1953. They would take full advantage of this disunity and the personality clash in the United Front government

after their landslide victory in the 1954 election. The twenty-one-point election manifesto of the United Front was able to arouse the imagination of voters to an unprecedented level and the already decaying Muslim League had no election strategy to address the anger and disappointment of the same electorate who were instrumental in carving out Pakistan, a homeland for Indian Muslims in 1947. The Muslim League banked on the single point agenda of framing an 'Islamic Constitution'. During the election campaign, their two slogans of 'Islam in danger' and 'Pakistan in danger' sounded worn-out and clichéd, and failed miserably to touch the chord of the transformed Bengali Muslim mind of 1954. The slogans were considered irrelevant and hollow by the electorate once Pakistan was achieved. Furthermore, to counter such propaganda from the Muslim League, the United Front had already committed in its twenty-one-point manifesto that no law would be created that went against the fundamentals of Islam. In addition, the voters were more concerned about their basic needs and welfare in 1954 than fighting for religion. In the total absence of a cultural alternative from the League, the ideals associated with Bengali nationalism were gradually taking strong roots. In East Bengal, religion suddenly lost its appeal and Islam in particular appeared to become anathema to the proponents of Calcutta-dominated Bengali culture. The language movement provided a unique romantic appeal to the educated youth. As expected, the Muslim League was practically decimated in the election. The United Front won two hundred and twenty-three out of a total of three hundred and nine seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Awami League alone was victorious in one hundred and forty-three seats. The results achieved by the Muslim League were almost ludicrous. They could win in only nine constituencies. Most of the League ministers, including the much-hated Chief Minister, blamed for the killing of the language martyrs lost in the election. That was in fact the demise of Muslim League in East Pakistan. Since then, the party has existed in name only.

Chowdhury Khaliqzaman, the then Governor of East Pakistan, invited Fazlul Huq to form a provincial government on 25 March 1954. Internal conflict immediately surfaced within the United Front government over the selection of ministers. The Awami League in particular felt neglected by their representation in the ministry. Relations between the two major components of the United Front, i.e. the Awami League and the Krishak Sramik Party began to sour sooner than expected. On the other hand, the Muslim League, instead of embarking on honest soul searching to analyse the reasons for their humiliating defeat, became engaged in a nasty conspiracy with the military and civil bureaucracies to remove the

democratically elected government. On 15 May 1954, more than thousand people lost their lives in a savage communal riot between Bengali and non-Bengali workers in the Adamjee Jute Mill, the largest jute mill in Asia at that time. Muslims were killing Muslims in a country created primarily on the basis of religion!

“But immediately after taking oath, we received the information in Governor House that a riot had taken place among the workers in Adamjee Jute Mill. All the ministers led by Mr. Huq went immediately to the site. We were shocked and appalled. We had to cautiously walk around scores of dead bodies lying around.” (Ahmed, 2015: 262).

There was a similar tragic incident of lesser magnitude at the Karnaphuly Paper Mills in Chittagong earlier on 23 March. The military and civil bureaucracies in West Pakistan were just waiting for an opportune moment to strike. The Adamjee Jute Mill gave them the excuse.

Although the East Bengal government was in no way responsible for the carnage, the West Pakistani leadership was not ready to listen to any logic. Hastily, Golam Muhammad, a former bureaucrat and the then Governor General of Pakistan instructed Chaudhury Khaliqzaman, the then Governor of East Pakistan to declare an emergency under section 92 and dissolve the Legislative Assembly. Chaudhury Khaliqzaman refused to become a party to this undemocratic act and was readily shown the door. A Pakistani Army general was appointed as Governor in his place as a prelude to martial law in 1958. Major General Iskandar Mirza, the newly appointed Governor immediately imposed section 92 and removed the provincial government. A few arrests were made and A.K. Fazlul Huq was put under house arrest. Incidentally, both Maulana Bhasani and Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy were abroad at the time of the imposition of section 92 in East Pakistan. Maulana Bhasani was in Sweden to attend an international conference and Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy was seriously ill and was undergoing treatment. Maulana Bhashani was declared an enemy of the state by the Pakistani regime and could not return home until 25 April 1955. Many believe that the USA had a role in all these undemocratic manoeuvres. The foreign policy of Pakistan had tilted completely in favour of America by the mid-1950s. Pakistan by then had joined both CENTO and SEATO, the defence pacts under American patronage. US intelligence was deeply suspicious of Maulana Bhashani for his left-leaning philosophy. The suspicious activities of an influential New York Times journalist in East Pakistan, John P. Callahan, also suggested US intervention in the removal of the United Front ministry. This pro-US

policy of Pakistan continued until President Ayub took the initiative to develop relations with the communist bloc, particularly China, in 1963.

The next four years were a period of uncertainty, political horse-trading and non-stop conspiracy in Pakistani politics. On the federal front, General Iskandar Mirza managed to occupy the chair of the Presidency as the representative of both the civil bureaucracy and the military oligarchy. Five Prime Ministers had taken the oath of office only to be summarily removed by the military-civil bureaucracy clique. This included a one-year premiership of Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy. Apparently, Suhrawardy's premiership was the moment of greatest triumph for the Awami League during the Pakistan era as the party was in power both at the centre and in the province. Aatur Rahman Khan, the founding Vice-President of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was the Chief Minister of East Pakistan when his leader Suhrawardy was Pakistan's Prime Minister. Unfortunately, all was not well inside the party itself. The adoption of the country's first Constitution in 1956 was the only positive development during the period. But it should be noted that the constitution of India had been adopted on 26 November 1949 and had come into effect on 26 January 1950. The politicians of Pakistan took six years more than their Indian counterparts to frame the fundamental law of the country. This clearly shows their lack of democratic commitment. However, the blame for the continuance of autocratic rule during most of the twenty-four years of the Pakistan era should lie squarely at the feet of the Pakistani military establishment. The military was the major impediment to the democratic governance of the country. India was able to bridge the cultural gap between Bengalis and Punjabis, Tamils and Gujaratis, Kanadas and Marwaris, etc. by practising democracy as the way of binding them together. In the case of Pakistan, the absence of democracy widened the cultural divide between the east and the west. G.W. Choudhury, eminent scholar and Minister of the Yahya regime, sums up the reason for the failure of Pakistan in a few sentences:

“The driving force behind the creation of Pakistan was democracy, but soon after the nation had been created, the democratic process was killed. The eclipse of the democratic process – first under an imperfect parliamentary system and then under military regimes – was the basic factor for Pakistan's failure in national integration and for its ultimate disintegration in December 1971. There were, no doubt, other factors such as economic disparity in per capita income between East and West Pakistan, cultural conflicts among the peoples of two geographically separated units, and finally the external complicating factors which intensified the internal diversive forces. But all these factors were, in a sense, products of the lack of the democratic political order in the country.” (Choudhury, 1994: xii)

Differences between Maulana Bhasani and Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy were brewing for a long time, especially on the issue of foreign policy. Pakistani rulers consistently pursued a short-sighted, pro-US foreign policy right from the country's birth even at the cost of compromising its sovereignty. India, on the other hand, maintained the stature of a large, democratic, dignified and strategically important country by expertly utilizing the US-Soviet rivalry for global domination. When Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru was bathing in the glory of creating the non-aligned movement with Sukarno of Indonesia, Tito of Yugoslavia and Nasser of Egypt, Pakistan shamelessly kept kowtowing to the policy of western imperialism. They were under the false impression that, in the case of war against a hostile and more powerful neighbour, the USA would come to the aid of Pakistan. This naive dream of the Pakistani leadership never materialized in any of the Indo-Pakistani wars, despite the fact that Pakistan was an early and active member of both CENTO and SEATO.

The USA and other Western nations, in fact, had always shown sympathy and support towards India during any hostility in the subcontinent in the guise of maintaining neutrality. The exception was in 1971. President Nixon and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, personally disliked Indira Gandhi, the then Indian Prime Minister. But even then, they could not do much for Pakistan at the time of actual war in the face of strong opposition from the Congress and the Senate. But that episode will come later. We are still in the 1950s. As Prime Minister, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy not only endorsed the foreign policy of Pakistan, he was also regarded as one of the staunchest pro-US politicians in the country. On the other hand, Maulana Bhasani a firm believer in the egalitarian character of Islam found atheist communist regimes to be far more sympathetic to the aspirations of Muslim peoples around the world. His anti-colonial politics during the British era were justifiably transformed into anti-imperialism after the birth of Pakistan. It was only logical that the political philosophy of the two principal leaders would clash head-on at some point in time. First, the establishment of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League in 1949 and second, the landslide victory of the United Front in 1954 were the result of misrule by the Muslim League and disillusionment among the general population in East Pakistan.

As Suhrawardy became the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the rift with Bhasani could only have widened as, in addition to foreign policy differences, the need to put up a united fight against the common enemy, the Muslim League, was also no longer relevant. A split among the component parts of the United Front was glaring even before Suhrawardy

became Prime Minister. Presently it was the Awami League, the most powerful party within the front, which faced division. Abul Mansur Ahmed, a trusted follower of Suhrawardy since Calcutta days and a sitting minister at the time of the latest intra-party crisis, describes the leadership struggle with a clear censuring of the political move by Bhasani:

“Suddenly Maulana Bhasani resigned from the presidency of Awami League. A couple of Awami League leaders known to be close to Maulana Sahib accompanied by one East Pakistan industrialist had met with the President of Pakistan. We knew only this much. How can there be a connection of this with Maulana’s resignation? Resignation of Maulana is a crisis for the Awami League, there could be negative reaction in the next election – I tried to convince the Prime Minister according to my assessment of the situation. There was substantial political difference between Prime Minister and Maulana Sahib. At the minimum, Maulana was advised differently. He resigned just on the eve of the Awami League council. Maulana Sahib definitely expected that he would win in the council. Because by that time, a huge majority of students and youths were becoming anti-American. Many among the Awami League counselors also shared the same opinion. Maulana must have come to the conclusion that the compromise formula reached at Kagmari convention between Shaheed Sahib and Maulana Sahib was no longer needed. Whatever may be the reason, Maulana had already decided that either he would lead Awami League minus Suhrawardy or he would form another part ... Bhasani Sahib lost in the council. Despite his defeat, the council requested the Maulana to withdraw his resignation. In response, he formed NAP (National Awami Party).” (Ahmed, 2015: 385–386)

Syed Abul Maksud, the official autobiographer of Maulana Bhashani writes about the break-up within Awami League in a more impersonal manner:

“After Kagmari conference it was not possible for Maulana Bhashani and pro-Bhashani leftist leaders and workers to remain in the Awami League. Moreover, they were a minority in the party. There was no possibility to compromise on the question of principle with Prime Minister Suhrawardy, Chief Minister Aatur Rahman and their colleagues and supporters. They were of the opinion that the issue of autonomy of Bengal has already been resolved and it is not possible to change pro-US allied foreign policy.” (Maksud, 1994: 178).

The Kagmari conference of Bhashani marked a watershed in Pakistan’s politics. In his presidential speech at the conference, Maulana Bhashani cautioned the West Pakistani leadership that if the exploitation continued, the people of East Pakistan might one day be forced to say goodbye to

Pakistan. This was in fact the second such threat of secession from Bhashani. In a public meeting at Paltan Maidan on 17 June 1955, he had for the first time uttered this secessionist threat. It was very surprising for a popular leader who, as the Muslim League President in Assam, had suffered much in the long struggle to establish Pakistan to be issuing such a threat. Maulana probably realized that the concept of Pakistan was by then dead in East Bengal.

Maulana Bhasani's resignation from the Awami League and his subsequent forming of a left-leaning National Awami Party was the first division in the Awami League. Within a year, another break-up of the Awami League looked imminent. This time the tussle for the leadership was between Aaur Rahman Khan, Chief Minister of the Awami League government in East Pakistan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the charismatic Party General Secretary and closest aide to Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy. Intra-party conflict of the Awami League vitiated the political situation to such an extent that even the functioning of the provincial Legislative Assembly became impossible. The fateful day was 22 September 1958. Deputy Speaker Shahed Ali, while presiding over the session, was seriously injured when the members of the assembly started a free-for-all fight inside the chamber. Fists, chairs, microphone stands and paperweights were thrown recklessly in a state of frenzy. The deputy speaker was hit by a missile and died of his injury the following day in hospital. The Pakistani Army junta was just waiting for such an opportunity. This show of shameful hooliganism by the politicians of East Pakistan inside the Assembly itself provided General Ayub Khan, Chief of the Army Staff, the excuse for a *coup d'état* on 7 October 1958. Pakistan's slide into the abyss of military dictatorship was completed in less than eleven years from the birth of the largest Islamic nation in the world.

The initial reaction of the people of Pakistan to martial law was rather positive, although it was their first experience of military rule. People in general had long been disappointed with the selfish attitude and poor governance of politicians. They could not even draft a constitution for the country until 1956. Even after the enactment of this constitution, there was no sign of any improvement in the overall governance of the country either at central or provincial level. Both intra- and inter-party conflict and the opportunism of ambitious leaders made the functioning of democracy impossible. Corruption and nepotism were rampant. The killing of a deputy speaker inside the Assembly as a result of a free-for-all fight among the elected members was the proverbial last nail in the coffin of democracy in Pakistan. At the centre, there was not a single person, except probably Suhrawardy, who could have provided the leadership required

for democracy to thrive in a multi-ethnic state. Unfortunately, his one-year stint as prime minister not only failed to meet people's expectations but also succeeded in exposing his limitations. After Suhrawardy's departure, subsequent prime ministers served as meek puppets to the interests of the military bureaucracy. The then President, Major General Iskander Mirza, was himself an active member of the conspirators. The political stage in Pakistan seemed ready for a military strongman and, therefore, people in general were rather relieved to see the imposing personality of General Ayub.

Over the next four years, Ayub Khan initiated a number of changes, some controversial. The most controversial was, of course, the abrogation of 1956 constitution which was, without doubt, something valued by the population at large as it generally met their democratic aspirations. Ayub surprisingly declared it unworkable and impractical. In 1959, he promulgated the Basic Democracy Ordinance for an indirect election of the President of the country, thereby depriving the public of an important right. Under the new ordinance, the voters would elect eighty thousand so-called Basic Democrat members who would then elect the President of the country. This was done clearly with the aim of perpetuating his autocratic reign as it is always easier to manipulate eighty thousand members of an electoral college either by distribution of favours or the use of state power. In 1961, he promulgated the next controversial ordinance, abolishing the autonomous character of public universities. The public universities were brought under the direct control of the government. Again, the aim was to suppress student movements which had historically always had an anti-establishment character. Ayub did not forget that it was the students of Dhaka University who had been in the forefront of the famous language movement in 1952 which had brought about the downfall of the Muslim League government. Ironically, it was the students of the same Dhaka University who would launch the first organized movement against the Ayub regime just one year later. Until the students started their movement against the Hamoodur Rahman Commission in 1962, opposition politicians could not muster enough courage to even use strong words in the criticism of Ayub's imposition of martial law. In addition to the weakness caused by their disunity, the politicians were also suffering from a moral dilemma as the governance of the country prior to the imposition of martial law had been a farce in the name of democracy:

"I am not aware whether there was any movement against martial law during nearly four years of it in West Pakistan. But, there was surely no movement in East Pakistan. On the contrary, people appeared to be happy at least, for initial few months of Martial Law." (Ahmed, 2015: 450)

Ayub, however, made pragmatic changes in foreign relations. The general who would spearhead a war against India in 1965, succeeded in bringing Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, to Pakistan in 1960 on his only state visit to the country. Pundit Nehru visited Pakistan on the occasion of signing the Sind River Water Sharing Agreement between Pakistan and India. It was definitely a significant achievement for a military dictator. General Ayub also realized that Pakistan could not survive on the perceived but hollow support of the USA alone. He started building relations with both the Soviet Union and China. Significant numbers of trade and cultural agreements were signed with the two leaders of communist bloc. The 1962 Sino-Indian war brought America and India closer together to fight their common enemy, China. In a discussion with the Indian Ambassador to the USA during the war, the American Secretary of Defense surprisingly suggested using East Pakistan as a corridor for the movement of Indian army and military supplies to rescue their forces besieged in Assam. He was bluntly dismissive when the issue of breaching the sovereignty of Pakistan in such a case was raised by none other than the Indian Ambassador to the USA himself. America was evidently unhappy with the rapid development of relations between Pakistan and China and did not consider it necessary to hide this displeasure. The Americans even threatened to stop economic aid to Pakistan.

According to Oli Ahad, a leader of the 1952 language movement and a widely respected political leader in Bangladesh, the Americans had been encouraging secessionist movements in East Pakistan from the early 1960s. The American Ambassador in Pakistan reportedly said that of any future American aid, the portion for East Pakistan would be specified and earmarked in advance. This was a direct affront to the authority of the government of a sovereign country. Luckily for Pakistan, the relationship with China continued to develop over time to one of close allies, irrespective of the domestic political upheavals or the change of leadership at the top in Pakistan. On the other side, the pro-Indian policy initiated by President Kennedy in 1962 was followed earnestly by subsequent administrations, except for a brief period in the Nixon-Kissinger era. However, the US never hesitated to use Pakistan whenever the need arose. Despite all the controversies surrounding Ayub, his legacy as the architect of the China-Pakistan relationship still survives. Oli Ahad writes on these fundamental changes in the foreign policy of Pakistan under Ayub:

“In 1963, US Ambassador declared that the portion for East Pakistan would henceforth be specified in advance from the total US aid for Pakistan. As a result, people of East Pakistan was encouraged to consider that America is more sympathetic towards them than central government of Pakistan. The

aim of such comment was to skillfully instigate the people of East Pakistan against the central government. By this time, President Ayub had lost interest in imperialistic military alliance and becoming closer to socialist China and the Soviet Union. The US government was trying to put the central government in an awkward position by various means. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not hesitate to become a pawn in this effort.” (Ahad, 2004: 273)

The period from 1958 to 1962 was the era of complete de-politicization in Pakistan. Most of the prominent political leaders were kept in jail. A.K. Fazlul Huq died in April 1962 bringing an end to the illustrious career of the greatest Bengali Muslim politician of the British era. The 1962 student movement played a significant role in changing Ayub’s domestic policies. He started extending olive branches to the politicians he liked. On 1 March 1962, the second Constitution of Pakistan, dubbed the ‘Ayub constitution’, was adopted. He changed the parliamentary system of 1956 into a presidential one. And according to the new constitution, the President would be elected by his new ‘basic democracy model’, that is, the Electoral College system instead of by direct franchise. The martial law government then promulgated the Political Party Regulation Act to allow political activities as the first step to Ayub Khan becoming President.

On 25 September 1962, an anti-Ayub five-party opposition alliance was formed at Lahore. Called the National Democratic Front, it consisted of the Awami League, the National Awami Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, Nejam-e-Islam and a faction of the Muslim League. Unfortunately, in December 1963, shortly after formation of the alliance, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, the most popular opposition leader died in Beirut where he was undergoing treatment. With the death of Suhrawardy, a golden phase of Muslim politics in a united India came to an end. The great leaders of the Pakistan movement were all gone. The vacuum created by the demise of the two giants of Muslim politics in Bengal within a span of less than two years would not be filled during what remained of the Pakistan era. Bhashani was still alive, but his political domain in pre-partition days remained confined to Assam. He was not widely known in all-India political circles. Stature of both Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy was higher than the Maulana. The time was right for the emergence of a new crop of leaders in East Pakistan. The person who was best able to catch the public imagination after the death of Suhrawardy was his disciple, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the future leader of the liberation struggle in Bangladesh. It was the combination of the political acumen of Sheikh Mujib in assessing the right public mood at the right time and the monumental follies of Ayub which made the former a larger-than-life

figure. Mujib had eclipsed everybody, including Maulana Bhashani under whose leadership he was a junior joint secretary, when the Awami Muslim League was born in 1949.

Maulana Bhashani was released from jail on 3 November 1962. Ayub was by then desperately in need of developing a meaningful, friendly relationship with the communist world, especially with neighbouring China. He correctly assessed that Maulana Bhashani was the perfect leader who could bring China closer to Pakistan. President Ayub invited the elderly leader to the Presidential House in Rawalpindi. They had a long meeting on 22 August 1963 to discuss both domestic and international issues. Some of Bhashani's political colleagues in East Pakistan, however, expressed serious reservations about his meeting with the military dictator. But Bhashani probably gave more importance to the welfare of Pakistan. He flew to Peking on 24 September 1963. Maulana Bhashani, well-known for his admiration of socialist ideology and Mao Tse Tung, was warmly received by the Chinese leadership. He was given the status of a head of the state. Bhashani had a successful bilateral meeting with Mao. At the end, Bhashani's visit to China provided such impetus in developing a close bilateral relationship between Pakistan and China that the relationship survives even today. Not surprisingly, Maulana Bhasani was severely criticized by the pro-Indian and pro-Soviet lobbies in East Pakistan for this visit to China:

“Bhashani's China visit created mixed reactions in the political arena. On the one hand, ruling Ayub government was trying to improve relations with China, and on the other, Bhashani also nurtured sympathy for communist China. Opposition political parties did not take his visit to China immediately after meeting with Ayub normally. Bhashani had to face severe criticism for this. He was accused of giving indirect support to Ayub. Pro-soviet faction within his own party also became annoyed with him. Bhashani became politically isolated temporarily because of China visit.” (Maksud, 1994: 246)

A presidential election was held in Pakistan in January 1965. Miss Fatima Jinnah, sister of late Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, was the candidate for the COP (Combined Opposition Parties). The COP was principally comprised of the Awami League, the National Awami Party, the Council Muslim League, Nejam-e-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami. General Ayub was the nominee of the Convention Muslim League, a breakaway faction of the grand old Muslim League led by Ayub himself. Miss Fatima Jinnah lost heavily in West Pakistan but performed comparatively better in East Pakistan, although the total number of votes

was higher for Ayub, even in the eastern wing. The military leader of the *coup d'état* in 1958 became the democratically elected president in 1965, albeit by the 'basic democrat' method. With this achievement, the ambitious general reached the zenith of his career. Who would have thought, on the day of his landslide victory in the Presidential election, that the same man would be forced out of office by an unprecedented mass uprising within just four years?

In September 1965, the subcontinent tasted its first full-scale war. There had been a previous battle fought over Kashmir in 1948. But that incident was rather a skirmish along the narrow part of the international border near the disputed valley. That battle had ended in a ceasefire along the so-called Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. This time it was a seventeen-day intense battle along the entire western front. There was no hostility in largely undefended East Pakistan which the Indians could easily have occupied with their much stronger forces along their eastern front. The neglect by the West Pakistani ruling class towards the defence of East Pakistan was exposed in the course of 1965 war. Ayub finally agreed to a ceasefire because of Pakistan's rapidly dwindling military hardware and intense international pressure. The stalemate on the frontline, however, temporarily increased his domestic popularity as always happens in any country during a war. President Ayub felt betrayed by his Western allies during the Indo-Pakistan war when they imposed a total embargo on arms shipments to Pakistan. After the war, he tilted decisively towards communist China. While Ayub remained busy with outside world, his domestic problems were mounting ominously. In June 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman unveiled his historic six-point agenda which irreversibly changed the political scenario in Pakistan. The following were the main points:

1. The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense based on the Lahore Resolution, and the parliamentary form of government with supremacy of a legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.
2. The federal government should deal with only two subjects: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residual subjects should be vested in the federating states.
3. Two separate, but freely convertible currencies for two wings should be introduced; or if this is not feasible, there should one currency for the whole country, but effective constitutional provisions should be introduced to stop the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Furthermore, a separate Banking Reserve

should be established and separate fiscal and monetary policy be adopted for East Pakistan.

5. Taxation and Foreign Trade:

A. Taxation: The power of taxation and revenue collection should be vested in the federating units and the federal centre would have no such power. The federation would be entitled to a share in the state taxes to meet its expenditures.

B. Foreign Trade:

(i) Separate external trade account for each of the provinces is to be maintained

(ii) The federal foreign exchange requirements will be met by the province on the basis of uniform percentage rate of the earnings of each province or state.

(iii) Commodities from one province or state to another will move free of any taxation or tariff restrictions by the province or state.

(iv) Province or state would be allowed to place trade representatives abroad and negotiate trade deals in the interest of the province or the state irrespective of federal foreign relations.

6. Province or state should have the authority to raise and maintain under its own control, paramilitary or territorial forces to protect the territorial integrity as well as the constitution.

Ruhul Quddus and Ahmed Fazlur Rahman, two senior Bengali civil servants were known to be the main architects of the agenda. They drafted it during the early part of 1966 as talking points for Sheikh Mujib in the national conference of all political parties of Pakistan convened by President Ayub. The Awami League Working Committee later incorporated the six points as their party agenda. Sheikh Mujib was elected as the President of the Awami League in the council meeting held at Hotel Eden on 19 March 1966. Tajuddin Ahmed was elected his General Secretary. Mujib finally succeeded in establishing total control over the party and the six points became his glorious battle cry.

Although talk of provincial autonomy had been going on in Pakistan since the 1954 landslide election success of the United Front, the Awami League had never seriously pushed for it before formally adopting the six-point agenda in 1966. Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, immediately after becoming prime minister in 1956, even declared that his becoming prime minister was equivalent to achieving autonomy for East Pakistan. A radical section of left-leaning students had not only been demanding

autonomy since the early 1960s, they went a step further. In a report of the East Pakistan Communist Party in 1959, it was stated that the Bengali middle class and intellectuals were engaged in a debate on the possibility of establishing an independent East Bengal. With its six-point demands, the Awami League knowingly or unknowingly now took its first step towards endorsing the views of those radical students and setting off on the path to secession. This group was actively engaged from the early 1960s in campaigning for the establishment an independent East Bengal. Mohiuddin Ahmed, one of the founder members of Jatiyo Samajtantric Dal (JSD), a left-oriented, militant political party in Bangladesh writes:

“Sirajul Alam Khan initiated the formation of a secret organization within Chatra League. He created a small cell of three with Abdur Razzak and Kazi Aref. Razzak was Assistant Secretary of the central committee of Chatra League. Kazi Aref was then President of Dhaka city Chatra League. Sirajul Alam Khan was the theocratic leader. They were immersed in revolutionary romanticism. As a ritual, they cut the fingers and took oath by touching the blood that, they will not aim for any personal happiness, not even marry until East Bengal is independent ... The cell was given the name ‘Independent Bangla Revolutionary Council’. They used to publish an irregular bulletin by the name ‘Revolutionary Bangla’.” (Ahmed, 2016: 19)

In the face of rising separatism among Bengali Muslims, the response of the Ayub government, especially that of his then Governor in East Pakistan, was confusing, counter-productive and outright stupid. Governor Monem Khan was known as a spineless puppet of President Ayub. He and his advisors abjectly failed to grasp the sensitivity and seriousness of the nascent nationalist movement. In 1946, Bengali Muslims charged with religious fervour, had voted en masse for the creation of Pakistan, a homeland for the Muslims of India. They were now equally passionate about establishing their Bengali ethnicity. However, it was lost on the people of East Pakistan that Bengal, as a unified political unit, was the creation of the Muslim era. It was the Muslim Sultans who had nurtured and developed the indigenous Bengali language, long neglected by the Brahmanical ruling class. The middle-class intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s in East Pakistan repackaged the Hindu culture of 19th century, a product of the so-called ‘Bengal Renaissance’, as a form of pure secular Bengali culture. Fanatic followers of Rabindranath Tagore even proclaimed that the recital of Tagore poetry was like a religious ritual. Tagore’s active opposition to both the partition of Bengal (1905–1911) and the establishment of Dhaka University (1912–1920) was conveniently forgotten. Cultural aggression from across the border engulfed the whole

society. A stupid attempt by Monem Khan to ban the songs of Tagore on Pakistan radio totally backfired. Now Tagore was not only the icon of the Bengali middle class and intellectuals, even the general population was converted to *Rabindra Bhaktas* (ardent follower). The West Pakistani military leadership and their Bengali cohorts, in their ignorance of the rich Islamic cultural heritage of Muslim Bengal, audaciously questioned the Bengalis' commitment to Islam which only succeeded in alienating them further:

"Denigration of the piety of Bengali Muslims has also been manifest in similarly curious ways. Malik Feroze Khan Noon, the Punjabi Governor of East Bengal in 1952, was reported to have once remarked that the Bengalis were 'half Muslims' and accused them of not bothering to 'halal' (kosher) their chickens. The insult provoked a counterblast from the venerable Maulana Bhashani, 'Have we to lift our lungis (loin-cloths) to prove we are Muslims?'" (Mascarenhas, 1993: 18)

Arrogance and exploitation by the West Pakistani ruling class coupled with Ayub's autocratic governance had, by then, pushed the people of East Pakistan almost to breaking point. They were no longer loyal to the concept of Pakistan for which they themselves had fought before partition. An aspiration for freedom from West Pakistani economic exploitation was gradually being transformed into a demand for an independent East Bengal or Bangladesh.

On the other hand, although the Hindu Bengalis of West Bengal were providing enthusiastic support to the new aspiration of their once much-hated Muslim Bengali neighbours, they did not harbour any secessionist ideas for themselves. There was no identity crisis among the Hindu Bengalis in West Bengal. They were clearly Indian first, Hindu second and Bengali a distant third. It was the practice of uninterrupted democracy which kept India united with all the diversity associated with so many races and languages. And it was exactly the lack of democracy in Pakistan that had created a fertile environment for secessionist activities. Furthermore, the geographic separation of the two wings of Pakistan kept the people apart during the entire period of the existence of a united Pakistan. As a result, the bonding necessary for this strange nation to survive, physically separated by nearly two thousand kilometres of enemy territory, never had the chance to develop. West Pakistanis, especially the Punjabis, always looked down on the people of the eastern wing as an inferior race, a mindset that they might have inherited from their Aryan roots. National reconciliation remained a distant, unfulfilled dream. Under the circumstances, the only political solution was to form a loose

federation with maximum provincial autonomy and save Pakistan from inevitable break-up. Unfortunately, the Pakistani rulers were not ready to give any thought to the idea. They went on a war path, targeting Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a firebrand orator and central figure of the Awami League after the death of his mentor, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy.

Mujib was taken into custody with many of his colleagues after the general strike of 7 June 1966, called by the Awami League in support of their six points demand. A sedition case was brought against him in 1968 where he was charged with thirty-three other Bengali civil and military personnel for conspiracy to bring about the secession of East Pakistan with the aid of India. The historic Agartala case was the beginning of the end for Field Marshal Ayub and Pakistan. A mass movement launched at an unprecedented level and intensity under the leadership of Maulana Bhasani forced Ayub Khan to withdraw the case and release Sheikh Mujib unconditionally. Within a short period of less than three years from the day of unveiling the six-point agenda in June 1966, the Bengali Messiah, in the form of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was born. By this time, Ayub had succeeded in creating another unlikely lesser Messiah in West Pakistan.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the young, suave, Western-educated feudal lord, hand-picked by Ayub in 1965 to become Foreign Minister had become his strongest political opponent in the western wing by 1969. Differences between Ayub and Bhutto had surfaced at the 1966 Tashkent conference on the issue of an India–Pakistan peace treaty. Bhutto resigned from his office in August 1966 and founded his own Peoples Party (PPP). The rise of the PPP to become the most popular party in West Pakistan practically overnight was a fairy tale. In an attempt to change the focus of the people of Pakistan, the government announced a major celebration at the completion of a decade of rule by Ayub. They loftily termed it, ‘decade of development’. All the celebrations and euphoria of the ruling coterie proved futile given the lack of participation by the general public. Instead, the public not only ridiculed the pomp and grandeur of government-sponsored events, but also raised angry questions about the waste of public funds in an effort to shore up the sagging image of a hated dictator. According to Major General Muzaffar-uddin, former General Officer Commanding (GOC) of East Pakistan, Ayub contemplated the imposition of martial law in parts of East and West Pakistan at the height of the mass uprising. But his military commanders advised against it. The Army top brass was in no mood to accept only a small portion of the cake. They wanted total power. Ayub took his last initiative to remain in power and called for a roundtable conference in Rawalpindi in March 1969. This was a futile attempt to cleanse the political mess that Ayub had himself

created. After much deliberation and consultation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of the people of East Pakistan decided to participate in the conference. He was given the title of 'Bangabandhu' (Friend of Bengal) by the student union of Dhaka University prior to his departure from Dhaka to attend the conference. As expected, the conference failed to reach any consensus among the politicians of East and West. This failure was a clear indication that Ayub's days were numbered and, within just a few days, the inevitable happened. Ayub was forced to hand over power to the military on 25 March and Pakistan had its second martial law regime.

General Yahya Khan, the Chief Martial Law Administrator announced on 28 November that a new election would be held by 1970 and thereafter, the state power would be transferred to an elected parliament. Ayub's constitution of 1962 was also abrogated by the new martial law regime. In November, the same year, General Yahya, in a national address, also announced the date of the election, 5 October 1970. General Yahya then promulgated an ordinance (Legal Framework) outlining the following roadmap for the return to democracy:

1. The system of one unit for West Pakistan according to 1962 constitution is abolished.
2. General election will be held by direct franchise on the basis of proportional representation.
3. The number of constituencies for East and West Pakistan will be 169 and 144 respectively.
4. The newly constituted assembly will prepare and adopt a constitution for Pakistan within four months of its first session.
5. All the contesting parties in the election must abide by the Islamic Principles with which Pakistan was established.

The election date was later shifted to 7 December 1970. This shift was caused, firstly, by an administrative delay in the preparation of the election; and, secondly, by the East Pakistan coastal region being hit by the deadliest tropical cyclone of the century on 12 November. Nearly half a million lives were lost mainly in the storm surge that accompanied the 200 km/h winds. The martial law government had clearly failed to take adequate precautionary measures and shift coastal people to safer places before the cyclone hit the coast, showing their total neglect to the welfare and safety of the people of East Pakistan. Even after the carnage, the relief and rehabilitation work was inexcusably delayed. This was the proverbial last straw. The alienation of the people of East Pakistan was complete. As

a protest against government inaction, Maulana Bhasani decided to abstain in the election. Whatever might have been the real reason behind his sudden decision, this particular move tilted the election decisively in favour of the Awami League. In 1970, only Maulana Bhasani had the popularity and stature to challenge his former joint secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in any electoral battle in East Pakistan. His leaving the field was practically an endorsement for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to become the 'sole spokesperson' for the people of East Pakistan. His position in 1970 was similar to that enjoyed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1946. The election result was more spectacular for the Awami League than even the 1954 landslide victory of the United Front. They were victorious in one hundred and sixty-seven of the one hundred and sixty-nine parliamentary seats. In West Pakistan, the People's Party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto emerged as the largest party in the Constituent Assembly by capturing eighty-four of the one hundred and forty-four seats. Incidentally neither the Awami League nor the PPP could win a single seat outside their own provinces. The result of the election clearly indicated that Pakistan was no longer a single nation.

The Awami League contested the election with their six-point agenda and, therefore, claimed after the election that their victory was a clear mandate from the people of East Pakistan for that agenda. The political naivety of the military regime under General Yahya was clearly exposed in their overall handling of the election of 1970. Firstly, it was Yahya who changed the previously accepted parity of constituencies between East and West Pakistan under the one-unit system of the 1962 constitution. With a stroke of the pen, he handed Sheikh Mujib an absolute majority even before the election by allotting one hundred and sixty-nine seats to East Pakistan. The dismantling of West Pakistan from a single unit to four separate provinces opened another Pandora's Box. Probably his advisors and intelligence team gave an inaccurate assessment of the election result, suggesting that no party would get an absolute majority. Secondly, the Awami League's six-point agenda contrasted with the Legal Framework Order (LFO) issued by Yahya. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was absolutely transparent during the campaign that they were asking for a mandate to implement their six points and that this was non-negotiable. Yahya never complained before the election about the secessionist philosophy ingrained in the six-point agenda. Again, Yahya and his advisors miscalculated and hoped, without any practical evidence, that once Sheikh Mujib became the majority party leader of a united Pakistan, he would soften his stand. It was a grave miscalculation on the part of the Chief Martial Administrator. The public mood in East Pakistan had by then decided on complete

independence. As a popular leader, it was not possible for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to make a concession on the six-point agenda even if he had wanted to at that critical juncture in history. Any political observer, on analysing honestly the steps taken by Sheikh Mujib from 7 December 1970 to 25 March 1971, will come to the conclusion that he was not inclined to take responsibility for the break-up of Pakistan at any stage in the negotiation. His last offer to President Yahya of a Confederation and his refusal to declare independence in spite of the immense pressure exerted on him by Tajuddin Ahmed, General Secretary of the Awami League and every radical student leader, was consistent with his beliefs. Nobody should forget that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as a young student leader, had fought alongside his mentor, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, at Calcutta in the Pakistan movement in 1946. His ambivalence on Pakistan would again be observed in his discussion with Bhutto after his release from jail in January 1972.

The state of Pakistan could have died peacefully on the day of the election, 7 December 1970. But, the military junta and West Pakistani politicians, in their arrogance, refused to accept the obvious, thereby creating the perfect stage for the Pakistani military to commit war crimes and the most heinous act of genocide in Bangladesh in 1971. Bhutto fired the first shot by refusing to accept Sheikh Mujib as the leader of the House. He came up with the peculiar idea of two separate majority leaders in the two wings of Pakistan. Bhutto invented the new power source theory: 'Three bastions of Power – Awami League, Peoples Party and Army.' By acknowledging the existence of separate power sources in the two wings, it was Bhutto who gave the first indication of a possible carving up of Pakistan. It is possible that the military junta, in their twisted frame of mind, wanted to teach Bengalis a lesson before the ultimate break-up. After all, they always considered East Bengal to be a land of Hindus and lesser Muslims. The West Pakistani leadership neither knew about the rich Islamic heritage of Eastern Bengal, nor made any effort to learn that history during the twenty-four years of Pakistan's existence. On 3 January 1971, in the public meeting at Race-course in celebration of election victory, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman conducted the oath-taking ceremony of the newly elected members of Pakistan parliament. He started the oath by uttering 'in the name of Allah the merciful and Almighty' and concluded with the slogan: 'Joy Bangla Joy-Pakistan.' Apparently, Sheikh Mujib wanted to prove that he was neither against Islam, nor the concept of Pakistan.

President Yahya arrived in Dhaka on 11 January to meet Mujib and before leaving East Pakistan on 14 January publicly proclaimed him to be

the 'future' Prime Minister of Pakistan. On return to West Pakistan, Yahya had a series of meetings with Bhutto and the military commanders. This was probably when the conspiracy was hatched to deny Mujib his legitimate power. After a period of dilly-dallying, on 12 February, Yahya formally called the first session of parliament on 3 March at Dhaka. Exactly according to the plan hatched by the West Pakistani leadership, Bhutto, in a press conference on 15 February, announced his refusal to attend the session unless his demand of a 'prior understanding' was met. Over the next two weeks, Bhutto continued his efforts to rally support in West Pakistan. On 1 March, in a national address, President Yahya postponed the parliament session for an indefinite period. The people of East Pakistan responded immediately to Yahya's treacherous announcement with a massive show of unity and defiance. An international cricket match was in progress in Dhaka Stadium at the time of President's address. Angry demonstrators invaded the stadium and the spectators spontaneously joined them to force the match to be abandoned, with the protesters making spontaneous demands for the immediate independence of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujib avoided the demand and called for general strike on 2 and 3 March. All private and public enterprises remained closed in answer to the call of the supreme leader. In response, the government imposed a twenty-four-hour curfew. People ignored the curfew and were killed in great numbers, shot by the military. Even this reckless use of military force failed to control the protesting crowds by then numbering hundreds of thousands in Dhaka alone. The situation in East Pakistan was simply ungovernable and Sheikh Mujib was the de facto head of the government. President Yahya was compelled to announce a revised date for the parliamentary session as soon as possible. The new date of 25 March was announced in a nationwide address by the President on 6 March. In response, Sheikh Mujib gave his historic speech of 7 March in a mammoth public meeting at Racecourse. Again, he rejected the call from the political hardliners to unilaterally declare the independence of East Pakistan.

There was speculation in most of the West Bengal newspapers that an independence declaration would be made at the Racecourse meeting. Instead, Mujib outlined a list of demands for the President as preconditions for joining the parliament. He described the ongoing movement as the struggle for freedom, but curiously concluded his fiery speech again with Joy Bangla and Joy-Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib was in no hurry to take the blame for breaking up Pakistan. A.K. Khandaker, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh Liberation Army, writing about this speech in his memoirs

of the liberation war states clearly that Mujib concluded his speech with Joy-Pakistan:

"I do not think that the liberation war started with this particular speech of Bangabandhu. The concluding words of this speech was Joy Bangla Joy-Pakistan. After giving a call for war, he said 'Joy-Pakistan'! It is highly questionable that this could be the call for war or declaration of independence. This claim cannot be beyond doubt or debate." (Khandaker, 2014: 32)

Oli Ahad, in his memoir, entitled '*Jatiyo Rajnitir: 1945 theke 1975*', quoted the full text of the brilliant 7 March speech of Sheikh Mujib which would be later recognized by UNESCO as one of the finest pieces of oratory in the 20th century. Oli Ahad confirms that the speech definitely ended with Joy Bangla and Joy-Pakistan. However, this is another point of debate in Bangladesh as leaders of the Awami League in general and Sheikh Hasina, the current prime minister and daughter of Sheikh Mujib in particular, refuse to accept, namely that Sheikh Mujib had uttered Joy-Pakistan.

President Yahya arrived in Dhaka on 15 March to apparently resolve the political crisis. Later it would transpire that Yahya's coming to Dhaka was just a ploy to justify one of the world's worst genocides of the 20th century. Yahya needed time to reinforce the cantonments by bringing fresh supplies of troops and armaments from West Pakistan. He and his team of mainly army generals immediately began formal meetings with Sheikh Mujib. Bhutto joined the meeting later on 21 March. From 21 to 24 March, Mujib, Yahya and Bhutto had a series of bilateral and trilateral meetings. In all the public comments after each meeting with Yahya and Bhutto, Mujib was consistent in giving assurance that tangible progress had been made. In the midst of negotiation, on 23 March, a newly designed national flag for an independent Bangladesh was unfurled when Mujib took the salute from militant student volunteers. Flags were hoisted at the top of most of the tall buildings in Dhaka. But, the Pakistan government maintained a mysterious silence on this serious provocation on Pakistan Day itself. Possibly they were busy putting the final touches to 'Operation Searchlight', the blueprint for a massacre. The junta just ignored the hoisting of the Bangladesh flag, although Yahya, in his later speeches used this event, along with other excuses, to justify the senseless massacre committed on the night of 25 March and afterwards. The last meeting between the parties was held on 24 March. Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam and Dr. Kamal Hossain represented the Awami League whereas, the Pakistani central government side was represented by M.M. Ahmed,

Justice A.R. Cornelius, Lieutenant General Pirzada and Lieutenant Colonel M.A. Hasan.

The next twenty-four hours was a period of anxious waiting. Sheikh Mujib remained in his Dhanmondi residence still convinced that some positive news would come from the President House. General Yahya decided to leave on the evening of 25 March without any further communication with Sheikh Mujib. On the contrary, he remained busy in a day-long conference with his corps commanders. The President's departure was kept secret until he had cleared the air-space of East Pakistan. Even Bhutto was kept in the dark about the departure plan of the President. He would leave Dhaka on the afternoon of 26 March only after witnessing the dastardly acts of his countrymen in uniform. In the meantime, the cowardly general cum president needed the safety of distance before letting loose his butcher, Tikka Khan. In fact, the final order for a crackdown was received at Dhaka after the President's aircraft had touched down in Karachi. The Awami League leaders learned about the whole episode a few hours later. Tajuddin Ahmed immediately went to Mujib's residence with a prepared statement of a declaration of independence. Mujib bluntly refused either to read, record or sign the statement. Let me quote Maidul Hasan, writer and researcher, and secretary to Tajuddin Ahmed on this:

“Evening of 25 March, as President Yahya left this country, an uncertain and critical situation was created. Everybody started to ponder, what has to be done now. At that time, Tajuddin Ahmed and few other leaders were together at Dhanmondi 32, i.e. Sheikh Mujib's residence. In an opportune moment, Tajuddin Ahmed brought out a tape-recorder and gave a draft declaration to Sheikh Sahib to read. I heard this story from Tajuddin Ahmed. After the liberation war, when I was collecting documents on war, I asked Tajuddin Ahmed regarding the episode. The draft was written by Tajuddin Ahmed. The draft was like this: ‘The Pakistani army has suddenly attacked us. They have started repression everywhere. Under this situation we all have to commence the liberation war and I, being the elected President hereby declare independence.’

“Sheikh Mujibur Rahman read the draft silently. But he did not say anything. As if he was avoiding the issue.

“According to the statement of Tajuddin Ahmed, he then said, ‘Mujib Bhai, you have to say this now, because we do not know what will happen tomorrow. If they arrest all of us, nobody will know what they need to do under the circumstances. We will copy this declaration from somewhere and inform people. We will try if this can be done through radio.’ Sheikh Sahib replied, ‘This will remain as a document against me. Pakistanis will

be able to put me on trial on charges of sedition because of this.' Tajuddin was very annoyed at his reply and left Dhanmondi 32 immediately, probably after nine." (Khandaker, Hasan, and Mirja, 2009: 27–28)

While all the Awami League leaders were waiting in vain for a clear instruction from Sheikh Mujib, the general staff at the Pakistani Army 14 Division Headquarters was busy coordinating with all its units for the commencement of zero hour. Dr. Kamal Hossain and Amirul Islam went to the residence of Sheikh Mujib after ten at night all the while waiting for a call from the President. Mujib asked for the last time whether there was any communication with the government:

"I waited for a telephone call throughout the fateful day of 25 March. The telephone call never came. Indeed, when I finally left Bangabandhu at his residence at around 10.30 p.m. on 25 March, Bangabandhu asked me whether I had received such a telephone call. I confirmed to him that I had not." (Hossain, 2013: 103)

As Mujib was given the bad news, in sadness he told the Awami League leaders present at 32 Dhanmondi to leave and find shelter immediately. Sheikh Mujib then waited like a Greek tragic hero for the Pakistani army to arrive and arrest him. According to Major Siddiq Salik, Public Relations Officer of the Pakistani Army in Dhaka in 1971, the zero hour was initially set at 1 a.m. on 26 March. But field commanders persuaded the Army Headquarters (AHQ) to advance this to 11:30 p.m. on 25 March. The commanders felt that Bengalis were preparing for resistance and the overzealous troops wanted to launch surprise attacks against certain targets to deny them any preparation time. Accordingly, the columns of tanks and Armoured Personnel Carriers rolled out from Dhaka Cantonment (the Army headquarters) to target and kill innocent civilians one and half hours before the original zero hour. Genocide was to begin. With this brutal, stupid and arrogant act at midnight on 25 March, the Pakistani army stamped the final seal on the dismemberment of Pakistan and paved the way for the ultimate victory of Bengali nationalism nine months later.

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Nawab Sir Khwaja Salimullah



Mahatma Gandhi, Father of nation of India.



Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Founder of Pakistan.



Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India.



A K Fazlul Huq, the first Prime Minister of British Bengal.



Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India.



Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Prime Minister of Pakistan, 1956-57.



Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani,
Founder of East Pakistan Awami Muslim League.



Field Marshal Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan.



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Founding leader of independent Bangladesh waving to a cheering crowd on 10 January, 1972.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LIBERATION WAR OF BANGLADESH

As the Dhaka night was lit up by military shelling, city dwellers desperately clung to the floor to avoid volley after volley of machine gun fire, Sheikh Mujib patiently waited with his family in his famous 32 Dhanmondi residence for the arrival of the Pakistani Army to arrest him. He had been informed early in the evening, by an unknown person, of the imminent crackdown by the vengeful Pakistani Army. Anthony Mascarenhas dramatically describes the coming of the informer in 'The rape in Bangladesh':

"At about 8 p.m. on 25 March 1971, an unidentified cycle rickshaw hastily pulled into the lane leading to 32 Dhanmondi and came to a halt outside Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Dacca residence. The driver was coughing and out of breath. He said he had peddled all the way from the cantonment with an 'urgent chit' for Banga Bandhu. The unsigned message in Bengali was terse: 'Your house is going to be raided tonight.'" (Mascarenhas, 1993: 111)

Pakistani commandos finally arrived at Mujib's residence after one in the morning. They were challenged by the police guards posted at the gate who were immediately cut down by automatic fire. The commandos scaled the perimeter wall and announced their arrival with bursts from their Sten guns. Mujib, clad in a dressing gown over pyjamas, walked down the stairs from first floor and was promptly arrested and driven away in an army jeep. The brigade major of 57 Brigade, Major Jaffar barked on the wireless: 'Big bird in the cage.' Although General Tikka Khan had prepared a long list of Awami League leaders to be immediately arrested, surprisingly, only the Supreme Leader of the Bengalis was picked up on that night. A week later, on 3 April, Kamal Hossain was arrested by the Pakistani Army at his Lalmatia hideout and sent to West Pakistan. He was confined there until the end of the liberation war. In fact, Kamal Hossain accompanied his leader on his triumphant return to independent Bangladesh from Pakistan on 10 January 1972. However, for that fateful night, Sheikh Mujib was lodged in the Adamjee Cantonment School.

Nobody except Sheikh Mujib knows what thoughts filled his mind at that moment. Was it remorse, despair, helplessness or some hope? He did not share it with anybody, except perhaps his immediate family members. While Mujib was, in all probability, passing a sleepless night, Yahya's dogs of war were on a merciless killing spree. Mujib, as the supreme leader, shockingly failed to give any warning of what was coming to his hapless countrymen. Ironically, while Pakistani Army units were taking final positions for the slaughter, an Awami League messenger was handing a signed press release to local and foreign media: "Our talks with the President are over. We have reached agreement on the transfer of power and it is hoped that the President will now make the necessary announcement." The question of how a leadership could act in so naive and irresponsible a manner remains unanswered even after nearly five decades of our independence.

The military plan of General Tikka, Military Governor of East Pakistan for the night of 25 March, as described in the book of Pakistani major and PRO of the East Pakistan Command, Siddiq Salik is sufficient to understand the viciousness of their preparation to 'sort out' the Bengalis:

"At the given hour, Brigadier Arbab's brigade was to act as follows:

- 13 Frontier Force was to stay in Dacca cantonment as reserve and defend the cantonment, if necessary.
- 43 Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) Regiment, deployed at the airport in an anti-aircraft role since the banning of overflights by India, was to look after the airport area.
- Baluch, already in East Pakistan Rifles Lines at Peelkhana, was to disarm approximately 5,000 East Pakistan Rifles personnel and seize their wireless exchange.
- 32 Punjab was to disarm 1,000 'highly motivated' policemen, a prime possible source of armed manpower for the Awami League, at Rajarbagh Police Lines.
- 18 Punjab was to fan out in the Nawabpur area and the old city where many Hindu houses were said to have been converted into armouries.
- Field Regiment was to control the Second Capital and the adjoining Bihari localities (Muhammadpur, Mirpur).
- A composite force consisting of one company each of 18 Punjab, 22 Baluch, and 32 Punjab, was to 'flush' the University Campus particularly Iqbal Hall and Jagan Nath Hall which were reported to be the strong points of the Awami League rebels.
- A platoon of Special Service Group (Commandos) was to raid Mujib's house and capture him alive.

- A skeleton squadron of M-24 tanks was to make an appearance before first light, mainly as a show of force. They could fire for effect if required.” (Salik, 1997: 72–73)

The exact number of people killed in Dhaka on the night of the beginning of the ruthless nine-month genocide by the Pakistani army may not be known with any accuracy. But that is beside the point. The main issue here is that only a diabolical mind could have ordered troops to kill their own people with such ferocity and disdain. It seems that the entire West Pakistani corps commanders were transformed into bloodthirsty maniacs. In an effort to control the information and hide the massacre, General Tikka Khan had all foreign correspondents confined to their hotels. Three days later, on 29 March, the journalists were deported to Karachi by air. Ultimately, this proved to be another self-defeating decision by the Pakistan government. In the absence of any eye-witness accounts, the stage was set for speculation and rumour.

However just for the record and out of curiosity, I have consulted most of the well-known books written on the subject in my attempt to arrive at an informed guess of the number of casualties on that harrowing night. Anthony Mascarenhas claims that eight thousand men, women and children of Hindu minority communities were killed in Shankaripatti at old Dhaka alone. His estimate of casualties among students, professors and employees at Dhaka University also runs into the hundreds. Kamal Hossain, the only other leader arrested by the Pakistani Army in the crackdown, gives a general description of the army operation without touching on the issue of casualty figures in his book. As he was confined in West Pakistan during the whole period of the liberation war, it was probably not possible for him to make any reasonable guess. He did not attempt to conduct any research after returning to liberated Bangladesh or while writing a memoir of those nine harrowing months. He writes:

“In the next few days, the most disturbing reports began to spread of the wanton use of force against innocent civilians. Tanks bore down on them, living in slums along the side of the roads, leaving a trail of death and destruction as fires began to spread. In the university area, students’ residence halls, teachers’ residences, and even Shaheed Minar (an intimate but powerful symbol of people’s resistance) were prime targets.” (Hossain, 2013: 106)

A.K. Khandaker, Major Rafiq, Major General Subid Ali Bhuiyan, Major Jalil and other freedom fighters who have written stories of their contribution to the war failed to mention the numbers of Bangladeshis

killed during the nine months of the liberation war. Some of them have repeated a casualty figure of three million without any credible evidence. On the Pakistani side, Major Siddiq Salik is surprisingly candid when he writes about first night's operation: "The foreign press fancied several thousand deaths (in the university area) while the army officers placed the figure at around a hundred. Officially, only forty deaths were admitted." There is no denial of mass killings in the quote although the author has tried to conceal the actual number of victims. Lastly, I will quote from 'Dead Reckoning', written by Sarmila Bose, a scholar and granddaughter of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a highly respected Bengali politician during pre-partition days. There were three major targets in the massacre on the night of 25 March: Dhaka University; the Hindu locality of old Dhaka; and the Rajarbagh Police Lines. Quoting eye-witness accounts, Sarmila Bose writes about Dhaka University and Old Dhaka. The author is silent on the Rajarbagh Police Lines operation probably because of a lack of authentic data and eye-witness accounts. First she quotes the following recorded communication between a Pakistani field officer and his brigade commander in the midst of operation at Dhaka University:

"(Officer A): 'What do you think would be the approximate number of casualties of the University? Just give me an approximate number, in your view. What will be the number killed, or wounded, or captured? Just give me a rough figure. Over'.

(Officer B): '88...approximately 300. Over'

(Officer A): 'Well done. 300 killed? Anybody wounded, captured? Over'.

(Officer B): '88...I believe only in one thing: it's 300 killed. Over'.

(Officer A): '88, yes, I agree with you, that's much easier, you know nothing asked, nothing done, you don't have to explain anything. Well, once again, well done....'" (Bose, 2011: 66)

Officer B evidently was not inclined to take any prisoners alive which shows the Pakistani army's complete disdain for human life and their hatred for Bengalis. The commanding officer A, apparently not only condoned the massacre but also congratulated the Officer B for his crime against humanity! Sarmila Bose continues:

"At 'Shirishtola' in Dhaka University there is a memorial to all those belonging to the university who lost their lives during 1971. The total, including all faculty, students and staff killed during the whole of the year, is 149. Some of the faculty and students named were killed at other times in other places, so the number of those who were killed on the night of 25-26 March at the university would be lower than 149 by the university's

own count. Interestingly, the number of staff killed is twenty-nine, exactly the number cited by Rabindra Mohan Das.” (Bose, 2011: 67)

The author then writes a long section about the killings of the Hindus by the Pakistani army in a chapter under the heading, ‘Shankharipara: Army attack on a Hindu Area in Dhaka’. She cites the testimony of two eye-witnesses: Amiya Kumar Sur and Amar Sur. Both of them confirmed the killing of only about fourteen to sixteen persons as against the eight thousand claimed by Mascarenhas. Two of those killed by the Pakistani army on that night were Amar Sur’s own father and baby brother. Sarmila Bose flatly dismisses as ‘uncorroborated and hearsay’ the claim of Anthony Mascarenhas that eight thousand Hindus were killed at Shankharipara on the night of 25–26 March. She writes:

“According to the survivors of Shankharipara, the army did not go house to house. They entered only one house, Number 52. No one could tell me exactly why that house was targeted—perhaps because it was larger than other houses and looked more prosperous. Later, Amiya Sur saw the bodies there himself—fourteen or sixteen of them on the ‘angina’ (courtyard)—including one infant whom his father had been carrying. All the other residents who remained inside their homes survived.” (Bose, 2011: 74)

This controversy regarding the number of Bangladeshis killed by the Pakistani forces during the nine months of the liberation war remains unresolved even today. Claims range from a staggering three million according to the Bangladesh side to as low as fifty-eight thousand according to the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo. Sarmila Bose concludes by writing: “Regarding the 1971 war, this study argues that the Oslo dataset’s estimate of 58,000 battle deaths is an underestimate of war dead, and aims to amend the number upwards to 269,000 (with a range of 125,000 to 505,000).” The author’s estimates include largescale Bihari casualties who became victims of ethnic cleansing by the Bengalis in retribution for the Pakistani genocide. There may be controversy over the exact casualty figure, but the Pakistani army’s act of genocide is well established. Even if we take the average figure of two hundred and sixty-nine thousand, as mentioned by Bose, it was one of the worst genocides after the holocaust.

On the night of 25 March, while the Pakistani army were busy on their killing mission in Dhaka and Sheikh Mujib was possibly passing anxious hours thinking about his own future and that of his family and the nation, valiant Bengali soldiers in Chittagong rose up in revolt under Major Ziaur Rahman, the second in command of the 8 East Bengal. The situation in the port city and the cantonment had been tense since early March. There was

mounting resentment in the port among the Bengali stevedores and workers as Pakistanis were bringing in more soldiers, arms and ammunition from West Pakistan. Bengalis involved at the port operation sensed imminent danger. The people of Chittagong had been building barricades on the streets trying to disrupt army movements from early March. The removal of those barricades became part of the daily routine for the Pakistani army. It was a cat-and-mouse game played between unarmed, patriotic Bengalis and the patrolling army with machine guns mounted on top of their APCs. Another ship, M.V. Swat, arrived from Karachi and had docked at Chittagong port a few days before 25 March. The ship was full of armaments and other army supplies.

Colonel Janjua, Commanding Officer of the 8 East Bengal, ordered his second in command, Major Zia at 11 p.m. on 25 March to proceed to the port and expedite the unloading from Swat. Zia proceeded with a company of soldiers but was stopped on the way to the port by Captain Khalequzzaman who give him the first information that the West Pakistani officers and soldiers had already started disarming and killing Bengali soldiers. An apparently anxious captain then asked his superior officer about their next move. Without wasting any precious time, Major Zia instantly replied: "We revolt," and instead of going to the port, he moved back to the 8 East Bengal lines and took command. On returning to the unit, Zia immediately arrested all Pakistani officers including Colonel Janjua, the Pakistani commanding officer who was later killed by Bengali army in revolt. Zia then gave an impromptu speech to the assembled Bengali officers and soldiers justifying his revolt and requesting their allegiance. He received spontaneous support for his decision to commence a liberation war. He then started a battle of resistance against the Pakistani army with the available Bengali troops. After an intense battle with Pakistani forces, Zia decided to move troops towards Kaptai Road to dig a defensive line on the other side of the river Karnaphuly. This heroic battle by Zia at Chittagong was later praised highly by Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister of the Bangladesh government-in-exile on the day of the Proclamation of Independence. Tajuddin compared the Chittagong battle with that of heroic Russian resistance at Stalingrad against Hitler's invading forces during the Second World War.

On 27 March, Zia went to the radio transmission centre at Kalurghat and declared the formal independence of Bangladesh. He said in the declaration:

"The Government of the Sovereign State of Bangladesh on behalf of our great leader, the Supreme Commander of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. We hereby proclaim the independence of Bangladesh and that the

Government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has already been formed. It is further proclaimed that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the sole leader of the elected representatives of seventy-five million people of Bangladesh, and the Government headed by him is the only legitimate government of the people of the independent sovereign state of Bangladesh, which is legally and constitutionally formed, and worthy of being recognized by all the governments of the World. I therefore appeal on behalf of our great leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the government of all the democratic countries of the World, specially the big powers and the neighbouring countries to recognize the legal government of Bangladesh.” (Bhuiyan, 2016: 45)

Major Siddiq Salik also writes on the declaration of independence by Major Zia:

“Major Ziaur Rehman, the second in command of 8 East Bengal, assumed command of the rebels in the absence of Brigadier Mazumdar (who had been tactfully taken to Dacca a few days earlier). While the government troops clung to the radio station, in order to guard the building, Major Zia took control of the transmitters separately located on Kaptai Road and used the available equipment to broadcast the ‘declaration of independence’ of Bangladesh.” (Salik, 1997: 79)

Lieutenant General Jacob, Chief of Staff of India’s Eastern Army during the liberation war writes the following account of Zia’s revolt and resistance in Chittagong:

“Maj Zia resisted the Pakistani Army in Chittagong with all available Bengali regular and paramilitary forces. Heavy fighting erupted in the Headquarters of the East Pakistan Rifles, where the Pakistani Army used tanks, aircraft, artillery and fire from naval gunboats. The position was captured on 31 March. The next assault was on the Reserve Police Lines, which fell without much resistance. Zia then fell back towards Belonia, blowing up the strategic Feni road bridge which connected Dacca with the port of Chittagong.” (Jacob, 2004: 35)

No question was ever raised by any quarter about the declaration of independence by Major Zia during the lifetime of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Everybody accepted the fact that Mujib did not declare independence at any stage prior to his arrest by the Pakistani Army. Awami Leaguers started to claim, without any authentic or reliable evidence, only after the death of Mujibur Rahman that he somehow managed to send a hand-written chit proclaiming independence to some unknown person before his arrest by the Pakistani Army on the night of 25 March. It makes no sense. However, it was the declaration by Major Zia

that gave hope and inspiration to a shocked and stunned nation. It acted like a tonic for the people of East Pakistan. They realized that the long-awaited liberation war of Bangladesh had finally begun with the revolt of Bengali soldiers at Chittagong:

“So far as I know, Bangabandhu did not publicly tell anybody about the declaration of independence. Some people claim that Bangabandhu declared independence on the night of 25 March by sending a ‘chit’ through a Havildar. It is also claimed that Bangabandhu sent instruction to Chittagong Awami League leader, Zahur Ahmed Chaudhury to declare independence. In some places, it is also written that Bangabandhu declared independence through East Pakistan Rifles radio transmission broadcast or by sending telegram through postal and telegraph department. I have not found any logical evidence of those claims. The evidences that are presented do not appear reliable to me.” (Khandaker, 2014: 53)

A.K. Khandaker, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh Liberation Army even concedes in his memoir that it was Zia’s declaration that encouraged him to join in the war. He writes:

“I heard the declaration of Zia on the radio. I did not personally know Zia then. But I was relieved with this declaration and also felt contented that at least a major level military officer is now engaged in the war. I later came to know that President, Chittagong Awami League, Industrialist M.R. Siddiqui and General Secretary M.A. Hannan were also involved in the process. All the people of Bangladesh heard the declaration. I presume, people like me who desired to join in the liberation war were more encouraged after hearing Zia’s declaration. And then took firm decision that they would participate in the war ... In that critical juncture, Zia’s declaration provided strength and courage to the bewildered and leaderless nation. I heard from many freedom fighters during and after the war, that Zia’s declaration encouraged them to join in the liberation war to a great extent.” (A. K. Khandaker, 2014: 60–61)

The speech of Indira Gandhi at Columbia University as late as 6 November 1971, bears out the testimony that Sheikh Mujib had never made any formal declaration of independence for Bangladesh. Indira Gandhi said: “The cry for independence arose after Sheikh Mujib was arrested and not before. He himself, so far as I know, has not asked for independence even now.”

When Zia visited India as President of Bangladesh in 1977, Indian President, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, mentioned his declaration of independence in the presidential speech at a banquet in honour of visiting president:

“Your position in the annals of the history of your country as a brave freedom fighter who was the first to declare the independence of Bangladesh.” (Speech of Indian President, New Delhi, December 19, 1977)

I think the controversy regarding who declared the independence of Bangladesh should rest there.

The consequences of the crackdown of the Pakistani Army in Dhaka were immediate. Hundreds of thousands of terror-stricken people started a voluntary mass exodus from ravaged cities to the temporary safety of villages. As the army later spread its assaults to the interior, the people there started to cross the border to seek shelter inside India. The Pakistani Army's murderous and ill-conceived 'final solution' for East Pakistan started to backfire and a domestic problem gradually became a major international crisis. Instead of protecting the territorial integrity of Pakistan, the army was practically dismembering it. Brutal killings and the destruction and burning of villages as collective punishment by the army quickly succeeded in turning the entire population against the Pakistan government.

Most of the Awami League leadership, except for Sheikh Mujib and Kamal Hossain, were able to cross over into India by the first week of April. Tajuddin Ahmed got the first opportunity to meet Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, in Delhi, on 4 April when he introduced himself as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, although the provisional government of Bangladesh was yet to be formed. He later had to face severe criticism for this act from the young leaders of the Awami League. Indira Gandhi wanted to know from Tajuddin whether they were serious about independence. On getting an affirmative reply, she then suggested the immediate formation of a provisional government of Bangladesh in exile and also assured Tajuddin of all possible assistance from the Indian government. On 11 April, Tajuddin Ahmed announced in a radio address from India, the formation of a Bangladeshi government-in-exile with Syed Nazrul Islam as the Acting President, himself as Prime Minister and Colonel M.A.G. Osmani as Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladeshi liberation forces. The newly formed cabinet took an oath at Baidyanath Tala, Meherpur (later Mujibnagar) on 17 April 1971. In the Proclamation of Independence, it was affirmed that the people of Bangladesh would be ensured 'equality, human dignity and social justice'. There was no mention of the so-called fundamental principles of the liberation war in the original proclamation.

Lieutenant General Jacob, Chief of Staff of India's Eastern Command, however, claims in his book, 'Surrender at Dacca', that he was the first

person to suggest to Tajuddin the formation of a provisional government. He writes:

“Meanwhile, by the end of March 1971, a number of Bengali resistance leaders arrived at Calcutta. Prominent among them were Tajuddin Ahmed, Nazrul Islam, Qamaruzzaman, Mansur Ali, Col M.A.G Osmani and Wing Commander Khandaker*. A government-in-exile was soon formed and was housed in a bungalow on the Theatre Road (Shakespeare Sarani). I attended the initial discussions with Tajuddin and Nazrul Islam. They wanted to hold, in Baidyanath Tala or ‘Mujibnagar’ which was just across the border in East Pakistan, a parliamentary session of those members of Parliament who had already been elected and who had managed to escape to India. With no appreciable area of East Pakistan in their control and very few members of Parliament in India compounded by the absence of Mujib I suggested that they proclaim a provisional government. I gave them the example of the Free French Government and General de Gaulle during World War II. They asked me to prepare a draft declaration for them to work on, which I did and gave to Tajuddin. He in turn showed it to some legal luminaries in Calcutta and had it expanded and dressed in legal terms. The declaration was finally issued on 17 April at Baidyanath Tala, just inside East Pakistan, at a function organized by the Border Security Force. Unfortunately, some foreign correspondents stayed behind and saw the Border Security Force (BSF) removing the chairs.” (Jacob, 2004: 40–41)

The author clearly erred here as Wing Commander A.K. Khandaker crossed to Agartala much later. Khandaker has personally mentioned in his war memoir that he reached Matinagar BSF camp near Agartala with his family on 15 May, nearly a month after the Proclamation of Independence at Baidyanath Tala.

According to Jacob, the Indian government contemplated attacking East Pakistan as early as the beginning of April. However, military commanders in the field, including General Jacob, protested against the decision of political leaders as they felt the proposal was impractical. The Indian Army was not then prepared to launch a full-scale attack against Pakistan. In addition to a shortage of troops, there was also issue of logistics. Indian politicians and bureaucrats, including Indira Gandhi, were terribly upset by this stand taken by their military commanders. General Manekshaw, Indian Army Chief, even threatened resignation over the issue during a heated argument with the Prime Minister. At the end of the conference, however, the political bosses accepted the army position of targeting mid-November as the appropriate time to launch the offensive. President Yahya would later foolishly fall into the Indian trap by declaring

war against India on 3 December 1971 at the height of Indian preparedness.

Maulana Bhashani, the second most significant leader after Mujib in East Pakistan crossed to Assam in the early morning of either 15 or 16 April. He was received by Mainul Huq Chowdhury, Indian Cabinet Minister and former political colleague of Bhashani during pre-partition days. However, Maulana had to wait in his boat on the river Dhallai, adjacent to the international border, as the local Indian authority was initially hesitant to allow him to enter Indian territory. This hesitancy was due to Bhashani's Chinese connection. China was in favour of maintaining the territorial integrity of Pakistan, as according to the interpretation of communist leadership, the liberation struggle could not be considered a 'national liberation'. They interpreted it as a bourgeois secessionist movement. The pro-Chinese bloc in East Pakistan was also divided on the issue. Maulana being the first public advocate of an 'independent East Bengal' as far back in the 1950s was, of course, fully committed to the liberation of the country. Indira Gandhi, however, never fully trusted Bhashani and kept him under 'honourable internment', meaning under security watch, during his entire nine-month stay in India.

Starting from mid-April, the strategy of the provisional government was to recruit and train as many freedom fighters as possible and wage full-scale guerrilla war against the Pakistani occupying forces. The strategy was given the code-name 'Operation Jackpot' and Theatre Road in Calcutta was made the headquarters for the operation. Col M.A.G. Osmani was the Commander-in-Chief with Wing Commander Khandaker serving as his deputy. Major Zia, Major Khalid Musharraf, Major Safiullah, Major Jalil, Major Usman, Lieutenant Colonel Zaman and Wing Commander Bashar were the sector commanders responsible for the Chittagong, Comilla, Mymensing, Khulna, Kushtia, Rajshahi and Rangpur sectors respectively. In July, at a war council meeting at the headquarters in Calcutta, it was decided to form a new brigade, Z Force, under Major Zia. 'Z' obviously was selected from the first letter of Zia's name. The idea was to commence a classical offensive war as soon as possible in addition to guerrilla attacks against the occupying forces. Both Safiullah and Khaled were very annoyed at this decision as they felt Zia was being given more importance and honour than they were. Later, two more brigades under the names, S-force and K-force had to be formed to placate them. The problem of the egos of the commanders, even in the midst of the liberation war, is clearly reflected in this incident. Finally, the entire battlefield was divided into eleven sectors. The list of those in command of the sectors at different stages of the war is given below:

- Sector – 1: a) Major Ziaur Rahman (up to July)
- b) Captain Rafiqul Islam (July to December)
- Sector – 2: a) Major Khaled Musharraf (up to September)
- b) Major A.T.M. Haider (September to December)
- Sector – 3: a) Major K.M. Shafiullah (up to September)
- b) Major A.N.M. Nuruzzaman (September to December)
- Sector – 4: Major C.R. Dutta
- Sector – 5: Major Mir Shaukat Ali
- Sector – 6: Wing Commander M. K. Bashar
- Sector – 7: Major Qazi Nuruzzaman
- Sector – 8: a) Major Abu Osman Chaudhury (up to August)
- b) Major M.A. Manzur (August to December)
- Sector – 9: a) Major Ma.A. Jalil (up to early December)
- b) Major Zainal Abedin (a few days at the end of the war)
- Sector – 10: Commando forces under Headquarter
- Sector – 11: a) Major Abu Taher (August to November)
- b) Flight Lieutenant M. Hamidullah (November to December)

After the formation of the brigades, Bangladeshi forces started carrying out frontal assaults against targeted Pakistani outposts along the Indian border in addition to intensifying regular guerrilla operations deeper inside the country.

Students, peasants and workers, irrespective of political affiliation, crossed over to India in their hundreds of thousands to join the Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters). However, the Awami League leadership and the Indian authorities were not very keen to accept anybody other than those belonged to the Awami League. The condition of those patriotic young men who were not considered desirable by Indian recruiting authority was appalling. Some of them were even arrested by the local police on suspicion of a Naxalite link. Radical Maoist, Comrade Charu Mazumdar of Naxalbari, was then leading a leftist guerrilla insurgency against India. The Awami League leadership also remained apprehensive right from the beginning of the liberation war about the intentions of the pro-Chinese faction of the Bangladeshi freedom fighters. The young guns of the Awami League regularly complained to the Indian authorities about the training of non-Awami Leaguers. To pacify this grumbling discontent, Major General S.S. Uban was given the task of raising a special force consisting of the radical young Awami leadership and their hand-picked workers. The Bangladesh Liberation Force (BLF) was created as a joint venture between General Uban and R.N. Kao, head of the RAW ('Research and Analysis Wing', the Indian Intelligence Agency). The objective of the force was not to fight against Pakistani forces, but to exterminate the pro-Chinese and anti-Indian freedom fighters in fake

encounters. This was part of their grand strategy to establish Awami hegemony in independent Bangladesh:

“Young leaders of Awami League, Nure Alam Siddiqui, A.S.M. Rab and Tofail Ahmed in particular, started recruiting guerrillas from the youth camps, only Chatra League workers and their followers were selected. After getting the responsibility in the Bangladesh forces headquarter, I wanted that all those who had come to India leaving behind the country to join in the liberation war should be given an opportunity in addition to the Awami League and Chatra League workers. I did not get much result even after bringing the matter to the notice of related persons including Colonel Osmani. Initially political influence in the selection of freedom fighters was acute. This circumstance continued nearly up to August. Then there was some change in the overall situation.” (Khandaker, 2014: 92)

General Sujan Singh Uban, the controversial former Inspector General of the special frontier forces of India who trained hand-picked student leaders belonging to the student front of the Awami League has written about the joint strategic goal of the post-independence Bangladeshi and Indian governments to eliminate militants belonging to north-east Indian and pro-Chinese political elements in Bangladesh. In the book entitled, ‘Phantoms of Chittagong: The Fifth Army in Bangladesh’, Uban narrated an incident in which Fazlul Huq Moni, the nephew of Sheikh Mujib, and other Awami student leaders angrily protested against giving military training to the Bangladeshi youths not belonging to the Awami League. They were very apprehensive about the possibility of increasing the strength of anti-Indian political forces in Bangladesh. According to Uban, he assured the young guns that India would not support the leftists. It is evident from the narrations of Khandaker and Uban that the Bangladesh government-in-exile wanted to monopolize the liberation movement for petty party interest.

Major Jalil, the sector commander, is also scathing in his condemnation of political leaders belonging to the Awami League for their inaction and opportunistic attitude from the early stages of the liberation war. He writes indignantly about his first experience with the cabinet of the government-in-exile at Calcutta:

“On my release from the dungeon of British-built Fort William, I went to meet Tajuddin Ahmed.

“I was not only surprised, but also felt so devastated that I wished the earth to split open when I found Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed was busy merrily playing cards with his cabinet members with the exception of

Khandaker Mushtaque in a two-storied house at Calcutta's Baliganj residential area. They were enjoying life after leaving behind the innocent and peace-loving fellow countrymen to face the ferocious enemy. Although the earth did not split, I completely lost confidence and respect for Awami League leaders since that day." (Jalil, 1995: 38)

While the Bangladeshi government-in-exile was busy raising the numbers of Mukti Bahini with the assistance of India, the Pakistani authorities also ordered district administrations in East Pakistan to recruit and train *Razakars* to augment West Pakistani forces. Most of the members of this paramilitary force were unemployed and poor young men from rural areas. Jamaat-e-Islami and the splinter groups of the Muslim League assisted the administration in the recruitment process. By August, the manpower of *Razakar* rose to fifty thousand. However, they were no match for Mukti Bahini in respect of training, weapons or morale. Later, two more groups, under the names of *Al-Shams* and *Al-Badr*, were raised mainly from the dedicated party workers of Jamaat-e-Islami and other pro-Pakistan parties. They are generally blamed for some of the worst atrocities that was committed at the end of the war. Other than creating controversies and some division among the Bengali population, the raising of paramilitary forces served no military purpose for the Pakistani forces. On the contrary, they became a liability on the battlefield. Both military and political leaderships were clueless when it came to finding a suitable strategy to face armed resistance from freedom fighters and the intense hatred of nearly the entire population of East Pakistan:

"While Pakistani decision-making before the military crackdown of 25 March was unsystematic in design and insensitive to consequences, it subsequently became more ad hoc in structure, minimalist in terms of political reform, and dependent upon external events with respect to timing. Just as the military did not develop a strategy for dealing with contingencies in constitutional negotiations, neither did it develop a plan for the restoration of order after the military action. Movement toward a political settlement was intermittent, ambiguous in intent, and grudging. Policy was driven by an obsession with what India would or would not do and how political reforms, short of an accommodation with the Awami League, could be used to deprive India of justification for intervention. As in the negotiations for a constitutional consensus, the policy of the military decision makers was passive and reactive rather than active and assertive." (Sisson and Rose, 1990: 278)

The Mukti Bahini effectively stepped up their operations inside East Pakistan from September. The new batch of freedom fighters were better

trained and more motivated. Near the border they had the support of Indian artillery. But, deep inside the country, Mukti Bahini were fighting their battles independently under the leadership of Bengali commanders. There was a marked improvement in the methods of their guerrilla operation. Ambushes by freedom fighters were taking a heavy toll on Pakistani forces. The losses of the occupying army actually started mounting from July and at one stage they stopped returning dead bodies to the families in West Pakistan for fear of alienating public opinion there:

“As to the dead, we flew them to West Pakistan initially, but when by July and August their numbers began to soar, we stopped sending them to their relatives for fear of ‘creating an unnecessary scare’. When the attention of the visiting Chief of General Staff was drawn to this unpopular decision, he is reported to have callously remarked, ‘The dead are useless in the West as in the East.’” (Salik, 1997: 106)

The atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army had by then succeeded in transforming generally peace-loving Bengali Muslims into a martial race.

On 19 July, UN Secretary General, U Thant, sent a memorandum to the Security Council. The long history of India–Pakistan hostility was clearly in the mind of the Secretary General in drafting the document. On the situation in East Pakistan, he wrote:

“These human tragedies have consequences in a far wider sphere. Violent emotions aroused could have repercussions on the relation of religious and ethnic groups in the subcontinent as a whole and relationship of the Government of India and Pakistan is also a major component of the problem. Conflict between the principles of the territorial integrity of states and of self-determination has often before in history given rise to fratricidal strife and has provoked in recent years highly emotional reactions in the international community. In the present case, there is an additional element of danger, for the crisis is unfolding in the context of long-standing and unresolved differences between India and Pakistan, differences which gave rise to open warfare only six years ago.”

U Thant was prescient here in cautioning of the possibility of a wider armed conflict between India and Pakistan over the issue of East Pakistan.

As the war situation deteriorated, a frustrated Yahya suddenly decided to recall Tikka Khan to Rawalpindi in early September. The general returned to West Pakistan with the unsavoury title of ‘Butcher of Bengal’. By the time Tikka was withdrawn, a united Pakistan was already a lost cause. Dr. A.M. Malek, a dentist by profession and relatively unknown as

a politician, was appointed Governor of East Pakistan in place of Tikka on 3 September. The post was initially offered to Nurul Amin, a veteran politician who is generally blamed for the killing of the language martyrs in 1952 when Chief Minister of East Bengal. However, Nurul Amin declined Yahya's offer. Pakistan's beleaguered president was probably trying to do some window-dressing by installing a so-called civilian government. But the selection of controversial politicians who were despised by the Bengalis indicates that the West Pakistani leadership had learned nothing from their repeated mistakes.

A general amnesty was announced on 4 September in the vain hope of luring back members of the Mukti Bahini from India. It was too late an offer to have any impact on the progress of the liberation war. The government's next futile move was to order farcical by-elections to fill seventy-eight Awami League seats which had been declared vacant as a punitive measure after the March crackdown. Jamaat-e-Islami, the Council Muslim League, the Convention Muslim League, Nizam-e-Islam and the Pakistan Democratic Party, all collaborators with the Pakistani regime with hardly any popular following, submitted candidates. Even Bhutto wanted his share of the free pie. His desire was to get a few seats for the PPP in East Pakistan so that he could make a hollow claim that his party had, after all, attained a national character. In the 1970 election, both the Awami League and the PPP had polled so few votes in the few seats that they had contested outside their own provinces that the contestants even lost their security deposits. Bhutto wanted to improve his standing by taking advantage of the situation. In the case of the by-elections, it was a shameless hoax. In the end, General Rao Farman distributed the seats to political clowns in consultation with Yahya. Neither the people of Bangladesh nor the international community attached any importance to this drama. On the ground, people were getting more alienated from Pakistan with each passing day.

By October, Pakistan was clearly losing the war both on the battlefield and in respect of world opinion. President Nixon and the Chinese government, Pakistan's two closest friends, advised Yahya in September to find a political solution to the crisis. Yahya got the message and was frantically looking for an opportunity, even at the cost of agreeing to dismember Pakistan, to extricate himself and the Pakistani Army from the quagmire in East Pakistan. G.W. Choudhury narrates his 6 September interview with Yahya:

“The following was the substance of my interview with Yahya on 6 September. There could be no military solution to the crisis. Mujib must be released, and talks must begin with him and his exile government in

Calcutta. The Americans, with his knowledge and approval, had already started talks with the exile government, and the Americans were also being given facilities to negotiate with Mujib through his lawyer, A.K. Brohi. When I asked what would be the basis of the political settlement, he told me that he was not sure yet of its final shape or outcome. All that interested him was to keep the green and white crescent flag intact if possible, but if seventy-five million Bengalis would not have it, "let there be two Muslim states in the subcontinent" – he made this comment with great anguish." (Choudhury, 1994: 197)

It was too late for Yahya to achieve his wish for a face-saving retreat from East Pakistan. Naively, he was expecting to negotiate with Mujib, interned in Pakistani jail, when Mujib neither had communication with nor control over the government-in-exile. Indira Gandhi correctly assessed the military and political weakness of the historical enemy and was preparing to go for Pakistan's 'jugular'. By the time Yahya was literally begging President Nixon to come to his rescue, the army's own count reckoned that they had lost two hundred and thirty-seven officers, one hundred and thirty-six junior commissioned officers and three thousand, five hundred and fifty-nine soldiers in the fight against the Bangladeshi liberation forces. Throughout Pakistan's eastern command morale was low. They were falling back from the border areas as the combined pressure of the Mukti Bahini and the Indian Army was too much to bear. The Pakistani army actually lost the war long before 3 December, the date of the official declaration of war between the two hostile neighbours.

The Indian Army had intensified artillery shelling across the border from September onwards which had enabled Mukti Bahini to liberate some of the territories of Bangladesh adjacent to the border. It was a gradual process. In the interior, the guerrillas also increased both the frequency and the ferocity of their operations. Even the capital was not safe from guerrilla attacks. Monem Khan, the much-hated former Governor of Ayub, was assassinated in his own residence in the heart of the capital by the members of the Mukti Bahini. They even succeeded in exploding a bomb amidst high security inside the Hotel Inter-Continental, the only five-star hotel in Dhaka. Instead of taking the necessary steps to improve the overall preparedness of the army to face the inevitable war against India, Yahya and Niazi continued their fruitless attempts to bluff the nation and the world:

"Yet the President of Pakistan, in his radio broadcast on 12 October, gave this commitment to the nation, 'Your valiant armed forces are fully prepared to defend and protect every inch of the sacred soil of Pakistan.' By

then, about 3,000 square miles of border bulges had already gone under Indian control.

“General Niazi considered it his duty to back the President’s announcement with exaggerated claims of victory. He declared several times that if war broke out, he would take the battle to Indian territory. In his loud fantasies, his attack sallied, at one time, towards Calcutta and, at another, towards Assam. When I requested him, as his P.R. man, not to raise unattainable hopes, he said, ‘Don’t you know that bluff and trickery are the evil geniuses of war?’” (Salik, 1997: 116)

The month of October was significant in respect of the status of independent Bangladesh vis-à-vis Indian domination. As the overall ground situation, gradually but inevitably advanced towards a fully-fledged India–Pakistan war, India arm-twisted the government-in-exile of Bangladesh to sign a seven-point agreement in October severely compromising the sovereignty of a future independent Bangladesh. Insiders claim said that Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam fainted in agony after putting his signature to the agreement. Oli Ahad gives details of the agreement in his memoir:

“Bangladesh Government-in-Exile signed a seven-point secret agreement with India in October on the subjects of administration, military, trading, foreign affairs and defence. The agreement was as follows:

1. Administrative – Only freedom fighters would be appointed in the administrative service. Vacant posts will be filled by Indian officers.
2. Military – Necessary contingent of Indian forces will remain in Bangladesh after independence. From November 1972 onward, there will be annual review meeting to decide on the issue.
3. Bangladesh Army – Bangladesh will not develop any armed forces. A paramilitary force will be formed from the freedom fighters to control domestic law and order.
4. Indo-Pak War – Indian Army Chief will be given supreme command in the possible Indo-Pak war. Bangladesh Liberation Forces will be under the command of Indian Chief.
5. Trade and Commerce – Bilateral trade will be conducted on open market basis. However, trade account will be settled annually in UK currency.
6. Foreign Affairs – Regarding maintenance of bilateral relations with other countries, Bangladesh Foreign Ministry would maintain close contact with Indian Foreign Ministry and India will give assistance to Bangladesh as much as possible.
7. Defence – India will be in charge of Bangladesh defence.” (Ahad, 2004: 433)

India apparently desired to establish absolute hegemony over Bangladesh by forcing the government-in-exile to sign the humiliating treaty before committing their troops to a decisive war against Pakistan. However, Muyeedul Hasan, personal secretary to Tajuddin Ahmed in India, claims in his book, '*Muldhara: 71*', that although the signing of such a treaty was considered, it had not been concluded fearing a negative reaction from the international community. Both the Bangladeshi and Indian governments have remained tight-lipped about the controversy.

In November, the Indian military command ordered their troops to enter ten miles into East Pakistan to neutralize the effect of the Pakistani artillery and improve their offensive position. India was so confident about her diplomatic success and Pakistan's complete isolation that they were not at all concerned about any criticism from the international community for their crossing of the border without a formal declaration of war. This doctrine of undeclared offensive military action against a neighbouring country is clearly in violation of customary international law. By the end of the month, the Indians had captured part of Jessore, Dinajpur, Sylhet and Akhaura. However, dogged defence at Hilli, Kamalpur, Teliakhali and Khalai by the Pakistanis in the early part of the undeclared war taught the Indians useful lessons leading to a more pragmatic strategy of bypassing fortified positions. The Mukti Bahini efficiently guided the Indian Army to take alternative routes. This strategy of bypassing fortified positions would prove to be critical in December in forcing Niazi to surrender with ninety-three thousand Pakistani Army after only thirteen days of declared war. On 22 November, Yahya made a desperate appeal to the UN Secretary General complaining against 'unprovoked and largescale attacks' by India. With an army, reluctant to fight in the eastern wing, Pakistan's survival now depended solely on the support of the big powers. On 23 November, Yahya proclaimed a state of emergency in Pakistan. India did the same twenty-four hours later.

As full-scale war was just a few days away, the Pakistani Army was still hoping for an intervention from old and trusted friend China, which was little more than a fatansy. They failed to realize that the Indo-Soviet treaty signed earlier in August practically forestalled any such possibility. In case of a third country joining the war, India could have invoked Articles 5 and 9 of the Treaty, thereby bringing Soviet military might in on her side. It was not possible for China to mobilize forces along the fronts of both India and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Nixon and Kissinger were not in a position to materially help Pakistan in the face of strong opposition from Congress. In fact, Nixon had to stop all military assistance

to Pakistan as soon as hostilities began in East Pakistan. As a result, the perceived US deterrent against war in the subcontinent was long gone. International developments by the end of November forced Pakistan to fight its war alone. A UN proposal to post observers on both sides of the East Pakistan border was also summarily rejected by India. Under the prevailing situation, Pakistan had no option left other than to convert a proxy war to one that was fully fledged and declared. The greatest success of Indira Gandhi was, therefore, to impose the timing of the war on Pakistan exactly as her military commanders had planned. Pakistan in 1971 was no match for either the political guile of Indira Gandhi nor Indian military might.

Pakistan commenced hostilities on the western front on 3 December by carrying out pre-emptive strikes on the airfields of Pathankot, Jodhpur, Ambala, Agra and Srinagar. President Yahya formally declared war on India, with Pakistani ground forces commencing their offensive along the western front. Yahya expected swift advances in the western sector similar to the 1965 war, easing pressure on East Pakistan. But it was a different war this time, fought by mostly hesitant commanders and demoralized troops. An initial success at Akhnur was halted by a better prepared Indian Army and in the counter attack in Sind sector, the Indians were able to capture large chunks of Pakistani land. According to Herbert Feldman, the war on the western front ended with “India holding some five thousand square miles of Pakistan’s territory with 540 prisoners captured, while Pakistan held about 100 square miles of Indian territory (mainly in Kashmir) and 617 prisoners”. Statistics on Pakistani POWs given by Feldman excludes ninety-three thousand members of the army that surrendered in East Pakistan. Yahya’s strategy of diverting Indian Army from East Pakistan clearly failed. The long-held strategic concept that ‘the defence of East Pakistan lies in the West’ fell flat on its face with the defeat of the Pakistani army on the western front.

East Pakistan is surrounded on three sides by India with only a small land opening on its border with Burma. The Bay of Bengal on the fourth side was successfully blocked by the Indian Navy long before the declaration of war. So, the Pakistani army based in East Pakistan was completely cut off from West Pakistan by nearly one thousand, six hundred kilometres of Indian land. They had to rely on whatever military strength they possessed before 3 December to face the joint forces of India and the Bangladesh liberation army. During the first three days of the war General Niazi maintained his self-defeating buoyant mood with the expectation that the Pakistani Army on the western border would be able to penetrate deep into Indian territory and even occupy a few strategic

towns. According to Siddiq Salik, Niazi lost all hope of a breakthrough by 6 December. His own war was in the meantime in a complete mess. A skeleton air force and navy were devastated within a couple of days. Without air cover, Pakistani ground forces were like sitting ducks. Jessore was surrounded from all sides by Indian 9 Infantry Division on 6 December eventually falling on the next day. Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, and Sreemangal all fell to the advancing Indian Army by 6 December. The 57 Mountain Division reached the other side of Meghna river on 5 December. Ashuganj was taken virtually without a fight. The panic-stricken Pakistani Army was in full retreat towards the illusory safety of Dhaka. There were very few pockets of resistance. The strategy of Indian Army was to bypass those pockets to continue their blitzkrieg, aiming to capture Dhaka within the quickest possible time. The target timeframe was twelve to fifteen days. Bhutan recognized the independence of Bangladesh on 6 December followed by India. General Niazi privately conceded defeat only on the fourth day of the war in his official briefing to Governor M.A. Malek. With all his bravado evaporated, the much-decorated general broke down and cried like a baby in the course of the meeting at Governor House:

“General Niazi’s meeting with Governor Malik on the evening of 7 December was a very discomfoting experience for him. Officially and publicly Niazi had maintained a posture which was not supported by the facts. Should he admit his set-backs to a civilian Governor as early as the fourth day of all-out war? Or, should he keep up a façade of defiance and fortitude? If he chose the latter course, how long would he be able to fool the Governor, the Government and the public?”

“Governor Malik, General Niazi and two other senior officers sat in a comfortable room at Governor House. They did not talk much. Every few minutes, silence overtook the conversation. The Governor did most of the talking and that, too, in general terms. The crux of his discourse was: things never remain the same. Good situations give way to bad situations and vice versa. Similarly, there are fluctuations in the career of a General. At one time, glory magnifies him while at another defeat demolishes his dignity. As Dr. Malik uttered the last part of his statement, the burly figure of General Niazi quaked and he broke into tears. He hid his face in his hands and started sobbing like a child.” (Salik, 1997: 193–194)

At the end of the meeting, it was decided that the Governor would send a cable to the President to arrange for ceasefire. Dr. Malik send the following cable to the President almost immediately:

“7 Dec

Flash

Governor A M Malik to President A-6905 DTG 07...

“It is imperative that correct situation in East Pakistan is brought to your notice (.) I discussed with General Niazi who tells me that troops are fighting heroically but against hy odds w/o adequate armour and air sp (.) rebels cutting their rear and losses in equipment and men are heavy and cannot be replaced (.) The front in Eastern and Western sectors has collapsed (.) loss of whole corridor east of Meghna river cannot be avoided (.) Jessore has already fallen which will be a terrible blow to the morale of the pro-Pakistan elms (.) civil admin ineffective (.) food and other sups running out (.) Dacca city will be w/o food in 7 days (.) thousands of pro-Pakistan elm being butchered (.) million of non-Bengalis await death (.) No amount of lip service except physical intervention by world power will help (.) If any country is expected to help it should be within 18 hours (.) If no help is expected I beseech you to negotiate so that a civilized and peaceful transfer of power takes place and millions of lives saved (.)” (Matinuddin, 1994: Appendix)

But Yahya unnecessarily stalled for time and avoided giving any clear instruction either to Governor Malik or his military commanders. He was probably still expecting meaningful help from China and the USA. General Niazi would not receive clear authorization from Yahya to commence negotiation for a ceasefire until 14 December. By that time the dream of military support of ‘yellow from the north and white from the south’ was completely shattered. As Richard Sission and Leo E. Rose write: “A sense of buoyancy continued until it was learned that neither the Chinese nor the American Consulate knew anything about forthcoming assistance and that no wireless frequencies had been given for the purpose of contacting those whom the message implied were coming to the rescue.” India, by now victorious, was not considering a ceasefire but expecting the unconditional surrender of Niazi. Indira Gandhi herself wanted to solve the Pakistan problem once and for all. According to Junaid Ahmad, the Indian Prime Minister gave two speeches on 31 November and after the fall of Dhaka which together reflect India’s historic mindset in the clearest of terms. Junaid Ahmad in his ‘Creation of Bangladesh: myths exploded’ quotes from the speeches of Indira Gandhi:

- “1. India has never reconciled with the existence of Pakistan...Indian leaders have always believed that Pakistan should not have been created and that Pakistani nation has no right to exist. (November 31, 1971) (2016: 97)

2. We have taken the revenge of a thousand years and we have drowned the two-nation theory in the Bay of Bengal. (After the fall of Dhaka) (2016: 114)

A terrified Dr. Malik resigned from the post of Governor on 14 December under relentless air attacks on his official residence from Indian MiGs. He then hastily left Governor House and took refuge with his family at the Inter-Continental Hotel. Surprisingly, even in that final hour of ignominious defeat, the wicked mind of Pakistan's murderous army was hatching a plot for another massacre. This time, the target was Bengali intellectuals. It is widely believed that General Rao Farman sent his hand-picked 'death-squad', consisting of *Al-Shams* and *Al-Badr* members along with the army commandos, on the eve of surrender to commit this final atrocity:

"The death-squad style killing of pro-liberation intellectuals and professionals in the dying hours of the war remains one of the grossest atrocities of the 1971 conflict. Many questions about it, including how many were killed in this manner, who exactly organized it and why, remain shrouded in mystery. There appears to have been no official inquiry in Bangladesh about the killings. But a comparison of Dr. Aleem Choudhury's case with the reminiscences of the families and friends of many other similar victims, and an account given by the only known survivor of the Rayerbazar's killings, yield some consistent information.

"All of the victims seem to have been picked up from their homes in the second week of December, the vast majority on 14–15 December, by groups of armed Bengali youths described by the victims' families as *Al-Badr*, and taken away in a micro-bus. Many of their bodies were found three or four days later at the Rayerbazar brick-kiln. The bodies had blindfolds and hands tied behind the backs. Some bodies were never found or identified.

"It is widely believed in Bangladesh that the architect of the December killings of Bengali intellectuals supporting the liberation movement was Major General Farman Ali of the Pakistan Army. This is primarily because a list of names of intellectuals allegedly written by Major General Farman Ali was found by Bangladeshis after the war." (Bose, 2011: 152–153)

After receiving the go ahead signal from Yahya to commence negotiation for a 'ceasefire' with India, Niazi immediately rushed to the US embassy with a request for mediation. Consul General Herbert Spivack flatly spurned Niazi's request and agreed only to forward his message to Washington. The message on a ceasefire contained three basic requests:

i) the safety of Pakistani armed forces and paramilitaries; ii) the protection of Biharis; and iii) safety and medical care for the wounded. The proposal from the Pakistani side was transmitted to the Indian Army Chief via Washington and Delhi. He replied that the three requests from the Pakistani side were acceptable only in return for the unconditional surrender of Niazi and his forces. It was checkmate for Niazi. Major General Jacob was asked by General Manekshaw to fly to Dhaka with a 'surrender instrument'. He was received at Dhaka airport by the Chief of Staff of the Pakistani Eastern Command, Brig Baqar Siddiqui around midday on 16 December. Niazi was still living under the illusion that he might be in a position to negotiate the 'ceasefire agreement' which Jacob was bringing. Let me now quote a relevant first-hand account of Jacob on the day's event:

"I returned to Niazi's office and Col Khara read out the terms of surrender. There was dead silence in the room, as tears streamed down Niazi's cheeks. The others in the room became fidgety. They had expected the document to be on the lines of the proposals they had handed over on 14 December to Spivack, which envisioned a ceasefire and evacuation under arrangements of the UN. Farman Ali objected to surrendering to the Indian and Bangladesh forces. Niazi said that what I was asking him to sign was unconditional surrender. (2004: 142) ... I once again reiterated that as we had informed him earlier, through radio broadcasts and in our teleconversations that they would be treated as soldiers with due dignity and the Geneva Convention would be strictly honoured." (Jacob, 2004: 143)

The next important event of the day was the arrival of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, the victorious Commander of the Indian Eastern Command. General Niazi personally received Aurora and his wife at the airport. Siddiq Salik writes with a tinge of remorse regarding the short ceremony there:

"A sizeable crowd of Bengalis rushed forward to garland their 'liberator' and his wife. Niazi gave him a military salute and shook hands. It was a touching sight. The victor and the vanquished stood in full view of the Bengalis, who made no secret of their extreme sentiments of love and hatred for Aurora and Niazi respectively." (Salik, 1997: 211)

From the airport, Niazi and Aurora drove directly to Racecourse, the selected site for the surrender ceremony of the ninety-three thousand Pakistani troops. This was the death throes of a united Pakistan. I feel it is most pertinent to quote at this point from the first-hand account of the person who officially represented the Bangladeshi government at

Pakistan's surrender to the joint command of India and Bangladeshi Liberation Forces. Deputy Chief of Staff of Bangladesh forces, Wing Commander A.K. Khandaker was the representative of Bangladesh in the mysterious absence of his Chief, General Osmani. Major Haider was the other sector commander present. It is not clear what his official capacity was at Ramna Racecourse. Eminent freedom fighter Kader Siddiqui was also there on his personal initiative. However, no signature from the Bangladeshi representative was felt necessary by the Indian command on this occasion. We also do not know whether Bangladesh government-in-exile was even consulted in the drafting of the surrender instrument. It remains a mystery forever why Bangladesh was not properly represented in its final moment of triumph!

"We landed in a helicopter at Tejgaon airport at late evening. At the time of landing we could see thousands of people were waiting beside the road. General Niazi, General Jacob and few others Pakistani and Joint forces officers welcomed us at the airport. After that we drove in jeeps towards Ramna Racecourse. I drove with General Aurora in his jeep at Racecourse. On the way, we found relieved and delighted people with smiles on their faces. There was a big crowd around Ramna. At such a situation, we had to push through the crowd to reach the ascertained place. The ceremony was simple and quickly concluded. There were only couple of chairs and a table. General Niazi and General Aurora sat on the chairs. Surrender ceremony was not very well arranged.

"It was difficult for the guests to properly stand because of crowd ... Instrument for surrender was brought. General Niazi, General Officer Commanding of Eastern Command of Pakistan signed first in the document followed by Lieutenant General Aurora, General Officer Commanding of Eastern Command of India. Aurora gave the pen to Niazi for signature. Initially the pen was not functioning properly. Aurora shook it for some times and gave it to Niazi again. This time the pen did not disturb. On completion of signing they stood up. Thereafter, as per the convention of surrender, General Niazi very depressingly handed over his revolver to Aurora in a trembling hand. After that members of Mukti Bahini and Indian Army escorted Pakistani officers and soldiers to the cantonment ...

"We returned to airport on completion of surrender ceremony. Then we flew back to Calcutta via Agartala. It was late at night when we reached Calcutta. I felt so relieved. At the end of nine months long war I felt at that moment, war has ended, we have got an independent country, people of the country will now live in peace, they will achieve economic freedom." (Khandaker, 2014: 210–211)

Just one day before Niazi's surrender, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto surprisingly torpedoed the last chance for a face-saving withdrawal of the beleaguered Pakistani forces from Dhaka by rejecting a Polish proposal at the United Nations. Whether it was a deliberate act to complete the humiliation of arrogant armed forces of Pakistan, or sheer madness on the part of the head of the Pakistani delegation at UN remains unanswered:

“For the Government of India the most controversial and potentially embarrassing of the resolutions presented to the Security Council was that submitted by Poland, since it was the only resolution that had a high probability of adoption. The Polish resolution, like the earlier Soviet resolutions, called for the transfer of power in East Pakistan to the representatives elected in December 1970 – that is, Awami League – and this was, of course, the Indian policy as well. But unlike the Soviet resolutions, the Polish proposal also called for an immediate ceasefire and troop withdrawals by both sides, as well as the renunciation of claims to any territories acquired by force during the war. These provisions aroused considerable distress in New Delhi.

“A ceasefire and immediate mutual withdrawal before the capture of Dhaka, as specified in the Polish resolution, would have deprived India of the clear military victory in East Pakistan symbolized by the surrender of the Pakistani armed forces on that front. But even more important, a quick withdrawal of its forces would have vastly complicated India's capacity to assist the Awami League in establishing a stable and moderate regime in Bangladesh once both the Indian and Pakistani forces were withdrawn and the conglomeration of Bangladeshi resistance groups commenced their own civil war for control of the new country under circumstances that would have been difficult for India to influence. New Delhi also disliked the “renunciation of occupied territory” clause in the Polish resolution, which would have obliged India to once again restore the strategic points on the Pakistani side of the ceasefire line in Kashmir that had been seized at some cost.

“India did not doubt that the Polish resolution was really Soviet in origin, and New Delhi reluctantly conceded that it would have no option but to accept a Security Council Resolution that was approved unanimously, which the Polish resolution would have been. Fortunately for New Delhi, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the head of the Pakistani delegation to the United Nations, came to its rescue. In the Security Council proceedings on 15 December, Bhutto denounced the failure of the United Nations to act promptly, tore up a copy of the Polish resolution, and stormed out of the session, halting all consideration of the subject. Two days later Dhaka fell, the Pakistani army in the east surrendered, and the war was over.” (Sission and Rose, 1990: 219–220)

General Yahya was supposed to address the nation on 17 December, but his speech remained undelivered after the annihilation and surrender of the Pakistani Army in Bangladesh. In the draft of the speech, there were a number of offers for the people of the now non-existent East Pakistan (Bangladesh was already born), including a ridiculous declaration of Dhaka as one of the two capitals (the other being Islamabad) of Pakistan and making Dhaka the principal seat of parliament! After Pakistan's surrender, Yahya remained under virtual house arrest until his transfer of power to Bhutto on 20 December. Bhutto ascended to power over the corpse of a united Pakistan and the shattered prestige of their army. Indira Gandhi declared a unilateral ceasefire on the western front immediately after the fall of Dhaka. Her mission was accomplished:

“From 18 to 20 December the country was virtually without a government and Yahya Khan was more or less a prisoner; his coterie of political generals had been rendered impotent and the only person exercising authority was Gul Hasan whose orders were being obeyed. On his arrival at Rawalpindi, Mr. Bhutto was met by Gul Hasan and Rahim Khan and, with them, went straight to the President's House where he took over office from Yahya Khan.” (Feldman, 1975: 189)

Incidentally, there was also a similar administrative void in the newly liberated country of Bangladesh. The government-in-exile returned about a week later on 22 December from India. The delay is said to have been caused by security concerns in Dhaka. The Indian Army remained as the de facto ruler until the return of prime minister Tajuddin Ahmed and his cabinet.

The day of 16 December 1971 is the most glorious in the history of post-1947 India as the dream of Nehru and Patel to divide Pakistan was fulfilled. This sentiment would be echoed by Jawaharlal's grandson, Rahul Gandhi, when he declared in 2007 during an election rally: “You know, when our (Nehru) family commits to a task, it also completes it. In the past too, members of the Gandhi family have achieved the goals they have initiated like the freedom of country, dividing Pakistan in two, and leading the nation into the 21st century.”

I will conclude this chapter by quoting a significant part from the letter of President Nixon, written to Indira Gandhi two days after the fall of Dhaka. The content of the letter confirms the widely-held opinion that there was serious strain in the bilateral relationship between the two countries in 1971 over Pakistan:

“When we met in Washington you were assured of our intention to continue to carry the main financial burden for care of the refugees. You were informed of the Government of Pakistan’s willingness to take the first step of military disengagement if it could be assured that India reciprocate subsequently. You were also informed of various ways which could be used to get talks started between the Government of Pakistan and Bangladesh representatives. We asked your ambassador to work out with us a specific timetable for political evaluation. You said India wanted a peaceful solution. We accept that statement at face value.

“We never made any claims that our proposals met India’s position fully. There were proposals which could have started the process of negotiations. I had thought that this was one of those times when statesmanship could turn the course away from the history of war.

“If there is a strain in our relations, and there is, it is because your government spurned those proposals and, without any warning whatever chose war instead. The subsequent disregard by your government of repeated calls by the United Nations for ceasefire and withdrawal—adopted by overwhelming majorities—confirms this judgement.” (India–Bangladesh Relations: Documents—1971–2002, Volume V, Avtar Singh Bhasin, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, 2003)

An unusually tough diplomatic letter, indeed!

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CHAPTER SIX

INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH: MUJIB'S DILEMMA AND AUTOCRACY

Ramna Racecourse, three o'clock in the afternoon, 10 January 1972. An eighteen-year-old youth had been sitting on the grass since morning with his thirty-year-old cousin among possibly over a million, slogan-chanting, weeping, emotionally charged and celebrating people. They were all waiting for the return of the prodigal son. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Messiah of Bengali nation was returning from captivity to his victorious people who had fought a bitter, nine-month-long liberation war in his name while he remained captive in Pakistan. That eighteen-year-old youth is presently the author of this book and it was his first experience of attending a political rally. Suddenly everybody present at the ground on that momentous day leapt on their feet, simultaneously sobbing and cheering wildly like children.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had just climbed to the podium surrounded by other jubilant Awami League leaders. I looked around with the curiosity of a youth and saw tears in the eyes of everyone around me. I had left my maternal grandfather at home that morning; he was fasting on that day and had been on the prayer-mat praying to Allah for the safe return of the great leader. Mere mention of his name was enough to make any Bengali emotionally charged during the whole period of the liberation war. The war itself was fought in his name. Soon, the expected baritone voice touched the heart of the million present at Racecourse. Many more were glued to radios and television sets to listen to the live broadcast of another historic speech from probably the greatest 20th century Bengali public orator. The same person had addressed a similar sea of people at the same ground ten months before on, 7 March 1971. He had then been demanding state power from the Pakistani military junta as the leader of the winning party in the parliamentary election held on 6 December 1970. Now he was the undisputed leader of a newly born country, Bangladesh, with all the powers bestowed on him by more adoring citizens than any politician in any country could ever have wished. The time had come for him to deliver

and to meet the expectations that he himself had raised in the course of a long political movement against the Pakistani regime:

“His unbridled joy came through in his speech, as did a sense of fulfilment of the mission to which he had dedicated his life. I remember several topics of importance that he dealt with in his speech. The first was a tribute to all those who had lost their lives and had made untold sacrifices for an independent Bangladesh; secondly, he expressed his gratitude to all the states and peoples who had supported the liberation struggle. He appealed to all states to recognize the sovereign state of Bangladesh. This was followed by the statement which was a clear response to Bhutto’s request to retain some link. Bangabandhu categorically stated that, after what had happened during the last nine months – the onslaught, the untold suffering inflicted on our people, and the devastation wrought upon our land – the only basis on which relations could be established with Pakistan was as between two sovereign states. He said that he wished the people of Pakistan well, thus clearly distinguishing the common people from the oligarchs who were responsible for the crimes against humanity. He then said that enough blood had been spilt on the soil of Bangladesh and he wished to see an end to bloodshed.” (Hossain, 2013: 121–122)

We all returned home that evening misty-eyed, dreaming and full of hope. Our great leader was alive and he would lead the nation to prosperity and peace.

The first administrative act of the messiah was to change the type of the government. As per the Proclamation of Independence, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the President of Bangladesh. But now the supreme leader opted for a Westminster-style parliamentary system in which he wanted to become the first Prime Minister in post-independence Bangladesh, replacing Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister of the government-in-exile. Accordingly, a presidential order was promulgated on 11 January 1972. Barrister, Moudud Ahmed, the former Vice-President of Bangladesh and a senior leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) writes in his book ‘Bangladesh, Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’:

“However, in order to accomplish this process of changing from the presidential into a parliamentary one, Mujib as the President first appointed Justice A.S.M. Sayem as the Chief Justice under the Provisional Constitution Order and administered an oath to him in the morning of January 12, 1972 and then he himself resigned. On his resignation under section 8 of the Provisional Order the cabinet appointed Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury as the President who in turn was administered oath by the newly appointed Chief Justice. Thereafter Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and others of the government resigned and the President

commissioned Mujib under section 7 of the Provisional Order as the Prime Minister.” (Ahmed, 2015: 9)

Three years later in January 1975, Mujib would again become the President with the much-hated fourth amendment to the Constitution in the senseless pursuit of establishing a single-party autocracy in Bangladesh.

The next action of great significance, not only for Sheikh Mujib, but also for the shaping of the bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh was the signing on 19 March 1972, during a visit to Dhaka by Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, of the highly controversial India-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace, designed to last for twenty-five years. Until that point, Mujib could do no wrong in the eyes of the people of Bangladesh. As Colonel Faruk, the Chief architect of the bloody coup that toppled the single-party BAKSAL regime commented in an interview with Anthony Mascarenhas: “If he had asked us to eat grass or to dig the earth with our bare hands we would have done for him.” It was not only Colonel Faruk, but every single citizen of Bangladesh who remained steadfast in a willingness to make every sacrifice at the call of their beloved leader. But the signing of the Friendship Treaty with India was the beginning of suspicion and mistrust. The preamble of the treaty began with the sentence: ‘Inspired by common ideal of peace, secularism, democracy, socialism and nationalism.’

This represents a significant shift away from the Proclamation of Independence in which the emphasis had been on equality, human dignity and social justice. During the entire period of the liberation war, the issue of religion had never been raised. The inclusion of secularism and socialism in the preamble of the treaty has a strong flavour of the Indian Constitution, the preamble of which begins with: ‘We, the people of India have solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic.’ The question that pricked everybody’s mind was whether the Bengali Muslim identity that had developed over nearly a millennium had been changed by the creation of an independent Bangladesh? By embracing Bengali nationalism, do we need to shed our Islamic culture and heritage?

Bengali Muslims had always been suspicious of the motives of Indian Hindu leaders which led them to vote en masse in favour of creating a Muslim homeland, Pakistan, in 1946. Religion is an important part of the daily life of most Bengali Muslims. The language movement of 1952 had given rise to Bengali nationalism which had remained stronger than either Pakistani nationalism or Muslim identity up to the point of the independence of Bangladesh. During that period, Calcutta was considered holier than even Mecca to a considerable section of the Muslim middle

class and intelligentsia who love to call themselves secular. However, signing of the 25-year treaty with India suddenly gave the majority Muslim population of Bangladesh a jolt, almost a reawakening of the Islamic faith. Were they, now a vassal of India? Overenthusiasm on the part of Awami League leaders and their patrons in India quickly confirmed the popular perception that the Awami League was in fact anti-Islam:

“Presently it would suffice to say that some confusion was really created. That confusion encompassed issues related to consequence of division of Pakistan, national identity of Bangladesh, secularism etc. As a result, some even got the impression that calling themselves ‘Muslims’ or their country ‘Muslim state’ would antagonize the Hindu population in general and the Indian Government in particular. Young Awami leaders of freedom struggle did not possess the necessary political spirit or experience to realize that their thought process was not correct. Objection by an overenthusiastic ‘secular’ officer at the positive comment of Indian Defence Minister, Jagjiban Ram in praise of Bangladesh as a ‘Muslim country’ was the result of this inferiority complex. Owing to this complex, recitation from Holy Quran, use of Islamic greetings like Assalamu Alaikum and Khuda Hafiz was stopped in our radio and television and was replaced by Bengali *Shuprabhat* (Good morning), *Shuvo Shandya* (Good evening) and *Shuvo Ratri* (Good night). People of Bangladesh were shocked to find the new character of our Independence.” (Ahmed, 2015: 604).

Having been an active young worker in the Pakistan movement, Mujib faced a serious dilemma on his return to Bangladesh. Although he was not as overenthusiastic as some of his ‘indoctrinated secular’ colleagues in rejecting Muslim identity altogether, the India factor greatly limited his room for manoeuvre. It is widely believed that Mujib was rather forced to sign the 25-year friendship treaty to get rid of the more humiliating secret seven-point deal that the government-in-exile had had to agree as a price for Indian military support during the war of independence. Unaware of this fact while in captivity in Pakistan, he even gave tacit consent to Bhutto’s proposal to maintain some link with Pakistan when the latter went to see him at a government rest-house in Rawalpindi. Sheikh Mujib himself disclosed this understanding to his journalist friend Anthony Mascarenhas immediately after his release in London:

“What’s more, he was secretly nursing a tentative deal with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which would have maintained a ‘link’ between Pakistan and its breakaway province, Bangladesh.

“I got a glimpse of this unsavoury deal, which was fatally at variance with the Bangladeshi mood, when Mujib confided to me: I have a big scoop for

you. We are going to keep some link with Pakistan but I cannot say anything more till I have talked it over with the others. And for God's sake don't you write anything till I tell you' ... What exactly the formula was, Mujib did not tell me. But my own instant reaction to the disclosure was one of horror. 'Are you mad?' I told him, 'Don't you know what's happened in Bangladesh? After what the people have gone through they will lynch you on the streets of Dhaka, Bangabandhu or no Bangabandhu, if you so much as utter one word about a link.'

"Mujib did not have time to answer me. We were interrupted by the Indian High Commissioner, B.K. Nehru, who wanted a private word with him. Mujib's re-education had begun." (Mascarenhas, 1986: 5)

Indeed, the re-education of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was highly successful. Without completely denying the story of a secret talk with Bhutto, he accepted the new reality and shifted his position regarding a link with Pakistan while addressing the mammoth gathering at Dhaka on 10 January, at which I was present:

"Sheikh Mujib in his speech made three important and immediate announcements: (1) I am a Muslim, my Bangladesh is the second largest Muslim country; (2) I am grateful to Bhutto for releasing me. But I am unable to keep his request to keep one Pakistan with two wings owing to that gratefulness. Bangladesh will remain an independent sovereign state, (3) There is no parallel in world's history of the untold oppression and torture that their army had committed on the people of Bangladesh. In spite of that, Bengali nation will prove their greatness by forgiving them. I wish success of Mr. Bhutto. He should also wish us the same. They should remain in peace; let us remain in peace." (Ahmed, 2015: 605)

Sheikh Mujib was apparently in a tangle, caught from two sides. He could not mentally free himself from the fact that he had been born into a Muslim family nor from his active participation in the Pakistan movement. On the other hand, pro-India, Bengali nationalist elements in his own party and their mentor India were jointly pulling Mujib to join the ultra-secular ranks and abandon Muslim identity altogether. After 16 December 1971, the pro-Indian cultural front in Bangladesh became extremely aggressive. Successful infiltration of Indian agents, piggy-backing the highly emotional 1952 language movement, provided the opportunity for India to launch skillful cultural aggression. In the wake of 16 December 1971, the stage was nicely set for the final kill. In literature, drama, and in radio and television programmes, Islam was depicted not only as the enemy of Bengali nationalism, but as an outright evil. Stupid acts of collaboration in favour of the Pakistani regime by Jamaat-e-Islami and Muslim League

leaders provided the anti-Islamic forces the perfect excuse to vilify Islam. Posters appeared everywhere showing caricatures of bearded, prayer-cap (*tupi*) wearing elderly persons depicted as bloodthirsty monsters, with blood running down their sharp beastly teeth. Beards and caps had been known as Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) since the advent of Islam in Bengal. In rural areas, Some Imams (the people who lead prayer in mosques) were even given mob justice and killed publicly for alleged collaboration. Secularism in Bangladesh thus attained the character of outright anti-Islamism.

It did not take long for Bengali nationalism to lose its appeal for the majority of Bengali Muslims. By the end of 1972, the same Bengali Muslims who had fought a most brutal liberation war against fellow Muslims with the help of Hindu India, found slogans of Bengali nationalism irksome and increasingly alien to their Muslim identity. The once revered 'Joy Bangla', which had nearly replaced 'Assalamu Alaikum' immediately after liberation as a greeting for Bengali Muslims, could only be heard in public meetings and processions organized by the Awami League a few months later. What had been the battle cry of liberation had become little more than a party slogan, and a despised one at that. More ominously, the party that had led the independence movement was losing popularity at great speed.

The Constitution of Bangladesh was adopted on 4 November 1972 in the Parliament, comprised of the members elected on 6 and 17 December 1970. That particular election had been held in Pakistan under the supervision of the military regime of Yahya. This was another unique and disturbing characteristic of the Constituent Assembly of the newly independent country. The members had been elected under Yahya Khan's LFO for the specific task of drafting Pakistan's Constitution. The same members of Parliament were now drafting the Constitution of an independent country that had ceded from Pakistan. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his legal advisors were apparently aware of the inherent legal weakness of the Parliament. The sole task of the assembly was, therefore, limited to drafting and adopting the Constitution as it was not given any law-framing powers. The Proclamation of Independence remained the sole basis of all the laws that were framed by the government during the period from 16 December 1971 to 16 December 1972 when the new constitution took effect. For a full year, it was a Westminster-style government in name only as the law-making function remained exclusively in the hands of the executive branch which was not answerable to any Parliament.

India had provided all possible help and assistance in our liberation war against Pakistan. The then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi,

took our struggle for independence as a personal crusade and travelled all around the world flying the flag in favour of Bangladesh. The birth of Bangladesh was therefore a personal victory for her as well as for India. Her domestic popularity rose to unprecedented levels on the surrender of ninety-three thousand Pakistani troops to General Aurora on 16 December 1971 at Dhaka. Naturally, it was not all philanthropy on the part of the South Asian power. Both Nehru and Patel agreed to partition in 1947 in the expectation that the Muslim homeland would not survive long – that it would rejoin ‘mother India’ in short order. On the eve of partition in 1947, Nehru remarked: “India accepted the partition with the conviction that the new state was not viable and would collapse in a short time.” The events of 1971 represented a partial fulfilment of that long-cherished dream of the founding leaders of India. Furthermore, the neutralization of the eastern front in military terms was also an immediate tangible benefit for India. It greatly reduced India’s military expenditure. The rebellious states of the north-east of India, known as the ‘seven sisters’, who used to receive occasional shelter in East Pakistan were now at the mercy of Indian Army:

“But the Bengalis fleeing from hot pursuit of the Pakistani army were seeking shelter in India during the difficult days of 1971. They were given shelter. Both the parties had self-interest in this. Interest of the Bengalis was to get arms from India and liberate their country whereas Indian interest was to make the enemy permanently weak by dividing Pakistan in the guise of providing help, and also to initially control liberated Bangladesh and eventually merge it with India at an opportune moment. It will be a mistake to consider this as mere interest of India, rather it was their long-cherished dream.” (Jalil, 1995: 35)

Bangladesh was under de facto Indian military rule from 16 to 22 December, as the government-in-exile delayed its return from India because of ‘security’ concerns in the newly liberated country. What was the source or specific nature of the security threat that had never been explained by any responsible quarter with any degree of authority? There were strong rumours circulating that the Indian Army had taken a huge quantity of arms and ammunition from the cantonments and machineries, as well as equipment from the factories immediately after 16 December. If that is the case, then the delay in the return of the government-in-exile could be seen to have facilitated the Indian plunder. The arrest of the valiant freedom fighter and Sector Commander Major Jalil by the Indian Army on 31 December for objecting to such unfriendly activities suggest that the rumour was not completely baseless:

“After 16 December the Indian Army was found plundering various assets of Bangladesh. That plundering was pre-planned. It was not any spontaneous plundering of a jubilant victorious army. The plundering was shocking, reckless. As the Commander of Sector-9, I strongly protested against motivated plunder – tried to actively resist. I wrote urgent letters to Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed, Col Osmani and Lt Gen Aurora, General Officer Commanding, Indian Eastern Command in protest of plunder. Mr. Ali Tarek, PRO to the Prime Minister personally carried my letters to Calcutta. The special letter was sent on 17 December ...

“The Indian Army wanted to disarm the freedom fighters and then take all the weapons to India across the border. I became vocal against Indian conspiracy and started giving speech in public meetings ...

“Any attempt to safeguard national assets is sign of patriotism, it is not a conspiracy to create enmity against anybody. Our friend India had committed a mistake here and so, a joint force of Indo-Bangladesh Army arrested me from Jessore in an ambush as a ‘reward’ of my patriotism. I became the first political prisoner in my cherished independent Bangladesh. I saw the real face of independence in the process of my arrest at 10.30 in the morning of 31 December. I realized the significance and meaning of liberating Bangladesh with Indian help without a minute delay.” (Jalil, 1995: 57-59)

The suspicions of the patriotic people in the newly independent country regarding India’s hidden motives in helping our independence movement grew rapidly primarily because of the arrogance shown by the victorious Indian Army. Lawrence Lifschultz, South Asia correspondent of the Far Eastern Economic Review provides here an objective account of the early days of the Indian army’s presence in Bangladesh:

“On the surface the intervention of Indian forces into the conflict was not an unpopular development. The terror spread by the Pakistani Army had been unrelenting and people were genuinely glad to be free of it. As Indian soldiers arrived in Dacca and other towns, they were cheered. The defeat of the Pakistani forces had been accomplished and this was itself a great achievement both for Bengalis and Indians – albeit for different reasons. And in the process of the war an object deeper than the religious bitterness which had originally separated the subcontinent appeared to have been won.

“However, while haloed portraits of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Indira Gandhi adorned homes and hung from tea shops all across a newly independent Bangladesh, the small incidents which would ultimately turn friendship into animosity had already begun. As Indian forces captured Pakistani supply depots, Indian commanders immediately began ordering

the removal of a vast quantity of captured arms and ammunition. Four divisions worth of captured equipment was packed up and shipped across the border into India. Bangladesh commanders who objected were ignored. (1979: 36)

“At the Chittagong Naval Base Indian units removed every last piece of movable equipment from typewriters and ceiling fans to the silverware in the Officers’ Mess – only the Admiral’s desk was left untouched. And while, in all fairness, it must be noted that a number of Indian officers were ultimately court-martialled for looting, the mass removal of captured weapons was a careful policy decision made by India. New Delhi was determined to prevent sophisticated weaponry from falling into the hands, either of Bangladesh’s politically leftist guerrilla forces, or for it to become the basis of a well-equipped national army on India’s eastern flank. India had fought this war to neutralize its eastern front and it now made this clear to the Bengalis. They would be allowed second-hand vintage weaponry from Indian stocks for purposes of internal security and no more.” (Lawrence, 1979: 37)

The signing of the Friendship Treaty with India so early after liberation gave food for thought to the patriotic people of Bangladesh. Shortly afterwards, Bangladesh signed another agreement with India. This time it was a trade agreement. Resentment against India grew further as Article 4 of the agreement allowed free border trade which was economically damaging to a war-ravaged country. Border trade facilitated smuggling at unprecedented levels and caused prices of daily essentials to rise alarmingly. The idea that India had had a hidden agenda in helping our liberation war became firmly established in people’s minds. The more the Awami League leaders and ministers made submissive public gestures in their competition to show gratitude to India, the more the people in general became convinced of Indian hegemony. The honeymoon with India ended as early as the middle of 1972. Such was the seriousness of the situation that the issue of rising anti-Indian sentiment in Bangladesh was discussed in the Upper House of Indian Parliament:

“Questions in the Rajya Sabha: ‘Anti-Indian campaign in Bangladesh’.

New Delhi, August 4, 1972

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state;

- (a) Whether it is a fact that, of late, anti-India campaign has been developing in Bangladesh, and
- (b) If so, what is the reaction of the government thereto?

The Minister of External Affairs (Sardar Swaran Singh): (a) and (b):

Feeble attempts by some stray elements have been made to do anti-India propaganda. The Government of Bangladesh have strongly condemned such

misguided and unjustified attempts. Relations between the Governments and peoples of India and Bangladesh are very close and cordial. There is no room for any misunderstanding being created by such misguided and mischievous elements.

Shri Chandramouli Jaggaramudi: May I know the reasons why the Bangladesh people are showing their anti-India feelings?

Sardar Swaran Singh: I wish I could answer such stray elements who resort to this thing, which is not in the interests either of the people of Bangladesh or of India. And having said that the government and the people by and large of Bangladesh do not like this, I think we should close it here.” (India-Bangladesh Relations: Documents 1971–2002, Volume I, Avtar Singh Bhasin)

On the domestic front, everybody became a victim of the inexperience and the shocking economic mismanagement of the government. Mujib was still popular but his star began to fade rather quickly. Sycophants were busy creating a demigod out of Sheikh Mujib. He had earlier been given the title Bangabandhu by Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) after Ayub’s fall in a glorious mass upsurge in 1969. That title was apparently considered inadequate and too little for him in post-independence Bangladesh. Now, he aspired to become Father of the Nation. India has Bapuji Gandhi, Jinnah is Quaid-e-Azam for Pakistan, and, therefore, Bangladesh had to have her own Father of the Nation. But the drama went further still.

Sheikh Mujib was a great organizer and a brilliant public speaker. But he was no philosopher. The famous six points which had provided the intellectual justification for East Pakistan’s demands for autonomy were not his brainchild. Bengali bureaucrats and economists had formulated them. And he was also never known for any academic excellence. In spite of these limitations, suddenly it was claimed by the PR team of the Awami League that Sheikh Mujib had somehow attained the intellectual heights of Marx, Engels and Lenin, all in one package, and had given the world a new political philosophy by the name Mujibbad (Mujibism). And what is this Mujibbad? It was a hotchpotch of ideas borrowed from the preamble of the Indian Constitution: nationalism, secularism, socialism etc. An array of university professors, journalists and authors were commissioned by the government to write books on Mujibbad. Opportunists saw in it a route to fame, promotions and other rewards. Such opportunists were found in abundance, ever willing to resort to shameless sycophancy to attain senior positions in government which they did not deserve. Close relatives of Sheikh Mujib and thugs from the Awami League thought they were the natural owners of the private properties left behind by minorities, Biharis or Hindus, who had had to leave Bangladesh in the difficult days of 1971.

The easiest way to become rich overnight was by occupying houses, industries and shops belonging to those people who had fled Bangladesh:

“Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni,* with his stormtroopers went to Motijheel at the end of December to occupy the newspaper office of Dainik Bangla and Morning News. Acting Information Secretary, Bahauddin Chowdhury was standing at the verandah of the building. He was a former Communist Party worker and was a great admirer of Sheikh Mujib. He shouted at Sheikh Moni and said, ‘Not a step further so long I am present here.’ Sheikh Moni then took possession of the press and office of Urdu newspaper, Pasban at Motijheel. He displayed the signboard of ‘Modhumoti Press’ in front of the newspaper office and started publishing ‘Banglar Bani’, a Bengali newspaper from there.” (Ahmad, 2016: 63)

*Sheikh Moni was the influential nephew of Sheikh Mujib and a powerful member of Mujib's inner circle. He was killed with Sheikh Mujib on 15 August 1975 in the army coup. The property described above is worth \$100 million today and is owned by the heirs of Sheikh Moni.

The occupation of the Urdu newspaper was not an isolated incident; rather this was the order of the day during the Mujib era. The political vacuum in post-liberation Bangladesh, in particular the lack of any opposition, helped Mujib create a family-oligarchy. Octogenarian Maulana Bhashani was the lone cautionary voice against purposeful and extreme hero-worship. Mujib personally respected the founding President of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League. But age was not on the side of Maulana. His pro-Chinese political party was also in disarray. China had not only refused to recognize Bangladesh, the communist leadership continuously used its veto in the UN Security Council to block our entry into United Nations. Under the prevailing situation, any party with Chinese connections was automatically considered an enemy of state. Islamist parties were in greater danger. Because of their pro-Pakistani stance during the liberation war, members of all such parties were either in jail or in hiding to save themselves from mob justice. The bayoneting to death of four alleged Razakars of non-Bengali origin by Kader Siddiqui, a renowned freedom fighter in full public display in a meeting at Paltan Maidan, on 19 December 1971 horrified the civilized world. ‘The Times’ and other internationally renowned media carried shocking reports of the lynching. Violence was the order of the day.

A political challenge to Sheikh Mujib came from the most unexpected group. The Bangladesh Liberation Force alias the Mujib Bahini had been created by RAW during the liberation war with the objective of eliminating anti-Indian and pro-Chinese political forces in independent

Bangladesh. Sirajul Alam Khan, the most radical among the young leaders of the freedom movement and principal theorist of Mujib Bahini, soon became disillusioned with his supreme leader. It should be noted here that Sirajul Alam Khan was given special training along with the most die-hard Mujibists by RAW at Dehradun under the personal guidance of General Uban. Sirajul Alam Khan, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, Tofail Ahmed and Abdur Razzak were the four commanders of the Mujib Bahini. All four were Uban's disciples. The same Uban was later involved in the formation of paramilitary Rakkhi Bahini, the official killing squad of the Mujib government.

“Training for BLF (it was yet to be named Mujib Bahini) was arranged by a group of Special Frontier Forces (SFF) under direct supervision of Uban. It had two training facilities – one at Chakrata in Dehradun and the other at Haflong in Assam. Four transit camps were set up to select trainees. Barrackpore was for the south-western zone. Regional commander was Tofail Ahmed. His deputy was Nure Alam Jiku. Panga of Jalpaiguri was the transit camp for north-western zone. Commander of this region was Sirajul Alam Khan. Monirul Islam was his deputy. The transit camp for central zone was at Tura of Meghalaya. Commander of this region was Abdur Razzak. Syed Ahmed was his deputy. Agartala was the camp for eastern zone including Dhaka. Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni was the commander of this region M.A. Mannan and Dr. Nur Hossain Chanchal were the deputies ...

“Trainees were selected mainly from the members of Chatra League. Many Sramik League members were also given training ...

“Imparting political training was then seriously considered in addition to military training. Four Chatra League leaders were chosen for giving regular political education. They are Hasanul Huq Inu, Sharif Nurul Ambia, A.F.M. Mahbubul Huq and Masud Ahmed Rumi. All of them were from the pro-Siraj faction ... There were misunderstandings and skirmishes between the members of Freedom Fighters and BLF. It should be mentioned here that clashes between BLF and Freedom Fighters mostly occurred in Sector 2 among all the sectors. There was no communication or mutual understanding between the eastern regional commander Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni and the forces of Major Khaled Musharraf. Moni was bitter against the Tajuddin government. He used to complain that Khaled was providing training and arms to the leftist students ...

“The government-in-exile had reservation about the leftists. The leftists complained that they and especially Chatra Union workers were not given an opportunity to receive training at various sectors. BLF leaders were also cautious so that leftists did not receive training and arms from Indian authority.” (Ahmad, 2016: 48–52)

Factional tensions and personality conflicts started to mount inside the student front of the ruling party within less than six months of the return of Mujib to Bangladesh. As the students in former East Pakistan had always played a more aggressive and significant role in every anti-Pakistan movement since the days of the 1952 language movement, student leaders became more assertive in post-independent Bangladesh. This was particularly the strength behind Sirajul Alam Khan as he had a majority of the followers inside the Chattra League, the student wing of the Awami League. Siraj was apparently not happy with the performance of the Awami League government. He proposed to Sheikh Mujib the dissolution of the Awami League government and its replacement with a 'Revolutionary National Government'. Sheikh Mujib had never been left-leaning in his entire political career. The first break-up of the Awami League had occurred in the 1950s exactly on this issue. Mujib had supported the pro-Western policy of his mentor, Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, and had remained with this faction in the Awami League during the entire twenty-four-year period of a united Pakistan. Maulana Bhashani, being sympathetic to communist ideals, had had to resign from the party that he had founded to form a new political party by the name of the National Awami Party (NAP). Sheikh Mujib had played a significant role in the ouster of Bhashani from the Awami League.

Although circumstances forced Mujib to toe the Soviet line after Bangladesh was born, he was not very comfortable with it – another dilemma he had to face. He declared socialism to be one of the four basic principles of the state, he advocated the nationalization of banks, insurance companies and industries, and he stated repeatedly that the establishment of total communism was his ultimate goal. However, all Mujib's attempts to steer the country gradually towards socialism could not satisfy Siraj and his followers. They thought it was too slow and inadequate. Sirajul Alam Khan wanted an overnight Soviet-style state. Some critics, on the other hand, say that he had always been a man of the pro-USA lobby within the Indian government. There is no doubt that, all along, he had been India's man. Whether he was also representing US or USSR interests remains a point of debate, even today. A confirmed bachelor, he is still seen as a 'mystery man' in Bangladeshi politics. In hindsight, it appears that India might have had a role in creating the new party in the absence of any credible opposition party. Indian policymakers may have decided to fill the vacuum with their own people. In case of Mujib's failure to govern, the party composed of Uban's men could have served their interests more effectively with its anti-Indian façade.

It was the Chattra League that broke first. Sirajul Alam Khan had a majority of followers within the student front. In the third week of July, the two warring factions of the Chattra League organized council meetings on the same day at different venues. Both the groups declared Sheikh Mujib as their leader. Organizers from both the warring factions went to Mujib with the identical request to grace their conference as guest of honour. After much deliberation, Mujib decided to attend the official one although the conference of the breakaway faction was better attended and more colourful. Singers from West Bengal came to Bangladesh to add charm to the Siraj-led conference. Sirajul Alam Khan's Indian connections were once again on display. At the end of the drama, two Chattra Leagues emerged:

“The scene: Paltan Maidan, Dhaka. The date: 17 September 1972. The occasion: The first public protest against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's rule.

“Eight months after he had taken over as prime minister, the tide of popularity had begun to run out for Mujib. The great agitator, the champion of people's grievance, the beloved Bangabandhu on whom the most fulsome praise had been lavished, had now become the target of criticism from an outraged public.

“More than 100,000 people had gathered to hear another powerful rabble rouser bitterly denounce the prime minister for betraying the Bengalis and failing to fulfil pledges made before independence. He was Abdur Rab, the student leader and former Mukti Bahini freedom fighter who was once one of Mujib's staunchest supporters. Now Rab was telling the crowd: ‘Mujib said no one would be allowed to die of starvation after independence. Now people are dying for want of food.’ Egged on by the irate gathering Rab ticked off a long string of grievances – soaring prices which put food and other necessities beyond reach of the people, shortages, market manipulation, official corruption, nepotism, mounting unemployment, mass arrests and beatings by the police, an irresponsible government, a muzzled press. ‘The Awami Leaguers are more corrupt and much worse than the Pakistanis ever were’, Rab declared, in a punchy summation of public sentiment that brought the crowd screaming to its feet.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 19)

The die was cast. After the break-up of the student front, it was only a matter of time before a new political party would be formed from within General Uban's trained Mujib Bahini. People of Bangladesh did not have to wait long. In the unfolding drama, *Jatio Samajtantric Dal* (JSD – National Socialist Party) announced its arrival on 31 October. A seven-member organizing committee was formed. Readers may be surprised to

know that the main character behind the new initiative, Sirajul Alam Khan was not one of the seven. The show's principal character wanted to remain in the shadows. He is not called 'mysterious' for nothing! Tajuddin Ahmed was initially approached by Sirajul Alam Khan to join the new party, even to head it. Although Tajuddin had, by then, fallen from grace in the Awami League, he expressed his inability to leave Sheikh Mujib. The JSD arrived like a colossus in the opposition politics of Bangladesh. Even Maulana Bhashani was eclipsed. The ferocity of their anti-government and anti-Indian rhetoric surprised even the most dedicated pro-Pakistani elements in Bangladesh. But it was also a much-needed tonic for the common people, disillusioned by the thuggery of the Awami League cadres, the megalomania of Mujib, the rampant corruption in the administration, and Indian hegemony. The first national council of the JSD was held in Suhrawardy Udyan (formerly Ramna Racecourse) on 23 December 1972. Major (ret'd.) M.A. Jalil was elected the President with A.S.M. Rab as General Secretary. Again, we do not find the name of Sirajul Alam Khan among the fifty-one-member central committee. Mujib now had to face a formidable opposition party in a country that he had brought into existence just a year earlier.

Mujib's deficiencies as an administrator were most glaring in the rapidly deteriorating law and order situation. Awami League leaders around the country were behaving like local warlords. They acted as if above the law and a helpless population had no place to go to seek help or redress with life's difficulties. In many regions, freedom fighters either simply refused to hand in their arms to the authorities or returned only part of their arsenal. Armed gangs were found everywhere looting and plundering. In early 1972, Sheikh Mujib decided to form a paramilitary force comprising mainly freedom fighters belonging to the Awami League and its other associate bodies to counter the menace. He personally requested that the Indian government send General Uban to help develop the force. The force was later named *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini* (JRB – National Security Force). However, according to an interview given by Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, Chief of Bangladesh's Delhi Mission during the liberation war, the JRB was formed as part of the secret seven-point agreement signed between India and the Bangladesh government-in-exile in October 1971. Writing my book in 2016, I feel it is more important to focus on what the JRB did than why and how it was formed. Sheikh Mujib used his Rakkhi Bahini ruthlessly as instruments of repression to suppress political dissent and eliminate the growing radical left, including JSD, rather than as an impartial force against the thugs in his own party. The *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini* Presidential Order was

promulgated in March 1972 with retrospective effect from February. People had begun to hate the JRB even before the year ended because of its arbitrariness in operation, cruelty and its complete disregard for human rights:

“The Rakkhi Bahini was not under the control of any particular Ministry. It used to be under the direct authority of Sheikh Mujib as the Prime Minister, later as the President. It used to function in a mysterious way. Despite repeated demands from various sections of People including the newspapers, the government never disclosed its budget and composition.

“A large section of the public alleged that Rakkhi Bahini was an extension of Indian authority in Bangladesh. Not only the training but also all its materials and equipment were supplied by India. Their uniform was identical with the uniform of BSF [Border Security Force] and people generally identified Rakkhi Bahini with India as its creator. Its pro-Awami League role only strengthened this belief. The modus operandi, purpose and composition of the Rakkhi Bahini was the same as the Central Reserve Police in India.” (Ahmed, 2015: 72)

In a famous verdict on the arbitrary operational procedures adopted by the Rakkhi Bahini that allowed it to function with no accountability and complete disdain for human rights, the High Court observed:

“We must say that we have been greatly surprised to notice the fashion in which the officers of the Rakkhi Bahini have conducted themselves. It is in evidence that absolutely no records of the activities of the members of the Bahini have been maintained in connection with this case and no report thereof. Nothing in writing could be found to check up the activities with the person in their custody.” (Ahmed, 2015: 69)

Allegations of torture, abductions, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances were common. Nobody can say with any authority how many victims the JRB left either dead or crippled. But the JSD claimed after the fall of Mujib that thirty thousand of their workers had been killed. In the final analysis, the Rakkhi Bahini remained one of the causes for mounting hatred of Mujib.

Economic hardship also reached an unbearable level. Massive international help kept people more or less alive. But the Awami League leaders even misused and plundered relief supplies arriving for people in dire need. It is said that relief supplies arriving from the international community found their way to the markets in Calcutta and other towns in West Bengal. Such was the level of dissatisfaction with the Mujib

administration by the end of 1972 that any rumour, however absurd, would be believed by most people without question:

“If the new state did not collapse within the first eight months of its founding it was only due to the efforts of the international community UNROD, the United Nations Relief Operation in Dhaka, was an unprecedented rescue mission both in magnitude and effectiveness, one of UN's unsung success stories. Even the name signified a practical effort to cut through formalities, legalities and red-tape, to come to terms with the explosive reality of 75 million people in the gravest distress. Since the area, hitherto East Pakistan, was still formally recognized as part of Pakistan, a member state, the UN operation could not be designated as aid to Bangladesh. To give it the East Pakistan label would similarly have been offensive to the sensitive Bengalis and their international friends. So the UN Relief Operation to Dhaka was launched and with it the greatest single international outpouring of money, food, equipment and technical assistance known to date. (1986: 20)

“Toni Hagen, one-time head of UNROD, reported early in 1972, that ‘Bangladesh is like a sieve suspended in India’. Many merchants found it more advantageous to export the rice across the border where they got almost as much again for their crops. Not long after that, Dr. K.U. Ahmed, a Bengali lecturer in Brunei University in England, after making a detailed study of the problem came to the conclusion: ‘Food prices are soaring in Bangladesh chiefly because supplies sent in from abroad to relieve widespread hunger are being smuggled out to the Indian market by Bangladeshi traders aided by corrupt government officials.’ (Mascarenhas, 1986: 27)

While Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was reeling under the strain of governing his war-ravaged and nearly bankrupt country, Indira Gandhi and Bhutto met at a summit meeting to resolve the Indo-Pakistani dispute. The two leaders were no strangers to each other. Scions of two elite families, they had studied in the UK at almost the same time. Their summit, held at Simla, was the opportunity for them to reminisce and to try to unravel the complexity of the subcontinent. In the end, Bhutto succeeded in crossing the first hurdle by obtaining the return of POWs held in India. Indira Gandhi succeeded in pushing Kashmir onto the back-burner, albeit temporarily, within Indo-Pakistani bilateral relations. Bangladesh was left a passive bystander as the fate of ninety-three thousand Pakistani POWs was more or less finalized without consulting Mujib. Of course, no progress was made at the Simla summit on the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan.

The constitution of Bangladesh was adopted on 4 November 1972 and came into force on 16 December. This was a great achievement considering the fact that Pakistan only adopted its first constitution eight long years after its independence. However, the constitution created controversy as it followed the Indian example by incorporating secularism and socialism as fundamental state principles in addition to nationalism and democracy. In the 1970 election, the people of East Pakistan had voted to elect a Constituent Assembly for Pakistan. Those same members of parliament later became members of the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh. Therefore, with the adoption of the Bangladeshi Constitution, the function of the Constituent Assembly ended. The assembly was dissolved and the government announced the date for first general election in Bangladesh to be held on 7 March 1973.

The NAP (Bhashani), the NAP (Mozaffar), the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the newly formed JSD were the major contestants in the election along with the ruling Awami League. The CPB and NAP (Mozaffar) had been de facto subsidiaries of the Awami League since the beginning of the liberation war because of their Indian and Soviet connections. Even during the election campaign, the two parties obediently maintained a conciliatory approach towards the government. They were willing collaborators with the Mujib regime. As the electioneering intensified, (NAP) Bhashani and JSD adopted a more critical approach towards the government. Bhashani was heading a seven-party opposition coalition while the JSD decided to fight the election alone. Although the nucleus of the JSD comprised mostly Uban's men, the party upped its anti-Indian rhetoric in public. It remains a mystery whether JSD leaders, including the 'chief theorist' Sirajul Alam Khan, ever severed their Indian links. At this stage, the perceived anti-Indian stance of the JSD was serving them well in helping them to attract large numbers of restive youths who were shocked by the sheer magnitude of nepotism and mismanagement in the government.

The election result was never in doubt. The organizational strength and electioneering experience of the Awami League, coupled with the towering personality of Sheikh Mujib was impossible to beat in a fair election so early after independence. The opposition parties could expect to win only a few dozen seats in parliament. Unfortunately, Sheikh Mujib, the person who had fought relentlessly and suffered greatly in his efforts to establish the democratic rights of the people during the Pakistan era, was not ready to concede even those few seats to the opposition. The ruling party machinery was given a green light to terrorize both opposition

politicians and voters from the very start of the election campaign. They specifically targeted the NAP (Bhashani) and the JSD:

“Anyhow the atmosphere during the week further deteriorated when the Awami League stormtroopers destroyed the dias of a public meeting of the 7-Party Action Committee, set fire to the office of Jatio Samajtantric Dal headquarters at Dhaka and launched a physical attack on Ataur Rahman Khan.” (Ahmed, 2015: 164)

The full power of the government machinery was used blatantly to ensure victory for Awami League candidates. Polling booths were occupied, ballot boxes looted, voters terrorized and driven from polling stations, result sheets were changed in the process of counting votes. The government even went as far as forcing the Election Commission to change the officially declared result. A corrosive culture of manipulating election results in Bangladesh was established in the 1973 election. Mujib's autocratic character was gradually coming into full public view. The ruling party adopted the same policy in the elections for the student union at Dhaka University:

“There was a serious incident on the morning of the election. General Secretary of Chatra League A.F.M. Mahbubul Huq and Aftabuddin, executive editor of Ganakantha were sitting in the verandah of arts faculty ground floor after casting their votes at Dhaka University Education and Research Institute polling centre. It was around 11 in the morning. Sheikh Kamal* with a few of his associates forcibly bundled them to a waiting car. Once inside the car, they were blindfolded. Abductors then took them to a private house. They were kept in confinement for the night and were physically tortured.” (Ahmad, 2016: 98)

*Sheikh Kamal was the elder of the two sons of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was later assassinated along with his father in the August 1975 coup. He remained a thorn in the side of Mujib.

As expected, the Awami League won almost all the seats. The final declared result, including reserve seats for women, was:

Awami League	306
Jatio Samajtantric Dal	2
Bangla Jatiyo League	1
Independent	6

Moudud Ahmed writes on the blatant irregularities committed during the election:

“Ironically the same attitude was maintained throughout the election campaign and it reached its climax on the election day. Despite all the constraints and disadvantages the opposition faced, in about 2 dozen constituencies the opposition leaders and candidates showed a solid edge at the polls over the Awami League candidates and when the counting started in certain areas some of the opposition candidates were unofficially declared by the local officials as elected. But this was not to be allowed in the end ...

“The central leadership of the Awami League took it as a prestige issue on the question of allowing the prominent opposition leaders winning the election. The party stalwarts argued that victory in the election of persons like Ataur Rahman Khan, Mashiur Rahman, M.A. Jalil, Shahjahan Siraj, Rashed Khan Menon, Dr. Alim Al-Razee, Muzaffar Ahmed and Suranjit Sen would cast a direct aspersion not only on the party but also on the ‘Father of the Nation’. How could these people win when Bangabandhu was still alive and was the chief of the party and the government? ...

“Being convinced by all these considerations the central leadership of the Awami League had moved promptly once the news started pouring in that they were losing some important seats and more so that most of them belonged to some prominent opposition leaders. The Central Election Campaign Committee constituted earlier to handle the election affairs was completely bypassed and the responsibility of formulating strategies and actions was taken over by the control room at the Gonobhaban. When frantic telephone calls started pouring in from the candidates, who were likely to be defeated, the government machinery including the Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini was alerted and orders were sent to help out those candidates who were in trouble. As the counting of votes started indicating sure victory for some of the opposition candidates, helicopters were flown out to render assistance and at least in half a dozen constituencies entire ballot boxes were removed and replaced with new ones.” (Ahmed, 2015: 170)

It is a matter of irony that one of the leading Awami League candidates thus saved from the ignominy of sure electoral defeat was Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, the same Mushtaque who would succeed Sheikh Mujib as President of Bangladesh after his brutal killing in August 1975.

The fate of Bangladesh was sealed by a needlessly fraudulent election. With the rise of another dictator in a third world country, everyone realized that it would never be possible to change a corrupt and murderous government by democratic means. Dissention among soldiers and junior officers of the Bangladeshi Army also started brewing at this time. Radical ideas were spreading fast among patriotic sections of society. Siraj Sikder, a young engineer organized and fought against the Pakistani army with his band of communist guerrillas staying inside East Pakistan during the

liberation war in 1971. Siraj never returned arms to Mujib government after liberation. The revolutionary line followed by Charu Mazumdar, the charismatic pro-Chinese radical communist leader in West Bengal in the 1960s had greatly influenced him. The election fraud of 1973 made him more resolute. Siraj Sikdar and other militant communists decided that the regime of Sheikh Mujib could only be toppled by armed revolution. In fact, this radicalization of Bangladeshi politics started even before the independence of Bangladesh:

“After the mass movement of 1968–69 the constitutional method of solving the problems of East Bengal turned ineffective and the different revolutionary parties became pre-occupied with the preparation of the armed struggle to bring about democratic revolution in East Pakistan or East Bengal as the case might be. At the time when the Awami League, the Muscovite Communist Party and rightist parties were hindering the way to the imminent possible revolution under the flag of the constitutional movement; Siraj Sikdar addressed on 20 April 1970 an open letter to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The main theme of the letter was that there would be no scope whatsoever for the implementation of the six-point programme unless East Bengal was seceded from West Pakistan, and that must be accomplished through an armed struggle.” (Ansari, 1992: 547)

Under the new circumstances of Mujib-ruled Bangladesh, Siraj Sikdar identified the Awami League and Mujib as associates of Indian expansionism and, therefore, according to his thesis, armed struggle against the regime was justified as it had been against Pakistani occupational forces.

Soon the armed cadres of Sarbahara Bahini of Siraj were making daring attacks on isolated and remote police stations. In the Madaripur region, his party even succeeded in establishing total control within the so-called liberated zone running local administrative affairs. He quickly became a legendary figure in Bangladesh in the mould of Che Guevara. Almost simultaneously, Gonobahini, the military wing of the JSD was formed. A decorated liberation war hero, Colonel Taher, was made the commander of the revolutionary force and General Secretary of the Jatio Krishak League, Hasanul Huq Inu, his deputy. The aim of Gonobahini was also to topple the Mujib government by armed revolution. Politics is known for its strange bed-fellows. The same Inu would later become the hawkish Information Minister of Sheikh Hasina, Mujib's daughter. Instead of solving Mujib's political problem, the 1973 election rather complicated it.

Sheikh Mujib, a one-time champion of democracy, gave blanket approval to Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini and the Special Branch of the Police to

commit horrendous human rights abuses. Local Awami League leaders and workers provided Mujib's personal death-squad, in the guise of law-enforcement agencies, with lists of potential enemies. There were no formal arrests. The victims were abducted from their homes by killing squads comprising both uniformed and non-uniformed people and then tortured to death. It was the worst kind of vigilante operation. It was the repetition of what the Pakistani Army had done during the liberation war. Many of the dead and missing were themselves freedom fighters, now treated as enemies of state, or rather enemies of the 'Father of the Nation'. Even women were not spared from torture and other forms of degrading treatment. Sheikh Mujib also formed different political Bahinis to terrorize the opposition. The most notorious of them was Lal Bahini mostly comprising ruthless Awami thugs in the guise of industrial workers:

"Through this massive victory in the election the Awami League not only gathered more political strength but also a monopoly of power in the newly born country. The manifestation of a corresponding state of mind was found in the behaviour of its workers all over the country. Instead of regretting what happened in the election the party leaders moved in the opposition direction posing to be more powerful and boisterous than ever before. In less than a month after the election the labour front of the Awami League launched a campaign to drive out all other trade union leaders and workers from the industrial areas of the country. (2015: 174) ...

"The labour wing of the Awami League headed by Abdul Mannan had earlier formed a 'Lal Bahini' to help the government to establish 'socialism and economic emancipation of the working class.' The Bahini was to get rid of the 'bad elements' in the industrial areas and the 'corrupt officials' of the government controlled industries, although the area of their 'operations' extended beyond the industrial sector and some into the life of private citizens of the country. Under the patronage of the ruling elite, they grew in strength and in the process the discipline that was required to run the nationalized industries profitably was destroyed.' (Ahmed, 2015: 175)

In his unfinished memoir, Sheikh Mujib once wrote about the failure of Muslim League as a political party in post-1947 Pakistan in the following way:

"Due to the wrong policies of the government, there was gradual regression in everything. They did not know how to utilize a vibrant nation for the welfare of the country and how a nation can be used for constructive activities. Thousands of political workers got strayed in every direction. There were lot of jobs and plenty of workers. Unfortunately, they were not properly utilized. One of the principal causes for this failure was that the

leadership could not keep faith in the common people. Because they had no connection with the people. (Rahman, 2017: 90)

Was Mujib writing the epitaph of post-independence Awami League government while sitting in a Pakistani jail in Dhaka back in 1967? The similarity between the two situation is most striking.

Sheikh Mujib was becoming desperate. There was no sign of his international acceptance as a leader of an independent country beyond the Indo-Soviet axis. China had not only refused to recognize independent Bangladesh, but had also vetoed the country's entry into the UN. Muslim countries, led by Saudi Arabia, were openly hostile and shunned every effort on the part of Bangladesh to establish diplomatic relations because of their sympathy for Pakistan. The Muslim world was also extremely annoyed that we had incorporated secularism into our constitution:

"Nowhere had the Pakistani propaganda – that the largest Muslim state in the world had been broken up by external intervention – had greater effect than in Saudi Arabia. Given Saudi Arabia's special position in the Muslim world, and the late King Feisal's special commitment to Muslim solidarity, they were especially vulnerable to such propaganda. This was reinforced by the efforts of the various Islamic solidarity organizations based in, and financially supported by, Saudi Arabia. (2013: 191) ...

"I carried a personal message from Bangabandhu to Riyadh in late October/early November, and was granted an audience with King Feisal. After the initial exchange of greetings, I recounted his discussions with Omar Sakkaf on the importance of removing the anomalies reflected in the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries. When King Feisal, as anticipated, raised the question about secularism, I took the opportunity to explain the background in which the provisions had been made in the Constitution." (Hossain, 2013: 193)

In January 1974, before Kamal Hossain's visit to Saudi Arabia, Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury had also been sent by Mujib to plead the case for Bangladesh to King Feisal. The secularism issue was raised by the Saudi King on that occasion also. Justice Chowdhury tried his best to explain the philosophy claiming to the King that it was not anti-Islamic. But King Feisal was not convinced:

"Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, Bangladesh's first President, who later became Sheikh Mujib's travelling envoy, explained the Saudi position to me when recounting a meeting he had with the late King Feisal in January 1974.

“According to Justice Chowdhury, King Faisal wanted clarification of what was meant by the Article in the Bangladesh Constitution relating to secularism. ‘I told the King,’ he said with semantics that would have amazed King Solomon, that as President of Republic of Bangladesh, on various occasions I had referred to this particular Article and said that it did not mean irreligiousness. It merely meant that all persons professing different faiths would be treated with equality in the affairs of the state, i.e. they could profess and practice their own religion and maintain their religious institutions and should have equal opportunities in life. Since a very small minority does not profess the faith of Islam, Your Majesty might treat it as an Islamic country.’

“Justice Chowdhury continued: ‘For a time it looked as if the King was impressed by my argument. But then he said he would be happy if the word “secularism” was omitted from the Constitution and it is declared as an Islamic Republic of Bangladesh. He further met my point about tolerance of other religions by saying an Article specifying that the minorities would not be oppressed would be an adequate protection for them.’ King Faisal was not fooled. He did not grant recognition to secular Bangladesh.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 81–82)

Bhutto continued his dilly-dallying tactics in delaying recognition of Bangladesh for as long as possible to extract maximum possible political advantage from Sheikh Mujib, especially on the issue of the repatriation of the ninety-three thousand POWs including one hundred and ninety-five alleged war criminals who had been kept on Indian soil since the surrender of General Niazi in Dhaka. The domestic situation in Bangladesh continued its downward slide unabated and, by the end of 1973, the country was nearly bankrupt, though more than US\$2 billion in international aid had been pumped into it. Under the prevailing circumstances, Mujib was desperately looking for a way to improve his relations, at least to a workable level, with Western powers and Islamic states. He signaled to his advisors that they start covert negotiations with Pakistan. An Islamic summit at Lahore in 1974 provided both Bhutto and Mujib the cover they needed to recognize each other’s sovereignty. Bhutto was assured in secret that as a price of recognition from Pakistan, Sheikh Mujib would drop his demand that the one hundred and ninety-five Pakistani POWs accused of war crimes be put on trial. Pakistan at last recognized Bangladesh as an independent, sovereign country on 22 February 1974:

“On the question of recognition Bhutto at last used his own choice of time. He was successful in making the issue of recognition the focal point and continued to threaten China would again exercise her veto to block

Bangladesh's admission to the United Nations. When the date of the proposed Islamic summit conference to be held in Pakistan was getting closer new diplomatic moves were initiated to solve the crisis. Pressure was built up both within and outside the conference to facilitate the attendance of Bangladesh, the second largest Muslim country in the conference, which could not be attained without recognition of equal sovereignty between Bangladesh and Pakistan. On receiving and understanding that the proposed trial would be dropped, Bhutto posing to further the cause of Muslim solidarity declared his decision to accord recognition to Bangladesh on February 22, 1974. A goodwill mission of the Islamic Summit came to Dhaka with an invitation for Mujib and the next day an Algerian aircraft flew Mujib and delegation on a historic flight to Lahore to be received by Bhutto at the airport to the annoyance of many Indians." (Ahmed, 2015: 240)

How unhappy were India's leadership and people at seeing Mujib participate in the Islamic Summit in Pakistan? We will never know whether Indira Gandhi expressed any displeasure privately. At least nothing appeared in the media. But if we are to believe stories heard on the grapevine then she was seriously angered by the event. Indira Gandhi advised Mujib not to attend the conference. In Calcutta, some people burned Sheikh Mujib in effigy for his 'ungratefulness'. But nothing could deter Sheikh Mujib from attending the summit in Pakistan. I would remind my Bangladeshi readers here that it was Sheikh Mujib who persuaded Indira Gandhi to withdraw the Indian Army from Bangladesh within the shortest possible time after his return from a Pakistani prison. He raised the issue of withdrawal in his very first meeting with her in Delhi on 9 January 1972. Indira Gandhi and the Indian establishment possibly never forgot Mujib's courageous and patriotic act. However, the immediate benefit that Bangladesh received as a result of Mujib's pragmatic move was formal recognition from powerful Islamic states like Iran and Turkey. The dropping of Bangladesh's demand to try the hundred and ninety-five Pakistani POWs paved the way for tripartite agreement between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In April 1974, Kamal Hossain for Bangladesh, Swaran Singh for India, and Aziz Ahmed for Pakistan signed the treaty. Articles 13, 14 and 15 of the agreement are related to the abandonment of the demand to try the hundred and ninety-five alleged Pakistani war criminals by Bangladesh:

"13. The question of 195 Pakistani prisoners of war was discussed by the three Ministers, in the context of the earnest desire of the Governments for reconciliation, peace and friendship in the subcontinent. The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh stated that the excesses and manifold crimes

committed by these prisoners of war constituted, according to the relevant provisions of the U. N. General Assembly Resolutions and international law, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and that there was universal consensus that the persons charged with such crimes as the 195 Pakistani prisoners of war should be held to account and subjected to the due process of law. The Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs of the Government of Pakistan said that his government condemned and deeply regretted any crimes that may have been committed.

“14. In this connection, the three Ministers noted that the matter should be viewed in the context of the determination of the three countries to continue resolutely to work for reconciliation. The Ministers further noted that following recognition, the Prime Minister of Pakistan had declared that he would visit Bangladesh in response to the invitation of Bangladesh and appeal to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past, in order to promote reconciliation. Similarly, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh had declared with regard to the atrocities and destruction committed in Bangladesh in 1971 that he wanted the people to forget the past and to make a fresh start, stating that the people of Bangladesh knew how to forgive.

“15. In the light of the foregoing and, in particular, having regard to the appeal of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh stated that the Government of Bangladesh had decided not to proceed with the trials as an act of clemency.”

It was agreed in the meeting that the hundred and ninety-five prisoners charged with war crimes would also be repatriated with other POWs after the signing of the agreement. Evidently, the agreement was a political victory for Bhutto although the greatness of Sheikh Mujib in forgiving the atrocities of the Pakistani Army was duly recorded and acknowledged. Furthermore, with China pacified and the threat of its veto lifted, Bangladesh was at last admitted into world's greatest body, the United Nations. Sheikh Mujib attended the UN General Assembly in September 1974 and delivered his speech in Bengali. Anthony Mascarenhas quotes a cable from Shahidul Haq, the then editor of the Bangladesh Times, about Mujib's UN speech as an example of overenthusiasm on the part of the subservient media of the time, showing how low undignified sycophants can stoop:

“It seemed all so incredible yet so convincing. The moment of triumph for the Bengali nation and particularly for Bangabandhu came at 3.30 pm today when UN General Assembly reverberated to an impatient appeal for universal peace by him. It was the first time that someone spoke in Bengali in the 29-year history of the UN. And it was only in the fitness of things

that speaker was Bangabandhu. As a leader of a delegation put it, the parliament of man was 'totally captivated by the sound melody, serenity, onrush and aural majesty of language and delivery' of which most members did not know a word."

How ludicrous and cheap was such a cable from an editor of a leading English-language newspaper? Shameless eulogy was part of the media culture in those days. This type of subservience by the intelligentsia made a cult out of Sheikh Mujib and ultimately led to his tragic downfall. Both Sheikh Mujib and Bangladesh were sitting on a volcano when the editor of the Bangladesh Times probably thought that the best way to show gratitude to his master for allowing him to travel to New York was to write nonsense in the name of journalism. What a way to justify the spending of the public money of a poor country! Sheikh Mujib was to live for only eleven more months.

Sheikh Mujib had a deep-rooted hatred for men in uniform. His personal suffering and that of his family and friends during eleven long years of the Ayub military dictatorship left an indelible scar on him. The way he was implicated in the Agartala conspiracy case with the possibility of a death sentence from the military court only made him angrier. Apparently, Mujib formed a workable relationship with General Yahya, the next martial law chief and had faith in him to find an amicable solution even up to the evening of 25 March 1971. His repeated enquiries of Dr. Kamal Hussain as to whether any news had come from the President bear testimony to his expectation and trust in Yahya. The treachery of General Yahya was too much for him to bear.

From the night of his arrest on 25 March 1971 until the day of his return on 10 January the following year, Sheikh Mujib had very little idea about the heroic role of the officers and troops of the Bengali Army, the East Pakistan Rifles and Police personnel in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh. He might have suffered from an inferiority complex when he came to know that it was an unknown Major Zia who had declared the independence of Bangladesh which was fundamentally his job as the supreme political leader. It is not unlikely that the promotion of Shafiullah to be Bangladesh's first Chief of Staff despite his having been junior to Zia in the Pakistani Army was the result of Zia's historic declaration. In Zia's courageous declaration, Mujib might have suspected the over-ambition of a major. He must have always remembered his curt refusal to record the Independence Declaration when approached by Tajuddin Ahmed just before the Pakistani Army launched its infamous 'Operation Searchlight' at midnight on 25 March. Anthony Mascarenhas describes Mujib's antipathy towards the army:

“According to Manzoor*, Mujib had done his best to destroy the army. He had also adopted the policy of divide and rule, getting rid of anyone who seemed to be a threat to him. ‘It was he who divided the army into so many groups.’ He called them separately, giving one a promotion, another a perk. Things were done without reference to the Chief of Staff. (1986: 34) ...

“Mujib carried his hatred of the army with him to the grave. This attitude was shared by his ministers and other senior Awami Leaguers who had also escaped death at the hands of the Pakistan Army in 1971. To their basic hostility of things military was added, after independence, the fear that the Bangladesh Army might try to supplant them. This anxiety was grounded in the fact that the Bengali military men had been in the thick of the fighting during the independence movement while the Awami Leaguers stayed safely in Calcutta out of the line of fire. (1986: 35) ...

“Sheikh Mujib himself told me in February 1974 that he was against a powerful military force. ‘I don’t want to create another monster like the one we had in Pakistan.’ Mujib wanted the army to wither on the vine – but almost by accident it didn’t happen that way.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 36)

*General Manzoor would lead a failed coup in Chittagong in 1981 which killed President Zia.

However, Mujib’s immediate problem in 1974 was not the army, but famine. While the editor of the Bangladesh Times was busy drafting a flowery eulogy for Sheikh Mujib that would have been more appropriate for the emperors of a bygone era, the famine of 1974 turned into a nightmare for the country, devastating lives, families, human dignity and the country. The people of Bangladesh had faced the darkest days of Pakistani atrocities with heroism and patriotic fervour, rarely matched in history. But the man-made famine of 1974 broke the heart of the proud Bengalis. The price of commodities had been rising steeply since 1972. By the summer of 1974, the price of rice, a staple of the Bangladeshi diet, had risen beyond the reach of most ordinary people. This catastrophe was followed by a devastating flood. By the end of August, 40 per cent of the land area of the delta was under water. Starving rural people rushed to the cities for survival. It was an unending procession of skeletons coming to Dhaka from all directions. In the absence of effective governance, hoarders had a field day. Rice was nowhere to be found, even at its now staggering price. Soon, the streets of Dhaka were littered with dead bodies, a majority of whom were children. Bangladeshis were numb with shock. Surely this could not be the face of independence for which hundreds of thousands of people had sacrificed their lives. Nobody will ever know how many people died in the famine. Sheikh Mujib later admitted only twenty-seven thousand. The actual figure for those who died from starvation was

definitely a few hundred thousand. Deaths from other causes normally associated with famine, such as cholera, malnutrition and water-borne diseases were far greater. The worst aspect of the whole catastrophe was that it was not a simple lack of food that left people to die. The government was definitely constrained by dwindling food-stocks owing to production shortages and a lack of cooperation from the US government in providing timely food-aid. They even stopped shipments of foodgrains to teach Mujib an expensive lesson of the cost of hobnobbing with Cuba. But the main culprit was definitely the government of Bangladesh, for its lack of planning, inefficiency in distribution and overall inaction. The Nobel laureate, economist Professor Amartya Sen in his book, "Poverty and Famines", gives the crop production data for 1974 which surprisingly show a relatively good year for output in Bangladesh. According to Professor Sen, 1974 was a local peak year in both total and per capita output of rice.

Table 6.1: Rice output of Bangladesh, 1971–1975

Year	Production of rice (thousand tons)	Index of rice production	Per capita rice output (tons)	Index of per capita rice output
1971	10,445	100	0.133	100
1972	9,706	93	0.120	90
1973	10,459	100	0.126	95
1974	11,778	113	0.139	105
1975	11,480	110	0.132	99

Source: Sen Amartya, Poverty and Famines, 2010: 137

Amartya Sen then writes:

“In moving from rice production to food grains availability, wheat output, though tiny, has to be added and international trade must be taken into account. This is done in Table [6.2]. It is found, once again, that 1974 was a local peak. If one went by overall food availability, one would expect a famine less in 1974 than in any of other years. And yet the famine did occur precisely in 1974.” (Sen, 2010: 138)

Table 6.2: Food grains availability in Bangladesh, 1971–1975

Year	Total available food grains for consumption (million tons)	Population (millions)	Per capita availability (oz./day)	Index of per capita Availability
1971	10.740	70.679	14.9	100
1972	11.271	72.535	15.3	103
1973	11.572	74.441	15.3	103
1974	12.355	76.398	15.9	107
1975	12.022	78.405	14.9	100

(Source: Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 2010: 138)

Anthony Mascarenhas provides a heart-rending eye-witness account of the 1974 famine:

“The influx of people to the city brought new tensions to Dhaka where the government was embarrassed by the large swarms of beggars and destitutes everywhere. On 3 January 1975, a massive cosmetic operation was launched forcing 200,000 destitutes and slum dwellers either to their village or to be moved to three ‘camps’ that had been hastily laid out several miles from the city. The worst of these was at Demra, 14 miles from Dhaka, which the Guardian (dated 18.02.1975) described as ‘Mujib’s man-made disaster area’. Conditions in the camp were appalling.

“More than 50,000 people were crowded into the camp which was ringed with barbed wire and guarded by the Rakkhi Bahini. The authorities had provided a few latrines and water pumps. Each family was also given a 19’x9’ plot of land for a hut but no building materials. There were also no medical supplies, no means of income for the people and only a meager food ration. The four bed ‘hospital’ was used as a dormitory for the camp officials. An old man told visiting journalists, ‘either give us food or shoot us.’ According to Grace Samson, a Dutch Salvation Army volunteer, the tragedy was ‘not an act of God, but an act of government; a man-made disaster.’ It is not known how many perished in these camps. But it marked another turning point, for the people now not only cursed the government but also Sheikh Mujib himself.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 43)

Mujib finally panicked. The famine had torn away the remaining Teflon coating of the Messiah. He had to find somebody to blame. His Rakkhi Bahini and special police death squads had by then eliminated Siraj Sikdar. The radical leftist had been arrested in Chittagong. Popular gossip of that time was that Siraj Sikdar had been brought to Dhaka to

meet Sheikh Mujib. There had been a heated argument between them and an angry Sheikh Mujib personally ordered his elimination. This is a clear case of murder in custody by the order of the head of the government. The murder of Siraj was the first publicized extrajudicial killing in Bangladesh:

“It so happened that Siraj Sikdar, leader of the Maoist Sharbohora (proletarian) party and the man Mujib's son Kamal had once tried to hunt down, was finally caught by the police near Chittagong towards the end of December, 1974. According to his brother-in-law, Zackaria Chowdhury ('Zack'), Siraj Sikdar was escorted to Dhaka and taken to Gonobhaban to meet Sheikh Mujib. Mujib tried to win him over. When Shikdar refused to compromise Mujib ordered the police to 'deal' with him.

“Zack said that Siraj was driven hand cuffed and blindfolded to the police control room, on disused Dhaka racecourse and then taken out at night on a lonely road and shot. The official explanation given at that time was that Siraj Sikdar was shot dead 'while trying to escape.' His sister, Shamim, who is Zack's wife, however, maintains that the bullet wounds on Siraj's body clearly showed he had been shot from the front six times in the chest, probably with a sten gun.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 46)

More than thirty thousand workers and activists of other political parties, a majority from the JSD and pro-Chinese leftist parties are said to have been killed by Rakkhi Bahini alone. There were other official and unofficial killing squads. Leading pro-Soviet politicians, Muzaffar Ahmed and Moni Singh, then convinced Mujib that his only chance of survival would be to do away with Western-style democracy altogether and transform Bangladesh into a single-party, socialist state. India apparently supported the new initiative although relations between Sheikh Mujib and Indira Gandhi remained somewhat cool following Mujib's attendance at the Islamic summit in Lahore. To begin with, Sheikh Mujib declared a State of Emergency on 28 December 1974, suspending all fundamental citizens' rights. Attacks on the media had already started long before the official declaration of the emergency. The offices of Ganakantha, the party mouthpiece of JSD and Haq Katha of Maulana Bhashani, the two most popular newspapers, were repeatedly attacked by Awami League thugs. They physically assaulted the journalists and smashed printing blocks. Al-Mahmud, the editor of Ganakantha and one of the country's finest poets was arrested. The emergency provided greater powers to an increasingly autocratic government to curb even the minimum of freedom that the journalists exercised at great personal risk. Moudud Ahmed writes:

“The contents of the Emergency were similar to those which the people had earlier experienced in the long history of Pakistan and also during the British colonial rule. The Ordinance authorized the government to make rules which had 3 major aspects. In the first place, provision was made for preventive detention in case of prejudicial activities. The second one related to social crimes, such as smuggling, hoarding, black marketeering, illegal possession of arms, counterfeiting, sabotaging, adulteration, corruption, etc. and the third aspect authorized the government to make rules restricting and regulating the press reports and press freedom etc.

“The Ordinance was a comprehensive one embracing all possible areas and authorized the government to exercise power in social, economic and political spheres of the citizens. As a result, the rules made under the Ordinance were very comprehensive and severe in nature.” (Ahmed, 2015: 275)

The declaration of the emergency was only the beginning of the process of creating a draconian state. The ultimate aim was to create a state where one man, one family and one party would rule the rest, regarding them as a ‘sub-human’ species similar to Orwell’s ‘proles’ in his famous work of fiction, ‘1984’. In the Orwellian state of Oceania, 85 per cent of the population were considered sub-human or ‘proles’ by the party and its all-powerful ‘Big Brother’. Similarly, in Bangladesh, there would be no citizens’ rights other than those enjoyed by the Awami Leaguers. The rulers demanded robotic surrender of everyone else at the altar created for the super-human myth of Mujib, ‘the Father of the Nation’.

It took the government just twenty-seven days to have the parliament rubber-stamp the much hated fourth amendment to the constitution. On Saturday 25 January 1975, the Bill was passed within fifteen minutes of it being tabled without any discussion or debate in the house, making Bangladesh an autocratic, single-party state. In accordance with this dramatic and sweeping constitutional change, the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) was established as the sole political party in the country. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman simultaneously changed his designation from Prime Minister to President. This was rather an interesting twist. The same individual had not liked his original title of President which had been specified in the declaration of independence and had taken up the position of Prime Minister after his triumphant return from Pakistan in January 1972. He was at that time a champion of Westminster-style democracy. Just three years later, Sheikh Mujib was now wielding enormous autocratic power which no Pakistani Martial Law Administrator had ever dreamt possible. The transition of Sheikh Mujib from Prime Minister to President was so ludicrous that the actual

President, Mahmudullah, was not even asked to resign. He was unceremoniously shunted from the presidency to a lower position of Speaker of the House. Clause 35 of the 4th Amendment Act, 1975 clearly shows complete disregard for any norms of democracy or constitutionalism:

“35. Special provisions relating to President: Notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution, on the commencement of this Act,-

- (a) the person holding office as President of Bangladesh immediately before such commencement *Shall cease to hold, and vacate*, the office of President of Bangladesh;
- (b) Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Father of the Nation, Shall become, and enter upon the office of President of Bangladesh and shall, as from such commencement, hold office as President of Bangladesh *as if elected to that office*, under the Constitution as amended by this act.

Only two parliamentarians had the courage to oppose this blatant murder of democracy and resigned from Parliament in protest. General M.A.G. Osmani, the Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Liberation Army and Barrister Moinul Hussain, son of Late Manik Mia, the eminent Pakistani-era editor of the Daily Ittefaq, both resigned in protest at what they saw as an autocratic move. Sheikh Mujib did not stop at establishing one-party rule. His next target was the media. His fascist character was further exposed when, with the exception of four government mouthpieces in Dhaka, all newspapers – daily, weekly or monthly – were banned on 15 June 1975. The four surviving newspapers, along with government radio and television stations saw their main goal as singing the praises of the ‘Great Leader’, again an Orwellian move. Although it was the Bengali middle class and intellectuals who had made Mujib into this larger-than-life figure, he apparently nurtured a deep dislike for the educated middle class whom he used to sarcastically describe as ‘white clothed bhadralok’. After passing the fourth amendment to the Constitution, Mujib ordered all government civil servants and members of civil society to join BAKSAL, the so-called National Party. Two pro-Soviet parties, the Communist Party of Bangladesh and the National Awami Party (Muzaffar) worked hand-in-hand with Mujib in subjugating the people of Bangladesh. They were the smaller components of BAKSAL, the principal party being the Awami League. Bengal had always been a fertile ground for opportunists, sycophants and traitors. There was no dearth of such characters in 1975. Soon, opportunists and those on the make could be seen queuing in front of Gonobhaban, the official residence Sheikh Mujib, for a chance to be blessed by the great leader, to touch his feet or to somehow make a public show of supporting his so-called Second Revolution. State radio and

television and the four government controlled newspapers went into overdrive in their praise of the rare political intellect of the ‘greatest Bengali in a thousand years’. The man who was killing democracy in Bangladesh had in fact criticized the Muslim League in 1967 for the very crimes now committed in his name during the autocratic BAKSAL rule. In his *Ausamapta Atmajiboni* he wrote:

“Muslim League leaders tried to create a reign of terror so that no one can gather courage to criticize the government. Muslim League leaders failed to realize that the strategy that they had been following would one day haunt them. They thought public opinion can be controlled by letting loose the party thugs. This strategy had never been successful – and also cannot be successful, that they never tried to learn from history.” (Rahman, 2017: 110)

How can the person who preached such a political philosophy become an autocrat himself? Whether Sheikh Mujib was a hypocrite or a victim of circumstances, history will decide.

“Tragically this total extinction of democracy and the perpetration of one-man rule brought no significant public protest. As before, the press and politicians acclaimed the move; even the venerable old revolutionary, Maulana Bhasani, who had from time to time come out against him, announced ‘total support’ for Mujib’s second revolution, in a statement issued from his home in Kagmari Village, Tangail, on 8th March.

“Once it was made clear that exclusion from the new system meant virtual extinction, everyone started climbing on the bandwagon. More than 500 journalists in Dhaka went in procession to Sheikh Mujib’s house requesting membership of BAKSAL. At the same time the editors of nine leading Dhaka newspapers similarly petitioned Mujib in the most sycophantic terms. Stating that, ‘after the war of liberation you have given a call to the nation to unitedly respond to the Second Revolution for the economic emancipation of the masses,’ the editors said they would ‘feel glorified if they got the opportunity to work as BAKSAL members under the leadership of Bangabandhu.’ Mujib had reason to be pleased.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 59)

An apparently bewildered Moudud Ahmed asks an innocent question about the surprise move of none other than the person once described as ‘symbol of democracy’ in former East Pakistan. He writes in his ‘Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’:

“As far as Mujib was concerned he was the Bangabandhu, the Father of the Nation and the Prime Minister exercising all the executive power. He was the most powerful man, an omnipotent authority of the country. He was still the most popular and the most dominant personality in the regime. The Government, the Party and Parliament, all were under his complete command. He had no contender or challenger in the country. His leadership was undisputed and unquestionable. The system through which he chose to rule the country was on his side having 293 out of 300 elected seats under his control. And yet Mujib decided to change the system entirely, reconcentrate the power he already had in his own hand and dissolve the existing institutions. Is it for more power that he went for such a change?” (Ahmed, 2015: 287)

Moudud Ahmed is wrong here. Sheikh Mujib, the mass leader with the ability to excite people to frenzy with his fiery rhetoric, had lost his Midas touch after the tragic famine of 1974. As an intelligent politician, he would have realized this fact. BAKSAL was the last weapon of a desperate autocrat hoping to perpetuate his power and it would become the ultimate reason for his fall.

With an unpopular and autocratic Mujib heading the single-party regime in Bangladesh, India saw an opportunity to extract maximum benefit for itself in the form of the commissioning of Farakka Barrage upstream on the river Ganges, an idea first conceived in the 1950s. The declared objectives of the infrastructure project were: i) to draw water from upstream in order to improve the navigation of the river Bhagirathi and reduce silting at the mouth of the river at the port of Calcutta; and ii) to produce electricity. However, this environmentally damaging project had a wider strategic objective of crippling East Pakistan economically by setting off a desertification process with the reduced flow of water to all downstream rivers. The delta had been historically dependent for its agriculture on the free flow of Himalayan water mainly through the river Ganges (also known as Padma) and the river Brahmaputra (also known as Jamuna). Drawing of water upstream would likely have a huge impact on the daily lives of tens of millions of people downstream. During the Pakistan era, the two hostile neighbours failed to reach any agreement on the equitable distribution of Himalayan water. Although India had continued the construction of the barrage despite Pakistan's repeated protests, it could not commission it in the absence of water-sharing treaty, as any unilateral action on the part of India would have violated the 1966 Helsinki rules. Since the liberation of Bangladesh, India had given repeated assurances that the interests of Bangladesh would not be jeopardized. They were however, keeping a close watch on the political developments in Bangladesh.

During Sheikh Mujib's visit to India in May 1974, Indira Gandhi managed to get verbal agreement from him to a unilateral 'trial commissioning' of the Farakka Barrage in the lean season of 1975. Both Mujib and Indira knew that the word 'trial' was simply a way of hoodwinking the people of Bangladesh. There is no such thing as trial when a huge barrage like the Farakka is commissioned. This action by Sheikh Mujib was nothing less than a subversion of the national interest of Bangladesh, and the most damaging of his many follies. The Indian authorities assessed correctly that their commissioning the barrage in 1975 would go practically unnoticed in Bangladesh in the uncertain political environment that was prevailing after the establishment of BAKSAL rule. The strangulation of economic life in Bangladesh was announced on the morning of 21 April 1975 by Jagjiban Ram, the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation. Couched in diplomatic niceties, Jagjiban Ram declared in the Indian parliament:

"Since the discussions regarding allocation of the minimum flows of the Ganga during the lean months are continuing between the two Governments the present agreement is a provisional arrangement to enable the running of the feeder canal. This agreement is a breakthrough for the Farakka issue and sets an outstanding example of mutual understanding and accommodation of the two neighbouring countries in the development of the waters of an international river. It is hoped that this understanding will further reinforce the relations between the two countries and would enable expeditious settlement by negotiations of the Farakka issue on a lasting basis.

"I am happy to inform the House that the canal started running at 11 o'clock this morning." (Bhasin, India-Bangladesh Relations, Vol II)

India's use of water as a tool of aggression against the people of a militarily weak, economically poor, downstream nation started with Jagjiban Ram's announcement. Sheikh Mujib remained tight-lipped about the whole issue, nor was there any official comment from the Bangladesh government. India's aggressive attitude in the use of water resources continues to this day.

While the people were trying to absorb the shock of losing their minimal democratic rights, all was not well in the cantonment. Colonel Faruk and a few other young decorated army officers who had fought heroically in the war of liberation had been seething with anger at Mujib's imperious and corrupt governance. They were convinced that the independence of Bangladesh would be in jeopardy as long as Mujib remained in power. They expressed their displeasure to a few senior officers, including General Zia, the then deputy chief of staff, only to

receive a discouraging rebuff from their aloof seniors, as recounted by Colonel Faruk to Anthony Mascarenhas:

“According to Farooq, General Zia’s answer was: ‘I am sorry I would not like to get involved in anything like this. If you want to do something you junior officers should do it yourself. Leave me out of it.’” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 54)

Indeed, it was these same juniors who later engineered an apparently reckless and brutal military operation that surprisingly succeeded against all odds and toppled the notorious BAKSAL regime.

There was an official programme for the President to visit Dhaka University on the morning of 15 August 1975. The students’ union had once honoured Sheikh Mujib by bestowing the title, ‘Bangabandhu’. There was strong rumour that this time he would be declared ‘President for Life’. An elaborate programme was undertaken by the University authorities to lay on a welcome befitting the Supreme Leader. What the radical opposition JSD and its military wing, Ganobahini had in mind was, of course, vastly different:

“A programme was announced that Sheikh Mujib will come to Dhaka University. Necessary cleaning activities were going on at the university. Masters examination was in progress at that time. Teachers, students were all busy.

“Dhaka City and University units of revolutionary ‘Ganobahini’ became quite active. It was decided to give a demonstration of strength on the occasion of Mujib’s visit. But no programme for public protest or procession was taken.

“Nikhil* was killed while making a crude bomb in November 1974. That bomb was named ‘Nikhil’ after him. It has already been said that the processing technique of the device was very crude. Anowar Hussain**, the Commander of Dhaka city Ganobahini was a lecturer of Chemistry department at Dhaka University. He improvised ‘Nikhil’. In order not to allow the visit of Mujib at the university to conclude unhindered, four bombs were exploded in the university area on 14 August by the members of the Ganobahini at the instruction of Anowar. These were time devices. Ganobahini members placed the bombs supplied by Anowar at Dhaka University Library, Science Annex Building, Office of the V.C. and Curzon Hall. The bombs were exploded between 11 a.m. to 12 noon. There was some uproar and confusion. But it was short-lived.” (Ahmad, 2014: 170–171)

*Nikhil, an active Ganobahini member, was a lecturer at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

****Anowar Hussain was the younger brother of Col Taher. He would later become an ardent supporter of Awami League and become Vice Chancellor of Jahangir Nagar University as the reward from Sheikh Hasina.**

Sheikh Mujib, however, was killed before he could visit the university that morning. A handful of serving and retired mid-ranking officers with just six hundred troops of the 1st Bengal Lancers and the 2nd Field Artillery managed to stage the most unbelievably daring *coup d'état* in the early morning of 15 August 1975. The total number of officers that took part in the operation was less than ten:

“The main killer team led by Majors Mohiuddin, Noor and Huda, had raced through the deserted streets getting to Sheikh Mujib’s residence at approximately 5.15 am. They had 120 men squeezed into five trucks and the 105 mm Howitzer which was quickly set up on the main Mirpur Road at the corner of the lake and diagonally opposite the house. Other troops in more trucks blocked off the surrounding area. Then the majors and the men went in.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 72)

It was a tragic end for a man who had once been most popular political leader that Bengal had ever seen. However, by the time of his death, Sheikh Mujib was more hated than loved. Anthony Mascarenhas concludes:

“Once the darling of the independence movement ‘in whose magic name all things are done’, Sheikh Mujib as Prime Minister and President became the most hated man in Bangladesh within three short years of its founding. He and his family were killed for it. And the hatred lingers. Ten years after Mujib’s death, his daughter, Hasina, told me that she could not get the agreement of relatives and neighbours in their home village of Tungipara to erect a suitable monument over Mujib’s grave. ‘People react differently when you are not in power.’ (Mascarenhas, 1986: Preface v)

Oli Ahad, a senior politician and leading organizer of 1952 language movement has high praise for Col Faruk and the rebels who terminated the BAKSAL regime:

“August 15, 1975 will always be remembered as golden dawn of freedom from a foreign chain of slavery and the recklessness of national leadership. Indeed, it is a unique day in the life of the nation of freedom loving Bengalis. This was effectively, the first step and auspicious beginning of our obtaining freedom from the slavery of Delhi.” (Ahad, 2004: 488)

I began this chapter with my personal experience of the day when an undisputed, unblemished and extremely popular leader returned to his motherland. Similarly, I will conclude this chapter with my reminiscences of the morning of 15 August 1975, the day of his demise. I was a third-year student of the Department of Chemical Engineering at BUET in 1975. At around six in the morning I was rudely woken from my deep slumber in Room no. 310 (North), Sher-e-Bangla Hall. Somebody was shaking my shoulder and shouting at me. It was a student, one year junior to me, shouting, "Get up. Mujib is dead." I leapt to my feet trying to absorb the shock.

Another student brought a small radio. A certain Major Dalim was announcing on the radio that Mujib had been killed for his misdeeds and the patriotic army had seized state power under Khandaker Mushtaque, one of Mujib's senior ministers. The unknown major also claimed that martial law had been imposed and the official name of Bangladesh had been changed to 'Islamic Republic of Bangladesh'. My immediate reaction was one of utter disbelief. Even today I remember saying to myself, "It is nonsense, someone must be doing a practical joke on Indian Independence Day." However, with the radio broadcast of Khandaker Moshtaque, the new president at around 11 a.m. all my confusion was cleared. Mujib had, indeed, been killed in a military coup. We students went out to see what was happening in the city. We were four class-mates and we took a couple of rickshaws (a popular mode of public transport in Bangladesh) from in front of Jagannath Hall, a Dhaka University dormitory just across the road and travelled around the city for the rest of the day. Surprisingly, there was no sign of any remorse or mourning. On the contrary, people seemed to be generally happy, some of them were openly rejoicing. I remembered 10 January 1972 when I attended that historic meeting at Racecourse and been overwhelmed to see the public expression of love for the messiah. I silently asked myself, would it have been better if Mujib had died in a Pakistani jail and not returned to Bangladesh? In that case, he would have remained the eternal hero of the Bengali nation. Sheikh Mujib was undoubtedly a charismatic and brave man. He was a demagogue, but probably never really forgot his roots as a Bengali Muslim. In the end, he fell like a hero in a Greek tragedy. Colonel Farook, the mastermind of the coup, summarizes the rise and fall of the Bengali Messiah in his interview with Anthony Mascarenhas:

"Do you remember how we wept when we heard that Sheikh Mujib had returned? Remember the whole country, people mad all over! The man was almost made a god! In 1972 if he told us, 'Alright you all round up the Awami Leaguers or the Brigade Commanders, tie them up and throw them

in the river' we would have done it. Why? Because Sheikh Mujib had said it. What for? Nobody would have asked. I would not have asked. We felt we have got a country, we have got a leader. We were prepared to do anything. We did not mind any problem. Soldiers, men, rank, nothing mattered. It was such an extreme emotion and it was not just one person, but hundreds of thousands of people. All differences had died. That's why it turned so bitter. I say this chap (Mujib) has created the crime of the century by destroying the feeling of such a large number of people." (Mascarenhas, 1986: 49)

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE REAWAKENING OF MUSLIM IDENTITY: THE RISE OF BANGLADESHI NATIONALISM

The radio announcement of a certain Major Dalim in the early morning of 15 August 1975 bewildered more than shocked the listeners. What the unknown major broadcast on Bangladesh Radio was in essence: i) Sheikh Mujib had been killed by the patriotic members of armed forces; ii) the tyrannical government of BAKSAL had been toppled; iii) Bangladesh was now an 'Islamic Republic'; and iv) a martial law government, under the leadership of President Moshtaque, a former Minister in the Mujib regime, had taken over the government.

A *coup d'état* in a third world country was not an uncommon occurrence in the 1970s. Salvador Allende was killed in a similar coup in Chile in 1973. The most surprising part of the announcement on Dhaka radio was the change in the secular character of the state with the declaration that it was now an 'Islamic State'. The leadership of the *coup d'état* must have thought that this particular announcement, suggesting a return to Islamic roots, would make them more popular among the ordinary citizens of the country and thus offset any misgivings about the brutal killing of Mujib and his family. They were not wrong:

"Lest the importance of the backlash against the Awami Leagues secularist campaign be overlooked, one should recall that when Mujib's disgruntled former cabinet minister, Khandaker, announced the Sheikh's death on the radio and proclaimed himself to be in charge, he signed off with the traditional Muslim greeting, Salaam alaikum, peace be with you. At that, villagers throughout the land wept. For at last there was a sign that the government was neither "Indian" nor secular and that, after all, the people had not been betrayed. For initially the people had believed that secular meant that the government would be neutral among religions; they never dreamt it would be openly hostile. On this, the Sheikh, influenced by his advisors, had let them down.

"Undoubtedly, Mujib would not have understood any of the above, for he never thought about ideas in the extreme, never distinguished between

substance and style, and personally was a moderate. Unfortunately, instead of following his heart, he listened to his advisors, whose ideology was anathema to Bangladeshi masses.” (Novak, 1994: 181)

Political Islam had made its first entry into Bengal in 1203 AD with the victorious band of a Muslim army led by a physically short, but unusually long armed general of immense courage according to popular myth. The entry point for Ikhtiyar al Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji’s force in the region was not East Bengal, present-day Bangladesh. Rather, they came from Bihar and conquered Nadia, the temporary capital of the Hindu Sena King Lakhanasena. Nadia is presently situated in West Bengal, an Indian state. Exactly ten years before the conquest of Bengal by this man from Garamsir in northern Afghanistan, Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, the viceroy of Muizz-ud-Din Muhammad Ghori had established a Muslim Sultanate in North India and made Delhi his capital. Ghori defeated Prithiraj Chauhan in the famous battle of Tarain in 1192 and entrusted the job of consolidating Muslim power in the hands of his able general before himself returning to Khorasan. Ghori apparently did not like the climate in India.

Ikhtiyar al-Din marched from Oudh to Bihar, then known as Magadha and defeated Govindapala, the last Pala dynasty king. He then proceeded towards Nadia (Navadwip) at lightning speed and captured the city with only eighteen accompanying horsemen who were able to maintain the speed of the General, the bulk of the Muslim army were some distance behind. Lakhsana Sena, the elderly Sena ruler, fled from Nadia by river and took shelter deep in riverine East Bengal, at Vikrampur, near Dhaka. Ikhtiyar, instead of following the fleeing Bengal King, moved north to Gaud (Lakhnawati) and established his seat of government there. Lakhnawati then had two wings, the eastern one was Barendra and the western was Radha, lying to the west of the river Hughly. Muslim forces do not appear to have captured Dhaka and the Faridpur region of East Bengal for at least another seventy years. Mughith al-Din Tughral eventually achieved the feat of conquering East Bengal from the remnants of the Sena dynasty. Sylhet did not come under Muslim rule before 1300 AD. It took another two hundred years for the Muslim rulers of Bengal to capture the Chittagong region during the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah. Crown Prince Nusrat Shah personally led the expedition and expelled the Arakanese and Tippera forces from Chittagong in 1515 AD. However, it should be noted here that just before the establishment of Ilyas Shahi rule in the middle of the 14th century, Fakhr al-Din Mubarak was the first Muslim ruler to extend his hold from Sonargaon up to Chittagong. During his reign, the famous traveller Ibn Batuta visited Bengal and at Sylhet in

East Bengal he met Hazrat Shahjalal, the most revered Sufi of the age. However, Arakanese forces and Portuguese pirates were able to wrest control of Chittagong from later Muslim rulers. First Nusrat Shah and then the great Mughals consolidated a firm Muslim hold over the Chittagong belt.

In this process of nearly three hundred years of gradual expansion and consolidation of Muslim political power in East Bengal, or 'Bang', the western wing of Bengal remained always in closer alliance with Muslim seats of power and under the domination of Islamic conquerors. There was only a very short period of three to four years of Hindu revival under Raja Kans (alias Raja Ganesh, alias Raja Danuj Mardan Dev) from 1414 to 1418 AD. Muslim rule in Bengal ended after more than five hundred and fifty years with the defeat of Nawab Siraj-al-dowlah at Plassey in 1757. After that, it was a hundred and ninety years of British colonial rule first by the East India Company and then directly under the British Crown. If one is to believe the theory of the preaching of Islam with the unsheathed 'Sword of Allah', propagated by a section of British and Hindu historians, then conversion should have been more successful in West Bengal because of its proximity to the initial capital of Muslim conquerors. The demographic situation in Bengal during the five hundred and fifty years of Muslim rule and then even under the British colonial regime does not support the theory of conversion by force. The people of East Bengal found in the egalitarian character of Islam the path to social and economic emancipation. The Aryan conquerors in India always viewed the people beyond the eastern bank of Ganges with contempt. To them inhabitants of 'Bang' were of 'impure class', they were dasyus (ruffians), not fully human. Brahmanical law which had its roots in Aryan myths and philosophy denigrated the indigenous population of the eastern part of India. The general population of East Bengal at the time of the Muslim conquest were mostly peasants, fishermen and weavers. Furthermore, Buddhism, once the dominant religion in this area, was losing ground under persecution from Hindu Brahmin rulers. The situation was perfect for the arrival of a great number of Sufis (Islamic Saints) to preach Islam. Dr. Abdul Karim, an eminent historian and former Vice Chancellor of Chittagong University writes:

“With the advent of the Muhammadans in India an era ends – the old order passes. And in no country was the movement of Islamization more epoch-making. For of the various civilizations with which the Muhammadans came into contact in the course of their world-conquest, none could have been more diametrically opposed to their ideals than that of the people of India. Apart from the fact that the Islamic movement was of relatively

recent growth, forcing itself on the ancient and firmly established social and religious structure of India, it also postulates a clashing of fundamental convictions, a conflict of realism with idealism, of the material with the visionary, of the concrete with the abstract.' The above observation of Percy Brown in the context of the Indian subcontinent is also true about Bengal. But the proselytizing effect of Islam was deeper in Bengal than in other parts of the sub-continent as proved by the swelling of Muslim population in this deltaic region. Probably the problem is not so difficult for Islam in Bengal, because, (i) there has always been a preponderance of a non-Aryan element in this region and (ii) Buddhism which was uprooted from the land of its birth, i.e. North India, had been a great competitor of Hinduism in Bengal at the advent of Islam. The non-Aryan elements had somehow identified themselves with the degraded Buddhism of the pre-Muslim period. When such a rivalry was raging in the country, Islam came as a relieving force in which many found an easy opening to salvation and success. As discussed in a previous chapter, there seems to have been mass conversion in Bengal due to various reasons, but chiefly attracted by the social equality and fraternity of Islam as manifested by the simple and unostentatious life of the Sufis." (Karim, 2007: 189)

The demographic balance had tilted decisively towards the Muslims in the whole of Bengal by the early 20th century. According to the 1931 Census of India, Muslims were 54 per cent of the total population in Bengal. In East Bengal, the proportion of Muslims had climbed to 70 per cent. This was the result of tireless work by the Sufi preachers over nearly a millennium since the first contact of Arab Muslim traders with the coastal people of Eastern Bengal during the 8th and 9th centuries. The political identity of Bengal was also given by the independent and semi-independent Muslim Sultans. Before the advent of Islam, Bengal as we know it today, was a cluster of smaller feudal states with names such as Bang, Samatata, Pundra, Barendra, Gaud, Radha, Harikel, Chandradwip, Tamralipti and so forth. Sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah united the majority of these states under the name Bangalah to constitute the independent political unit which used to be pronounced 'Pengala' by the Portuguese and was ultimately named by the British as Bengal. The three provinces under Bengal were Sonargaon, Satgaon and Lakhnauti at the time of Sultan Ilyas Shah. Nearly all Muslim Sultans patronized the Bengali language and literature with regular royal grants and commissions. Bengal reached its zenith as a prosperous land for agriculture and centre of cotton and silk textiles under Muslim rule:

"So wealthy was Bangladesh under the Muslims that Vasco da Gama sailed there, rounding the Cape of Good Hope and entering the Indian Ocean in 1498. Reporting to Portugal's king, he described Bengal as a country that

could export 'grain and very valuable cotton goods, a country that abounds in silver'. By 1536 the Portuguese were trading at Chittagong and living along the Bhagirathi river in Radha above what is now Calcutta." (Novak, 1994: 77)

Unfortunately, after the Plassey debacle, Bengali Muslims, out of sheer frustration and a sense of defeat, withdrew into themselves. The hostile attitude of the new colonial rulers towards the Muslims as a community pushed them to further anonymity. The Bengali Hindus embraced the opportunity with both hands and the period of so-called Hindu Bengali Renaissance commenced under British patronage. Since then, Hindu intellectuals have monopolized Bengali nationalism as synonymous with Hinduism. I heard a very interesting anecdote from Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Secretary General of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, when he and I were in adjacent cells in Kashimpur Jail.

In the early 1940s, Mirza Alamgir's two paternal aunts were travelling on a train from Calcutta to Murshidabad. There were other passengers in the compartment in which they were travelling. One elderly Hindu befriended Mirza Alamgir's aunts who were college students at that time. They talked and shared food without bothering to ask their names or religious identity. Just before reaching the destination, the Hindu lady wanted to know the names of the young co-passengers. She was horrified to know that she had actually befriended a couple of young Muslim girls. Her immediate, bitter response was: "My God, you are Muslims! I thought you came from a respectable *bhadralok* Bengali family." As far as the Hindu lady was concerned, a Muslim can neither be respectable nor Bengali.

Bengali Muslims were on the receiving end of Hindu communalism during the entire period of British rule. In 1905, the Bengali Hindus fiercely opposed the partition of Bengal and even resorted to terrorism in the name of safeguarding Bengali, by which they meant Hindu, culture. They were successful in their movement and the British government ultimately annulled Bengal's partition during the visit to India of George V and Queen Mary in 1911. The same Bengali Hindus made a volte-face in 1947 and demanded the division of Bengal although Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave his consent to the initiative of Suhrawardy and Sarat Bose for a separate, united, Muslim-majority Bengal outside both Pakistan and India. Bengali Hindus could not accept a state where they would become a minority. They campaigned for the division of Bengal with the same old parochial attitude that saw Islam as having no place in Bengali culture:

“When Curzon partitioned Bengal in 1905, this elicited a storm of protest which forced the government to rescind his decision within six years. Indeed, Bengalis’ reputation for being in the vanguard of Indian nationalism owes much to the agitation which upset the ‘settled fact’ of partition, and which introduced new techniques of mobilisation to Indian politics.

“In 1947, Bengal was partitioned again, following horrific clashes between Hindus and Muslims. On this occasion however, hardly a voice was raised in protest. On the contrary, the second and definitive partition of Bengal was preceded by an organized agitation which demanded the vivisection of the province on the basis of religion. This movement was led by the very same section of Bengali society that had dominated its nationalist politics since the time of Bengal’s first partition: the so-called *bhadralok* or ‘respectable people’. In less than forty years, *bhadralok* politics had come full circle, moving away from nationalist agendas to more parochial concerns.” (Chatterjee, 2002: 1-Introduction)

The transformation of so-called Bengali Hindu secular intellectuals into a rabidly communal element was personified by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, the most popular novelist of his time. In 1926, he wrote an essay entitled, *Bartaman Hindu-Mussalman Samasya* (The present Hindu-Muslim problem), the most diabolical piece of Muslim bashing ever written by even the worst communal Hindu anywhere in India. According to Sarat Chandra, all Muslims were outright evil whether they were of foreign origin or local converts. He wrote:

“If learning is simply knowing how to read and write, there is little difference between Hindus and Muslims—But if the essence of learning is width of the mind and culture of the heart, then there is no comparison between the two communities—Many may hope to establish a parity of learning [between them] but I do not. A thousand years has not been enough time [to achieve this] – nor will another millennium suffice.” (Chatterji, 2002: 174)

Here Sarat Chandra clearly denigrates immigrant Muslims when he refers to the timeframe of a millennium. In the same article, he then vents his anger towards converted Bengali Muslims with undisguised contempt:

“I had a Brahmin cook once. He sacrificed his religion to indulge his passion for a Muslim woman. One year later, he had changed his name, his dress, and even his nature. The very face that God had given him had changed beyond recognition. And this is not an isolated instance. Those who know a bit about village life know that this sort of thing happens

frequently. And in the matter of aggression, these new converts put their Muslim co-religionist to shame.” (Chatterji, 2002: 174)

Joya Chatterji, in her work, analyses the parochial thinking and prejudice of not only Sarat Chandra but also other members of Hindu intelligentsia:

“It is their basic lack of ‘Culture’ that, Saratchandra argues, accounts for the brutality, barbarism and fanaticism of Muslims. These are the age-old, universal and unchanging attributes of the Muslim Community.” (2002: 174)

“Islam has, in this construction, a mysterious power to transform even the physical and personal attributes of recent converts, so that they are indistinguishable from the Muslim mass. The uncultured and barbaric essence of Islam, it suggests, is able to transcend not only the barriers of space, time, and geography, but also to cross the local ashraf-atrap frontier, so that these characteristics are as true of Bengali peasant converts as of the old Muslim aristocracy.” (2002: 174)

“The characteristics of Muslims are always the opposite of the attributes that are taken to constitute ‘Hinduness’. Thus Hindus may like Bipradas be ‘orthodox’ but they are always tolerant, while Muslims are invariably ‘fanatics’. In Hindus, adherence to orthodox religion in a matter of culture and virtue (as in Bipradas, Dayamayee and transformed Bandana), but in Muslims, ‘obsession with religion’ is a mark of their lack of culture, their innate barbarism.” (Chatterjee, 2002: 175)

The partition of Bengal in 1947 was the inevitable result of a poisonous communal situation as reflected in the diatribe of Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya. In an extremely vitiated communal environment, it was only natural that Bengali Muslims voted en masse for a separate Muslim-majority homeland in the election of 1946. It was also expected that the later rise of Bengali nationalism in the then East Pakistan received all possible encouragement from Bengali Hindu intellectuals and politicians from West Bengal. The central government of India might have felt some apprehension at the initial period of the movement for fear of encouraging a separatist movement in West Bengal itself. However, the Hindu religion of 80 per cent of the population in West Bengal had worked as a solid safeguard against any such nationalist passion. Delhi had its share of language-related problems in other parts of India. A strong anti-Hindi language movement in the south had discouraged central Congress leaders from coming out openly in support of the Bengali language movement in Dhaka. But the Bengali Hindus in West Bengal were under no such

inhibitions. Furthermore, the Bengali Muslim middle class and intellectuals in East Pakistan suffered from an inferiority complex and willingly accepted Calcutta's cultural domination. Like Saratchandra, many of them truly believed that Bengali Hindus were in fact a culturally superior species. Rabindra Sangeet (Tagore's Song) was treated with such reverence by a section of the middle class that it even eclipsed respect for any divine scripture. According to the secularist intelligentsia of East Pakistan, the liberation of Bangladesh was like returning to their roots and a victory of indigenous Bengali culture over Islam, a foreign import. I personally know of a family who recited the poems of Tagore at a Muslim grave yard instead of Quranic verses after the burial of their daughter. Such ultra-secularists still exist in present-day Bangladesh.

Many readers may feel the foregoing is a repetition of what I have already written in previous chapters. However, I believe that in order to understand fully the extent of people's suspicion of secularism in Bangladesh this repetition is necessary. Intense and extreme parochial passions and an admiration for anything representing Bengali Hindu culture were displayed by the secularists in the newly liberated Bangladesh for the first few months after 16 December 1971. I distinctly remember finding every single signboard around Elephant Road, an up-market shopping district in Dhaka, with anything written in English or Urdu smashed and destroyed immediately after liberation in 1972. Only the Bengali alphabet was acceptable to emotionally charged Bengali Muslims. As discussed in previous chapters, radio and television even stopped using Muslim greetings. It was not considered safe for bearded elderly men with Islamic head coverings (*Tupī*) to travel alone in the streets. They were jeered at and insulted by youths brandishing Sten-guns. In some instances, such elderly men were even physically assaulted. This nightmare, however, did not last long. Anti-Islamic euphoria soon started to evaporate. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not personally encourage such ultra-secular hooliganism. He instructed radio and television stations to resume Islamic greetings. In an effort to dispel misgivings about secularism, Sheikh Mujib's government started a campaign declaring secularism to be not anti-religion and, therefore, not anti-Islam. Unfortunately for the Awami League, perceptions of the party's being anti-Islam stuck permanently. Over-zealous secularists forgot that Islam is not just a religion but an ingrained part of the culture of Bengali Muslims:

"Nevertheless, the country is indelibly, eternally Islamic, if not politically at least socially, as, for example, in the United States, where Christianity is a social but not overtly political force. The distinction between religion as a

social and as a political force is major. Still, Bangladeshi minorities are treated as equals, despite minor tensions....

“Generally speaking, most Bangladeshis are devout, praying Muslims who feel themselves to be part of the larger Muslim world, and they are dedicated to the laws of their religion: charity, pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting during Ramadan, a sober life, and the belief in the majestic, unitary God of Islam. That austere, straightforward way of living infuses every aspect of life.” (Novak, 1994: 92)

By 15 August 1975, the majority of Bengali Muslims were starting to have strong misgivings about secularism. Euphoria at the triumph of Bengali nationalism over Islam had long since evaporated. There was a surprising reawakening of Muslim identity among many, taking it back to the levels seen before 1947. Disillusioned Bangladeshis by that time had started blaming India, rightly or wrongly, for everything from less water in the rivers and the 1974 famine to the formation of BAKSAL and the overall poor governance of Mujib. The Awami League, secularism, India and Sheikh Mujib were bracketed together as the sources of misfortune for Bangladesh and its people. Such was the intensity of religious emotion among many people that Major Dalim, in his announcement of the military coup and the brutal killing of Sheikh Mujib and his family on the radio on the early morning of 15 August, was confident enough to announce that henceforth the country would be known as Islamic Republic of Bangladesh. Later in the day, Khandaker Moshtaque, although maintaining silence about changing the identity of the state, finished his speech with ‘Bangladesh Zindabad’ instead of ‘Joy Bangla’ as used by Sheikh Mujib.

The broadcasting style of state radio and television was changed immediately with the introduction of more Islamic vocabulary. The name of state radio was changed from Bangladesh Betar to Radio Bangladesh. Bangladesh Betar was thought to reflect a Bengali Hindu vocabulary. Islam began a strong comeback into national life and culture. King Khaled, the then King of Saudi Arabia, on hearing the news of the overthrow of the Mujib government, gave formal recognition to Bangladesh almost immediately, a move followed by China. The atheist Chinese leadership was, of course, more concerned about the foreign policy of Bangladesh which had nakedly followed the Indo-Soviet line during Mujib’s rule. Secularism was removed as a fundamental state principle from the Constitution through the proclamation of Martial Law on 20 August 1975. The proclamation was given retrospective effect to 15 August. The political developments during that five-day period from 15 to

20 August need to be narrated before we proceed to consider Moshtaque's eighty-three days in power. Col Taher, a left-leaning sector commander, initially played an important role in facilitating the consolidation of power of both Moshtaque and the other coup leaders:

“Lieutenant Colonel Taher went to the radio station at 9.00 in the morning at the request of Major Rashid.* He found there Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, Taheruddin Thakur, Major Dalim and Maj Gen Khalilur Rahman. He advised the coup leaders to contact the three Chiefs of Staff as soon as possible. He gave five proposals to Khandaker Moshtaque. The proposals were:

1. Constitution should be scrapped immediately.
2. Martial Law should be declared and enforced.
3. Political prisoners should be freed irrespective of political affiliation.
4. All-Party National Government should be formed sans BAKSAL.
5. General election for the Constituent Assembly should be held at the earliest.” (Ahmed, 2016: 178)

*Major Rashid was the second most important coup leader and brother-in-law of Col Faruk, the mastermind.

Khandaker Mushtaque took the Presidential oath at Bangabhaban. The oath was administered by the Chief Justice. The three Chiefs of Staff went to the radio station and meekly pledged their allegiance to the new government. However, the Army Chief, General Shafiullah was soon replaced by Major General Ziaur Rahman. He was the most popular general among both troops and officers at the time. The country's population also respected him highly as a valiant freedom fighter and as the declarer of independence. All opposition political parties hailed the bloody change of the government and pledged support for the new administration:

“No tears were shed for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Maulana Bhashani, who had a few months earlier pledged ‘total support’ for Mujib's ‘Second Revolution’, quickly issued a statement welcoming the historic change and offering fullest support to Khandaker Moshtaque's government.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 82)

JSD and its military wing, Ganabahini, were also jubilant. A pamphlet welcoming the murder of Mujib was issued by Ganabahini with the title: ‘Murderer Mujib is murdered.’ Mohiuddin Ahmad, a former JSD leader writes:

“After two days, Nayeem Jahangir, a Dhaka University student went to Taher’s Narayanganj residence to get some direction about the situation. Nayeem was a fellow freedom fighter in the Sector 11 with Taher and used to frequently meet him. Taher told Nayeem with regret, ‘They have committed a major mistake, they should not have allowed the burial of Mujib. Now they will build a Mazar (mausoleum) there. The dead body should have been thrown in Bay of Bengal.’” (Ahmed, 2016: 179)

Mujib’s body was flown to his home village in an army helicopter and unceremoniously buried there on 15 August. There were only a few people to attend the last journey of man who had been the most popular leader that Bengal had ever seen.

Moshtaque’s uneasy alliance with the army somehow limped on for eighty-three days. Recognition of the country by China and Saudi Arabia bolstered his position, but only temporarily. His short period in power was mostly spent trying to accommodate diverse elements of shifting forces. Mushtaque had no power base of his own, neither among the public nor in the military. Everyone knew it was temporary arrangement. The pro-Indian elements plotted actively to topple Moshtaque with encouragement from across the border. They regarded Moshtaque as a pro-Pakistani usurper. Mujib loyalists among the military, suffering from a sense of guilt for not being able to save their ‘Bangabandhu’ at the moment of his greatest need, quickly organized themselves to mount a counter-coup. In addition, the arrogance and inexperience of the young coup leaders entrenched in Bangabhaban, coupled with the failure of the over-cautious Moshtaque to take a more courageous political posture, sealed their fate. Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, the ambitious CGS, and Colonel Shafat Jamil, Dhaka Brigade Commander with his newfound love and loyalty for the dead Mujib, probably emboldened by encouraging signs from the Indian High Commission made their strike on 3 November. The same Shafat Jamil had known of the junior officers’ plans to overthrow Mujib at a very early stage. It was Shafat Jamil who arranged the posting of Major Rashid in Dhaka as Commanding Officer 2 Field Artillery. Knowing full well that the young majors were planning some outrageous act, not only did Shafat remain silent, he in fact facilitated them to some extent:

“On one occasion he (Colonel Rashid) cautiously broached the subject with the Dhaka Brigade Commander, Colonel Shafat Jamil. He recalled that after they had traded words about how bad things were in Bangladesh, Shafat Jamil asked him: Ha, Ki Kora? (What shall we do?). Rashid promptly backed out. ‘No Sir,’ he told the colonel, ‘I won’t do anything unless you order me. After all you are my brigade commander.’ Rashid was quite shaken by the experience. He warned Farook not to trust anyone because he

feared the other officers were playing a double game and would put them in trouble.

“The meeting with Shafat Jamil did, however, have a very fortunate and totally unexpected result. During their conversation, Rashid said, Shafat Jamil had suggested that instead of going to the Gunnery School at Jessore, why not request a transfer to Dhaka ‘so that we can be in touch more conveniently’. This was, to say the least, a curious suggestion and raises question marks about the Dhaka Brigade Commander’s intention.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 56)

The counter-coup began on the night of 2 November. The first move was to recall the infantry guards belonging to 46 Brigade from Bangabhaban on orders from Shafat Jamil. They demanded the immediate surrender of Faruk and Rashid to the formal army chain of command, by then effectively under Khalid Musharraf. Major General Zia was already held captive with his family at his official residence in the cantonment. Faruk and Rashid refused to surrender and at one point it appeared that there would be a bloody showdown in the very heart of the capital. But that was an unrealistic proposition. The young majors had only a few tanks with no infantry support and were, therefore, no match for the combined forces of the military. General Osmani, the Defence Advisor to Moshtaque sensed the danger of fratricide within the army and successfully mediated between the two factions and apparently avoided bloodshed. The majors agreed to surrender in return for safe passage into exile for all those involved in the 15 August coup. Unfortunately, while the negotiation was going on, a massacre was being committed very near to the Bangabhaban. It is alleged that in the early hours of 3 November, Risaldar Muslehuddin and a group of assassins went to Dhaka Central Jail and mercilessly killed Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Qamaruzzaman and Capt. Mansur Ali, who had all been held captive since 15 August. This savage act was the execution of a diabolical contingency plan hatched by the 15 August coup leaders to eliminate the Awami League’s senior leadership in case of any counter-coup and to prevent India from restoring the BAKSAL government. Khalid and company would only learn about the massacre long after the majors had left the country.

General Zia was forced to resign as the Chief of Staff from his captivity in his own residence. The letter was short and the only thing that Zia had requested in his resignation letter was a normal pension and other benefits. That Zia was an unusually honest person had been reflected in his request:

“The resignation had been clearly obtained under duress because he was still being held prisoner in his own home. And if Zia was anxious about the future it was because he would have to live on his pension alone. Unlike some of the others he had not made money on the side. Indeed, after resigning, Zia asked one of his junior officers to find him a small house with a monthly rent of about 300 Takkas. ‘But sir,’ the embarrassed officer replied, ‘you can’t find a place even in Mohammedpur (a Dhaka suburb) for less than 800 Takkas.’ (Mascarenhas, 1986: 101)

Brigadier Khalid Musharraf forced President Moshtaque to accept Zia’s resignation and appoint him Army Chief of Staff. He also promoted himself to the rank of major general. This act was reminiscent of General Ayub’s self-proclaimed position of Field Marshal. A similarly vain and incongruous act would be repeated three decades later in Bangladesh by General Moin in 2008 when he would promote himself from Lieutenant General to full General after the India-sponsored quasi-martial law regime took power. The act of Moin, an officer commissioned after independence, should be considered more ludicrous than those of both Ayub and Khalid, as he had never had the opportunity to take part in a war during his military career.

Khalid Musharraf’s reign lasted less than forty-eight hours. There was no effective government for three days from 3 November. On the morning of 6 November, Chief Justice Abu Sadat Muhammad Sayem was sworn in to replace Khandaker Moshtaque as President. Khalid Musharraf was made Army Chief of Staff, replacing Zia. It appeared that counter-coup leaders had succeeded. But they underestimated the strength of the post-15 August appeal of Muslim identity among the people of Bangladesh and their intense hatred for the Awami League and for Indian hegemony at the same time. Khalid was quickly branded as an Indian stooge. His already crumbling authority was not helped by his overenthusiastic pro-Awami League mother and younger brother Rashed Musharraf, Member of Parliament under the defunct BAKSAL regime.

“With the ousting of Moshtaque and the majors, jubilant Awami Leaguers, students and pro-Moscow groups who had supported Mujib in the past came out on the streets in large numbers to celebrate. Tuesday, the 4th of November was observed as ‘Mujib Day’. Remembrance meetings were held in the main towns and in the capital, at Dhaka University Campus, the Shaheed Minar (Martyrs memorial) and other public places. A number of processions were taken out from different parts of the city to Road No. 32 Dhanmondi where Mujib’s house was filled with garlands and flowers. Next day a half day ‘hartal’ (business closure) in memory of Tajuddin and his companions shut down the city. ‘Namaz-e-Janaza’, the public prayers

for the dead, were said as the four murdered Awami League leaders were ceremonially laid to rest, three of them in Banani graveyard, Dhaka, in plots adjacent to the unmarked mass grave in which Sheikh Mujib's family lies. Then another mass observance with prayers in Mujib's memory was called for Friday, the 7th. All this gave the impression the coup heralded the return of Mujibism, when the people had barely got over the nightmare of Sheikh Mujib's prodigality, and the return of the allegedly pro-India Awami League when sentiment against India was running high because of a dispute over the Farakka Dam. What made it all the more damning for Khalid was the public outrage when they discovered that his mother and brother, both staunch Awami Leaguers, had led the main procession to Mujib's house on the 4th. The left-wing JSD and the right wing Muslim League seized on their presence in the Awami League procession as 'proof' that India was behind Khalid's coup. The charge was hammered home in hundreds of thousands of leaflets, 'Shabnamas' (anonymous night letters) and posters that flooded the military cantonment and main cities. The results were devastating.

"Colonel Shafat Jamil told me later in an interview that Khalid was very upset when he saw the papers that Wednesday morning. Picking up the telephone he asked his mother: 'What have you done? You have been in the procession and your picture is in the paper. For this you may have shortened my days and I may not survive.' According to Jamil, 'Khalid felt this would go against us very much.'

"Curiously neither of them did anything to counter it. The coup leaders neither encouraged nor discouraged or dissociated themselves from the Awami League demonstrations. For the first three days when it mattered most they unaccountably remained silent and so let their case go by default." (Mascarenhas, 1986: 105)

I vividly remember those three tumultuous days. The whole atmosphere was like the lull before a storm. That perfect storm soon came with all its fury and flattened Mujibism for a second time in three months. And I do not agree with Anthony Mascarenhas that the Khalid-Shafat duo let the pro-Indian charge against them go by default. As an inexperienced youth on that day, I believed that they willingly cultivated a pro-Indian image in the country, and even now that I am a good deal older, my conviction has not changed. In all probability, they were very much an active part of the pro-Indian secular forces. I was at Dhaka University on the morning of 4 November with a few BUET friends to see for ourselves what was happening there. The controversial procession consisted of a few hundred participants. The mother of Khalid Musharraf was in fact, leading the procession. I clearly identified Khalid's brother and a few pro-Soviet communist leaders in the first row. Those in the procession were wearing

black arm-bands in honour of the slain Sheikh Mujib and carrying flowers. We asked some of them where they were going and were told Sheikh Mujib's house at Road 32, Dhanmondi. They were going there to pay their respects to Sheikh Mujib and show support for Khalid Musharraf and company.

At that time, the Aga Khan international football tournament was in progress at Dhaka Stadium. So far as I remember, an Indian police team was also participating. Rumour quickly spread that they were in fact members of Indian Army and had been involved in Khalid's coup. The rumour might have been completely baseless. But such was the intensity of anti-Indian feeling that people readily accepted the apparently absurd story. The arrogant smile of Khalid Musharraf appeared on the front page of all national newspapers on 6 November, flanked by Air and Naval Chiefs fixing the insignia of major general on the lapel of his uniform. Anthony Mascarenhas is correct in expressing his surprise at Khalid's silence in countering the propaganda alleging he had Indian connections. But it was a calculated, though risky, gamble which did not ultimately pay off. On the one hand, Khalid was expecting to ride on the Awami organizational bandwagon to ensure some popular support, but more important for him was to get quick Indian military assistance. He was a much-decorated and able military commander. He could not be so naive as to ignore the huge popularity of General Zia among the soldiers of the Bangladeshi Army. Sadly, the officer corps of the Bangladeshi Army, barring a few, had consistently shown their middle class, opportunistic character. Khalid was confident of managing them by wielding both carrot and stick, but to counter the threat from the troops, he desperately needed the Indian Army by his side before it was too late. That was probably his military strategy for survival. Unfortunately for him, the speed and spontaneity of the Sipahi revolution gave his Indian friends no time to intervene.

In 1857, the great Sipahi Mutiny against British colonial power had ended in failure mainly because of an absence of a single, unified command. But this time Ziaur Rahman's personal charisma and the steady build-up of his image after his declaration of independence in 1971 provided a rallying point for every patriotic element in the Army. The organizational capability of JSD and the courage of Colonel Taher also proved to be decisive in the battle against Khalid and his cohorts who were considered unpatriotic usurpers by army and people alike.

“Zia was a popular figure in the Bangladesh Army, with an impressive reputation. He had been commissioned in the 2nd Punjab in 1965 before transferring to the 1st East Bengal Regiment. Later he spent five years with

military intelligence. Reverting to the Bengal Regiment in 1966, Zia did a three-month stint with the British Army on the Rhine. In 1971 he gained considerable fame as the man who announced the independence of Bangladesh over Chittagong Radio after the Pakistani army cracked down on the Bengalis. Later, his war-time service as commander of 'Z Force' added to his reputation." (Mascarenhas, 1986: 53)

The third coup in just three months started with the sounds of automatic weapons at around 11 p.m. on the night of 6 November. I was in my room no. 310 of Sher-e-Bangla Hall, North Block, in the BUET. All the inmates of the student dormitory immediately gathered on the verandah with feelings of worry and hope. Was it the sound of an invading Indian army opening fire on our patriotic forces or it was a patriotic section of the Bangladeshi Army revolting against Indian stooges? We did not have to wait long to find out. With other BUET students we had by then started an impromptu procession inside the campus led by Monirul Islam, a fourth-year student and General Secretary of JSD Chatra League. We shouted slogans, *Taher-Zia Bhai Bhai*, Down with Indian Agent Khaled, *Sipahi-Janata Revolution Zindabad*. Gunfire and shelling carried on uninterrupted until morning. There was an unconfirmed report that General Zia had already been freed from house-arrest by patriotic soldiers and was again in command of the army. It was a heady night of celebration and patriotic fervour.

Early in the morning of 7 December, we started on foot ignoring the danger from stray bullets. Our destination was not decided, but we wanted to get as close to Dhaka Cantonment as possible. We did not need to go that far. When we reached PG Hospital, one kilometre from our university, we were transfixed by a most unusual sight. A battle tank was surrounded by cheering people! Its turret was garlanded. Petals of roses were strewn all over the armoured vehicle. A soldier, possibly an NCO, was addressing the gathering. He said: "Indian agent Khaled Musharraf has been killed along with two other traitors this morning by the patriotic soldiers of the Bangladeshi Army. Khaled had invited the Indian Army to invade Bangladesh. He was trying to flee from Dhaka and take shelter in India. Patriotic members of the Bangladeshi Army located their car early in the morning and killed them. Bangladesh is truly liberated from today. General Zia is our leader and Chief of Staff. Long live General Zia, Bangladesh Zindabad." The gatherings cheered wildly at the end of every single sentence uttered by the soldier. People started climbing on the tank helped by the soldiers. It was a scene of unforgettable camaraderie between the civilian population and the army:

“The jawans took over the radio station at 1.30am, announcing to the night staff on duty that ‘Sephai Biplob (Sepoy revolution) has begun and will continue under Ziaur Rahman. The astonished didn’t quite know how to take it. When they realized that the jawans were not threatening them and that Khalid Musharraf had been defeated, they all joined with the wildly celebrating troops. Some Lancer tanks, piled high with exuberant soldiers and civilians, showed up in the middle of the city. The sight of these mechanical monsters had always sent people running for their lives. Now crowds filling the streets cheered them on. As the radio continued proclaiming ‘Sipahi Biplob’ and that General Zia had taken over, thousands of people who had at first been alarmed by the firing in the cantonment, poured into the streets to celebrate. For three days they had believed that India through Khalid Musharraf was threatening their hard-won independence. Now that that nightmare was over, they hailed the troops as liberators. Everywhere jawans and civilians exchanged salutations, embraced one another, danced in the streets. The night was filled with cries of ALLAH HO AKBAR, BANGLADESH ZINDABAD, SEPAHI BIPLOB ZINDABAD, and GENERAL ZIAUR RAHMAN ZINDABAD – God is great, long live Bangladesh, long live the Sepoy Revolution, Long live General Ziaur Rahman. It seemed that the people were reliving the heady moments of the Bangladesh upsurge in March, 1971. It was a night to remember.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 110)

With the successful Sipahi-Janata revolution, the second most popular leader after Sheikh Mujib came to state power in post-independence Bangladesh. This time the leader was from the army:

“Taher’s men took control of the radio station. Many among the groups were students of Dhaka University, wearing trousers and shirts and a rifle hanging from shoulder. Cap and boots could not be arranged in the hurry. They were wearing sponge sandals. One of the party was Muhammad Shafiqul Islam, Chatra League leader of Surja Sen Hall. Shafiq thought, ‘revolution is completed, but nobody knew what to do next, they did not care whether they had boots or sandals on their feet.’ There was an announcement in the morning that proclaimed Sipahi revolution under the leadership of Revolutionary Soldiers Council and Ganobahini. There was no mention of Taher or any other leader in the announcement. The announcer did not mention his name either. Taher and Inu went to the cantonment in the morning to meet Zia. He asked, where is Sirajul Alam Khan? Zia wanted to discuss with the main leadership of JSD. Nobody knew about the whereabouts of Sirajul Alam Khan.” (Ahmad, 2016: 195–196)

Taher's own account of the developments from 4 to 7 November, according to the testimony that he delivered before the Special Martial Law Tribunal, is the following:

“On the afternoon of the 4th November a message reached me from Major General Zia through one of his relatives. He appealed to me to use my influence with the troops to rescue him and save the sovereignty of the country. I sent word to him to remain calm and gather courage. I also assured him that discipline in the Armed Forces would be restored soon, and there would be an end to all underhand actions. In the meantime, our vigilant soldiers and officers requested that I should take certain necessary decisions and plan the overthrow of the treacherous Khalid Musharraf clique. The highest initiative in this regard came from the soldiers, particularly the NCOs and JCOs.

“After intense consultation and contact among our forces, plans were made to carry out the necessary steps. On the 6th of November I appealed through representatives of all units in the Dacca Cantonment for the troops to remain alert and to wait for instructions. Everyone was on full alert on the late evening of the 6th of November. The uprising was to be carried out in the early hours of the dawn of the 7th of November at 1 a.m. Our decisions were: 1) To oust the Khalid Musharraf clique from power; 2) to free Ziaur Rahman from captivity; 3) to establish a Revolutionary Military Command Council; 4) to release all political detainees irrespective of party designation; 5) to withdraw all warrants of arrest on political workers; 6) to form an all-party democratic national government excluding BAKSAL; and 7) to accept and implement the Twelve Points Demands of the Revolutionary Soldiers Organization (Biplobi ShainikShangstha).” (Lifschultz, 1979: 90)

Taher's problem with Zia and the military establishment would arise later over the issue of the ‘Twelve Points Demands’ of the JSD. Major Dalim, the person who had announced on the radio the killing of Sheikh Mujib and the fall of the BAKSAL government on the morning of 15 August, claims that the spirit of the 15 August coup that toppled Mujib and Sipahi-Janata Revolution of 7 November were identical. He writes:

“15 August and historic 7 November are not separate developments. The two incidents are inseparable. Inspired by the same spirit, patriotic elements within the army had led both the revolutionary uprisings. The army was in the forefront of 15 August and the same duty was discharged jointly by the army and Taher led Ganobahini on 7 November. The spirit of the two popular uprisings was to safeguard national existence, re-establish democracy and human rights, make national independence meaningful by tearing away our beloved country from the Indo-Soviet axis, free the nation

and people from suffocating situation by ending autocracy and dictatorship.” (Dalim, 2006: 44-45)

The friendship between Zia and Taher turned sour even before the jubilant crowd had returned to their mundane daily lives. Taher had already been indoctrinated in leftist ideology, whereas Zia remained a professional soldier. Like any other revolution in history, the soldiers committed excesses and unnecessarily killed innocent officers who had just been following the orders of their superiors. Rapid and repeated changes at the top made life difficult for those young, hapless officers. To whom should they listen? Rebellious soldiers saw the professionalism of the officers as an act of cowardice, and killed a good number of them including a doctor from the Army Medical Corp in their overenthusiasm to enforce vigilante justice in the initial stages of the revolution. Colonel Taher now demanded quick implementation of his ‘Twelve Points Demands’ on behalf of the jawans. The essence of this charter of demands was to convert the Bangladeshi Army into a radical, revolutionary force along the lines of Peoples Armies in communist countries. The officer corps in the Bangladeshi Army, trained under the Pakistani system, were right to ‘see red’ in Taher’s charter. General Zia was torn between his loyalty to the institution and his personal gratitude to Colonel Taher for his heroic role in saving him from the clutches of Khalid Musharraf. He tried desperately hard to find common ground. General Zia accepted a few of the demands which were related to the general welfare of common soldiers such as, improved pay, better accommodation and abolition of the ‘batman’ (personal orderly) system for officers. He also released Major M.A. Jalil, A.S.M. Rab, Muhammad Shahjahan and other JSD leaders who had earlier been jailed by Sheikh Mujib. But, he could not agree to the complete abolition of the officer corps thereby risking the dismantling of the army as an institution. This action would definitely have gone in favour of India.

Colonel Taher, an egoist, made a great miscalculation by underestimating the overall popularity of General Zia both among the army and the people. He decided to challenge him and called for the overthrow of Zia with the same Ganabahini and radicalized Sepoy axis. The failed insurrection only succeeded in the unnecessary killing of a few more officers. General Zia’s hand was forced by the last revolt. He was under pressure from the members of the officer corps to act decisively. A crackdown against JSD started on 23 November. A.S.M. Rob, Major Jalil, Hasanul Haq Inu and Taher’s elder brother Flight Sergeant Abu Yusuf Khan were arrested on the first day. On 24 November, Colonel Taher was arrested at his Dhaka University hideout. The trial of Colonel Taher started on 21 June 1976

before a specially constituted military tribunal at Dhaka Central Jail. It was a swift military trial. Col Taher showed extraordinary courage during the entire process. He delivered a courageous testimony full of patriotic fervour. Unfortunately, the Tribunal found Taher guilty and issued the death penalty. An appeal for clemency was rejected by President Sayem, most probably under pressure from the cantonment. Taher was executed on the morning of 21 July. Even in the moments just prior to his hanging, Taher did not show any nerve or emotion. He died a hero – a sad end for another valiant freedom fighter and a patriot.

The events of both 15 August and 7 November must have shocked the Indian leadership. Developments were so dramatic and swift that India did not have time to react militarily. Spontaneous and enthusiastic celebrations, with people taking to the streets on both occasions, also tied the hands of the big neighbour. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was rather forced to take a public position after the killing of Sheikh Mujib that, with the change of government in Bangladesh, there would be no shift in the bilateral diplomatic relationship:

“Statement of the Official Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, regarding the special message from the President of Bangladesh to the Prime Minister of India. New Delhi, August 25, 1975

“The High Commissioner of Bangladesh, Mr. Shamsur Rahman, called on the Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, this morning and delivered a special message from President Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed. The message refers to the shared struggle and sacrifice of the two countries for the independence of Bangladesh. It says that the existing bonds of friendship between the two countries and peoples are “deeply cherished and valued” by the government and people of Bangladesh.

“President Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed reiterates his Government’s commitment to honour existing bilateral treaties and agreements between India and Bangladesh. He expressed confidence that the two countries will work in close cooperation to maintain between them ‘friendship, fraternity and peace, free of any friction and tension’.

“The Bangladesh President has reiterated the five principles of peaceful cooperation as the common base for good-neighbourly relations between the two countries. He mentioned his country’s continued adherence to the policy of non-alignment and its commitment to work for normalization of relations in the subcontinent.

“The Prime Minister said that India reciprocated the feelings of friendship for Bangladesh. We believe in friendly relations with all our neighbours and

would continue to play our full part in promoting cooperation and good relations among the countries of the subcontinent.” (Avtar Singh Bhasin, 2002: India–Bangladesh Relations – Volume 1)

However, Indira Gandhi would try her best to destabilize Bangladesh through both overt and covert means during the entire period of Moshtaque and Gen Zia. India gave shelter to Independence war hero Kader Siddiqui after the fall of Sheikh Mujib. Siddiqui waged unsuccessful war against Bangladesh along the border with direct assistance from RAW. Indira Gandhi also tried to internationally isolate first Khandaker Moshtaque and then Ziaur Rahman which was not successful either. The Indians did not hide their joy and support for the counter-coup of Khalid Musharraf:

“But the most revealing element of Brigadier Musharraf’s November 3rd putsch was the exuberant reaction of India. Before the news of the jail house murders became public on November 5th, the official Indian radio and strictly censored press greeted this second putsch with such unrestrained pleasure that few observers failed to suspect India’s covert hand. The ‘official’ Indian press campaign of well-informed leaks seemed too well organized to have been spontaneous.” (Lifschultz, 1979: 7)

General Khalid Musharraf removed Khandaker Moshtaque and Chief Justice A.S.M. Sayem was sworn in as the President on 6 November. Khalid was then killed a day later in the Sipahi-Janata Revolution on the early morning of 7 November. As a result, the responsibility for creating a legal instrument to give cover to Bangladesh’s three days, sans government from 3 to 7 November fell on President Justice Sayem, General Zia and former President Khandaker Moshtaque. Accordingly, after much consultation, President Sayem enacted the following Martial Law Proclamation on 8 November 1975:

“Whereas the whole of Bangladesh has been under martial law since the 15th day of August, 1975:

“And Whereas Khandaker Mostaque Ahmed, who placed the country under martial law, has made over the office of President of Bangladesh to me and I have entered upon that office on the 6th day of November, 1975:

“And Whereas in the interest of peace, order, security, progress, prosperity and development of the country, I deem it necessary to keep in force the martial law proclaimed on the 15th August, 1975:

“And Whereas for the effective enforcement of martial law it has become necessary for me to assume the powers of Chief Martial Law Administrator and to appoint Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrators and to make some modifications in the proclamation of the 20th August, 1975”. (Constitution of Bangladesh)

Careful reading of the two Martial Law Proclamations of 15 August and 8 November give us the following legal chronology of events during the tumultuous eighty-five days that reshaped the politics of Bangladesh.

- 1) Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed proclaimed the first martial law on 20 August with effect retrospective to 15 August.
- 2) Chief Justice A.S.M. Sayem took office as President and the Chief Martial Law Administrator, a position vacated by Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, on 6 November 1975 as the outcome of counter-coup led by Khalid Musharraf.
- 3) General Zia, under house arrest, was forced to resign from the position of Chief of Staff, and Khalid Musharraf compelled Moshtaque to appoint him in Zia's place before Moshtaque was forced to resign on 6 November.
- 4) After Khalid's counter-coup failed and he was killed by the revolutionary soldiers, General Zia was reinstated to his previous position of Chief of Staff, Bangladeshi Army on 7 November.
- 5) On his reinstatement, General Zia was made Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator along with two other forces Chiefs.
- 6) Justice A.S.M. Sayem proclaimed the second martial law on 8 November and assumed the position of Chief Martial Law Administrator.

Although it was Justice Sayem who proclaimed the second martial law instrument, it was clear from the beginning that actual power resided with the armed forces, so the attempt to present a civilian face for martial law could not have lasted long. It is, therefore, a matter of great surprise that Justice Sayem could hold his dual positions of President and Chief Martial Law Administrator for a full year. On 28 November 1976, he was relieved from the post of Chief Martial Law Administrator and Zia replaced him. After five months, Justice Sayem also lost the constitutional top job. Zia assumed the presidency in addition to his CMLA post. On 21 April 1977, President Sayem made the following proclamation probably under duress:

“I, Abu Sadat Muhammad Sayem, because of my failing health, am unable further to discharge the function of the office of President. I do hereby nominate Major General Ziaur Rahman to be the President of Bangladesh and hand over the office of President to him.”

Zia was now completely on his own. From the side of the people, Zia had nothing to worry about. The euphoria of the people at the developments of 7 November had given clear support to the choice of leader. But Zia faced danger on two other fronts. One was the army. The other was India. The Bangladeshi Army was to remain Zia's nemesis until his assassination in 1981 by General Manzoor's uniformed men in Chittagong. After the crushing of the JSD-led rebellion in the follow-up to the Sipahi-Janata revolution, there remained three groups inside the army conspiring against him:

1. Remnants of Taher's radically indoctrinated Revolutionary *Shainik Shangstha*.
2. Coup leaders of 15 August 1975 who felt betrayed as Zia had not allowed them to return to Bangladesh after Khalid's downfall.
3. Ambitious freedom fighter generals all aspiring to the top positions in the army.

It is said that there were eighteen major and minor coup attempts to topple Zia before he was finally killed by the nineteenth. This, unfortunately, reflects a serious lack of discipline and patriotism in the Bangladeshi Army.

On the India front, Indira Gandhi did not accept Zia for a single day. It is widely believed that she gave sanction to the RAW to eliminate Zia from the day of his accession to power. Gandhi's loss in the 1977 general election, in fact, provided temporary respite to the most popular President that Bangladesh has ever seen. Sheikh Mujib returned to Bangladesh on 10 January 1972, a larger than life image with immense popularity. But he had lost most of it before the year had even ended. By the time he was killed on 15 August, Sheikh Mujib was merely an unpopular autocrat. General Zia was fortunate enough to remain popular until his assassination in Chittagong:

“As this commentary indicates, the beginning of the Awami League's decline had set in within the first year of independence. The idealism and enthusiasm which the party had inspired in its struggle against Pakistan's military dictatorship was being drowned in a sea of corruption. And the corruption was funded principally by nearly \$2 billion worth of relief commodities, aid contracts and international business which poured in from the bountiful overseas comucopia following independence. While the bribe, the kickback and the payoff had all previously existed in the familiar form known as *bakhsheesh*, what was new was the extraordinary sums now involved. In two and a half years the regime in Dacca received more aid than it had received in its previous 23 years as the province in East

Pakistan. Talk of 'black money' and stories of illicit trade deals became part of the dark new folklore of the post-independence period." (Lifschultz, 1979: 40)

Zia was extraordinarily honest, in sharp contrast to the leaders that Bangladeshis had had before him.

An immediate issue of contention with Indira Gandhi was the Farakka Barrage. Sheikh Mujib had given verbal consent for test-run of the Barrage during his Delhi visit in 1974. That test-run eventually became permanent without referring the matter back to the Bangladeshi authorities for formal approval in the form of a water-sharing treaty under the Helsinki accord of 1966. Sheikh Mujib either remained busy with other pressing engagements or knowingly kept the dispute under wraps. Now Zia, being a patriot and a courageous soldier, wanted a formal treaty to ensure an equitable share of the Ganges water for Bangladesh. Indira Gandhi dismissed this logical demand, underestimating Zia's patriotism, courage and resolve. She continued to snub Zia. Bangladesh issued a white paper on Farakka and then formally referred the dispute to the UN under international law. On 15 November 1976, the Bangladesh delegation to the 20th meeting of the Special Political Committee of the UN made the following proposal on five major elements to the dispute for incorporation in the UN resolution:

"First: The Assembly must call upon and encourage the parties concerned, in the interest of peace and prosperity of the region, to arrive at an immediate resolution of the dispute arising from the diversion of Ganges water,

"Second: It must recognize that an immediate resolution of the dispute is an essential prerequisite for any future permanent settlement,

"Third: The Assembly should recommend that, in the meantime, no unilateral action be taken that would adversely affect the historical and traditional usages of the Ganges river waters,

"Fourth: The Assembly should request the Secretary General of the UN to assist the parties concerned in the immediate resolution of the dispute and in reaching a fair and expeditious settlement using also as appropriate, such assistance as may be available through the relevant elements of the United Nations system,

"Finally: The Assembly must remain seized of the problem by requesting the Secretary General to follow up the implementation of the above proposals and reporting thereon to the next regular session of the assembly." (Ref: Bangladesh Foreign Ministry Archive)

The Goliath of India eventually lost to the David of Bangladesh in the UN battle. The Special Political Committee of the UN adopted the Bangladeshi position in its resolution, although it was couched in diplomatic jargon. India was compelled to sign an agreement on the water sharing of the Ganges on 5 November 1977. This was Zia's greatest diplomatic victory. However, by the time the accord was reached, Indira Gandhi was out of power. She would never forget the humiliation. Prime Minister Desai wanted to improve relations with Bangladesh. It is also believed that Desai stopped RAW from executing the plan to topple and kill Zia, a policy allegedly sanctioned earlier by Indira Gandhi:

“The respite in Indo-Bangladesh relations proved rather temporary as with the return of Mrs. Gandhi to power in January 1980 old acrimonies soon resurfaced. Since she believed that the 1977 agreement on Farakka was unfair to India and the Janata Party Government had sacrificed too much to buy too little – and that too only illusory goodwill. When no consensus seemed to emerge on the question of augmentation of the Ganga waters, Mrs. Gandhi remained as uncompromising as ever. It was now her endeavor to regain the ground said to have been lost in the signing of the Farakka Agreement.” (Avtar Singh Bhasin, India–Bangladesh Relations: Documents – 1971–2002, Volume 1)

General Zia's entry into formal politics was a foregone conclusion. His political vision was reflected in the Proclamations (Amendment) Order 1977 issued on his assuming the position of CMLA. The most significant parts of the proclamation were:

“6(2) The citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshis
6(6) (b) before entry 8 as so renumbered, the following new entries shall be inserted namely:-

“1. In the beginning of the Constitution, above the preamble, the following shall be inserted, namely:-

‘BISMILLAH-AR-RAHMAN-AR-RAHIM

(In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful)’

“2(ii) for second paragraph the following shall be substituted, namely:-
‘pledging that the high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice, which inspired our heroic struggle to dedicate themselves to, and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in, the war for national independence, shall be the fundamental principles of the Constitution.

“3. in article 8, for clause (1) the following shall be substituted, namely:-

‘(1) The principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice, together with the principles derived from them as set out in this part, shall constitute the fundamental principles of state policy.

(1A) Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of actions.”

The above proclamation reiterated the fact that we, the Bangladeshis, are indeed a different nation from the Bengalis of West Bengal on two distinct counts:

1. The people of erstwhile East Bengal are citizens of Bangladesh, an independent, sovereign country. In the 1972 Constitution, our citizenship was declared as Bengali which was not only legally questionable, but also gave the impression that Bengalis across the border are of the same nation and culture, only separated by an ‘unwelcome’ border. Furthermore, the existence of other ethnic minorities in Bangladesh was totally ignored in the constitution. Sheikh Mujib had even instructed them to abandon their own culture and merge with the majority Bengali population and, in doing so, had sown the seed of discontentment among the Chakma population who would later wage armed insurgency with Indian help. Declaration of Bangladeshi as our citizenship in place of Bengali was also an attempt to include all ethnic minorities into the national mainstream.
2. Bangladesh is a huge Muslim-majority country. The religious beliefs of the majority of citizens received proper recognition by incorporating ‘Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim’ and ‘absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah’ in the Constitution. The Bengalis of West Bengal on the other hand are majority Hindus. They are also Indian nationals having a separate and distinct culture of their own.

In enacting the proclamation, General Zia not only reiterated the Islamic faith of the majority population of Bangladesh, but also gave a strong and clear message to the proponents of One Bengal that the independence of Bangladesh was not the first step towards unification with India as envisaged by Patel and Nehru at the time of the creation of Pakistan. A separate homeland for Indian Muslims in Muslim-majority areas of the subcontinent was a historic necessity and the break-up of

Pakistan had in no way undermined the heroic struggle of our forefathers to create that homeland. Even Sheikh Mujib was an activist in the Pakistan movement. He was a member of the student front of the All-India Muslim League and a disciple of Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy. He even conceded in his biography that he personally participated in street fights against the Hindus in Calcutta during the Pakistan movement:

“I was present there with some students. As the news spread that the Muslim League government had fallen, tupi clad bearded Marwaris started fireworks and were rejoicing. I could not control myself. Many of our party workers were present and we got engaged in street-brawl forcing the Marwaris to flee. Mr. Muhammad Ali came out and tried to assuage our anger holding me by the hand. Hindu leaders also came out and protested. However, afterwards, the situation became peaceful and we returned.”
(Rahman, 2017: 33)

Bengali Muslims courageously rebelled against the exploitation and autocratic governance of the West Pakistani military rulers. It was also a justified rebellion against tyranny and oppression. But they never aspired to return to the Hindu India fold. It is also true that the rise of Bengali nationalism had radically changed the views of a section of middle-class intellectuals on the practice of Islam. So-called secularism in Bangladesh had always harboured the seed of anti-Islamism. The controversial role played by Jamaat-e-Islami and other rightist Islamic parties during the liberation war provided the perfect alibi for ultra-secular elements to launch vicious propaganda against Islam and Bengali Muslim culture after 1971. But, it never affected the rural population. They actively participated in the liberation war, both by taking part in the actual fighting and by providing shelter and food to the Mukti Bahinis. In numerous instances these common people suffered terribly from loss of life and property when the Pakistani Army took collective revenge on them for supporting the freedom struggle. But, their love for their religion never deserted them. During a nine-month ordeal, they always prayed to Almighty Allah to help them to defeat the enemy, who incidentally were also Muslim. No doubt, Pakistanis also prayed to the same Allah for their victory in the war. But they were clearly the oppressor and Allah never assists oppressors. General Zia, the man who declared the independence of Bangladesh was a practising Muslim himself. As a military strategist, he probably realized that without a strong revival of the Islamic faith among the population Bangladesh would not be able to maintain its sovereignty in the face of sustained cultural aggression from across the border. He could not have missed the importance of the ideology of Islam as a counterbalance to the

Bengali Hindu ideology propagated by pro-Indian ultra-secular elements in the name of Bengali nationalism.

The entire concept of Bengali nationalism was built on the cultural plank created as a result of the Hindu Renaissance of the 19th century aided by British colonial power. Immediately after the liberation of Bangladesh, many Hindu customs were patronized by the ultra-secular elements in the guise of returning to Bengali culture. Young Muslim girls were seen wearing *Shakha* and *Sindoor* (a religious custom for married Hindu women), claiming the fad to be a part of Bengali culture. The use of *Mangal Pradip* (fire worship at *Diwali* and *Kali Puja*) at the beginning of any political or cultural function had crept into Bangladeshi society after liberation in the name of Bengali culture. Anyone daring to criticize the customs as un-Islamic was branded a collaborator of the Pakistani regime and an Islamic fundamentalist. Every nation must have a culture of its own. Religion can never be divorced from culture. Durga Puja, although a religious festival, is obviously part of Bengali Hindu culture. North Indian Hindus do not celebrate Durga Puja as it is not part of their culture. Hindus in Maharashtra celebrate the Ganesh festival with the same intensity with which Bengali Hindus celebrate Durga Puja. Curiously, according to Hindu mythology, Ganesh is Durga's son. Similarly, Eid celebrations are definitely a part of Bengali Muslim culture. No Bengali Muslim true to his faith can accept Durga Puja as part of his culture, nor can a Hindu Bengali accept Eid. Cow is a sacred animal according to Hindu culture. But Bengali Muslims sacrifice the same animal in the name of Almighty Allah every year on the day of Eid-ul-Azha as a ritual in commemoration of sacrifice made by Prophet Ibrahim of his son Ismail. We, the Muslims in Bengal are part of a great civilization and our ancestors played a significant role in giving political and cultural shape to Bengal as we know it today. After the liberation of Bangladesh, pro-Indian ultra-secular elements tried to intellectually and culturally Indianize Bangladesh. With the propagation of his Bangladeshi nationalism, General Zia successfully defeated their attempt to turn Bangladesh into a vassal of India. He provided a distinct identity to the people who were suffering from an identity crisis as a result of a long history of cultural aggression.

The arrival of General Zia on the political scene in Bangladesh was warmly welcomed by the Islamic world. He cultivated a close relationship with most of the members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). His personal stature reached such a height that he was nominated by the OIC to mediate between Iran and Iraq when the unfortunate war broke out between those two Islamic nations. His domestic popularity also soared as the general population saw in him as a patriotic, honest and

hardworking statesman who could save Bangladesh from the mess created by Sheikh Mujib. Unfortunately, as I noted before, the Bangladeshi Army proved to be his nemesis. There were regular coup attempts, almost every few months. The ambition of Colonel Faruk and his team of majors who had toppled Mujib in 1975 also remained a constant headache. They wanted participation in government.

In April 1976 Col Faruk attempted a rebellion at Bogra Cantonment. He had returned suddenly and unannounced from exile in Lybia on 23 April and proceeded to visit the cantonments in Savar and Bogra to incite his Bengal Lancers. Zia was able to suppress the mutiny with the help of the Infantry and other loyal divisions. Instead of taking harsh measures, however, Zia again allowed Faruk and Rashid to return to exile. Then came the October 1977 mutiny. This time it was the remnants of JSD elements among the JCOs and NCOs of the Bangladesh Air Force and Army Field Signals Battalion who organized the uprising. A JAL (Japanese Airline) DC-8 with one hundred and fifty-six passengers was hijacked by the communist Red Army after it had taken off from Bombay en route to Haneda airport in Tokyo. The hijackers forced the pilot to land at Kurmitola airport in Dhaka on 28 September 1977. They demanded six million US dollars as ransom and the release of nine of their comrades from jail in Japan. The entire machinery of the Bangladesh government was engulfed in negotiations with the hijackers. The Air Chief, A.G. Mahmud was in charge of the negotiation and was stationed at the airport when the mutiny started. An Air Force sergeant led a force of about seven hundred mutineers. In the name of *Sipahi Biplob*, they committed an unprovoked massacre at the airport terminal. The Air Force officers present to assist Air Vice Marshal Mahmud in the negotiations were identified and killed in cold blood. Although the Air Chief Marshall miraculously escaped the massacre, nearly half of Air Force's flying strength was liquidated in a single day. Group Captain Raas Masood, Group Captain Ansar Ahmed, Wing Commander Anwar Sheikh, Squadron Leader Matin, Flight Lieutenant Shaukat Jan Chowdhury, Flight Lieutenant Salahuddin, Flying Officer Mahbub, Flying Officer Akteruzzaman, Pilot Officer Ansar, Pilot Officer Nazrul and Pilot Officer Sharif were among those killed. The 46th Brigade and 9th Division had to move their forces to defeat the rebels. There were nineteen such coups over a span of six years and President Zia was killed in the last one, four years later in Chittagong.

In 1978, General Zia finally decided to resign from the Army and formally enter politics. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party was formed in 1979. The National Awami Party (NAP) of the late Maulana Bhasani

immediately merged with the BNP. Maulana Bhasani, one of the most respected political leaders who never sought state power in his long political career spanning more than half a century had already died in 1976. Some right wing political parties also joined the BNP along with the left-leaning NAP (Bhashani). Among the prominent politicians who joined the BNP, Shah Azizur Rahman, Mashiur Rahman (Jadu Miah), Kazi Zafar Ahmed, Mirja Golam Hafiz, Captain (retd.) Abdul Halim and Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan were notable. The BNP became a platform for all nationalist forces who refused to surrender to the hegemony of India.

General Zia contested the Presidential election in 1978 against his Commander-in-Chief during the liberation war, General Ataul Gani Osmani. General Osmani was the candidate of the combined opposition led by the Awami League. The election was held on 3 June 1978. General Zia scored a thumping victory, polling 76.6 per cent of the votes against 21.7 per cent polled by Osmani. In the parliamentary election held one year later, the BNP emerged victorious with more than a two-thirds majority. The breakdown of parliamentary seats won by each party in the election was as follows:

BNP	207
AL	39
Muslim League and IDL	20
JSD	8
AL (Mizan)	2
NAP (Muzaffar)	1
Jatiyo League	2
Jatiyo Ekota Party	1
Ganotantric Andolan	1
Independents	16

Shah Aziz of the BNP was elected Prime Minister. The Awami League emerged as the main opposition party in parliament with thirty-nine seats and Asaduzzaman was elected leader of opposition. Sheikh Hasina, the surviving elder daughter of Sheikh Mujib, had been living in Delhi in political asylum since the killing of her father. The Indian government had given her husband, Wajed Ali Miyan, a job. She did not play any significant role in the 1979 election. She would not return to Bangladesh for another couple of years. President Zia facilitated the return of Sheikh Hasina to Bangladesh in the second week of May 1981. On her arrival, she was given the custody of all her family's fortunes. Incidentally, the

President was to live for only seventeen more days after the return of Sheikh Hasina.

The conspiracy to assassinate Zia had been brewing since the Sipahi-Janata Revolution of 1975. As mentioned earlier, a total of nineteen coup attempts were made during his five-year rule. Even the Indian media reported that RAW had been planning from the mid-1970s to eliminate Zia with tacit approval from Indira Gandhi. The defeat of Indira Gandhi in the 1977 election provided a brief respite for Zia as Morarji Desai, the Janata Dal Prime Minister who replaced Indira Gandhi did not agree with RAW's plan to destabilize Bangladesh by assassinating the President. The return of Indira Gandhi to power in 1980 could have encouraged both domestic and foreign conspirators to go ahead with that earlier plan. In any event, the plan went ahead in the early morning of 30 May 1981:

“The assassination of Ziaur Rahman was blamed on India because ‘he had wanted to transform a limited independence to full independence’. India’s failure to ratify the Land Boundary Agreement of May 1974 and delay in the grant of the lease of Tin Bigha corridor contributed substantially to the worsening of relations. Bangladesh felt cheated – rightly – that India after being allowed to retain southern Berubari was not keen on the implementation of the rest of the agreement and the lease of the Tin Bigha to give her the contiguity with her two enclaves of Dahagram and Angarpota.

“The depth to which the bilateral relations sank may be gauged by the reports carried by the print media alleging that the Indian intelligence agency RAW had stepped up its secret activities to cause widespread disruption in Bangladesh.” (Avtar Singh Vasin, *India–Bangladesh Relations; Documents-1971–2002*, Volume 1)

General Manzoor, valiant freedom fighter and one-time confidante of Zia, fell out with him over the selection of Ershad as Army Chief. As GOC Chittagong, Manzoor, an able and ambitious general, had built a sort of small empire for himself. During his tenure, the Chakma insurgency at Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) was at its peak. To fight the India-sponsored tribal insurgency, the Chittagong Military command was given additional troops and armaments. As a result, Manzoor had with him a group of efficient and loyal staff officers. One of the staff officers was Colonel Mahbub, nephew of Manzoor. How General Zia, himself a former army intelligence officer, could have allowed uncle and nephew to be posted to the same place at the same time is another mystery. With the help of selected well-trained officers, including Colonel Mahbub, Manzoor was giving shape to the conspiracy to kill the President:

“Among them were two men who would have a deep influence on Manzoor. One was Lieutenant Colonel Motiur Rahman, his GSO-1 or Principal Staff Officer. The other was Lieutenant Colonel Mehboobur Rahman, CO of 21st East Bengal Regiment which formed part of the 24th Infantry Division. Mehboob was Manzoor’s nephew ... It’s not known exactly when the germ of rebellion began to sprout. But, clearly Moti and Mehboob were conspiring actively as early as September, 1979, when they found themselves posted together with another Liberation War colleague, Lieutenant Colonel Dilawar Hussain, in the Chittagong Range. Mehboob was at Dighinala, Moti at Rangamati, and Dilawar, who was Assistant Director of Ordnance Services at Chittagong Cantonment ... Moti and Mehboob also recruited Major S.M. Khalid, Brigade Major of the 69th Infantry Brigade. The four of them with Manzoor’s patronage became the driving force of the rebellion that eventually killed Zia.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 157)

President Zia arrived at Chittagong by a Bangladesh Biman special flight on the morning of 29 May 1981. The purpose of his visit was mainly political. A leadership tussle among the senior members of the Chittagong BNP had been going on for some time which irked Zia. He wanted to give a personal hearing to the mid-level district leadership to get the actual picture and resolve the problem. It was nearly midnight when he finished his meetings with them. After a late dinner, President Zia retired to his suite at Chittagong Circuit House, by now well past midnight. The rebels of Manzoor were all officers, mostly from the 6th, 11th and 28th Bengal. Not a single soldier was involved either in planning or in the operational stage of the killing of this popular, honest and patriotic President. Amid incessant rain accompanied by thunder and lightning, the killing squad attacked Chittagong Circuit House at around four in the morning. The operation was swift and deadly, facing little resistance from surprisingly inadequate security. President Zia was killed with Lieutenant Colonel Moinul Ahsan, Chief Security Officer to the President and Captain Ashraful of the President Guard Regiment (PGR). One police constable and one soldier of the PGR were also among those killed. Only two of the raiders were injured as a result of accidental fire from their own men. Both of them survived the injury, to be convicted later in a trial and executed by hanging.

General Manzoor announced on Chittagong Radio on 30 May the killing of the President. He also claimed to have formed a so-called ‘Revolutionary Council’. Manzoor’s revolution survived only until 1 June. When it became clear to all that the Chittagong *coup d’état* had no support in the army outside the small group of the conspirators, General Manzoor tried to flee to India with his family. They were intercepted and caught at

Asia Tea Gardens at Fatikchhari. According to a government white paper, General Manzoor was killed at about 10 p.m. by agitated soldiers at Chittagong Cantonment when Captain Emdad, his escort, was trying to take him to a detention centre inside the Cantonment:

“The refusal of the common soldier to get involved in the mutiny and Zia’s assassination was the outstanding feature of the Chittagong events. The uprising failed principally because the soldiers refused to join in and the rebel officers were left without an Army. In doing so the jawans to a great extent retrieved the reputation of the Bangladesh armed forces which was disgraced by the cowardly acquiescence of some officers in Chittagong to the dictates of the mutineers or the equally disgraceful tacit acceptance by others of the *fait accompli*.” (Mascarenhas, 1986: 163–164)

Incidentally, Col Mehboob, the nephew of General Manzoor, was also killed by soldiers in the Chittagong Cantonment.

After the quelling of the mutiny and the subsequent killing of Manzoor, the attention of the whole nation turned towards finding the dead body of the assassinated President. The killer officers had taken the bullet ridden bodies of Zia and his two military aides from the circuit house at around 11 a.m. on 30 May and buried them in a remote place called Rangunia, about thirty kilometres south of Chittagong on the way to Kaptai. Frantic searches by both the military and civil administrations succeeded on 1 June in locating the burial place with the help of a student of Chittagong Engineering College. Earlier, General Manzoor had refused to send the body of the slain President to Dhaka. Bashiri, the engineering college student had, in fact, accidentally witnessed the burial of Zia and his aides from his nearby hiding place. Later the search party was horrified to see the partially decomposed body of the President. There were more than twenty bullet wounds and his face was half blown away. The *Namaz-e-Janaza* of Zia was held near the parliament building in Dhaka on 2 June and attended by nearly a million bereaved, wailing mourners from all walks of life. This was the largest ever gathering in a Janaza in Bangladesh and remains so to this day. The whole nation gave an emotional and befitting farewell to the national hero who had made them proud by providing a distinct national identity. Sheikh Mujib led the people of East Pakistan to independence, but it was Zia who gave the nation its identity.

Let me now add a short epilogue to the story. I have been writing this chapter for the last four days sitting in cell no. 5 in the Surma ward of Kashimpur Jail no. 2. And today, as I finish these last few lines, I can hear a recital of the Holy Quran coming from an adjacent cell. The prisoner whose voice I can presently hear is Lieutenant Colonel (retd.) Ehsan. He

passes most of his time in captivity here in prayer. This fifty-year-old bearded, retired Army officer is the younger brother of Lieutenant Colonel Mahboob who killed Zia in that stormy night at Chittagong Circuit House thirty-five years ago. Ehsan was arrested in 2011 for his alleged involvement in the conspiracy to topple the secular and fascist regime of Sheikh Hasina. Ehsan was picked up from his residence late at night by the commandos of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI). He was kept in solitary confinement in Dhaka Cantonment for more than a year without trial. In fact, the story of his arrest, along with a few more officers, was first published in Amar Desh, the vernacular newspaper of which I was the editor until my arrest. On publication of the story, the government first denied it for a couple of days, but finally had to admit that the army had indeed arrested some serving and retired officers. Army HQ called a news conference where they also threatened me with dire consequences for publishing the story. I did not know Ehsan personally or any other officers allegedly involved in the conspiracy at the time of publishing the story. Then, on 24 April 2014, the Kashimpur Jail Authority informed me that an army officer would be coming to the Surma ward to serve his sentence.

At his court martial, Ehsan was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment in addition to his 18 months' confinement without trial at Dhaka Cantonment. I met Ehsan for the first time at Kashimpur Jail when he arrived later that day. I do not know how to explain this strange and tragic episode in a family where one brother was killed by the avenging soldiers for his role in killing a nationalist President and the other is serving a prison sentence for alleged involvement in a conspiracy to topple a pro-Indian prime minister. It makes the story far more baffling when one considers the fact that this particular prime minister and the slain president belonged to the two diametrically opposite political camps. The slain President was the proponent of Bangladeshi nationalism while the prime minister champions Bengali nationalism. It may so happen that Lieutenant Colonel Mahboob who, being himself an ultra-secular, hated Zia, a practicing Muslim while Ehsan, an Islamist hates Sheikh Hasina, the supreme leader of anti-Islamic political force in Bangladesh. I have never discussed with Ehsan his political beliefs or family affairs and am unable to throw any light on these differences between siblings. I only feel sad for the mother, a decent octogenarian lady, with whom I had the opportunity to talk when she came here to meet her younger son. She was very kind to me. Life is full of such surprises and inconsistencies.

Lastly, I may inform my readers that Bashiri, the engineering student who helped the authorities locate President Zia's unmarked grave in 1981

is also personally known to me. He is one of the members of the same engineering professional group to which I belong. He narrated the story to me of the army convoy carrying uniformed soldiers and three dead bodies on the late afternoon of 30 May 1981. The soldiers in uniform then brought local labourers to dig a grave. Later, they also brought one Imam from a nearby village and, after performing the *Namaz-e-Janaza*, three bodies were buried in haste in that single grave. The convoy left after the burial, heading towards Chittagong city. Bashiri witnessed all this hiding behind a nearby bush. He kept the secret to himself until the collapse of the mutiny. On hearing the news of Manzoor's killing he went to Rangunia Police station and told them what he had seen. Thus, the mortal remains of a hero and patriot were recovered.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE POLITICS OF THE STATE RELIGION: THE LOST DECADE OF THE ERSHAD REGIME

General Hussain Muhammad Ershad is the most controversial and opportunist general turned politician in the history of Bangladesh. Curiously, he is also blessed with an unending supply of luck. During the liberation war, being a Bengali military officer, he not only served in the Pakistani Army, but more surprisingly was allowed by the military junta to fly regularly between the two warring wings of Pakistan. It is claimed by many that because Ershad remained so loyal to the West Pakistani regime at a time when they were butchering his fellow countrymen he was made an influential member of the military tribunal who tried officers and soldiers of the Pakistani armed forces charged with indiscipline and misconduct! While most of his Bengali colleagues stationed in the western wing of Pakistan were under confinement, Ershad remained in active service during the entire period of the liberation war. Lieutenant Colonel Ershad was repatriated to Bangladesh in 1973, along with other Bangladeshi officers and soldiers stranded in Pakistan. Almost immediately, Sheikh Mujib sent him to attend a military course in India without knowing that the course was designed for Brigadiers. On arriving in Delhi, an embarrassed Ershad prepared to return to Dhaka. However, he was told by Army HQ to stay and, before the scheduled start-date of the course, he was hurriedly promoted to the rank of Brigadier. There had never before been such a promotion in the Bangladeshi Army. Ershad's star continued to rise even after the fall of Mujib. By the time General Zia relinquished his position as Chief of the Army and retired to enter politics in 1978, Ershad was not only a major general but also the most senior. This put Zia in a quandary over the selection of his successor.

Among the freedom fighters, Major General Mir Shawkat and Major General Manzoor were the main contenders for the top post. But by that time, Manzoor had fallen out with General Zia. General Shawkat, although apparently trusted, had a flamboyant lifestyle which displeased puritan Zia. Furthermore, both Manzoor and Mir Shawkat were openly ambitious.

Zia did not want to risk his power by appointing either as Chief of the Army. Manzoor's failed coup in 1981 proved that Zia was right to be cautious. Both died in the above failed coup attempt. On the other hand, Ershad, now the most senior, had served all his previous masters with apparent humility, he had no following among the officer corps, had generally been looked down on and ignored by his peers and other soldiers alike for his questionable role during the liberation war, his expensive taste and his womanizing. Eventually, the balance tilted in his favour and he was awarded the most coveted post in the army. None of the freedom fighters liked this particular appointment by Zia. While General Shaukat kept his disappointment to himself, Manzoor was furious. His common sense deserted him and he attempted a foolish *coup d'état* from Chittagong which not only failed but succeeded in opening the gates of President House to his sworn enemy, Ershad.

There is a popular perception in Bangladesh that General Ershad might have had a clandestine role in killing President Zia and that Manzoor was somehow duped into the conspiracy and then quickly killed on Ershad's orders to keep the mystery from unfolding. But, how can this conspiracy theory be reconciled with the public knowledge of the sworn enmity between the two generals? How could they have conspired together to kill the charismatic President? What was the benefit for Manzoor of getting involved in the conspiracy with Ershad? If they were in it together then why did Manzoor announce the sacking of Ershad from the Army in his first radio announcement immediately after killing Zia? Lot of questions, but no plausible answers. General Ershad's immediate response on hearing of the assassination of President Zia was highly professional, even immaculate. He put down the rebellion within two days, with no bloodshed other than the retaliatory execution of General Manzoor and his nephew, Lieutenant Colonel Mahboob by the enraged soldiers. The entire command structure of the Bangladeshi Army, including freedom fighter generals, rallied solidly behind him, a repatriated non-freedom fighter. He followed both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution. The ailing Vice-President, Justice Sattar who was under treatment at the Combined Military Hospital, was personally escorted by Ershad to Bangabhaban for his swearing-in as Acting President. There was no repetition of the 15 August uncertainty in the administration when Sheikh Mujib had been killed. The government and the cabinet functioned efficiently and strictly according to the Constitution. A presidential election was held in November 1981 in which the BNP nominee, Justice Sattar heavily defeated the Awami League candidate, Dr. Kamal Hossain. There was appreciation from home and abroad for the assistance provided by the

Bangladeshi Army in general, and General Ershad in particular in the process of democratic transition. However, this was only a façade.

Ershad had been eyeing Bangabhaban from the moment Zia was killed in Chittagong. Almost immediately after the Presidential election, Ershad started criticizing the government openly for alleged corruption and incompetence. He went as far as circulating to all the media a written rebuke of the BNP government under President Sattar. Under normal circumstances, General Ershad would have been sacked and arrested by the President on charges of treason. But either President Sattar lacked the necessary courage or he had realized that the tide had turned irreversibly against him. Ershad was flexing his muscles with the full support of the military who were itching to become masters of the nation again. Furthermore, there was serious division within the BNP leadership. Some of the senior colleagues of Sattar had by then already established contact with Ershad. On 24 March 1982, President Sattar was forced to hand over power to Ershad and declare martial law in the country, the second period of martial law since independence:

“Election observers described the result as justified or at least, realistic. Even the Chief of Staff of the Army, Lt Gen Ershad told the foreign correspondents that the election was fair. He went to Bangabhan and congratulated the newly elected President. But within a couple of days he changed his tune. He said that the defence forces should have a partnership role in the running of the state. Initially, his statements were in coded language, but gradually he demanded formation of a ‘National Security Council’ in clear terms. After much deliberation, President Sattar agreed to form the council under him consisting of four cabinet ministers and three chiefs of the armed forces. By this time, the extent of Ershad’s demands had increased considerably. He now claimed that the armed forces must have majority representation over civil administration in the council. That means he wanted effective veto power over the President and his cabinet.” (Rahman, 2002: 107–108)

General Ershad had learned well from the mistakes committed by General Khalid Musharraf in the failed counter-coup of 1975. Although the Awami League welcomed the army takeover by writing eulogizing editorial in the party mouthpiece daily paper, the ‘Banglar Bani’, Ershad did not, at least publicly, associate himself with the established pro-Indian, secular party. He successfully kept his deal with Sheikh Hasina a secret. Instead, Ershad claimed the mantle of General Zia, still hugely popular, even after his death, among both people and the army. He declared in all public addresses that the political philosophy of Zia would be followed meticulously by his regime. He claimed to be a practicing Muslim and a

nationalist. As a gimmick, once a week, he used to ride a bicycle to his office, imitating Zia's frugal lifestyle. He reiterated his faith in Islam and craftily selected mosques in different parts of Dhaka to attend the weekly Jummah prayer. As a public display of a simple, honest and religious soldier in the mould of Zia, his performance could not have been bettered. No one ever knew whether the packaging of Ershad for the first few months was the general's own idea or was planned and executed by a group of experts from our large neighbour, a country greatly experienced in realpolitik since the days of Chanakya, the brains behind great Mauryan dynasty. After all, the elimination of Zia and the removal of the BNP government suited the agenda of both the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League and the Indian leadership.

Ershad's next move was to split and try to crush the BNP as a political force. Age-old carrot and stick policies were expertly deployed. A group of opportunist leaders within the BNP continued to jump on the Ershad bandwagon at various stages of his despotic nine-year rule. He was able to gather at least sufficient numbers of fortune seekers to be able to give shape to his political ambition. The Awami League leadership clearly supported Ershad's *coup d'état* from the beginning and also all his subsequent political moves. The BNP was, on the other hand, in such political disarray that they failed to organize any effective demonstration against Ershad's declaration of martial law. The young nationalist leadership, especially the students, were completely disillusioned by the meek surrender of President Sattar and other senior leaders. They took the initiative to bring Begum Khaleda Zia, the thirty-five-year-old widow of Ziaur Rahman into politics to take on the leadership of the party. The gradual transformation of a politically inexperienced housewife into one of the most popular democratic leaders to represent the ideals of Bangladeshi nationalism is highly admirable. How she suffered for her courage in upholding the cultural identity of the Bengali Muslim would ultimately be a cause of great admiration. She alone stood firm in seeking to thwart Ershad's treacherous efforts to hijack and destroy the nationalist platform created by her slain husband.

In the meantime, Ershad continued his strategy of projecting himself as a nationalist with tacit encouragement from Delhi. He never uttered the Awami slogan of 'Joy Bangla', opting instead for 'Bangladesh Zindabad' in order to confuse nationalist supporters. The Awami League was supportive of Ershad's strategy to divide the political forces that believed in the separate, cultural identity of Bengali Muslims as opposed to 'Bengali nationalism'. Both India and the Awami League had known that these were the people who would always fight against Indian hegemony. If

Ershad were to succeed in attracting a section of such forces, that would be politically beneficial to the Awami League and their mentor. The elimination or weakening of nationalist forces in Bangladesh would remove the obstacle to East Bengal's reunion with the so-called 'One Bengal', meaning greater India. No Indian leader had ever really given up the dream of re-uniting the subcontinent with Bangladesh and Pakistan rejoining India to create '*Akhand Bharat*' or Greater India. Relations between Indira Gandhi and Zia had always been frosty, characterized by mutual distrust. The arrival of Ershad on the political scene in Bangladesh resulted in the immediate warming of the relationship with India.

Ershad and his wife went to India on a two-day official visit in October 1982 at the invitation of the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi. The Indian Prime Minister spoke warmly of the shared world perspective of the two friendly governments in a speech given at a banquet in honour of Ershad. The concluding para of the speech was:

“Excellency, you are no stranger to India. May this visit be the starting point of a new chapter of trust and cooperation between our two countries which share a past and must live in peace and close cooperation in the future. Through you, I should like to convey our warmest good wishes to the people of Bangladesh.” (Bhasin, 2002: India–Bangladesh Relations, Volume 1)

It should be mentioned here that, when General Zia visited Delhi during the premiership of Indira Gandhi before her loss to Janata Dal in the 1977 election, she gave him the cold shoulder. The logic provided by the South block (the Ministry of External Affairs) for the cool reception given to the Bangladeshi leader was that Indira Gandhi, being a democratic leader, could not be seen to endorse military takeover in a neighbouring country. But, apparently, in General Ershad's case, no such idealistic consideration inhibited Indira Gandhi from befriending the army strongman.

On 7 October 1982, the Indo-Bangladesh Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the sharing of the Ganges waters at Farakka was signed, removing the 'guarantee clause' for a minimum release of water during the lean season to the downstream river Padma at Farakka Point to the detriment of the interests of Bangladesh. Zia had been successful in incorporating that clause into the water accord signed with the Janata Dal government in 1977. Ershad's surrender of the national interest once again paved the way for the unilateral withdrawal of water from the international Ganges river by India. This disastrous act was similar to what Mujib had done in 1975 by verbally allowing India to unilaterally commission the

Farakka Barrage in violation of the Helsinki accord of 1966. Ershad again went to Delhi in 1984 to personally lead the Bangladesh delegation to the funeral of Indira Gandhi who was gunned down by her Sikh body guards. In the same year, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi personally visited Bangladesh after a cyclonic storm devastated the southern coast. It did not take long for Ershad to visit India again in 1986 when his host, President Giani Zail Singh of India, did not fail to mention in a banquet speech that Ershad had become a rather frequent visitor to India:

“Your Excellency, Begum Ershad and distinguished guests. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, Mr. President in our midst today. You are of course no stranger to this country. Not only have we had the pleasure of welcoming you to this country on more than one occasion, we also recall the time you spent in this country in one of our important institutions.” (Banquet speech of Indian President on 14 July 1986) (Bhasin, 2002: India-Bangladesh Relations, Volume 1)

The familiarity of Ershad with Delhi circles helped him to forge unity with Sheikh Hasina to jointly face the challenge from Begum Khaleda Zia. He maintained a secret alliance with Sheikh Hasina from the very early stages of his takeover. His vice-president, Moudud Ahmed writes:

“Ershad followed the strategy of underestimating and ignoring Khaleda Zia and BNP, and considered the Awami League as his principal political opponent. Because of this perception, on the one hand he had nursed Awami League and on the other, had tried to demolish BNP. According to the political judgement of Awami League, Ershad is the lesser evil ... At least twice Ershad had met Hasina secretly. Once he took Hasina on a long drive and assured her that he would reinstate Shaikh Mujib as ‘Father of the Nation’ and would arrange the trial of Mujib’s killer.” (Ahmed, 2015: 309)

However, the policy of appeasement of Hasina and India could not solve all his domestic political problems. Although major political parties could not gather enough strength to mount a movement against the undemocratic regime, the students of Dhaka University played a heroic role in opposing Ershad’s marital law from as early as 1983. Professionals, especially lawyers and journalists, also organized regular protests. In the midst of ongoing street demonstrations against him, Ershad called for national parliamentary elections in 1986 in an attempt to give legitimacy to the army coup that had toppled a democratically elected government in 1982.

There was initial understanding between the BNP and the Awami League that all the major political parties would boycott the election to

block Ershad's move to gain legitimacy. Sheikh Hasina, in a dramatic volte-face, however decided to participate just a few hours before the scheduled beginning of the submission of nomination papers. It is widely believed in Bangladesh that the change of heart of the Awami League president was the result of secret negotiation with Ershad in which India had played an important role. Jamaat-e-Islami, in a show of abject opportunism, followed the Awami League and also contested the election. The Islamist party had been banned after the independence of Bangladesh for its controversial role during the liberation war. Furthermore, according to the original Constitution of Bangladesh, there was no scope for any religion-based organization to form a formal political party and engage in activities of a political nature. The fifth amendment to the constitution in 1979, during Zia's rule, had again allowed those parties to resume political activities and contest elections. General Zia had since been heavily criticized for this action by pro-Indian and anti-Islamic intellectuals and politicians. The Jamaat leadership probably thought that it was a great opportunity to organize their grassroots by participating in the 1986 election. This was politics of convenience at its worst. In the end, the BNP led by Khaleda Zia remained the only major party outside the election fray. It was a very courageous decision that would pay her a rich dividend later.

As expected, the election was marred by widespread violence and wholesale rigging, thereby vindicating the stand of Khaleda Zia. Ershad's Jatiyo Party which he had formed in 1985 won an absolute majority in the parliament. The official result of the election led to the following distribution of seats in Parliament:

Jatiyo Party	153
Awami League	76
Jamaat-e-Islami	10
JSD (Rab)	4
Muslim League	4
NAP	5
CPB	5
JSD (Siraj)	3
NAP (Muzaffar)	2
BAKSAL	3
Worker's Party	3
Independents	32

The decision of Khaleda Zia to boycott the election under Ershad made her immensely popular among the general population and she was hailed as the 'Uncompromising Leader' against autocracy. The Awami League and other parties who had participated in the election were branded traitors. The fraudulent election failed to solve Ershad's problem. On the contrary, he was further alienated from the people of the country. The boycott of the election by Khaleda Zia deprived the parliament of legitimacy, even in the eyes of the generally pro-Indian civil society. Sheikh Hasina found herself in an embarrassing situation as a result of a human relations disaster for the Awami League. Adverse public opinion forced the Awami League and Jamaat leadership to review their positions. Ultimately, they decided to resign en masse from the parliament in early 1988, making it virtually defunct. By then, Ershad had also resigned as Army Chief and had participated in a farcical Presidential election. On this occasion, all major parties including the Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami boycotted. A few little-known politicians and political lightweights like Colonel Faruk, the chief architect behind the *coup d'état* against Sheikh Mujib contested the election of 1987. Ershad was declared winner by a huge margin by the Election Commission. The resignation of the Awami League and Jamaat members from parliament in the same year soon forced the 'elected' President Ershad to dissolve parliament in 1988 long before the expiry of its five-year term.

The dissolution of parliament was a huge political victory for the BNP and greatly strengthened the position of Begum Khaleda Zia as the true flag bearer of nationalist politics and the democratic movement in Bangladesh. It was not a minor achievement for a housewife with barely five years' experience in politics. Ershad called for a new parliamentary election in 1988. But his political star was waning fast and, as in the Presidential election, all major political parties boycotted the parliamentary election. The boycott by the Awami League of the election also signaled a shift in Delhi's support for Ershad. Indian intelligence was under the erroneous impression that it was not Khaleda Zia but Sheikh Hasina who was by then the most popular leader in Bangladesh and, therefore, a return to democracy in Bangladesh would serve the purposes of India better. The countdown to Ershad's downfall started with the second round of fraudulent parliamentary elections. The Jatiyo Party was practically the sole contestant this time. The other parties were insignificant. The Election Commission reported a turnout of 52.5 per cent. But the real figure was less than 10 per cent. The parliamentary seats won according to the declared result of the farcical election were:

Jatiyo Party	251
Combined Opposition Party	19
JSD (Siraj)	3
Freedom Party	2
Independents	2

But, Ershad was also a cunning politician. He changed his political stand overnight to an Islamist position so extreme that it even surprised the most radical among them. In a sudden constitutional amendment, Ershad made ‘Islam’ the State Religion of Bangladesh. The amendment is quoted below:

“The Constitution (Eighth Amendment) Act, 1988

2A. The State Religion – The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the Republic.”

There had been no demand from the Muslim-majority population of Bangladesh for any declaration of a state religion in the country. They had been satisfied when Zia amended the constitution in 1979 (fifth amendment) by inserting ‘Bismillah-ar-Rahman-Rahim’ at the mast of the preamble, abolished secularism as a fundamental principle and declared ‘absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah’ as the fundamental principle. This was enough for the Bengali Muslim population of Bangladesh to establish a distinct identity of their own, different from the Bengalis of West Bengal. Why then did Ershad decide to play the card of state religion?

There are two hypotheses. The first is that he was seeking to curry favour with the Islamic world. Relationships between Ershad and Hasina began to sour after 1986 election. Her image suffered as a result of her last-minute decision to participate in the election and thus give legitimacy to Ershad’s hugely unpopular coup. The Awami League’s participation in the election also facilitated Ershad in prolonging his reign for four more years. Hasina might have felt that Ershad did not adequately reward her for the huge political risk that she had run. The position of leader of the opposition, in a rubber-stamp parliament under autocratic government, was something of an albatross around her neck. A public perception of a secret deal involving the transfer of sacks of cash was also an embarrassment for the daughter of Sheikh Mujib. She now wanted nothing less than full power. Sheikh Hasina had always remained India’s first choice. The Delhi establishment accepted Ershad as a temporary arrangement out of expediency to give Hasina time to consolidate her power base. As India gradually tilted in Hasina’s favour, Ershad needed

support from the Muslim world for his survival. The eighth amendment definitely helped him improve his standing among Muslim nations. Ershad was successful on that point.

The second hypothesis is more Machiavellian. From the day, the military had grabbed power in 1982, Hasina, India and Ershad had had a common adversary in Khaleda Zia. President Zia created the BNP more as a platform for all nationalist, Islamist and anti-Indian forces in Bangladesh, than as a traditional political party. Zia's widow had become the undisputed heir apparent to his legacy. Without being able to split her support, it was impossible for Hasina to score victory in any fair election. Ershad, with his more radical Islamist image, was the best bet for Hasina and India to achieve that objective. If we accept the second hypothesis, then the adoption of a state religion might have had prior tacit approval from Delhi.

Ershad, however, also had other cards up his sleeve. He decided that the Bangladeshi Army would, for the first time, participate in a UN peacekeeping mission on the Iraq-Kuwait border. Ershad was killing two birds with one stone. The decision satisfied his only domestic power base, the army. Joining a peacekeeping operation was a great opportunity for them to earn good salaries (and in foreign currency). Secondly, both the USA and the Islamic world welcomed the gesture. The international standing of Ershad moved a few notches up the scale. As icing on the cake, the cunning dictator almost simultaneously adopted a strong anti-Indian public posture on the domestic front. Leaders of his Jatiyo Party suddenly started blaming India for all domestic political disturbances. The last action irked the Indian establishment and the Foreign Ministry of India had to issue a strongly worded statement against the Ershad regime:

“Statement of the Official Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India refuting certain allegations made against India by a Bangladesh leader.

“New Delhi, January 1, 1988 We are amazed to see the statement made by Mr. Shah Moazzem Hossain, Secretary General of the ruling party in Bangladesh, to the effect that the agitation in Bangladesh by the opposition parties started after a particular country was refused transit facilities for its troops. The reference is clearly to India. We have at no time asked Bangladesh for transit facilities for our troops, nor even hinted at any such possibility. The assertion is thus blatantly false.

“If the insinuation is that such facilities are required to engage China, with which India is improving its relations, it is clearly the product of a fevered imagination.*

“We hope that these offensive and unfriendly allegations about India will stop. Unfortunately, this latest outburst is of a piece made by some Bangladeshi leaders, all of which seek, without any basis in fact, to blame India for the domestic agitations against the present government. It is an old ruse, but one which is patently ill-founded, to try to throw the blame for one’s domestic problems on to another country.”

*After the visit of President Ershad to China in July last, the Far Eastern Economic Review of Hong Kong has reported that Bangladesh President had assured the Chinese leader Zhao Ziyang during their meeting that ‘Bangladesh will not allow India to move military supplies across its territory to the northeast sector in the event of Sino-Indian hostilities’. This assurance was given on July 3, despite Dhaka’s worry that India might insist on invoking the transit provisions of the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Peace signed in 1972. According to these reports it was the Chinese Vice-Premier Qiao Shi who had raised the question of India’s use of the Treaty during his visit to Bangladesh earlier, and now Bangladesh sought to extend this assurance at the highest level. (Bhasin, 2002: India–Bangladesh Relations, Volume 1)

All these innovative and smart diplomatic moves, however, failed to create any impact on the overall dissatisfaction of the general population at home. Ershad had never been popular and could not shake off the tag of opportunist ‘usurper’, despite his best efforts.

Ershad’s eight years of misrule had nearly ruined Bangladesh economically. Rampant corruption, a stagnant economy and the devastating floods of 1988 brought the country to the brink. Foreign currency reserves had dwindled to a dangerous level. Bangladesh did not even have enough hard currency to finance three months’ imports. There was such a mismatch in revenue management that the entire development budget was dependent on foreign aid and loans from multilateral and bilateral sources. Although he had built a few roads and other visible infrastructure, many such projects were cosmetic at best. Demand for change started to snowball within one year of the farcical parliamentary elections of 1988. Professionals of every category united to call for a restoration of democracy. Lawyers were boycotting courts. Journalists were organizing rallies and demonstrations on a daily basis. The students of Dhaka University, who had been the first group to effectively protest against Ershad’s declaration of martial law in 1983, also began to mobilize. Ershad’s attempt to organize his party’s student front with a liberal supply of money and arms failed miserably. The small minority of gold diggers were driven out from Dhaka University after a few skirmishes with the general students. Exasperated, Ershad then took two

gambles to contain student unrest, both of which backfired. Angered by the failure of his party's student wing to organize, he issued an official announcement temporarily stopping the work of Jatiyo Chattra Samaj. This was in fact an admission of political defeat. Then, the Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, Dr. M.A. Mannan, a man trusted by Ershad, oversaw elections in the Dhaka University Students Union (DUCSU). Considering the political situation in the country, it was also a surprising decision. In the election, the student front of the BNP won a massive victory which shocked both Ershad and Sheikh Hasina. The latter had expected that her Awami student front (*Mujibbadi Chattra League*) would be victorious.

In the political history of Bangladesh, DUCSU has always played a very important role. From the historic 1952 language movement to the 1969 mass upsurge that catapulted Sheikh Mujib to the supreme leadership of the then East Pakistan, DUCSU was in the forefront of all democratic movements. In 1990, the mantle of that leadership went to Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Chattra Dal who grabbed the opportunity with both hands. Ignoring the secret understanding between General Ershad and Sheikh Hasina, students from around the country, from every educational institution, rallied around the DUCSU leadership of the pro-BNP student front. Even the Awami League's affiliated student front, *Chattra League*, joined with *Chattra Dal* to form the All Students United Front to launch a vigorous movement to oust Ershad's autocratic regime. Sheikh Hasina reluctantly and belatedly gave lukewarm support to this unity among students:

“Although during Ershad's nine years of military autocracy, the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina made some superficial criticism, the stand of the Awami League had been inconsistent, shifting. Sheikh Hasina often supported the administration, often opposed them, other times she remained neutral. On the other hand, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia took an uncompromising stand against military government from the very beginning, it never changed. By the end of the nineties, people were giving total support to Khaleda's position.” (Rahman, 2002: 124)

Politically cornered, Ershad, upped his anti-Indian rhetoric. He had by then realized that India had decided to ditch him in their effort to bring Hasina to power. Indian intelligence had reported to the political leadership in Delhi that Hasina would easily win in a free and fair election. Ershad, for the first time, voiced concern for the plight of the Kashmiri Muslim which surprised everybody. In his speech at the monthly meeting of the Council of Editors in Dhaka, Ershad expressed his concern over the

oppression by Indian forces in the valley and called for an immediate end to oppressive measures. The Indians were not amused. The issue was raised in the Rajya Sabha:

“Question in the Rajya Sabha: ‘Anti-Indian statement by the President of Bangladesh’. New Delhi, March 21, 1990.

“Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) Whether Government are aware of the statement of the President of Bangladesh to the effect that he sees India as its only adversary and possible source of threat; and
- (b) If so, what is the reaction of the Government thereto?

The Minister of External Affairs (Shri I.K. Gujral):

- (a) Yes, Sir. Government’s attention has been drawn to statements to that effect attributed to President Ershad.
- (b) Government has raised this matter with the Bangladesh Government. In a joint press conference during my visit to Bangladesh from 16–18 February, 1990, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, in reply to a journalist’s query, said that he did not think President ever said such a thing. He further said that the President had been quoted out of context.”
(Bhasin, 2002: India–Bangladesh Relations, Volume 1)

Everybody realized that Ershad’s days were numbered. Exasperated, India also gave support to the unity of all anti-Ershad political parties, including the BNP. After all, Delhi was confident about the victory of the Awami League in a free and fair election. Ershad was now seen merely as an irritant which should be removed.

Krishnan Srinivasan, the then Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka, narrates his country’s role in the fall of Ershad in diplomatic language:

“What has been India’s involvement in toppling Ershad? Later historians and observers inside and out of Bangladesh will say we played a prominent role. Others may even enquire why we abandoned Ershad. Some will say he sealed his fate when he connived at the anti-Hindu riots. Others will point to his indiscretion in invoking the menace of a neighbouring malevolent power. On the diplomatic and political front, in truth, we played little part. Our statement on November 28 was cold and hurtful but not lethal. At the popular level, we made most of a low-cost operation and were the only outside element to play any major part. We had urged Hasina to concur with the rest of the joint opposition in rejecting participation in any future election under Ershad, and we helped to promote student unity. We helped in getting the opposition to agree upon one name as interim president when

the various conflicting options got bogged down. And that just about sums up India's role – perhaps not crucial but supportive and opportune. No other country, except perhaps Pakistan, could have done anything similar, and it would have had serious problems of credibility with Hasina. Anyway, if commentators in the future wish to give us a greater share of the credit, so much the better. Unfortunately, India will unavoidably become a factor in the future elections, with the BNP and other nationalists predictably raising the spectre of Indian domination.” (Srinivasan, 2009: 271–272)

The Indian High Commissioner avoids mentioning in his book the real cause of the policy of abandoning Ershad. Indian intelligence was of the opinion that Hasina would sweep to power in a free and fair election. As a result, policy makers in Delhi decided to ditch the smaller client to pave the way for return of the Awami League, the historical friend to power.

With Indian support gone, Ershad's power structure began to crumble all around him. As a last resort, he looked to the army for continuing support for their former chief. But as an institution, the Bangladeshi Army was reluctant to shoulder the responsibility and blame for keeping an increasingly unpopular general-turned-politician in power any further. Ershad declared an emergency in Bangladesh on 27 November 1990 citing a threat from a foreign power, again meaning India. The Indian foreign ministry dismissed the allegation in reply to a question from a journalist in Delhi:

“President Ershad has not referred to India by name but if the insinuations are indeed directed against India we will have to take a very serious view of it. The Government of India would like to emphatically deny any involvement in the internal affairs of Bangladesh and the current wave of protests there.” (Bhasin, 2002: India–Bangladesh Relations, Volume 1)

The Bangladeshi Army eventually sided with the popular uprising. The army's collective decision not to support Ershad's regime any longer was conveyed to him. After the historic 7 November *Sipahi-Janata* revolution, this was the second occasion on which our defence forces have shared the people's aspiration. The military dictator's civil and military confidants quickly sought to abandon the sinking ship. The Islamic world kept their silence on the internal developments in Bangladesh. India had already decided to dump Ershad in favour of Sheikh Hasina. The USA had no special interest in keeping Ershad in power and was encouraged to find in the popular movement the possibility of a democratic Bangladesh, a rarity in the Islamic world. Ershad's extraordinarily good fortune finally deserted him. He was unpopular at home and friendless abroad. The endgame of his despot government was dramatic and swift. On 6 December 1990,

Ershad resigned as President of Bangladesh. However, to have remained in power for nearly nine years was no small achievement on the part of the military dictator. Moudud Ahmed, his Vice-President writes:

“Ershad was fortunate in various ways. He did not possess any popular support at the time of his takeover and was characterized as an infiltrator by force. He overthrew BNP government with silent support from another large political party. He was more acceptable to Awami League and India than BNP. As the circumstances were complementary to his objective, he had been able to use the two major political parties for his convenience and wish. And he could remain in power without possessing any political philosophy for nearly nine years.” (Ahmed, 2014: 466)

Prior to Ershad’s resignation, the two main leaders, Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina agreed to the formula of an interim caretaker government, headed by Chief Justice Shahabuddin for conducting the parliamentary election. However, Justice Shahabuddin only agreed to take the responsibility on the condition that he would be allowed to return to his position of Chief Justice after conducting the election and transferring power to the elected government. Accordingly, the Constitution would later be amended in order to provide a legal cover to a pretty complicated and unique formula for a change of government. The eleventh amendment of the constitution says:

“THE CONSTITUTION (ELEVENTH AMENDMENT) ACT, 1991

“An act further to amend the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

“Whereas in the face of the country-wide popular upsurge for overthrowing the illegal and undemocratic government and giving democracy an institutional shape the then President was compelled to tender resignation;

“And whereas after the historic success of students, peasants, workers, employees, the people in general, the main political alliances and parties and all professional organization, regardless of their political affiliation, belief and leanings, the three main political alliances and parties made an ardent call to the Chief Justice of Bangladesh, Mr. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed to take the reins of a neutral and impartial government as its head;

“And whereas the then President appointed Chief Justice Mr. Shahabuddin Ahmed as Vice-President in the vacancy caused by the resignation of the then Vice-President and tendered his resignation to him;

“And whereas upon a positive assurance of the three main political alliances and parties of the country to the effect after having run the government temporarily till the establishment of an elected democratic government through a free, fair, and impartial election to Parliament he would be eligible to return to the office of the Chief Justice of Bangladesh and with the noble purposes of restoring democracy the Chief Justice, on the 21st day of Agrahayan, 1397 B.S. Corresponding to the 6th day of December, 1990, assumed the onerous responsibility of running an impartial government as Acting President;

“And whereas during the period in which Chief Justice Mr. Shahabuddin Ahmed exercised the powers and performed the functions of the President in his capacity as Vice-President, a Parliament comprising people’s representatives and a people’s government have been established through a free, fair, and impartial election;

“And whereas it is expedient to make provisions for ratification and confirmation of the appointment of Chief Justice Mr. Shahabuddin Ahmed as Vice-President, the exercise and performance by him of all powers and functions of the President acting as such and all Laws and Ordinances made by him and acts and things done and all actions taken by him in that capacity and for his return to the office of the Chief Justice of Bangladesh in accordance with the assurances of the people and the Main Political Alliances and parties.”

Some instrument indeed!

The three main political alliances referred in the above amendment are the BNP-led nationalist front, the Awami League-led secular group and the left alliances, respectively. Thus, an autocratic rule that had lasted eight-and-a-half years was overthrown by a popular uprising similar to that which had resulted in General Ayub’s fall in 1969. However, there is a basic difference between the two events. Another martial regime occupied power in Pakistan in 1969. In case of Bangladesh, fall of Ershad paved the way for democratic governance. Social scientists and economists consider the 1980s to be a lost decade in Bangladesh because of poor governance, a decline in the economy and the absence of democracy. The gravest offence that Ershad committed was the destruction of values in society. He institutionalized corruption, debauchery and blatant nepotism by patronizing all manner of vices. Since that time, the romantic ideal of middle-class simple living has had no place in the highly materialistic Bangladeshi society. The legacy of Mujib is Bengali nationalism, that of Zia Bangladeshi nationalism; but the legacy of Ershad is the moral degradation in this country:

“Ershad had not a clue as to political development: that freedom is a kind of wealth that creates more wealth and all the other higher values a good society reveres. Under Ershad, political development took a step backward. For unlike Mujib and Zia, Ershad was not a natural politician with a common touch of appeal. He did not have the warmth to attract crowds or to reach the average farmer. On television, he appeared stiff and on radio, stilted. In person, tall and well dressed, his shy manner was off-putting. He liked a slow golf game, good food, nice clothes, and fast women. Such was not the makeup of a man of the people; it reflected the values of the mis-educated new class, at odds with the poverty and rusticity of the villagers. (1994: 188) ... First, his expensive tastes were causing an outcry, as he lived too well due to his insatiable appetite for money and women. Second, his weakness in the face of opposition signalled that he would not fight if challenged. Indeed, he kept a plane ready at the airport, just in case.” (Novak, 1994: 190)

The above political epitaph of Ershad on his fall from power in 1990 was written by James Novak, resident representative of the Asia Foundation in Dhaka from 1982 to 1985.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE ISLAM EQUATION IN PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS

It was the night of 27 February 1991. I was glued to our bedroom television set. The people of Bangladesh had just finished the exuberant exercise of the first ever parliamentary election under a non-partisan caretaker government. They have exercised their right of franchise in a feisty and carnival-like atmosphere. This was the first taste of free and fair elections in post-independence Bangladesh. I was feeling slightly disappointed as my family could not go to the voting centre to share the wonderful experience. We were registered to vote in Dhaka. Unfortunately, my work-place at that time was at Chittagong. I could not arrange leave from the British company I was working with to travel to Dhaka to cast my vote. During the day, I had taken a leisurely drive around the port city and had seen enthusiastic voters everywhere. Contented smiles and a sense of accomplishment lit up the faces of the crowd. The people's power had become victorious over a highly corrupt and autocratic regime. The beginning of a democratic era could not have been better. Now the wait was for the final verdict of the people, freed from the shackles of autocracy.

I had been sitting in front of the television since seven in the evening to enjoy the live broadcast of the election results. Bangladesh national television had been broadcasting the results directly from the Election Commission. Although nobody had conducted any opinion polls prior to the first truly free and fair election in the history of Bangladesh, the public perception was that the old guard Awami League would do well thanks to their experience and organizational strength. Sheikh Hasina, the Party President had boasted in an interview with an Indian newspaper just a few weeks before the election that her main rival, the BNP, would not get more than ten seats in parliament. She had predicted that the fallen dictator Ershad's Jatiyo Party would emerge as the main opposition party. She and her mentors in India thought victory for the Awami League was a foregone conclusion. The few results declared before midnight were going mostly in

favour of the Awami League to justify their prediction. The trend began to change after midnight, with the BNP gradually emerging victorious. By four in the morning it was clear that although a few seats short of an overall majority, the BNP would clearly emerge as the largest party in the parliament by a big margin. The final result of parliamentary seats won was:

BNP	140
AL	88
Jatiyo Party	35
Jamaat-e-Islami	18
BKSAL	5
Communist Party	5
NAP(Muzaffar)	1
NDP	1
Ganatantri Party	1
JSD (Siraj)	1
Workers Party	1
Independents	3

The result of the election was a huge shock for the Awami League and their pro-Indian, secular thinktank. The people of Bangladesh had once again decisively rejected the philosophy of Bengali nationalism in favour of General Zia's Bangladeshi nationalism which had always been considered Islamic in character and thus abhorrent to the so-called secular intelligentsia. India had invested significant resources in promoting and cultivating Islam-haters in the media and cultural arena since before the creation of Bangladesh. The intelligence establishment in Delhi was flummoxed at the unexpected outcome of the election. Krishnan Srinivasan, the then Indian High Commissioner, provides glimpses of India's miscalculation and disappointment at the unexpected election result. The High Commissioner's diary makes for highly interesting reading which helps us immensely to understand the policy and expectations of our large neighbour. This is a 'must-read' for all politicians in Bangladesh. He writes:

"Hasina must be counting on the minority tradition of voting for the Awami League whatever happens and their weakness in not finding affinities elsewhere. We still keep hearing about a BNP wave; it is difficult to assess this when there have been no free elections for so long, and when the popular received wisdom is that the rural masses are wedded to Mujib's name and that the BNP have no grassroots organization. But the

BNP/Jamaat outcry that the Awami League is atheist or anti-Muslim because it is secular may have an impact in the rural areas, and the depredations of armed gangs during the Awami rule are unlikely to have been forgotten. Our present guess is that with its allies, the Awami League will approach but not secure 200 seats. (2009: 287) ...

“My High Commission colleagues think that a two-thirds majority for Awami League is out of the question and that the BNP could spring some surprises on Hasina. If the Awami League do not get at least a majority, we shall have egg on our combined faces, not only here but also in India, since it had always been India’s presumed wisdom that the Awami League represented the silent majority in Bangladesh and it was only dictatorship and army rule that prevented this majority from manifesting itself. (2009: 289) ...

“We keep making electoral assessments – as does everyone else. Our latest is that the Awami League and its allies could win 150 seats or thereabouts. (2009: 300) ...

“The various observers, including from India, who attended the polls, declared them free and fair, with an above 50% turnout. The BNP and the Awami League each won about 31% of the vote and the JP and Jamaat each won 12%. Two seats have been postponed due to the death of candidates, and four where a re-poll is to take place. Out of 294 declared, BNP won 138, the Awami League and allies 97, the Jatiyo Party 35 and the Jamaat 18. Others got 6. (2009: 301) ...

“BNP’s campaign against Indian domination and Hasina’s alleged intention to remove the role of Islam from the Bangladeshi constitution evidently struck a responsive chord with the voters. In contrast, the Awami League’s campaign was over-confident and Hasina’s shrill attacks on Khaleida, Ziaur Rahman and Ershad proved counter-productive. I have to admit that our own forecast in terms of seats was deplorably off the mark, though it is clear from percentages of the votes cast that things might easily have gone the other way. Hasina responded testily to her trouncing by alleging there was widespread election rigging, and showing no grace in defeat. Her better bet will be to exhibit a little patience and allow BNP to falter at the formidable obstacles lying ahead of any government. Patience and dignity in defeat, however, are not among her strong suits. (2009: 302) ...

“There is little doubt that Hasina’s image as an Indian protégé, stands her and us in no great stead. Whether she will ever be able to shake this off, or whether the party will remove her for a more effective leader, must be questions for the future. (2009: 303) ...

“In an atmosphere of cacophony and confusion, what emerges is that the Pakistanis, Saudis and Chinese will now command the fast track and are jubilant that the anti-Awami League, anti-Indian sentiment has been endorsed in a spectacular fashion. The Awami League will take time to heal its wounds, and the scarcely concealed criticism and scorn poured on Hasina will take its toll.” (Srinivasan, 2009: 307)

The main slogan of the Awami League during the vigorous election campaign was ‘Joy Bangla’, the battle cry of freedom fighters during the liberation war in 1971. The appeal of the slogan had, however, long since evaporated thanks to the misrule of the post-independence government of Sheikh Mujib. In 1991, the slogan only helped to revive the memory of Mujib’s autocracy, the 1974 famine and his formation of the hated BAKSAL, the one-party rule in Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina and her campaign strategists were actually living in the past.

We do not have anything like the US presidential campaign debates which prepare public opinion to a significant extent. US voters get the opportunity to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the policies of the contestants through those debates. In Bangladesh, each major party, however, get one important opportunity to reach the voters through a nation-wide television address a few days before the election. Sheikh Hasina’s address to the nation was a disaster. She was shrill and vituperative in her crude personal attack on Khaleda Zia and her late husband. Hasina completely misjudged the popularity of the martyred president and tried to belittle the contribution of Ziaur Rahman as a valiant freedom fighter during the liberation war and afterwards, as an honest and hardworking president. In addition to annoying the voters, the tone of her speech probably also made the Bangladeshi Army uncomfortable and disillusioned. In the 1990s, the Bangladeshi Army was still growing into its new role in UN peacekeeping and, therefore, the mercenary considerations of the 21st century were yet to win over nationalist and patriotic fervour. Zia’s Bangladeshi nationalism provided a sense of pride and identity to a nation torn between apparently anti-Islamic Bengali nationalism and the rich Islamic heritage of the people of this land. In comparison to Hasina, Khaleda Zia came across as fresh, sincere, accommodating and patriotic in her television address. Her uncompromising stand against the military dictator, Ershad, during the democratic struggle of the 1980s, also made her immensely popular among young voters. The combination of Zia’s idealism and Khaleda Zia’s personal popularity tilted the balance decisively in favour of the BNP in the ballot. A Bangladeshi-born BBC journalist gives us following objective assessment:

“We finished our dinner early to listen to the televised speech of Awami League leader. In her 45-minute speech, she spoke about ‘Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’, but most of the time was utilized for President Ziaur Rahman, BNP and its leader Begum Khaleda Zia—and it was said in an extremely unpleasant, attacking and vulgar language. I firmly believe that, no democratically developed country would allow the broadcast of such a personal attack against political opponents on national television.—

“I asked an old Awami League supporter and close associate of Sheikh Mujib whom he would vote for. He replied, ‘I could have voted for only one party. But after listening to the television speech of the party leader, I am rethinking whether I would cast my vote at all.’ Everyone present there on that night agreed that the speech of Sheikh Hasina would not be helpful either for her or party...

“Next day, I reported in a commentary on the BBC that even a day ago, I thought that Awami League was slightly ahead in the opinion polls, but on assessing the reaction to the speech of Sheikh Hasina I have changed my opinion and now think BNP is going to win. Many of my Awami League supporter friends rebuked me over telephone for my comment. Ataus Samad and Mark Tulley maintained their forecast of Awami League victory. My colleague and friend Mark Tulley was annoyed as I disagreed with their forecast.” (Rahman, 2002: 132–133)

The satisfactory election results for Ershad’s Jatiyo Party and Jamaat-e-Islami, tainted by autocratic governance and Pakistani collaboration respectively, also came as a big surprise. The people of Bangladesh had never accepted the *coup d’état* of General Ershad in 1982 against a democratically elected incumbent BNP government, although the army takeover was bloodless. His rather long nine-year rule was marred intermittently by popular uprisings and he was ultimately dethroned by a people’s revolution in 1990. At the time of the election he was under house arrest. With thirty-five seats in the 5th Parliament, Jatiyo Patiya became the third largest block after the BNP with a hundred and forty and the Awami League with eighty-eight. The most stunning was the victory of General Ershad himself in all five seats that he had contested in Rangpur, the town where his father had settled after 1947 migration from Jalpaiguri of West Bengal. Only Khaleda Zia matched this feat of winning five constituencies. However, the achievement of Begum Zia was even more spectacular as she contested from five different regions around the country, whereas Ershad did not venture outside his home district. Sheikh Hasina on the other hand surprisingly lost by huge margins in two of the three constituencies that she contested. Both her opponents in the capital

were relatively lesser-known politicians. A lone victory in her home constituency at Gopalganj saved her political career.

Many eyebrows were raised at the victory of eighteen Jamaat-e-Islami contestants in the election. They had remained the most controversial political force in post-independence Bangladesh for their collaboration with the brutal Pakistani army and alleged war crimes in 1971. Participation in the fraudulent election of 1986 under Ershad along with the Awami League also went against popular sentiment. The generally secular media in Bangladesh have all along been hostile to this party, portraying them to be part of a global Islamic Brotherhood movement. The election of 1991 put to rest the myth that Jamaat-e-Islami was a spent force in Bangladesh politics. Later events would however, prove that the 1991 rise of Jamaat-e-Islami from the ashes of 1971 did not bring good fortune, at least for their Pakistan-era leadership. Jamaat-e-Islami decided to give unconditional support to the BNP from outside the government to enable the nationalist party to cross a hundred and fifty-one, the magical number required in parliament to form a government. Begum Khaleda Zia was sworn in as the first woman Prime Minister in Bangladesh. The record of the first Muslim woman Prime Minister in the world, however, belongs to Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan who was elected in 1988.

A bitter and inconsolable Sheikh Hasina refused to accept the result of the most free and fair election in Bangladesh's history. Dr. Kamal Hossain, the only Awami League leader to keep Sheikh Mujib company in the prison of what was then West Pakistan during the nine months of the liberation war and later Law and Foreign Minister of the post-independence Bangladesh government, tried his best to convince Sheikh Hasina to see reason and accept the verdict of the electorate. Dr. Kamal was himself defeated in the election by a lesser-known BNP candidate from a constituency in the capital. Hasina was furious at Kamal Hossain. He was physically assaulted by the young thugs of the party for giving sane advice to the party leader. Dr. Kamal was later unceremoniously ousted from the Awami League. After much drama, including resigning temporarily from the post of the Party President, Sheikh Hasina ultimately took her seat in parliament as leader of the opposition. In her first address in the parliament, she declared ominously: "I will not allow this government to function even for a single day in peace." She kept her promise in letter and spirit.

Khaleda Zia began her journey in government with a deadly natural disaster. One of the most ferocious and devastating tropical cyclones of the 20th century hit the coastal belt of Bangladesh on the night of 29 April 1991. One hundred and forty thousand people, mostly along the

Chittagong coast, perished in the twenty-foot storm surge with accompanying wind speeds of 250 km/h. Economic losses approached US\$2 billion. Spontaneous international support and generous assistance enabled Khaleda's government to absorb the body blow as it sought to restore its day-to-day functions. However, this unfortunate beginning did not deter her from implementing the tripartite agreement signed prior to the election to amend the constitution to return Bangladesh to a Westminster form of government. The twelfth amendment was passed unanimously in Parliament in September 1991. Khaleda Zia assumed the office of Prime Minister on 19 September:

“It was a moment of great triumph for democracy in Bangladesh. On 19 September 1991, Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of the assassinated President Ziaur Rahman, took oath to assume the office of Prime Minister, vested with all the executive powers of the state. After nearly eighteen years' hiatus a civilian politician was elected by the people to govern and lead the country once again under a parliamentary system of government. For the people of Bangladesh, it was indeed a victory – a restoration of people's power and their universal right of franchise.” (Ahmed, 2017: 33)

However, within a very short space of time, their inexperience in managing realpolitik started to tell on Khaleda Zia's government. Begum Khaleda Zia was literally forced by her archrival Sheikh Hasina to move General Ershad from house arrest in his residence at Gulshan to Dhaka Central Jail. This immediately sowed the seed for permanent enmity between the BNP and the Jatiyo Party. General Ershad was kept in prison for the entire period of Begum Zia's first premiership. He was also treated rather rudely inside the prison where his status as former president counted for very little. The BNP government was also pressurized into arresting Professor Gulam Azam, Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami and the most controversial among all Pakistani collaborators. Jamaat-e-Islami who had given unconditional support to the BNP to secure a parliamentary majority and form a government, considered this arrest of their party chief a betrayal. The biggest beneficiary of these two acts was the Awami League. Sheikh Hasina succeeded in achieving her goal of politically isolating the BNP very early in its term of office.

Allegations of vote-rigging by the ruling party in a by-election in Magura constituency embarrassed the then Chief Election Commissioner to such an extent that he decided to resign. Jamaat-e-Islami now demanded that the constitution be amended to accommodate a short-term caretaker government provision for all future general elections. The Awami League not only accepted the Jamaat proposal, but also, taking its cue from

Machiavelli and Chanakya, formed an alliance with the Jatiyo Party, Jamaat and pro-Indian left-wing parties to establish a vicious and violent anti-government movement. Secular figures in the Awami League conveniently forgot their extreme hatred for Islamist Jamaat and did not hesitate to include Jamaat leaders in the Liaison Committee constituted to oversee the joint anti-government movement. In 1994, people were surprised to see Sheikh Hasina, leader of the opposition, holding press conferences flanked by Jamaat's Matiur Rahman Nizami and the NDP's Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, both of whom would be hanged two decades later by the same Sheikh Hasina for alleged war crimes in 1971:

“Unfortunately the Parliament elected in 1991, was almost paralyzed by the various demands raised by the opposition and the ruling party's failure to come to any settlement with them. (Ahmed, 2017: 33)

“But hardly three years had expired with the BNP at the helm of government when the opposition parties in Parliament, led by the Awami League started to raise the demand that all general elections in future should also be held under a neutral caretaker government and the Constitution should be amended to make it a permanent feature. This demand led to a deadlock between the ruling government and the opposition, as a result of which the entire energy of the government shifted from concentrating on the economic priorities to containing the opposition in Parliament.” (2017: 34)

The anti-government movement took a violent turn. Hartal (strikes), blockades and arson attacks became regular event. Scores of lives were lost as a result of opposition violence and the use of live ammunition by the police in response. The international community tried its best to mediate between the warring parties and to resolve the crisis. Democracy being a rarity in the Islamic world, the international community tried hard to save the democratically elected government in Bangladesh. The Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoku visited Dhaka in September 1994 and proposed a three-point plan for talks. Sir Ninian Martin Stephen, former Governor General of Australia and envoy to the Secretary General, arrived in Dhaka the following month to facilitate dialogue according to the three-point plan. Unfortunately, dialogue broke down in an atmosphere poisoned by mistrust.

In December 1994, all opposition members, led by the Awami League, resigned from the parliament. Nonetheless, the government somehow limped on for another year before calling a general election on 15 February 1996. The opposition parties boycotted the election as their demand for temporary caretaker government to conduct elections had not

been accepted by the ruling BNP. An unprecedented spate of violence continued during the whole period of electioneering. Law-enforcement agencies failed to restore even a semblance of order on the day of the election itself. Terrorists armed with home-made bombs were even able to attack Sonargaon Pan-Pacific, a popular five-star hotel in the heart of the capital. In the end, the election was a complete farce. Due to the widespread violence, the Election Commission was forced to suspend the election in as many as one hundred and nineteen constituencies! A hollow victory for the BNP in the single-party election further eroded the credibility of the government. The combined opposition parties intensified their movement demanding cancellation of the single-party election and the resignation of the government. The civil bureaucracy staged an unprecedented civilian coup with the public announcement of a refusal to cooperate with the incumbent government. On 27 March 1996, the newly constituted Parliament accepted the demand for an interim caretaker government and passed the 13th Constitution (Amendment) Bill accordingly. Begum Khaleda Zia submitted her resignation to the President on the same evening. Her second term in government had lasted just forty-one days. The last retired Chief Justice Habibur Rahman took the oath of office as Chief Advisor according to the provision of thirteenth amendment. Thus, a new chapter in constitutional governance began in Bangladesh. The BNP was practically forced by political circumstances to amend the constitution and hand over power to the caretaker government.

Caught on the wrong foot in predicting the outcome of 1991 parliamentary election, the intelligence establishment in New Delhi was in no mood to repeat the mistake. They nudged the Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami, mortal enemies in 1971, to temporarily bury the hatchet not only to attain the immediate objective of toppling the nationalist BNP government, but also to ensure a division of Islamist votes at the subsequent election of 1996. Jamaat-e-Islami would pay a terrible price for this short-sightedness twenty years later. At one stage in the election preparation, the Awami League allegedly conspired to remove the President of the Republic by staging an army coup. Abdur Rahman Biswas, the then President, was elected while the BNP was in power and the Awami League leadership thus considered him an obstacle. The then Army Chief, General Nasim attempted a *coup d'état* with the help of known pro-Indian retired and serving officers. This adventure backfired as a majority of field commanders were still nationalists in 1996. Major General Imamuzzaman, GOC 9th division, Major General Matin, Director General of Forces Intelligence, Major General Subid Ali Bhuiyan, PSO and Brigadier General Abdur Rahim, Commanding Officer of the

Engineers Brigade played significant roles in thwarting the pro-Awami League putsch in the cantonment. General Nasim, the Chief of the Army was removed and arrested but, surprisingly, got away without any punishment by the caretaker government of Justice Habibur Rahman. Why, how and under whose influence he was saved from facing an inevitable court martial has remained a secret ever since. His only punishment was premature retirement from the army with full benefits! The people of Bangladesh sighed with relief on seeing the pro-Indian army rebellion crushed by the patriotic section of the defence forces. Everybody now eagerly awaited the election of 12 June 1996.

Sheikh Hasina needed desperately to change her pro-Indian, anti-Islamic image. Secularism had dismally failed her in the 1991 election. To perform better in 1996 election, she decided to make a U-turn and adopt an Islamist position. She went to Mecca to perform Umrah just prior to the 1996 election and returned from Saudi Arabia wearing a hijab, marking the birth of a new public image for the campaign for the election of the seventh parliament. The champion of secularism now suddenly appeared as the most devout Muslim woman in all her posters and other election propaganda materials. Pictures of Hasina wearing a burqa or hijab, sitting on prayer-mat with eyes closed and two palms stretched upward to receive divine blessings were plastered all over the country. In the 1991 election, the very same Awami League had used propaganda materials showing dogs with skullcaps bearing the Islamic crescent as a way of ridiculing and insulting the ulemas of the country. The massive defeat of the party and that of Sheikh Hasina herself in that election had had a sobering effect on the ultra-secularist faction in the party. They grudgingly accepted the fact that Islam had a strong presence in the democratic process in Bangladesh. Election strategists also advised Sheikh Hasina to come to a tacit understanding with Jamaat-e-Islami to ensure the defeat of the BNP.

Golam Azam, the Jamat Amir still smarting from his prison experience under Khaleda Zia's government, reportedly issued a fatwa that Sheikh Hasina was, after all, a pious Muslim. Against the wishes of the majority of Sura members, party functionaries and supporters, Golam Azam used his strong personal influence in the Sura to take the decision for Jamaat to contest all the constituencies where the BNP had performed well in the previous elections with the objective of dividing pro-Islamic votes between the BNP and Jamaat. Although this strategy succeeded in securing power for the Awami League, it proved to be a disaster for the Islamist party itself. In the 1996 election, Jamaat managed to win in only three constituencies, down from eighteen in 1991. Even pro-Jamaat voters

rejected the policy of hobnobbing with the Awami League. More significant was the fact that Jamaat's short-sighted policy ensured the defeat of BNP candidates in at least fifty other marginal constituencies. The Awami League emerged victorious with one hundred and forty-six seats. The BNP managed to win in one hundred and sixteen seats thereby making them the largest opposition party in the parliamentary history of Bangladesh. The Jatiyo Party also fared well by capturing thirty-two parliamentary seats. Despite his massive defeat in the election, Jamat Amir Golam Azam expected that his tacit support for the Awami League would bring other political benefits for the party.

Since the return of Golam Azam from Pakistan in the late 1970s, the Awami League and their secular allies had been demanding a trial of those accused of collaborating with the Pakistani regime and allegedly committing war crimes in 1971. The BNP and Jatiyo Party remained ambivalent on the issue, especially given that it was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had declared an amnesty for all collaborators in 1973. Bangladesh had also signed a tripartite agreement during the Mujib period with India and Pakistan, withdrawing the demand to try one hundred and ninety-five alleged Pakistani war criminals. Therefore, the BNP and the Jatiyo Party considered the issue long since settled. But for the Awami League, this was a very important and live issue with the potential to earn them a rich political dividend. Intellectuals of the party prepared a list of alleged war criminals and demanded they be put on trial. Golam Azam was at the top of that list. He must have expected that in return for his assistance to the Awami League in the 1996 election, the Awami League leadership would drop the demand for him to be tried for war crimes. This high-risk gamble would ultimately fail and pave the way for the destruction of his party and the execution of alleged collaborators. In hindsight, if Jamaat had followed their 1991 electoral policy of not standing against BNP candidates in marginal seats, there would have been a strong possibility of the BNP returning to power. In that scenario, consecutive defeats for the Awami League in 1991 and 1996 might have spelt the end of Sheikh Hasina's political career. But, that was not to be.

The Awami League returned to power after twenty-one years in 1996. The Indian government realized the need to prop up their client in Dhaka. The Ganges water-sharing accord was signed promptly with Sheikh Hasina which India had avoided for almost two decades citing one excuse or another. India's dilly-dallying had irked Khaleda Zia so much that she had raised the issue in her speech as Prime Minister to the UN General Assembly in 1992. The issue had first been raised in the international

forum by her late husband, General Ziaur Rahman in 1976. The belated signing of the Ganges accord in 1996, however, had little impact on the gradual drying of the river Padma. The adverse ecological impact of the steady withdrawal of water upstream over a period of twenty-four years was irreversible. In spite of this, Sheikh Hasina claimed the signing of the water-sharing agreement as a victory for her so-called constructive diplomacy with India.

Another gift from New Delhi quickly followed the water-sharing deal. Since the 1970s, the Indian intelligence establishment had given military training and provided money and arms to Chakma insurgents in the CHT. The problem had its roots in the development of the Kaptai hydro-electric power station by the Pakistani regime in the early 1960s. In the construction of the project a significant portion (about 40 per cent) of cultivable land in the area had been flooded and nearly a hundred thousand tribal people, mostly Chakmas, rendered homeless. It is alleged that the compensation given by the Pakistani government was grossly unfair and rehabilitation measures were also inadequate. Furthermore, the tribal leaders who were entrusted with the responsibility of distributing compensation by the then government had misused the funds. This created widespread resentment among the Chakmas. However, during the Pakistan period, the resentment never turned violent. One reason for this subdued protest may have been that the ceremonial Chakma King, Raja Tridib Roy, had maintained an extremely cordial relationship with the ruling elites of West Pakistan. He, in fact, opted for Pakistan after 16 December 1971 fearing retribution from the Bangladeshi government for collaboration with the Pakistani military junta during liberation war. Tridib Roy continued serving the government of Pakistan as a minister until 1973. Tridib Roy never returned to Bangladesh. His son, Debashish Roy, is the current ceremonial Chakma King.

The Chakma issue was made more complicated by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after the liberation of Bangladesh. When the Constitution of Bangladesh was adopted in December 1972, Manabendra Narayan Lama, an influential Chakma leader and elected member of the East Pakistan provincial assembly in the 1970 election, refused to endorse it. He met with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a member of Tribal delegation and protested vehemently against Article 6 of the constitution which said: 'Citizens of Bangladesh to be henceforth known as Bengalis.' The Chakma considered the article to be a denial of the rights of the small ethnic minorities in the country. The delegation submitted a four-point set of demands, including a change to Article 6, to the then Prime Minister. Sheikh Mujib reacted angrily and advised the delegation in harsh terms to

accept Bengali nationalism and assimilate themselves into the national culture of the Bengalis. In response to Sheikh Mujib's hard line, Manabendra Larma formed a militant organization under the name of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti which eventually became the armed secessionist group, the Shanti Bahini. As long as Sheikh Mujib remained in power, the Indian authorities refrained from intervening in the Shanti Bahini cause. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, the RAW was given a green light from New Delhi to assist the Chakma rebels. Border camps were established at Tripura to receive and train the rebels. Selected members of the Shanti Bahini were also given military training at special training centres in many parts of India, including Dehradun, in the same facility where Mujib Bahini was trained under General Uban during Bangladesh's war of liberation. For the next twenty years, the rebels wreaked havoc in CHT, targeting in particular poor Bengali Muslim settlers from the plain. They also engaged the Bangladeshi Army in guerrilla warfare when the army was sent to CHT to restore order. It was an undeclared low intensity proxy war waged by India using Shanti Bahini as its advance troops. This aggression from the big neighbour and so-called friend, in violation of the 25-Year Friendship Treaty took a serious toll in lives and property, both civil and military.

Since returning to Bangladesh from self-imposed exile in Delhi in May 1981, Sheikh Hasina had never criticized the anti-state activities of the Chakma rebels or their Indian patron. On the contrary, the left-leaning and ultra-secular section of the Awami League had often made critical remarks about the patriotic armed forces who were fighting against Indian-sponsored tribal terrorists in discharge of their duty to safeguard the country's integrity. Srinivasan, the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, was once taken aback by blatant unpatriotic comments made by Sheikh Hasina regarding the insurgency in CHT when he called on her in February 1992 on official business. He narrates the story in his memoir, *Jamdani Revolution*:

“February 21 1992

“I called on Sheikh Hasina to say goodbye. She was with a team from the Awami League, her acolyte Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdus Samad Azad who was thoughtful and restrained in what he said but rather overawed by Hasina, Kaiser Chowdhury who was exuberant and articulate, professor Mannan who was anxious to create a good impression on Hasina but failed to rise above the superficial, and Abul Hasnat who did not open his mouth but is said to be in Hasina's increasing favor. (2009: 413)

“She also mentioned Hill Tracts but had no semblance of an idea of the nature of a ‘political solution’ though the Awami League kept on talking about one. She said it would be useful if India denied any connection with the Shanti Bahini, and claimed that the Shanti Bahini raids were mainly a put-up job by the Bangladesh Army in order to entrench themselves. I then asked her in that event who would believe our denial in any case?... She had the impertinence to say at one point that the Awami had lost the election because of India since the BNP used an anti-Indian campaign. It seems that it has not dawned on her even now that the AL lost the election because of her want of a convincing platform and a proper election strategy.” (Srinivasan, 2009: 414)

These comments made by Sheikh Hasina to the Indian High Commissioner against the Bangladeshi Army are clearly seditious. The hatred towards the men in uniform that she had inherited from her father had obviously been intensified by the tragic death of Sheikh Mujib and his family in the 1975 *coup d'état* led by junior officers of the Bangladeshi Army. Her outburst in the meeting with Srinivasan reflects that deep-rooted hatred for the Bangladeshi Army.

Even before Hasina had come to power, New Delhi had been considering winding up the Shanti Bahini training camps as the continuation of the CHT insurgency had started to create additional problems in India's volatile north-east. Ulfas, Mizos, Nagas and Bodos had been waging war against the Indian federal army since 1947. The presence of Shanti Bahini terrorists on Indian soil was giving encouragement to India's own rebels. The victory of Sheikh Hasina in the election of 1996 provided the perfect opportunity for an exasperated India to close the Shanti Bahini chapter. Hasina was offered a peace deal with Chakma rebels which she readily accepted. The Shanti Bahini leadership was also told firmly by their Indian mentors that the said deal was the maximum they could expect. They were told to pack their bags and return to Bangladesh. There were some provisions in the 1997 Peace Accord which constitute gross violations of many of the articles in our constitution. However, neither the Hasina government nor the Shanti Bahini could go against the wishes of their common mentor and so the accord was signed on 2 December 1997. Sheikh Hasina was confident that the accord would bring her a Nobel Peace Prize. But, unfortunately for her, that the dream failed to materialize. The personal frustration of Sheikh Hasina only intensified when Professor Yunus and Grameen Bank received the most coveted prize in 2006, the first such honour for any Bangladeshi citizen or organization. Professor Yunus would later pay a heavy price for this international recognition.

The signing of the two accords did not bring the expected dividend in terms of popularity for the Awami League government at home. Around the same time, Islamic militancy raised its head quite unexpectedly in Bangladesh. Two consecutive free and fair elections in 1991 and 1996 had raised the image of Bangladesh as a role model for other democratic Muslim countries. Despite financial mismanagement by incumbent governments, the international community felt optimistic about the future of Bangladesh. The country's people were praised for their resilience, commitment to democracy and to the religious values of moderate Islam. But that image suffered a serious blow from a terrorist attack on an event in a cultural function in Jessore, a border district with India in 1999. Ten people died and scores were injured in the bomb attack against Udichi, a secular cultural organization with India connections. The government claimed that the perpetrators were militant Harkat-ul-Jihad. Mufti Abdul Hannan, an Afghan war returnee was the leader of Harkat. He would later die on the gallows. More carnage soon followed. On 14 April 2001, a series of bomb explosions killed ten and injured many more during the early morning celebrations for the Bengali new year at Ramna in the capital. The alleged perpetrators were again members of Mufti Hannan's Harkat. Innocent people were the victims in both cases. I do not dare to claim to understand all the reasons for the rise of Islamic terrorism in Bangladesh in late 1990s under a secular government. My personal opinion is that both domestic and external factors contributed to the radicalization of a very small segment of the population in this country.

Historically, the Awami League had always been a cadre-based party with a violent core of activists. The commitment to democratic values of most of the activists of the party is only skin-deep. The success of Sheikh Hasina in returning the party to power after a gap of twenty-one long years provided the activists the opportunity they were waiting for. The unexpected failure in the 1991 election made them intensely hungry for money and power. Once in government and intoxicated with power, this impatient group of activists let loose a reign of terror after 1996. Opponents, both personal and political, were tortured and killed at will without a care for the rule of law. The politicization of the administration created an environment of impunity. A breakdown of morality and discipline in the state machinery, including among the members of law-enforcement agencies was the inevitable outcome of this lawlessness. The environment was ripe for the formation of radical groups, religious or otherwise.

The external factors involved five countries: the USA, the Soviet Union, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. A small number of Bangladeshi

Islamists went to Afghanistan to join the Mujahideen in the 1980s to fight against the Soviet occupying forces. The near decade-long US-sponsored and Pakistan-facilitated jihad in Afghanistan attracted young Muslims from many Islamic countries. The Reagan administration provided all necessary support to the anti Soviet coalition, holding them up as freedom fighters. The Islamic world, in general, was also sympathetic to the Afghans in their courageous struggle for freedom against a superpower. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, a large number of young men with military training returned to their home countries imbued with a desire for social change. We had a few such radicalized 'returnees' in Bangladesh. They were seen as local heroes, having been involved in the defeat of the Godless superpower, the Soviet Union. Cells of future Salafi extremists were established almost unnoticed around the country where moderate and mystic Sufis preached Islam at the beginning of the millennium. Almost simultaneously, religious extremism was rising dramatically in supposedly secular India. The demolition of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya by the BJP Kar-Sevaks (militant activists) led by L.K. Advani and other senior leaders of the radical Hindu party in 1992, with tacit support from the Union Congress government of Narsimha Rao, prepared the ground for the phenomenal rise of rabidly communal Hindutva politics. Although Begum Khaleda Zia's government was very effective in firmly controlling the expected backlash in Muslim-majority neighbouring Bangladesh, domestic communal elements saw the brutal killings of Muslims in their thousands in communal violence in India following the Babri Mosque demolition as moral justification for action. After her victory in the 1996 parliamentary election, Sheikh Hasina's hobnobbing with New Delhi added to the discontent of already enraged Muslims. I still want to give the benefit of the doubt to Sheikh Hasina. A politically naive Prime Minister probably had no clue that a toxic environment favourable to a flourishing of extremism was being created under her regime.

Begum Khaleda Zia took advantage of Muslim anger against the Awami League and formed a four-party electoral alliance of nationalists and pro-Islamic political parties. She learnt a lesson from the 1996 election defeat in that any division of pro-Islamic votes would only favour her rival at the ballot box. As a result, the pro-Islamic parties made the most triumphant electoral comeback in East Bengal since 1946. Begum Khaleda Zia decimated the Awami League in the October 2001 election. The BNP led four-party alliance scored landslide victory bagging 226 seats in a parliament of three hundred members. The Awami League was reduced to fifty-nine from the hundred and forty-six that they had achieved in 1996.

Once again control of Bangladesh slipped out of India's hands after only five years. However, the daughter of Sheikh Mujib was more successful than her father in that she managed to complete her term of office from 1996 to 2001. Political analysts in Bangladesh are of the opinion that having assessed correctly the extent of estrangement between voters and the Awami League, New Delhi sent early feelers to the BNP high command before the election in 2001. The USA and other western nations were also supporting the BNP as they realized economic mismanagement and a dismal law and order situation under an Awami regime could cause violent unrest in the most densely populated country in the world. They preferred a change in the administration to ensure good governance.

Begum Khaleda Zia made her intentions to tackle law and order with a firm hand amply clear immediately on assuming the premiership. She called the Bangladeshi Army to support the civil administration to root out terrorism from society. The methods applied by the army were ruthless, extreme, extrajudicial and undoubtedly undemocratic. Nearly a hundred alleged political terrorists, a surprising majority of whom belonged to the ruling BNP, lost their lives, tortured to death in custody or victims of extrajudicial killings in the so-called 'Operation Clean Heart'. Although the population at large enthusiastically welcomed Khaleda Zia's moves, with hindsight it can now be said that it was 'Operation Clean Heart' itself that sowed the seeds of the army's hatred for politicians. It was unfortunate that the army was given licence by a democratically elected civilian government to arrest and torture political activists and grassroots leaders, bypassing all legal process and relying merely on allegations. This is similar to what Sheikh Mujib had done, though he later repented in post-independence Bangladesh. One question still haunts BNP activists and supporters even after fifteen years: why, under a BNP government, did the army mostly target BNP grassroots politicians? Known criminals and terrorists of the Awami League were either allowed to quietly slip into India or remain safely underground during the entire operation which lasted two months. A former army officer gave me an explanation. As the operation was carried out hurriedly, immediately after the change of government, the army was supplied with the list of alleged criminals compiled by the police. The database of police was composed mostly of those names against whom reports or charges had been made during the period from 1996 to 2001, the period when the Awami League was in power. It is only natural that the names of then opposition BNP activists would feature predominantly in that police record. Coordinating responsibility for 'Operation Clean Heart' was given to Brigadier Masud of DGFI, a former Rakkhi Bahini officer and, more importantly, the

brother-in-law of the younger brother of Khaleda Zia. In 2007, the same Masud, as GOC of the 9th Division, would conspire with external forces to destroy the BNP and nationalist politics in Bangladesh.

'Operation Clean Heart' was followed by the formation of the infamous Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a supposedly elite force within the police. The RAB was formed by inducting army, navy and air-force personnel, including officers on lien in addition to police personnel. Most of the RAB officers received training in the USA while the battalion was being formed. Unfortunately, the RAB became a death squad operating outside any judicial control. The number of extrajudicial killings in Bangladesh skyrocketed after the formation of the RAB. The general population again welcomed the extreme policy of the government as most of those killed were alleged criminals. Khaleda Zia, at least, maintained her political honesty by not interfering in the operation of the RAB, nor did she allow the Home Ministry to misuse the elite force against political opponents. However, she can also be criticized for her silence and inaction when it became clear that the RAB had become a vicious tool for human rights abuse. It is an irony of fate that, by 2016 when I was writing this book in prison, Khaleda Zia and her party were facing the wrath of the same 'Genie' that she herself had created. Sheikh Hasina has transformed the RAB into a 21st century version of the SS, Savak or Stasi, the most feared and loathsome security services of Nazi Germany, the Shah's Iran and communist East Germany, respectively. As an ardent follower of Chanakya and Machiavelli she has no qualms about using the RAB to eliminate political opponents.

While Khaleda Zia remained busy taking extreme measures against social and political criminals, Islamic terrorism succeeded in spreading its network almost silently across the country. Shayikh Abdur Rahman, brother-in-law of Mirza Azam, General Secretary of the Awami League's youth front and Bangla Bhai, an unknown private college teacher suddenly emerged from nowhere as leaders of the JMB, a militant organization. An increasing number of terrorist attacks claimed lives and damaged property. A horrendous grenade attack on an Awami League political rally in Dhaka on 21 August 2004 by alleged militants not only proved to be extremely embarrassing for the four-party alliance government, but also shook the very foundations of democracy. All the good work of the Khaleda Zia government in reviving the moribund economy, improving law and order and achieving impressive gains in most social sector indicators were being undone by the heinous acts of a few misguided militants. Before the grenade attack, there was another incident in Chittagong which seriously damaged the government's bilateral relations with India. On the night of 1

April 2004, police intercepted the loading of ten trucks with illegal arms and ammunition at a jetty on the Karnaphuly River in Chittagong. It was alleged that the arms delivery was intended for the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), a militant group fighting for the independence of Assam from India. Our big neighbour claimed that the DGFI and National Security Intelligence (NSI) were behind the botched operation. India was waiting for just such an opportunity to malign the nationalist government.

New Delhi succeeded to accumulate enough weapons to wage an international campaign against Bangladesh. Fifth columnists inside the country also joined the Indo-Jewish lobby to portray Bangladesh as a terrorist and failed state. The common agenda was to effect regime change in Bangladesh. For a long time, India had been following a highly intelligent and successful two-track policy in the Middle East. Publicly, she lent vigorous support to the rights of the Palestinians to establish a separate, independent homeland on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution No. 242. Privately, however, India and Israel have maintained close cooperation on intelligence sharing and the development of nuclear technology. India has also maintained full diplomatic relations with Israel. Mark Sofer, the Israeli ambassador in Delhi, in an interview given to an Indian magazine said on the record that during the Kargil War against Pakistan, Israel assisted India in achieving a turnaround in the battle situation. He did not, however, elaborate on the details of the assistance. The foreign ministries of the two countries also cooperate closely to maintain lobbies in support of each other's interests in Washington.

Anti-Bangladesh propaganda, started by Bertil Lintner of the Far Eastern Economic Review as far back as April 2002, intensified significantly from 2004. B. Raman, Jaideep Saikia, Subhas Kapila, Anand Kumar, Sanat Chakraborty, Sudha Ramachandran, Balbir Punj and Vijay Thakur are a few names among possibly hundreds of Indian journalists and intellectuals who started a deliberate campaign against Bangladesh with the determined objective of convincing Western capitals of the need to topple the BNP-led nationalist and Islamist coalition. These Indian journalists and academics were joined by the likes of Alex Perry, Eliza Griswold, Arnaud de Borchgrave, Chris Blackburn, Christopher Walmoor, Richard Benkin, Selig Harrison and others in Washington, New York and London. Bertil Lintner has described Bangladesh as a 'Cocoon of terror', even a 'New Afghanistan'. In a virulent anti-Bangladesh article published in the Far Eastern Economic Review within six months of Khaleda Zia's coming to power, Lintner wrote:

"A revolution is taking place in Bangladesh that threatens trouble for the region and beyond if left unchallenged. Islamic fundamentalism, religious

intolerance, militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups, a powerful military with ties to the militants, the mushrooming of Islamic schools churning out radical students, middle-class apathy, poverty and lawlessness all are combining to transform the nation.” (Lintner, Bangladesh—a Cocoon of Terror, Far Eastern Economic Review, 4 April 2002)

The article is full of such extreme and baseless propaganda. The global geopolitical situation underwent dramatic changes in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on America. Prior to that, US policy toward Bangladesh was generally to support pro-Western, moderate Muslim political parties in the democratic governance of the country. But post-9/11, the USA was clearly hostile to the entire Islamic world. Both India and Israel were enthusiastic supporters of the new jingoistic policy in Washington. They worked closely together to fuel Islamophobia in the west.

An alarmed Khaleda Zia made a swift change in her policy of apparent indifference towards Islamic militants and gave instructions for a massive manhunt to apprehend the terrorists. Law-enforcement agencies coordinated their operations well and saw quick success. First, Shayikh Abdur Rahman and then the notorious Bangla Bhai were arrested along with other linchpins of terrorist organizations. The government took another wise decision. Instead of eliminating them immediately in an extra-judicial way, all of them were tried in open civilian court. The ring leaders were given death sentences, and subsequently hanged once all legal formalities as per the constitution had been completed. Unfortunately, Washington had by then fallen for the relentless propaganda in the Western media planted with stories from New Delhi. Officers at the Dhaka Cantonment were already discussing how to bring about a military takeover in 2005 while the BNP was day-dreaming of another term in the office. The appointment of General Masud as GOC of the 9th division provided the necessary inspiration to the conspirators. A junior colleague of Masud later told me that the GOC was constantly in touch with RAW and the US Embassy in Dhaka. As the personal relationship between Tarek Rahman, the elder son and declared political heir of the Prime Minister, and General Masud deteriorated over some family matter, the fate of Khaleda Zia was sealed. General Moin, the Chief of Staff and General Masud were just waiting for the green light from Washington and New Delhi to strike. General Shakil, DG BDR, later killed in the BDR mutiny and other senior members of the conspiracy made direct contact with Sheikh Hasina to convey their loyalty to her. General Rumi, the army intelligence chief, was in the meantime doing everything possible to keep Khaleda Zia in the dark by giving her false assurances of the continuing loyalty of the army.

Probably the most dangerous role was played by Major (retd.) Sayeed Iskander, the ambitious younger brother of the Prime Minister and Member of the Parliament from the Feni constituency, Khaleda Zia's ancestral district. General Moin, General Rumi and Sayeed Iskander had been course mates in the army. Sayeed Iskander might have nursed an ambition to inherit the mantle of BNP Chairperson, elbowing out his nephew Tarek, in the case of a military takeover. After all, the key player General Masud was his close relative as they had married sisters while Moin, the army chief, was a course mate and close friend.

The crisis erupted when the Awami League refused to accept Chief Justice K.M. Hasan as Chief Advisor to the caretaker government and the BNP was in no mood to compromise. According to the provision in the constitution, the last serving Chief Justice automatically becomes the first choice as Caretaker Chief of the interim government to conduct the election at the expiry of each five-year term of the elected government. In case of his unavailability, the next choice is the previous Chief Justice, followed by any other retired Judge of the Appellate division with the proviso that he be selected in consultation with major political parties. The last alternative in the constitution is for the President of the Republic to take additional responsibility as Caretaker Chief in case all other alternatives fail.

Initially, Chief Justice K.M. Hasan was willing to become Chief Advisor. But the intensity and the violence of the street movement launched by the Awami League and perhaps the pressure put on him privately by diplomats, including the US Ambassador, unnerved him. He formally announced his refusal to become Chief Advisor at the very last moment, thus creating a serious constitutional crisis. As the two major parties failed to reach an agreement on any other acceptable candidate, President Iajuddin Ahmed proposed himself for the post of CA as per the last alternative of the relevant provision of the constitution.

28 October 2006 was a sad day for Bangladesh. Extreme savagery in the form of a mass lynching was displayed in the streets of Dhaka. Awami League cadres, armed with bamboo poles and wooden planks, literally beat to death at least a dozen Jamaat-e-Islami workers in front of live cameras. Another hundred were seriously injured. The gruesome and horrifying show of beating young men to death was played live on different private television news channels. The insane mob kicked the dead victims and danced on their lifeless bodies. I was watching television along with my mother and my wife. I do not have the literary capacity to adequately describe the cruelty of the bloodthirsty mob. I only remember that we had to switch the television off, unable to continue watching the

ghastly scene. The three of us were speechless, on the verge of tears. Thirty lives were lost in next four days. The BDR and the police patrolled the streets but never tried to stop the massacre. Surprisingly, the army which would stage a new style of *coup d'état* less than three months later, did not intervene as freshly spilt blood flowed in streets up and down the country. Begum Khaleda Zia was still under the mistaken impression that the army generals would remain loyal to her. After all, many of them were close to her younger brother and had been personally selected by her for promotion and strategic postings. Before dying, Julius Caesar uttered '*et tu Brute*' to a single person, his friend Brutus. Khaleda Zia's misfortune was that she was surrounded by many Brutuses. Professor Iajuddin was sworn in as Caretaker Chief at Bangabhaban, the residence and office of the President, on the evening of 28 October in the midst of mayhem.

The BNP-led four-party alliance clearly made mistakes while in power. Its failure to take action against corrupt elements in the government definitely disappointed the general population. But, beyond that Khaleda Zia had suffered things that were beyond her control. She came to power at a time when the whole world was in shock following 9/11. The election in Bangladesh was held on 1 October 2001, just nineteen days after the destruction of twin towers by al-Qaeda terrorists. Before 9/11, bringing democracy to Islamic countries was the declared objective of the West. Bangladesh had been a role model in this respect since 1991. In spite of stray instances of political violence and one failed coup attempt in 1996, the transfers of power had generally been carried out peacefully and according to the constitution. In each of the three elections – 1991, 1996 and 2001 – the incumbent had lost which gave credence to our electoral process. The nation was expecting to evolve gradually into a stable two-party political system like the UK or the USA. The day-to-day practice of Islam by the people in Bangladesh was also appreciated by the West who saw it as pious and moderate. The restraint shown by the population of over 90 per cent Muslims in the face of extreme communal provocations coming from across the border was always praiseworthy. The reaction of Bangladeshi Muslims to the Babri Mosque demolition, the Mumbai riots or the Gujarat massacre was considered measured and minimal. The Ulemas of Bangladesh also played a commendable role in calming the sentiments of the population on each occasion.

Ultra-secular elements in Bangladesh had continuously tried to stir up trouble during the 1990s, possibly at the behest of their Indian friends. The live broadcast by Western media of an interview with a controversial Bangladeshi female author, Taslima Nasrin, holding a burning cigarette between her fingers and contemptuously turning the pages of the Holy

Quran was an example of bad taste and extreme provocation. The fact that the woman in question has now taken refuge in India clearly indicates motive and connection. The US aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq, resulting in millions of civilian deaths caused anguish among the Muslims in Bangladesh. They were definitely hurt by the suffering of innocent men, women and children in fellow Muslim countries. There were protests and meetings denouncing the aggressors. But there was no instance of damage to any US or Indian property. No foreigners were abused or attacked until some appalling incidents in 2016. We had to bear the brunt of imported Islamic terrorism committed by a misguided few. But Bangladesh never exported any terrorism. Rather, Bangladesh has become the victim of other people's wars and folly. When biased imperialists like Bertil Lintner cynically equate Bangladesh with Afghanistan, they choose to forget that it was the cold war between the USA and the former Soviet Union that created the Afghan situation in the first place. Saddam Hussain was pampered and promoted by the USA and the Soviet Union in turn to serve their imperial designs. Hapless Muslim counties like Bangladesh suffer due to such foreign policy blunders by the so-called superpowers. Unfortunately, post 9/11, the priority of Western countries has changed radically from promoting democracy to ensuring security. Human rights have no place today in the so-called democratic West when the victims are Muslim. Under the changed geopolitical circumstances, it has become difficult for militarily weaker Muslim-majority countries like Bangladesh to safeguard their sovereignty.

It is no surprise that Islam remains an important and emotive political issue in Bangladesh. The results of the three elections discussed above clearly indicate that people's perceptions of the political parties with respect to their positions on Islam and India are vital for the outcome of an election in this country. Sheikh Hasina complained to the then Indian High Commissioner with remorse that she had lost the 1991 election because of voters' perception that she was pro-Indian. The High Commissioner was seriously irked by Hasina's comment. In 1996, Sheikh Hasina was forced to re-package her public profile to that of a devout Muslim. The strategy brought her success at the polls. Begum Khaleda Zia succeeded in uniting the Islamic parties under her nationalist leadership in 2001 and, as a result, almost decimated the Awami League by winning three-quarters of the parliamentary seats in the election. The international community should realize that with the rich history of Islam in eastern Bengal, Islam is bound to remain a strong political issue in independent Bangladesh. There is no need for the politicians of Bangladesh to be apologetic about Islam's role in politics in a country where 90 per cent of the people are Muslims. It is

futile to try to cure the West's bias against political Islam. They never complain about the declared Zionist character of the state of Israel. The rabidly communal Hindutva philosophy of India's ruling BJP is also acceptable to them. The current Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, was the chief architect of the Muslim massacre in Gujarat in 2002. He never even said sorry for his brutal act. But that does not make him less welcome in Washington or any other Western capital. The British monarch is officially called the 'defender of the faith'. The US President takes the oath of office with a bible in his hand. Many political parties in various Islamophobic countries in Europe go by the name of Christian Democratic Party. They do not apologize for mixing politics with religion. The same people should accept that the Islamic character of Bangladesh is an important safeguard of our sovereignty and independence.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE TROJAN HORSE OF ONE-ELEVEN

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman continued to nurture his hatred for the Pakistani army after he returned triumphant to Bangladesh in 1972. This obsession against the men in uniform gradually transformed into a dislike of any defence force, including that of Bangladesh. Discussing the army, he confided to his journalist friend, Anthony Mascarenhas: "I don't want to create a monster like the one we had in Pakistan." His attempt to downsize the military and make a parallel force personally loyal to him in the form of India-trained 'Rakkhi Bahini' was the result of a deep-seated antagonism towards the traditional army as a class. Senior officers in the Bangladeshi Army could not fail to notice this negative attitude on the part of their supreme leader. General Manzoor complained bitterly to the same foreign journalist: "Mujib has done his best to destroy the army. He has also adopted the policy of divide and rule, getting rid of anyone who seemed to be a threat to him." Senior colleagues of Sheikh Mujib shared this hatred of their leader. Anthony Mascarenhas provides an insight to their general hostility:

"This attitude was shared by his ministers and other senior Awami Leaguers who has also escaped death at the hands of the Pakistan Army in 1971. To their basic hostility of things military was added, after independence, the fear that Bangladesh Army might try to supplant them. This anxiety was grounded in the fact that the Bengali military men have been in the thick of the fighting during the independence movement while the Awami Leaguers stayed safely in Calcutta out of the line of fire." (Mascarenhas, 1986: 35–36)

It is, therefore, not a complete surprise that Sheikh Mujib was eventually killed by a disgruntled section of the same army that he hated so much.

His daughter, Sheikh Hasina was brought up in an environment where army bashing was all around her. The tragic massacre of Sheikh Mujib and his family on that night in August 1975 further hardened her attitude against the military. Pro-Indian secular elements in Bangladesh constitute

the largest segment of Awami League supporters. Since the independence of Bangladesh, this section has consistently advocated abolition of the army. They argue that since India is the 'most trusted friend' and Bangladesh is virtually surrounded by that huge 'friendly' nation, it is unnecessary and, indeed, wasteful to maintain a defence force. That Sheikh Hasina considers the army more a liability than an asset is evident from comments she made to Krishnan Srinivasan, the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh from 1989 to 1992. She also blames the army for its role in her election defeats in 1991 and 2001. Sheikh Hasina and her senior colleagues publicly blame the DGFI, the intelligence unit of the defence forces, for the ghastly grenade attack by militants on her rally in August 2004. The government of Sheikh Hasina has implicated two generals in the case relating to that dreadful attack. Both have been languishing on death row in Kashipur prison since 2010.

However, the general population of Bangladesh used to admire our army for its patriotism, courage and pro-people character. That is, until one-eleven. The Bengal regiment rebelled against Pakistani occupational forces in 1971 and Major Zia declared independence when the politicians failed to give any meaningful direction to the nation. After independence, the same army, in 1975 and 1996, succeeded in resisting coup attempts by pro-Indian factions. The men of the BDR fought heroically against the far stronger Indian military and defeated them, against all the odds, when regular troops of the so-called friendly neighbour tried to encroach across our border at Roumari in Rangpur district in April 2001. New Delhi was not at all amused by the nationalist fervour shown in the battle of Roumari by the border forces of Bangladesh. Nine years later they would take brutal revenge for this audacity by dismantling the BDR as an institution. The courageous two-decade-long counter-insurgency operation carried out by the army saved CHT from the clutches of the India-sponsored Shanti Bahini secessionist group. The Indian intelligence establishment knew very well that Indian expansionist designs could not be implemented if the Bangladesh defence forces were able to maintain their nationalist character. The decision of the BNP high command to appoint General Moeen as Army Chief in 2005 and the highly ambitious General Masud as GOC of the 9th Division in 2006, presented India the exact opportunity they had been waiting for since 1975.

It is a well-established fact that truth is the first casualty of war. Misinformation campaigns against nationalist and Islamist political forces started in 2005 among the officer corps of the Bangladeshi Army by vested interests. However, the principal target of the campaign was Tarek Rahman, eldest son of General Ziaur Rahman and Begum Khaleda Zia.

Tarek was targeted for being the political heir apparent to Khaleda Zia; he was tipped to be the next leader of the BNP. General Zia, the founder of the BNP was greatly admired for his strong patriotism, courage and exemplary incorruptible character. He did not even own a house in Dhaka at the time of his assassination in 1981. General Zia, a devout Muslim, was also free from all social vices. A vigorous campaign started in the army in 2004 to portray Tarek Rahman as the total opposite of his father in every respect. It was a no-holds-barred character assassination campaign to set the national army against the son of their most respected Commander-in-Chief. Tarek's choice of friends and associates did not help his cause. His friends utilized the clout of Prime Minister's son to enhance their individual business interests. Furthermore, senior army officers had seen Tarek grow from a boy into a young political leader before their very eyes. Begum Zia never changed her residence from the Dhaka Cantonment where she had settled in 1972 with her late husband, the then Deputy Chief of Staff. The old saying that familiarity breeds contempt was unfortunately borne out once more in the case of Tarek Rahman. How could yesterday's upstart kid become today's national leader? This question was on the lips of every senior officer in the army. The conspirators were intelligent enough not to attack Begum Zia personally at least during initial days of the smear campaign. Their public message was that they, as a nationalist army, supported the widow of General Zia, but that, as a proud army, they could not take orders from her son who was of 'questionable character'. The whole campaign was brilliant in its execution and highly successful in swaying public opinion inside the cantonment against Tarek Rahman. The RAW was waiting for the completion of the BNP's term of office as they knew from the unhappy experience of the botched coup attempt in 1996 that hasty decisions could be counter-productive.

However, the fifth columnists made adept use of the final year of Khaleda Zia's premiership to plant regular stories in the secular, pro-Indian media about alleged corruption and the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh. With the active support of New Delhi, similar stories were also regularly planted in the foreign press. In 2005 and 2006 Indian influence over the Bangladesh military had yet to reach the level required to be able to engineer regime change unilaterally without Washington's approval. That level of Indian influence would be visible later under the rule of Sheikh Hasina. But from 2005 onwards, General Moeen and General Masud busied themselves cultivating relationships with Western embassies. They were constantly feeding information to foreign diplomats about growing discontent in the army over the role of Tarek Rahman. General Moeen writes in his memoir on the conspiracy within the army:

“I used to regularly brief the division commanders about the situation of the country and listened to their opinion. Some of them pressed me to take immediate action. Particularly, GOC of Savar division, Major General Masud always expressed his concern in severest of terms at the dismal condition of the state and political situation.” (Ahmed, 2009: 323)

Khaleda Zia was eventually allowed to complete her five-year term of office. She handed power over to a caretaker government on 28 October 2006. From 28 October, onwards, there was no effective government in the country. Awami League activists let loose a reign of terror. The army, BDR and police deployed by the government preferred to look the other way. Public lynchings, vandalism, looting, and destruction of private and state property were everyday occurrences. The President and Chief Advisor, Prof. Iajuddin were powerless without the cooperation of the civil and military administration. Police, BDR and Army Chiefs continued to give him the cold shoulder, ignoring all his directives. The president’s weak personality further aggravated the situation.

Begum Khaleda Zia, then out of office, continued her election campaign across the country under the mistaken impression that election of the eighth parliament would be held on schedule. She had a strong conviction that her generals would not betray her. However, the generals were then putting the finishing touches to the operational plan of a new style of military takeover with active Indo-US support. There were still remnants of nationalists among the senior field commanders. But they were misled by Moeen and Masud with the false propaganda that the imminent *coup d’état* would take place with the purpose of strengthening Khaleda Zia and bringing her back to power after restoring order in the country and punishing corrupt elements inside the BNP. The Awami League, on the other hand, while grudgingly accepting Prof. Iajuddin as Chief Advisor, intensified its violent movement. They knew from the beginning that there would not be an election. The army was only buying time before the final putsch. General Ershad, the fallen dictator of the 1980s, after a short-lived political courtship with the BNP, ditched them at the opportune moment and joined the Awami camp as part of a well-rehearsed plot. On cue, on the eve of the election on 5 January, Sheikh Hasina announced a formal boycott of the poll. Along with Ershad she launched an all-out movement to oust Iajuddin.

On 7 January 2007, as I was about to begin lunch, my cell-phone buzzed. It was Lutfuzzaman Babar, former state Home Minister on the line. He told me that Anwar Chowdhury, Bangladeshi-born British High Commissioner in Dhaka had invited him to high tea at his official residence. I was also invited. It was a surprise to me, and not a pleasant

one. It used to be my official responsibility as Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment and Energy Advisor to the Prime Minister to interact with diplomats. Anwar and I knew each other well. Once he had been attacked by alleged Islamic militants when he went to pay respects at the mausoleum of a famous Sufi in Sylhet, Anwar's birth place. He survived the grenade attack and had since become apparently disillusioned with the BNP government. I declined Anwar's invitation by telling Babar straight that I was not a politician and felt that, therefore, hobnobbing with diplomats was not my cup of tea. Furthermore, since leaving office, I had returned to a private life. But a further surprise awaited me. The former Minister informed me that Begum Khaleda Zia, my previous boss as Prime Minister, wanted me to accept Anwar's invitation. I was checkmated.

On arrival at the residence of British High Commissioner, we found Ms. Patricia Butenis, the US ambassador already there. I joked with her, saying with a smile that I was not surprised to see her. After tea and snacks we sat down to talk serious business. The US Ambassador declared bluntly that unless the election was suspended immediately tanks and armoured carriers would start rolling at any moment from the cantonment. She also hinted at sending both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina into exile if they did not come to a compromise soon. I argued with both diplomats trying to convince them to allow the Election Commission to conclude the election process which was already under way. After all, the election date of 22 January was only a fortnight away. I proposed, without any authority from BNP high command, that another election could be held in consultation with all the political parties and stakeholders within next six months or earlier. I also argued for the need to maintain constitutional continuity of democratic governance in Bangladesh. Patricia Butenis cut me short, saying that the 'green light' for the military option had already been given and there was no scope for renewing negotiations. The US ambassador also confirmed to me that both she and the British High Commissioner had already discussed the matter with Army Chief, General Moeen and Principal Staff Officer, General Jahangir. Butenis further added that under no circumstances would the international community accept a one-sided election in Bangladesh. Seven years later, the same so-called international community would not only accept a single-party election in Bangladesh, but they would also allow the fascistic Sheikh Hasina government to continue in power for an indefinite period! We sat in silence sipping our tea.

After a while I broke the silence by saying: "Well, my advice to both of you is to convey the message directly to the two leaders." They liked the idea. Anwar Chowdhury called Zafrullah, a Presidium member of the

Awami League to seek an immediate appointment with Sheikh Hasina. The response from the Awami League was so quick, it was as if they had been waiting for the call. Sheikh Hasina agreed to meet the diplomats within an hour. On the other hand, Begum Zia gave an appointment for next evening. The US ambassador arranged that meeting through Riaz Rahman, State Minister of Foreign Affairs during the BNP government. Once all the appointments were finalized, it was time for Babar and me to leave. That was the last time that I saw either Anwar Chowdhury or Patricia Butenis, although they continued with their assignments in Dhaka for nearly another year. The two diplomats acted publicly as ‘friend, philosopher and guide’ to the military junta that toppled the caretaker government of Prof. Iajuddin. Their Indian counterpart provided the same service, albeit clandestinely.

The four of us left the residence of British High Commissioner at the same time in two different cars, going in different directions. Patricia Butenis and Anwar Chowdhury headed for Sudha Sadan, the private residence of the Awami League President, Sheikh Hasina. Babar and I went to brief Khaleda Zia at Hawa Bhaban, the office of the BNP Chairperson. It was not easy for a former subordinate to convey the threat of exile to a former Prime Minister. I was as diplomatic as possible in my short briefing. Khaleda Zia listened to our report in silence with admirable calmness. Next evening, she received the US ambassador at the same office. I do not know what exactly transpired between the two women during their conversation as I was not present at the meeting. But, apparently, the threat of exile made little impression on Khaleda Zia. The very next day she left Dhaka to continue election campaigning as if nothing had happened. Why was she so confident? The only plausible explanation is that Khaleda Zia had blind faith in Moeen and Masud. And how cruelly she was wronged by her angels! I was not able to see her until she was released from jail in October the following year. General Moeen concedes in his memoir that foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka and at least one Under Secretary General of the United Nations instigated the military takeover in blatant disregard of diplomatic norms:

“At a certain stage, a delegation of diplomats belonging to powerful nations met with me and told that in case of the army’s cooperation in an election not participated in by all the political parties, they will request UN to suspend participation of Bangladesh in the international peacekeeping operations. It was not difficult to understand the inevitable result of their covert threat.... Under Secretary General, Mr. Guehenno told me clearly that an election without the participation of all political parties will not be acceptable to them. He further added that withdrawal of Bangladesh Army

contingents from international peacekeeping operation will be seriously considered if the army is involved in such an election.” (Ahmed, 2009: 322–323)

According to General Moeen, he received the telephone call from UN headquarters on the morning of 11 January. But somebody is definitely telling a lie here. The official statement of United Nations dated 10 January 2007 does not contain any threat to suspend Bangladesh’s participation in peacekeeping operations. It says:

“The political crisis in Bangladesh has severely jeopardized the legitimacy of the electoral process. The announced cancellation of numerous international observation missions is regrettable. The United Nations has had to suspend all technical support to the electoral process, including by closing its International Coordination Office for Election Observers in Dhaka. The United Nations is deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation in the country, and urges all parties to refrain from the use of violence. It is hoped that the Army will continue to play a neutral role, and that those responsible for enforcing the law act with restraint and respect for human rights. The United Nation urges the non-party caretaker government and Election Commission to create a level playing field and ensure parties can have confidence in the electoral process.

“The United Nations is concerned that Bangladesh’s democratic advances and international standing will be negatively affected if the current crisis continues. It urges all concerned to seek a compromise that will serve the interests of peace, democracy and the country’s overall well-being.” (Source: UN archive)

It was a balanced and pragmatic statement. However, the local UN office in Dhaka released another statement on the morning of 11 January which included the following paragraphs additional to the original statement issued in New York:

“The Armed Forces have recently been fully deployed in support of an election that some major political parties have decided to boycott.

“The Armed Forces, including Police, play a major role in UN Peacekeeping Operations around the world, and are doing an excellent job.

“The United Nations appreciates the traditional role played by the Bangladesh Armed Forces in support of previous, fully contested elections through the maintenance of law and order, so citizens can exercise their right of franchise. However, should the 22 January parliamentary Elections proceed without participation of all major political parties, deployment of

the Armed Forces in support of the election process raises questions. This may have implications for Bangladesh's future role in UN Peacekeeping Operations." (Source: UN office at Dhaka)

Now, who authorized Ms. Renata Lok Dessallien, UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka, to issue the unusual threat of possible suspension of Bangladesh's participation in UN peacekeeping operations? The Security Council did not convene any meeting to discuss the Bangladesh situation. Without an explicit Security Council Resolution, even the Secretary General cannot issue such threat against a sovereign nation. How then could a mere Country Representative have issued such a threat and instigated a *coup d'état*? A decade later, the same person, as UN Resident Coordinator in Myanmar, would facilitate the genocide of the minority Rohingya Muslims by the radical Buddhist Myanmar army. Is she engaged in special operations outside the control of UN Secretary General?

Patricia Butenis was absolutely truthful when she told me on the evening of 7 January that tanks were already on the roll. The formal declaration of the takeover came on 11 January. General Moeen and General Masud went to President House with a blunt ultimatum. Once inside the premises, they were presented with loaded pistols personally by the Military Secretary of President Iajuddin. Surprisingly, the job of the military secretary is to ensure that nobody reaches the President with a firearm. The person responsible for ensuring the security of the President became a security threat himself! This particular military secretary, a general, was specifically selected by the Khaleda Zia administration because of his family links with the BNP to ensure maximum security for the President. The tentacles of the RAW are visible everywhere. Mokhlesur Rahman gives us a first-hand account of the role of the military secretary on that particular day. Mokhles, the press advisor to President Iajuddin, recalls in an interview given to Daily Ittefaq, a vernacular newspaper on 30 November 2014:

"In spite of this, military officers led by the Army Chief were detained at the gate. Commander of President Guard Regiment (PGR) held a meeting in my office. He was in favour of resisting the entrance of the Army Chief inside Bangabhaban (President House). But, at one point, Military Secretary to the President (MSP) personally arranged to bring the three chiefs to his office. Three pistols were given to the Army Chief and others in the office of the MSP through SSF. It is illegal for any person entering the President House to carry a firearm. Therefore, they could not bring their arms. It was the MSP who supplied pistols illegally through SSF." (Daily Ittefaq, 30 November 2014)

Professor Iajuddin was forced at gun point to resign from his position of Chief Advisor and declare a state of emergency. Although he was allowed to keep his title as President, real power now belonged to the army. Prof. Yunus, the Nobel laureate and darling of the Western powers was first offered the post of Chief Advisor. He refused it and proposed instead Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, former Central Bank Governor during the BNP regime. This proposal was acceptable to the military junta and, more importantly, to the diplomatic troika of the USA, UK and India. The Awami League was euphoric and promptly welcomed the change in government, calling it a victory for their movement. A beaming Sheikh Hasina, with her entire team of Awami League senior leaders, attended the swearing-in ceremony of the army-installed caretaker government at Bangabhaban. Begum Khaleda Zia correctly assessed the situation and boycotted the ceremony, rejecting the junta government as unconstitutional. However, she failed to mount any street protests against military takeover. In the hindsight, it appears now that Khaleda Zia should have immediately gone to the people and called on them to resist the illegal takeover.

The pro-Awami League media was understandably jubilant. The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, and other newspapers belonging to the Indo-US lobby welcomed the army's intervention with glowing tributes. The wider population of the country who were by then tired and disgusted by the endless cycle of political violence that had raged since 27 October the previous year also welcomed the change. The so-called 'army-backed caretaker government' (that was the name given to it by the junta) declared '*jihad*' against corruption which was also enthusiastically supported by the general public. Thousands of politicians and businessmen were arbitrarily arrested on alleged and unsubstantiated charges of corruption before being tortured and sent to jail. This situation lasted for about three months. But the euphoria of Awami League soon evaporated once Sheikh Hasina was arrested on charges of corruption. A few days later Khaleda Zia was also arrested. Tarek Rahman, the perceived villain in the eyes of the army, was arrested very early in the so-called anti-corruption drive. He was heavily tortured in custody. Later, Arafat Rahman, the younger son of General Zia was also arrested and tortured in custody. The army's methods of heavy torture made both brothers seriously ill and left them partly crippled. Arafat Rahman would eventually die in exile in Malaysia.

Before their arrest, both Khaleda and Hasina were offered the option of exile. Sheikh Hasina promptly accepted the offer and left for the UK with an assurance from the junta that Khaleda Zia would shortly follow her. Before leaving Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina gave a public commitment that

once returned to power, the Awami League would give legitimacy to the unconstitutional government and all their illegal activities. Begum Zia boldly rejected the exile option and dared the junta to arrest her. This brave stand increased her popularity and placed Hasina in political limbo. A.B.M. Musa, an elderly pro-Awami League journalist and former colleague of Sheikh Mujib, advised Sheikh Hasina to return immediately to recover the political ground she had lost by accepting the offer of exile. She took the advice and sought to return immediately to Bangladesh from her self-imposed exile in the UK. A section within the junta however, tried to block Hasina's return in the expectation that they would be able to change Khaleda Zia's mind by applying more pressure on the family. All international airlines were officially instructed by the government of Bangladesh not to allow Sheikh Hasina to board any flight heading to Dhaka. An impatient and desperate Awami League president then telephoned Pranab Mukherjee, foreign minister of India, from London asking him to put pressure on General Moeen to facilitate her return. India duly intervened and Sheikh Hasina was allowed to return only to be arrested a few days later on charges of corruption.

It did not take long for cracks to develop within the junta. The extremely ambitious General Masud had had some personal motivation for supporting General Moeen in the coup. First, he wanted to teach Tarek Rahman a lesson for allegedly insulting him while the BNP was in power, and second, he aspired to become Army Chief himself by pushing Moeen into the ineffectual President's chair. His first objective was achieved by the arrest and torture of Tarek Rahman. But, serious obstacles appeared in the way of his supposedly smooth progress to the top seat at Army Head Quarters. It was all the more frustrating for the junta that neither the USA nor India was enthusiastic about such a move. And without the blessings of those two external powers, both Moeen and Masud were powerless. Policy differences between Washington and New Delhi on shaping the political roadmap for Bangladesh complicated the matter further.

Washington's naive foreign policy establishment believed sincerely that the people of Bangladesh were eagerly awaiting a third political force. In professor Yunus, Washington thought they had found their man. Unfortunately for the USA, Dr. Yunus failed to create even a ripple when a wave was expected in response to his declaration of the formation of a new political party with the blessing of the army. Though disappointed with Khaleda Zia Washington probably did not see Sheikh Hasina as her replacement. According to the assessment of the US embassy in Dhaka, Moeen was simply mediocre and, therefore, not Presidential material. Their best bet had always been Yunus. Unfortunately for the USA and its

Western allies, the people of Bangladesh just refused to take any notice of Nagarik Shakti, the still-born political child of Prof. Yunus. The guru of Grameen Bank soon realized that politics was not his cup of tea and officially declared the end of the nascent party. Even before the end of 2007, policymakers in Washington realized that they were, in fact, out of options in Bangladesh.

India, on the other hand, was singularly focused on bringing Sheikh Hasina back to power even before the first tank rolled out of Dhaka Cantonment on 11 January (“1/11”) with US blessings. The Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka wisely kept himself completely in the background while Patricia Butenis and Anwar Chowdhury were seen publicly guiding the new administration. After all, the CIA is no match for the RAW when it comes to meddling in and managing the domestic affairs of South Asian countries, except possibly Pakistan. India quietly went along with the ambitious minus-two theory of the West, knowing full well that it was a non-starter from the beginning. The RAW had been cultivating its agents in the cantonments even before 1/11. In post 1/11 Bangladesh, when the West remained obsessed with Prof. Yunus’s project, the RAW continued extending its sphere of influence among all the country’s institutions. Indian intelligence worked single mindedly in their efforts to create an environment that would ensure an election victory for the Awami League whenever it was to be held. And they had the last laugh.

What was the ‘patriotic’ Bangladeshi Army doing while our sovereignty was being gradually eroded by the actions of the RAW? Either they had been duped, or had remained naively unconcerned by the activities of the intelligence agency of a foreign power inside their own institution. The entire set-up of the DGFI was then busy with their efforts to instigate a break-up inside the BNP, the flag bearer of Bangladeshi nationalism. We do not know whether any army general had shown the courage to argue against the self-destructive policy of Moeen and company. The so-called guardians of sovereignty paved the way for a foreign power to gradually take total control of Bangladesh.

There was also plenty of in-fighting within the army driven by personal interests. Lieutenant General Masud was allegedly caught conspiring with a section of DGFI officers led by Brigadier Bari to stage another coup to topple Moeen. General Masud was immediately sent packing to Australia as the High Commissioner of Bangladesh. Brigadier Bari was also sent to Washington, initially as Military Attaché and then into permanent exile. The USA and India might have mediated to bring about a compromise between Masud and Moeen, both agents of the Indo-US axis. Moreover, infighting among the 1/11 conspirators could have seriously jeopardized

the longer-term interests of both countries. After all, Moeen, Masud and others faithfully served the interests of their foreign masters at the cost of national sovereignty. It cannot be mere coincidence that General Moeen, Brigadier Bari and Fakhruddin Ahmed, the Chief Advisor, have found shelter in the USA after transferring power to Sheikh Hasina in January 2009. General Masud is immensely rich and now runs multiple business enterprises in Dhaka.

Masud's failed coup attempt not only exposed a fissure within the army, but also put paid to any remaining dream that Moeen may have had about becoming President. Once that ambition was laid to rest, the only wish Moeen and his generals possibly had was for a safe exit. After the mindless torture of Tarek and Arafat, the two sons of Khaleda Zia in a DGFI investigation cell, Sheikh Hasina was the obvious choice for the army to ensure them safe exit coupled with a guarantee from India. Similarly, as the Yunus project failed to take off, the secular Sheikh Hasina was the only choice left for Washington. It was possibly the greatest victory for India's geo-political strategists in relation to Bangladesh since 1971. The Muslim-majority eastern neighbour had finally fallen into the trap created by its big brother.

Dr. Gauhar Rizvi, a US-based Bangladeshi national with Indian origins was selected jointly by Indian and US intelligence establishments to mediate between Moeen and Sheikh Hasina while she was held in custody. He arrived in Dhaka with the mission. Dr. Rizvi was warmly received by the army-backed government on his arrival at Dhaka during the emergency. Brigadier Amin, the most powerful intelligence officer in the DGFI after Brigadier Bari's fall from grace, was made coordinator to oversee and ensure the success of Rizvi's mission. Brigadier Amin personally escorted Gauhar Rizvi to a special 'sub-jail' where Sheikh Hasina was also detained. Rizvi, a non-Bengali with an Italian wife, was an old family friend of the Awami League president. It did not take long to finalize the deal. Sheikh Hasina was hastily released and allowed to leave the country. But one problem remained. Sheikh Hasina's return to power was dependent on holding a general election. After all, the India-USA-UK troika had all along been justifying the 1/11 intervention on the premise of the participation by all major parties in the election. Without the BNP's participation in the next election that logic would fall flat. An attempt to break the BNP failed in the face of the absolute loyalty for Begum Khaleda Zia among grassroots party workers and nationalist supporters. The army-backed caretaker government was compelled to come to a compromise with her in an effort to bring the BNP into the election.

Khaleda Zia refused to accept being set free before the release of her two sons. A semi-crippled Tarek Rahman was released from prison first and sent to exile in London. His younger brother, Arafat Rahman, arrested and tortured by the junta, was also released and sent abroad for treatment. At last, Begum Khaleda Zia was released. During her year in internment, she had lost her octogenarian mother.

A timetable for the election was announced by the same Election Commission which from the day it was set up had worked in cahoots with the military junta to try by every means possible to divide the BNP. In fact, the activities of the Election Commission had been so nakedly partisan that Shamsul Huda, the Chief Election Commissioner, had to publicly apologize to the BNP leadership just before the election for all their wrongdoing. Begum Khaleda Zia had really no option but to participate in the election. The army's two-year period of repression had made the party so weak that it had neither the energy nor the organizational strength to launch any meaningful mass movement. Furthermore, the global geo-political situation was totally in favour of the anti-Islamic Awami League. US policy towards South Asia had changed radically after the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York and the attack on the Pentagon by Islamic terrorists. India had become their only trusted strategic ally in the region. In the end, the USA had to accept Indian hegemony over Bangladesh as the price for this new friendship.

Suppressing her mental anguish and ignoring physical handicap, Khaleda Zia immediately hit the road to campaign energetically, like someone possessed. Sheikh Hasina, on the other hand, used her time in Washington to meet Bush administration officials to discuss the future strategy once she was declared the winner of the election. She was so confident of victory that she returned to Bangladesh with less than a month to go before the election. There was no need for any election campaigning for her. The USA, India, the Bangladeshi Army and the Election Commission were all the while conspiring not only to ensure Sheikh Hasina's victory but also to destroy the nationalist and Islamist polity in Bangladesh. The BNP and coalition which had had two hundred and twenty six seats in the previous parliament was only able to win thirty seats! Khandaker Delwar Hossain, the then Secretary General of the BNP, and Tarek Rahman were vehemently against participating in the artificial election. Tarek made an almost prophetic prediction, only a fortnight before the election, that the BNP would not win more than thirty seats, almost as if he had some prior knowledge of the exact election result. Pranab Mukherjee, the former President of India, candidly acknowledges

the special relationship that Sheikh Hasina had maintained with him and his family in his political memoir, 'The Coalition Years'. He has also described how he mediated the deal between General Moeen and Sheikh Hasina to bring Hasina to power. He writes:

"In February 2008, Bangladesh Army Chief Moeen Ahmed came to India on a six-day visit. He called on me too. During the informal interaction, I impressed upon him the importance of releasing political prisoners. He was apprehensive about his dismissal by Sheikh Hasina after her release. But I took personal responsibility and assured the general of his survival after Hasina's return to power ... Sheikh Hasina had been a close family friend, and when I was the External Affairs Minister, India tried to help her cause by building adequate international pressure for free and fair elections after the caretaker government. In fact, when some Awami League leaders deserted her at the time she was in jail, I rebuked them for their stand and told them that to leave someone when they are down is unethical.

"The general election was held in December 2008, and Sheikh Hasina won with a thumping majority." (Mukherjee, 2017: 114)

On reading the above memoir, one specific question comes to mind. How, in February 2008, fully ten months before the parliamentary election could both Pranab Mukherjee and General Moeen have been so sure of Sheikh Hasina's victory? The secret hand of India and the army of Bangladesh in ensuring that victory is nakedly evident here.

India and her client in Bangladesh emerged as the ultimate victor at the conclusion of the 1/11 experiment. As a country, Bangladesh has lost its sovereignty. As people, we have lost our unique cultural identity, our rich Islamic heritage and, most importantly, our freedom. Nationalist and Islamic parties have lost their organizational strength, unity and political voice. The Bangladeshi Army has lost its courage, professionalism, self-respect and popular support. Interestingly, the USA is also a loser. By making Bangladesh a client state of India, Washington has lost all its influence in this emerging economy with a population of a hundred and sixty million mostly Sunni Muslims. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the USA is no longer a decision-maker here. India dictates the terms which the world's only superpower follows obediently. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her ministers now regularly lampoon the USA. She has said many times in public, in parliament and in press conferences that she values geographically a nearer friend much more than a faraway one, indicating India and USA respectively. The change in American policy in South Asia has made militarily weak countries like Bangladesh, virtual satellites of India. New Delhi's wish is now Dhaka's command. During

the last ten years, India has gradually succeeded in establishing absolute control over all the institutions in Bangladesh. The Awami League government has already given strategic corridor facilities to India in the name of a need for transit to connect the volatile northeast with the rest of India. Dhaka is now an extension of the foreign policy establishment in Delhi and toes the Indian line on every single issue. Our sovereignty is much weaker than even that of Bhutan. An Indian general has recently portrayed the situation in Bangladesh correctly when he said: “Bangladesh will not be allowed to remain outside the Indian radar anymore.” That says it all.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TERROR OF AUTHORITARIAN SECULARISM

It is 8 a.m. on 25 February 2009. Residents of Dhanmondi and adjacent areas were shaken by the unexpected sound of intense automatic weapons fire. Morning is a busy time for this upper-middle-class area. At this hour, on weekdays, the surrounding roads are usually packed with cars, buses, three-wheelers and paddle-rickshaws, the unique and popular mode of transportation in Bangladesh. Office workers, merchants, college and university students, schoolchildren escorted by their mothers are rushing to their destinations. The high boundary wall of Peelkhana, the Headquarters of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), a fifty-thousand-strong paramilitary border security force, is the southern boundary of the Dhanmondi Residential Area. People know that the BDR are celebrating their regular annual event. The prime minister inaugurated this year's 'BDR week' a day earlier. She is also scheduled to return to Peelkhana this evening for dinner as the guest of honour. People initially thought that the rattling sound of machine-gun fire was part of ongoing celebrations. But why did it continue for so long? Initially sporadic, then continuous, with many weapons involved. Nobody knew exactly what was happening inside the high security BDR headquarter. Panic spread. Rumours abounded. Curiosity and anxiety gradually turned to fear.

Sheikh Hasina, the 'secular darling' of both New Delhi and Washington has just returned to power with a huge majority in the parliament in a stage-managed election. A public pronouncement of satisfaction by the US ambassador at the result of the election left the people of Bangladesh in no doubt that the support of supreme superpower in the unipolar world was rock-solid for the anti-Islamic political force led by Sheikh Hasina in the fourth largest Muslim country in the world. The craftily planned and superbly executed election victory fitted exactly into the world vision of the administration of George Bush Junior and their most important South Asian ally, India. According to the Bush doctrine of the new world order after the fall of the Soviet Union, Islam had remained

the only impediment to establishing a global hegemony along a US-Indo-Zionist axis. For the time being, the threat from economically giant and rapidly progressing military power-house that is China was almost forgotten. After all, they were known atheists. To the West, the green of Islam with its crescent, was many times more abhorrent than the yellow peril. China was a faraway land of dragons and mysteries. Islam was almost a neighbourhood threat. Only three centuries ago Ottoman Turkey laid siege to Vienna, the pride of the Christian Habsburg monarchy. The Holy Roman Empire fought alongside the Habsburg monarchy to defeat the invading Islamic power. Bitter memories of Ottoman dominance are still fresh in many parts of Europe. To counter the Islamic threat in 21st century, America and Europe need secular political parties like the Awami League in power in Muslim-majority countries. The 1/11 events in Bangladesh, a country of a hundred and forty million Sunni Muslims had been designed precisely to implement an Indo-US agenda in South Asia. General Moeen, the then Chief of Staff concedes in his autobiography that the Bangladeshi Army faithfully implemented the master plan devised by Indo-US strategists just to ensure that their participation in the UN peacekeeping operations was not jeopardized. After all, the fat salaries that come with UN jobs are paid in US dollars. Personal well-being is more important than patriotism. The army did everything in its power to facilitate Hasina's triumphant rise to power to appease Uncle Sam and Big Brother India. There should have been no reason for unrest within the defence forces so soon after the election victory of the Awami League. The rank and file in the Bangladeshi Army should have been jubilant that, with Hasina in power, their UN jobs were no longer at risk.

Jawans in Peelkhana actively participated in the election campaign in favour of Tapash, the Awami League candidate from the Dhanmondi constituency, violating the rules of employment in the BDR. They chanted Awami slogans with gusto, distributed leaflets and organized election camps for the Awami League in cooperation with local party leaders. Commanding officers who are all seconded to the BDR from the army as per convention, turned a blind eye to these illegal activities by the Jawans, which amounts to tacit approval and encouragement. The officers knew very well when to look the other way. More importantly, the elected member of parliament from Dhanmondi belonged to the ruling family. He was the favourite nephew of the Prime Minister. The powerful Prime Minister had herself been in Peelkhana just twenty-four hours earlier to receive a formal salute from the BDR contingent and was scheduled to return that same evening. What went wrong?

Private television channels started to broadcast 'breaking news' on the unrest in Peelkhana. But the news was mostly sketchy, partial and speculative. Jawans were seen on the television screen with their faces half covered with red, yellow and blue pieces of cloth, brandishing weapons and firing indiscriminately into the air. They were also shouting some incoherent demands. The first accurate news, not surprisingly, came from Indian media by eleven in the morning. They had greater access to all information in Bangladesh affairs than local journalists under the Awami League regime. India's NDTV claimed that an uprising by soldiers in the BDR headquarters had taken place and a massacre of army officers and their families was in progress. The Indian news channel further claimed that General Shakil, DG of the BDR, and his wife had already been brutally killed by the mutineers. Official sources in Bangladesh neither denied nor confirmed the story. They remained absolutely tight-lipped. The NDTV account was factual. The brutal, senseless killings and rape which had started in the morning on 25 February, continued for twenty-four hours. Surprisingly, the army did nothing to save their comrades from the wholesale slaughter or their families from extreme humiliation and insult even though the Dhaka Cantonment and the Army Headquarters are less than twenty minutes' drive from Peelkhana. The most powerful 9th Division of the army and the armoured regiment at Savar is another forty-five minutes' drive.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina invited the leaders of the mutiny for a lunch meeting at her official residence. Food was brought in from a nearby five-star hotel. Surprisingly, the team selected by Sheikh Hasina to conduct the negotiations with the rebels only included politicians. Representatives from the armed forces were not even allowed entry to the negotiation room in accordance with a demand of the mutiny leaders. The Army Chief, General Moeen, along with the Chiefs of the Air Force and Navy were kept waiting in an adjacent room. Sheikh Hasina agreed to most of the demands and offered a general amnesty in return for surrender. Surprisingly, that surrender took place after a delay of a further twenty-four hours. During this whole period of utter confusion and uncertainty, the army officers and their families were at the complete mercy of the rampaging Jawans. It remains a mystery how the army command could agree to their comrades, along with their wives and children, being held hostage for more than thirty-six hours without making any attempt to rescue them. More surprisingly, the Prime Minister never made any attempt to communicate with the DG of the BDR nor did she demand a guarantee of the safety of the army officers during negotiations with the rebels. Sheikh Hasina later conceded that General Shakil did in fact call

her at some point in the morning. But the exact conversation has never been made public. Long before the official surrender, the mutilated bodies of slain army officers were found floating in the canal adjacent to the BDR headquarters. It had been an orgy of slaughter and rape. Fifty-seven officers, from major generals to lieutenants, had been murdered in cold blood. The number of rape victim will never be known. Later, the army headquarters set up a commission of enquiry to find out why, how, when and by whom. The actual report was swept under the carpet as the names of Awami League leaders, including the kith and kin of the prime minister and influential MPs and ministers, began to surface during the army investigation. A government version of the mutiny was, however, published which raised more questions than it answered.

But social media teemed with various conspiracy theories. The common element in all these theories was the alleged participation of an Indian intelligence death squad in the massacre. There were also allegations that the government of Sheikh Hasina facilitated the departure of the death squad from Bangladesh when it had accomplished its mission. It is further alleged that India wanted to take revenge against the Bangladeshi defence forces for the killing of Indian BSF and other regular troops in the successful defence of Roumari at the Rangpur border in 2001 by the BDR contingent stationed there. This is an old wound for India:

“At least 18 soldiers have been killed in an exchange of fire between Indian and Bangladeshi border guards at a frontier outpost, according to officials in Dhaka. Bangladeshi officials say that two of their soldiers died and 16 Indian border guards were killed in the clash at a border outpost in Kurigram.” (BBC News/South Asia, news.bbc.co.uk/south_asia)

The Indian government, politicians, and the media at the time, found it very hard to swallow the ‘impertinence’ of the BDR in inflicting such a stinging defeat on the country’s mighty neighbour. According to them, it was an act of gross ungratefulness as it was India who had helped Bangladesh to obtain independence from Pakistan in 1971. The then DG of the BDR, Major General Fazlur Rahman was removed from his command by Sheikh Hasina and was later dismissed from the army entirely under the government of Khaleda Zia. Even this was not enough to assuage the anger of mighty India. However, conspiracy theorists argued that India itself had in fact instigated the BDR massacre and, in doing so, had not only decimated the Bangladesh Rifles as an institution, which was their prime objective, but had also significantly reduced the fighting capability of armed forces. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigation team visiting Bangladesh after the mutiny also

suspected a ‘conspiracy’ without naming any particular country. A local English daily known for its US-India links quoting unnamed Criminal Investigation Department (CID) sources published the following story:

“The visiting Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) team has said the carnage at Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) headquarters last month was a ‘conspiracy’.

“The FBI agents made the observation after comparing the BDR incident with mutinies staged by military and paramilitary forces in other countries, said officials of the CID after a meeting with the team yesterday. The CID sources, however, declined to elaborate on the matter.”

The newspaper later withdrew the story from their online version, probably under pressure from the government.

Even the leading Indian newspaper, The Hindu, published a commentary on 2 March 2009 under the heading, ‘Conspiracy theory in BDR mutiny’:

“As the full horrors of Bangladesh Rifles mutiny unravel, a conspiracy theory is gradually taking shape with survivors and security analysts saying it was a “planned killing” aimed at ‘crippling’ the army and BDR in a country that has just returned to democracy.

“‘It was a planned killing’, Army doctor Lieutenant Colonel Abdus Salam, who survived the massacre, told reporters at the Army headquarters at a special briefing. He also asserted that only a section of the rebel soldiers was involved in the massacre....

“Most security analysts, including former chiefs and generals in unison also declined to call the massacre inside BDR headquarters ‘a mere mutiny’, putting their weight behind the growing fears about a conspiracy.

“The analysts feared that a particular quarter chalked out the plan to kill all senior Army officers serving in the BDR as they gathered at the paramilitary force’s headquarters to celebrate the annual BDR week.”
(Cited from: Conspiracy theory in BDR mutiny, [www.thehindu.com>article 16628246](http://www.thehindu.com/article/16628246))

According to wikileaks, Sheikh Hasina approached Delhi and Washington for help in the wake of the mutiny. Both the USA and India were quick to announce their full support for Sheikh Hasina’s government in its hour of need. The BDR mutiny later provided the perfect pretext for Sheikh Hasina to purge the Bangladeshi Army of elements with

undesirable views, that is, alleged BNP and Jamaat supporters and sympathizers or so-called Islamists. The situation in the cantonments became tense and volatile as the extent of the losses became evident to the nation. Sheikh Hasina was confronted by angry and grieving young officers at the army headquarters when she went to the Dhaka Cantonment to pacify the rank and file of the defence forces. The Telegraph in the UK published the following story on 13 March 2009 under the heading, ‘Bangladesh Army officers blame Prime Minister for mutiny’:

“Angry Bangladeshi army officers shouted down Sheikh Hasina, the country’s prime minister, at a private meeting, and blamed her for the murder of more than 70 of their comrades by mutineering border security guards ...

“Senior officers, who lost friends and family members in the massacre, said they believed the delay costs dozens of lives.

“‘You are responsible for all the deaths because you did not allow the army to intervene and we want an explanation from you,’ demanded one officer. ‘Had we been allowed to intervene there would not have been so many blood baths. We could have rescued a lot of officers from the camp.’ Another said: ‘You didn’t call the army and that’s why so many officers were killed.’ Several officers demanded to know why she had not visited the scene of the carnage. ‘Why didn’t you go and see?’ ‘Why did you send the interior minister?’ they asked.” (Cited from: www.telegraph.co.uk/bangladesh)

Every single officer who dared to raise their voice against Sheikh Hasina in the meeting was eventually sacked from the army. One retired army general claimed to this author that the threat of Indian intervention prevented them from taking any action against the mastermind behind the destruction of the Bangladeshi Army. He further claimed that the eastern command of the Indian Army was kept on high alert in the wake of the massacre to face down any threat against Hasina. I was surprised at this revelation. If the Bangladeshi Army is so scared of possible intervention by the Indian Army, then how on earth would they be able to defend the territorial integrity of Bangladesh?

Incidentally, the purging of the defence forces was made a declared objective of the Awami League even before the general election in 2008. Sajeeb Wajed Joy, son of Sheikh Hasina co-authored an article with Carl Ciovacco under the title, ‘Stemming the rise of Islamic extremism in Bangladesh’. The article was published in the Harvard International Review on 19 November 2008. Within less than three months,

Bangladesh's defence capability was practically destroyed by the BDR revolt and subsequent purges. A convenient coincidence indeed! Joy and Carl categorically blamed the Bangladeshi Army in their article for the rise of so-called 'Islamic extremism' in the country and hinted at wholesale purges once the Awami League managed to get into power:

"Islamic extremism is also on the rise in Bangladesh because of the growing number of Islamists in the military. The Islamists cleverly began growing their numbers within the Army by training for the Army Entrance Exams at madrassas. This madrasa training was necessary because of the relative difficulty associated with passing these exams. The military is attractive because of both its respected status and its high employment opportunities in a country where unemployment ranges from 20 per cent to 30 per cent for younger males. High demand for military posts has resulted in an entrance exam designed to limit the number of recruits. Before this madrasa entrance exam campaign, only 5 per cent of military recruits came from madrassas in 2001. By 2006, at the end of BNP's reign, madrassas supplied nearly 35 per cent of the Army recruits. In a country that has seen four military coups d'état in its short 37-year history, the astronomical growth of Islamists in the military is troubling to say the least...

"To counter the increased military recruitment from the madrassas, more youths – especially the secular-minded – must also be taught how to pass the Army's Entrance Exams. It is not enough to desire more secularly-taught youths to enter the military, but the plan must place them on the same playing field with the madrasa recruits. Instead of outwardly restricting madrasa training for the Entrance Exams, secular school entrance exam training would counter JI's strategy to Islamify the military and thus the nation. An alternative source of recruits could switch back the military's ideological balance to a more secular recruit base." (Cited from: [hir.harvard.edu>stemming-the-rise-of-](http://hir.harvard.edu/stemming-the-rise-of-))

Incidentally, the name of the Prime Minister's son was later removed from the controversial article. No investigation of the BDR carnage and subsequent developments within the Bangladesh defence establishment can be completed objectively without taking into account the forward plan of Joy as detailed in the Harvard article and in the history of Roumari defeat of Indian aggressors back in 2001.

The government of Bangladesh, in a surprise move, decided to disband the BDR which had a gallant reputation as a brave unit fighting against the Indian Border Security Force along 4,000 km-long Indo-Bangladesh border. By taking this decision, the government in power had also undermined the legacy of the former East Pakistan Rifles who played a heroic part in the liberation war of 1971. The Bangladesh Rifles were

actually born during the war against the Pakistani occupational forces. The death knell for such a patriotic institution was sounded by the political party who claimed themselves to be the champions of pro-liberation forces in Bangladesh. More than twenty thousand battle-hardened soldiers of the BDR lost their jobs in the subsequent cleansing operation. Seventyfive Jawans were killed during interrogation allegedly as a result of torture in custody. A few thousand were given various sentences including a hundred and fifty-two death penalties. The demise of the BDR as an institution is naturally very satisfying for India. Presently the Indo-Bangladesh border is practically at the mercy of the Indian BSF who have earned a notorious reputation by regularly torturing and killing Bangladeshi civilians along the border. A demoralized and newly constituted BGB (Border Guard of Bangladesh) is helpless to respond effectively to Indian aggression. Therefore, the net result of the mysterious BDR mutiny can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Disbanding of a battle-hardened and patriotic institution, the BDR.
- (2) Killing of fifty-seven elite army officers and, thereby, significantly reducing the fighting capability of the Bangladesh Army.
- (3) Creating the opportunity for the Sheikh Hasina regime to complete a purge of the army as was indicated in the article earlier co-authored by the prime minister's son.
- (4) Making the four-thousand-kilometre border area a virtual killing field for Bangladeshi citizens by Indian BSF.
- (5) Demoralizing the Bangladesh Army.

Sheikh Hasina, having successfully achieved her first objective of neutralizing the army by taking advantage of the BDR mutiny, now proceeded systematically to destroy political opposition. The USA and India knew that unless nationalist and Islamic forces were either destroyed or sufficiently weakened to the level of irrelevance, Hasina's hold on power would always be under threat. America wanted to see her in power for a few consecutive terms at least. On the other hand, India's desire was for eternity. From defeat in the 2001 election, Sheikh Hasina has also learned her lesson. The people of Bangladesh, especially Bengali Muslims, have a penchant for change. They voted for the All-India Muslim League en masse in 1946 to ensure the creation of an independent homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. The same voters not only defeated but practically decimated the Muslim League in the 1954 election in East Pakistan. The party would never recover from that drubbing. In the election of 1970, the Awami League virtually eliminated all other political

parties. After his return from a Pakistani jail in 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was treated like a messiah who could do no wrong. Bengali Muslims were ready to sacrifice anything and everything for their demigod. Within less than a year, however, the popularity of the great leader had almost evaporated. Although Bengali Hindus have maintained their loyalty to Sheikh Mujib and his family, a majority of Bengali Muslims were rather apparently happy at the tragic events in the 1975 bloody changeover. They rejoiced at the fall of Mujib's autocratic BAKSAL regime. The voters of this country have rejected the incumbent party each time in the three consecutive general elections from 1991 to 2001 which were held under non-party, caretaker administrations. Given the opportunity to exercise their right of franchise in a free and fair atmosphere, there is a more than even chance that Bangladeshi voters will again unseat the incumbent regime. Sheikh Hasina cannot afford to take any risk of losing power after abusing it so horrendously for such a long time. She, therefore, amended the constitution in 2011 to scrap the provision for a non-party interim caretaker government for holding free and fair elections. It is not at all relevant to her that it was in fact she who had led a violent agitation with Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jatiyo Party in 1995 and 1996 against the then ruling BNP government. Scores of lives and billions of dollars of national wealth were lost in the violence unleashed to help her realize her goal to amend the constitution to insert that very provision for a caretaker government. It served her political purposes then. But now, that same system put an unsurmountable obstacle in her path to remaining in power for the rest of her life. She is adept at Machiavellian manoeuvring with single-minded devotion to statecraft.

Since 9/11, US policy of promoting democracy in the Muslim world has also gone through a radical change. Presently the focus is limited to fighting so-called Islamic extremism and defeating political Islam rather than promoting democratic values. Autocratic regimes are usually far more effective in fighting dirty wars against their own people on behalf of imperialist powers. Perón in Argentina, Pinochet in Chile, Noriega in Panama, Batista in Cuba, the Shah in Iran, Saddam in Iraq, Sisi in Egypt and Hasina in Bangladesh are just a few examples of such regimes. Western leaders seem content to look the other way when religious extremist parties like the Hindutvabadi (militant Hinduism) BJP in India and Likud in Israel rise to power. For them, it is business as usual. Rampant killings of Kashmiri Muslims and massacres of Palestinians by the security forces of India and Israel respectively have been going on for more than seventy years right under the noses of the UN, defying the resolutions of its Security Council. Unfortunately, most of the worst

human rights offenders in the world today are the strategic allies of the Western world. Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh is one of them.

Before setting out to crush opposition nationalist and Islamic political parties, an increasingly impatient Sheikh Hasina felt the need to curb and silence the media first. I became involved in the media in 2008 by buying a vernacular newspaper. The Daily Amar Desh became hugely popular in a short space of time because of its courageous and independent editorial policy. Within a year, I had managed to make myself a target of the extremely powerful prime minister by daring to report a story alleging corruption that involved her son. There were a couple of attempts made on my life by people from government agencies when I was driving to my office. My car was seriously damaged on both the occasions. Luckily, I escaped without any physical injury. Finally, on the early morning of 2 June 2010, a huge contingent of police raided the office of Amar Desh and arrested me. I was arrested on the basis of a false and concocted police diary under penal code section 420, and that without any arrest warrant. The newspaper's office was ransacked by hundreds of armed police, including elite commandos. Our printing press was simultaneously invaded and all the journalists and employees were driven out of the premises. Without any legal authority, the police stopped publication of what was by then the second largest circulation national daily. Pro-government and pro-Indian media either publicly supported this act of terror by the secular, authoritarian regime or gave tacit support by keeping silent about the blatant attack on media freedom. This shameful behaviour by other organs of the media is reminiscent of similar support given by the pro-Pakistan media to the undemocratic Pakistani regime when they banned the Pakistan Observer which supported the historic language movement in the early 1950s. The police action against Amar Desh is also reminiscent of the draconian, single-party rule purported by Sheikh Hasina's father in 1975 when all the newspapers in the country were banned except for four government mouthpieces. However, Sheikh Hasina, ably guided by Delhi and Washington, acts with more guile than her late father. Instead of enacting laws for the wholesale banning of media, she prefers to use police power against targeted newspapers, television channels and media personalities.

I remained in prison for ten months. Numerous vexatious cases were filed against me during detention. The total number of such cases exceeded fifty before I was temporarily released on bail on 17 March 2011. Amar Desh was able to resume publication after six weeks by order of the Supreme Court. This was only the beginning of our suffering at the

hands of the law-enforcement agencies of our fascist regime. We would later face a much worse situation. But, before narrating that story, which is of a personal nature, we need to cover other more important issues of national significance.

The tumultuous events of 1975 in Bangladesh had been a foreign policy disaster for India. The massive election victory of nationalist and Islamic forces under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia in 2001 was another bitter defeat for New Delhi. Once the perceived nationalistic character of the Bangladeshi Army has been successfully compromised in the post-1/11 Bangladesh, Indian strategists devised an operational plan to neutralize all anti-Indian political forces in Dhaka to ensure their perpetual control over domestic politics in the fourth largest Muslim country in the world. India had been arm-twisting Bangladesh since its birth to obtain free transit facilities through our territory to connect the turbulent northeast with the rest of India. This access was necessary for them to counter the military threat from China. During the Sino-Indian war in 1962, Indian forces had suffered badly from a lack of supplies of military hardware and timely replacement of troops. Transit facilities through Bangladesh would significantly strengthen India's military position in that respect. M. Sakhawat Hussain, a retired general of the Bangladeshi Army wrote an article entitled, 'China-India-US tangle – Challenge for Bangladesh' published in the book, *The India Doctrine* edited by M.B.I. Munshi:

“It would not be out of place to mention that if one has a deep sense of the Indian perception of Chinese influence in the region, particularly in case of Bangladesh—which seems to be a geo-strategic nightmare for India—one would fathom the geo-strategic importance of a corridor or transit through Bangladesh. The implication of such a passage would be of huge military significance to Indian ambitions and the search for an alternative to much constrained access through the northern Jalpaiguri-Shiliguri corridor. Transit through Bangladesh would require India to segregate military and civilian passage in emerging situations or in a situation of conflict with China...” (Hussain 2007: 179)

The nationalist BNP and all the Islamic parties are vehemently opposed to giving transit to India as such an arrangement would seriously compromise our sovereignty. Under the circumstances, Hasina had to attempt to weaken the patriotic political forces before being able to grant transit rights to India. Sheikh Hasina's government started to implement the agenda by first targeting relatively smaller Islamist organizations, labelling them Islamic terrorists. I remember personally cautioning the

leadership of both the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami about the imminent threat to their existence more than once. But the leadership decided to follow a disastrous policy of 'wait and see' instead of organizing any effective mass movement against political and cultural aggression from India. The more Sheikh Hasina harassed, arrested, tortured and killed young people belonging to various Islamic parties, her appreciation and support in the West and India increased. She then pulled out the ace of the 1971 war-crime tribunal to crush Jamaat, the largest among the Islamist political parties. This Islamic party had always maintained a close relationship with the USA. The ageing leadership, tainted by their support for the Pakistani regime during our liberation war, committed the fatal mistake of underestimating the resolve of Hasina and India on the issue. They thought Uncle Sam would come to their rescue for the loyalty the party had shown to the superpower since its inception after the 1947 partition. Instead of fighting the allegation of war crimes politically, Jamaat opted for a legal battle in a country where the judiciary is largely dysfunctional. The entire leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami paid the price for this folly on the gallows. Thousands of young followers of the party also lost their lives, victims of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, when they protested against what they claimed to be the 'judicial murder' of Jamaat leaders. Presently the party is in complete disarray. The Western world condoned the vicious human rights violations by maintaining total silence over the issue, although both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have questioned time and again the validity of the legal process. The situation in present-day Bangladesh resembles Pinochet's Chile, Saddam's Iraq or the Shah's Iran. All these dictators were creations of the USA. Only after successfully eliminating and neutralizing Islamic political parties, did Sheikh Hasina target the BNP, the flag bearer of nationalist politics and the largest opposition party in Bangladesh.

The Awami League government first tested the organizational strength of the BNP on 13 November 2011 over a supposedly non-political issue. Khaleda Zia, the leader of the opposition in the parliament and former Prime Minister and widow of slain president, General Zia, was evicted on that day from the cantonment residence where she had lived for thirty-eight years. General Zia had been allocated the house on his promotion to Deputy Chief of Staff by the Sheikh Mujib government in 1973. General Zia, who lived a simple life, had never left that Deputy Chief's house although he was later promoted to the rank of Army Chief and eventually became the President of the country. Zia was also an exemplary honest politician. On his assassination in 1981, his widow and two younger sons became homeless as Zia had never bought a house in Dhaka. The bereaved

nation gratefully gifted the cantonment house to the widow of the late president on a perpetual lease, to be her residence for life, by executing the appropriate legal deeds. The parliament also unanimously passed the transaction as law. The then Army Chief, General Ershad signed the necessary transfer papers. But, the judiciary under Sheikh Hasina surprisingly 'discovered' a legal fault in the transaction after thirty years and passed the order to evict Begum Khaleda Zia. This is the only residence that she had known as her home as a young wife, middle-aged mother and elderly grandmother. The Bangladeshi Army promptly and enthusiastically executed the court order by forcibly evicting the wife of their former chief! This inhuman eviction was the acid test for both the army's loyalty to Sheikh Hasina and the BNP's organizational strength. Sheikh Hasina emerged victorious on both counts. The army had indeed shown tremendous enthusiasm, bordering on indecency, in implementing the eviction order, thereby demonstrating their unflinching support for Sheikh Hasina. This public show of army loyalty further boosted Hasina's confidence and sent a reassuring message to the Indo-US axis. First 1/11, and now the eviction of Khaleda Zia, both represented a definitive U-turn by the army, turning its back on its pro-nationalist past. This army was now a trusted comrade-in-arms of the secular political forces in Bangladesh and would fight on their behalf against the BNP and alleged Islamist elements. Sajeeb Wajed Joy's dream, as articulated in his Harvard article, had finally come to fruition.

On the political front, the weakness of the BNP as an organized political party was ruthlessly exposed by the failure of the party leaders and activists to voice even a mute protest at the inhuman treatment of and insult to their party chief. Only a few hundred demonstrators, mostly women activists, had the courage to approach Jahangir Gate, the entrance of the Dhaka Cantonment, shouting some empty slogans when Begum Khaleda Zia was being disgracefully thrown out of her home by a contingent of police, RAB and army. A crest fallen, shocked, weeping Khaleda Zia was seen on national television that evening trying to say a few incoherent words. The subsequent failure of the BNP in the 2014 and 2015 anti-government movements to restore democracy should have been foreseen by Begum Zia on that, the very day of her personal despair. Unfortunately, she failed to do so. On the other hand, Sheikh Hasina and her Indo-US mentors made no mistake in appraising the organizational weakness of BNP.

On 30 June 2011, the fifteenth amendment of the Constitution of Bangladesh was passed in the parliament abolishing the caretaker system for interim, non-party governments to conduct free and fair elections. This

was key to enabling Sheikh Hasina to retain power for as long as she wishes. In Bangladesh, no ruling party has ever lost a general election that it has conducted itself. On the contrary, in every election under the caretaker system, the incumbent had lost. Sheikh Hasina's intentions were very clear. Like her father, she also wants to rule for life. But there is a significant difference between their strategies. Sheikh Mujib's attempt to establish single-party state brought disaster for himself, his family, party and, of course, India. Sheikh Hasina is not only far more intelligent than her megalomaniac father, but also takes advice from Delhi more seriously. Instead of formally announcing single-party rule in terms, a move which would create unnecessary controversy, she has manipulated the system and constitution with great finesse to make Bangladesh a de facto single-party state for all practical purposes. With the passing of the controversial amendment in parliament, the last nail in the coffin of democracy in Bangladesh was hammered home. The opposition parties, already in disarray in the face of ruthless attacks by the autocratic regime, had no capacity to launch any effective street movement against this undemocratic move by parliament.

The present global geo-political situation is also entirely in Hasina's favour. In 1975, during the cold war, her father was largely dependent on the support of the Soviet axis and India. Although that support was invaluable to Sheikh Mujib, the strength of the combined enmity of the USA, China and the Islamic world was more formidable. China and Saudi Arabia did not even recognize the independence of Bangladesh until the fall of the BAKSAL regime and the death of Sheikh Mujib in 1975. The USA used to consider the 'champion of Bengali nationalism' as a mere puppet of India, the most important ally of Soviet Union in South and South-East Asia. Peter Frankopan, an Oxford academic, writes about the special and historic relationship between Soviet Union and India:

"The Soviets also devoted considerable efforts to cultivating Iraq and India. In the case of the later, the USSR supplied armaments that accounted for more than three-quarters of all New Delhi's military procurement imported from abroad in the 1960's—in quantities that rose throughout the following decade. Sales included some of Moscow's most sophisticated weaponry, Mig-27 and Mig-29 fighters, and state-of-the-art destroyers, while India was favored with a licence to produce military aircraft that had been denied to the Chinese." (Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*)

It was only natural that the Washington establishment nurtured a feeling of great hostility towards the Soviets' closest strategic partner in South Asia during the period of the cold war. The fall of the Soviet Union

in the 1990s presented new sets of challenges for former friends and foes around the globe. Bangladesh was no exception. India and Sheikh Hasina have both been extremely successful at extracting maximum benefit from the transformed geo-political situation.

In the 1990s, this country, with the highest population density in the world and with 90 per cent Muslims, used to be cited as a role model for democracy and moderation in the Islamic world. In most of the parameters of global social development indices, Bangladesh was far ahead even of its huge neighbour, India. The USA and other Western countries genuinely supported the continuation of democratic practices in this country. Ambassador Mary Ann Peters of the USA played a strong role in the process of conducting free and fair elections under the caretaker government in 2001. Her strong public stand helped the then Election Commission and the military to withstand pressure from the Awami League and from India who were trying to foil the people's verdict which they assumed would not be in their favour. Unfortunately, democracy is out of fashion today among Western powers. Let me recount a relevant anecdote.

Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the Secretary General of the BNP, was in the cell next to mine in the Kashimpur prison. We used to discuss current issues a great deal. He told me about his conversation with Oscar Taranco of the United Nations. Mr. Taranco, an Argentine diplomat, was sent to Dhaka for negotiation between the Awami League and the BNP in 2012 to find a way to conduct a free, fair and inclusive election in Bangladesh. In one of the conversations with the BNP Secretary General in New York, when Mr. Alamgir pleaded against the farcical one-sided election of Sheikh Hasina, Taranco said bluntly: "We are no more concerned with democracy, security is our priority." The message from the UN diplomat was clear: so long as Sheikh Hasina continues the oppression of Islamist elements, her support from Western capitals would continue. The same United Nations engineered a *coup d'état* in Bangladesh in 2007 to stop the attempts by the BNP – the ruling party at the time – to engineer a one-sided election. At that time, democracy was far more important to Taranco and his colleagues at the UN. I narrated the story of 2007 in the previous chapter.

Sheikh Hasina and her mentors in New Delhi assessed correctly the new sense of urgency priority being given to 'security' at the UN Headquarters, in Washington, and in London and Brussels. They took a gamble on 5 January 2014 by conducting a voter-less, single-party sham election and struck gold. One hundred and fifty-three ruling party

candidates in the three hundred-member parliament were declared elected unopposed by the subservient Election Commission even before election day in a bid to ensure the continuation of the Hasina government even if it became impossible to hold a voter-less election. The incumbent Prime Minister was thus able to claim a majority in parliament before a single vote had been cast on 5 January. The return of the Awami League to power was, therefore, guaranteed. This farcical election was also held without dissolving the incumbent parliament which is an age-old convention in all democratic nations that practise a Westminster system. As a result, in many constituencies after 5 January, there were concurrently two members of parliament until the day of the swearing-in ceremony for newly elected members. At that point, the previous parliament was at last automatically dissolved. Sheikh Hasina, ignoring democratic convention, kept alive the previous parliament as a 'Plan B'. With the brute force of her three-quarters majority in the undissolved parliament, she could have extended the life of the parliament by passing a bill if all other options to cling to power failed. The so-called international community did little to stop this daylight robbery of democracy.

Just before the scheduled election date, Indian diplomats, led by Foreign Secretary Sujata Singh, visited Washington to lobby for a Sheikh Hasina style democracy. She also came to Dhaka to bolster Delhi's puppet regime. Dan Mozena, the US ambassador in Dhaka, flew to Delhi in a futile attempt to persuade the Indian government to postpone the single-party election in Dhaka and resume negotiations with the opposition parties to agree on the modalities for holding an inclusive election. Delhi was in no mood to listen to the US ambassador. The Indian media reported that the foreign ministry establishment left Mozena in no doubt that he was not welcome in the Indian capital. This hectic parley among foreign diplomats proves beyond doubt that Bangladesh is no longer a true sovereign state, as envisaged in the UN charter. Sovereignty has already been leased out to Delhi as part of the new world order arranged by the USA. Even the then Indian minister of foreign affairs, Salman Khurshid acknowledges frankly that India sided with the Awami League when he writes in his book, 'The other side of the Mountain': "We were virtually squeezed into the Awami League camp."

The European Parliament, in a resolution of 16 January 2014, made following comments on the farcical election:

"A. whereas on 5 January 2014 Bangladesh held general elections under the auspices of an interim government headed by the former and present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who had done away with the traditional

Bangladeshi system of a neutral caretaker government by means of the 15th amendment to the constitution in 2011;

“B. whereas 2013 has reportedly been the most violent year in post-independence Bangladesh’s history, and the pre-election and election phases in particular have been marked by widespread violence, with blockades, strikes and voter intimidation orchestrated mainly by the opposition and with over 300 people killed since the beginning of 2013, including at least 18 on election day, with Bangladesh’s fragile economy being paralysed as a result;

“C. whereas the elections were boycotted by the opposition alliance led by the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), which had insisted on a ‘non-party’ caretaker government, and resulted in a largely unopposed victory for the ruling Awami League, with over half of the constituencies uncontested and low voter participation; whereas the Election Commission reportedly had to suspend voting at over 300 polling stations due to violence;

“D. whereas Bangladesh’s two main parties have a long-standing tradition of uncompromising confrontation and mistrust which risks jeopardizing the impressive social and economic progress made by Bangladesh in the last decade;

“E. whereas a UN mission led by Oscar Farnandez Taranco, which had been intended to broker a compromise, concluded its five-day visit on 5 October 2013 without having achieving a breakthrough;

“F. whereas UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that he regretted the fact that the parties had not reached an agreement before the elections, and called on all sides to ensure a peaceful environment ‘where people can maintain their right to assembly and expression’;

“G. whereas the EU has good, long-standing relations with Bangladesh, including through the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development; whereas, however, it did not send an election observation mission to the country, because the conditions for representative elections had not been met on account of the absence of opposition candidates,

“H. whereas Bangladesh’s electoral commission had declared the elections to have been free, fair and credible, and whereas the new government led by the re-elected Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been sworn in; whereas voter turnout in these elections was very low, at 40% according to government figures, 20% according to Dhaka-based diplomats, and even lower according to representatives of the opposition,

“I. whereas the leader of the opposition, Khaleda Zia, has been restricted in her movements, other prominent BNP members have recently been arrested and numerous BNP supporters have reportedly been going into hiding for fear of reprisals.” (Cited from: Texts adopted on Thursday 16 January 2014 – Recent elections in Bangladesh: www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc)

On 9 January 2014, The Economist described the sham election under the heading ‘Another beating: Sheikh Hasina plans to hang on to office after an electoral farce’. The same weekly had earlier published another story entitled ‘Electoral farce in Bangladesh’ on 3 January. The Economist’s reporter wrote from Dhaka:

“Of 300 elected parliamentary seats, 153 will be uncontested. Of 92m eligible voters, 48.3m will not vote. Those who do may choose between the ruling party’s candidates and candidates beholden to them. In gargantuan Dhaka, voting is to take place in only two of 20 constituencies.”

However, all those criticisms failed to deter Hasina from seizing power by force for another term. Carte blanche from Delhi and acquiescence from the USA, the UK, the EU, the UN and the Bangladeshi Army all bolstered her grip on power. The driving objective of the global superpower and the regional power is to steer the country away from apparent resurgence of the Islamic faith and political Islam. The USA had been following a two-pronged policy in Bangladesh. Firstly, as a part of global war against Islam, Washington needed an anti-Islamic government in secular garb for this Muslim-majority country. Sheikh Hasina fitted that requirement exactly. Secondly, to counter the growing economic and military might of China they needed India as a strategic ally in South Asia. The sovereignty of Bangladesh is a small price to pay to achieve that ‘invaluable friendship’ with India. George W. Bush’s administration initiated the process of Indo-US entente after 9/11. Japan and South Korea had been the most significant post-second world war allies of the USA in the Asian theatre. Now they needed India to increase pressure on China. President Obama not only continued with the neocon policies of his predecessor in South Asia, he proceeded further in forging a military alliance with the one-time closest ally of Soviet Union. However, unfortunately for US policymakers, India is surrounded by mostly hostile neighbours.

China and Pakistan are India’s historic and mortal enemies. Nepal, although a Hindu country, bitterly resents India’s big brother attitude. Bhutan has lately started to feel uneasy about being seen as a client of India. She now wants to develop friendly relationships with China as well.

Myanmar is torn between Chinese and American influences. Therefore, for the security of India, a puppet regime in Dhaka is essential. Bangladesh and India share nearly four thousand kilometres of border. A less friendly government in Bangladesh would stretch Indian military resources to breaking point, especially if there were a war with either China or Pakistan.

India and the West are unanimous in their support for the policy of brutal extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of alleged Islamists in Bangladesh and Sheikh Hasina's overall work towards de-Islamization. There is absolutely no accountability for the thousands of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. We find in Bangladesh the repetition of the earlier US policy to support ruthless autocrats in Muslim countries. Sheikh Hasina is presently being nurtured in the mould of Saddam or the Shah of Iran. Peter Frankopan, an academic at the University of Oxford, writes in his book, 'The Silk Road', about past US support for the Shah of Iran and Saddam of Iraq, two of the most notorious dictators of 20th century:

“Although criticism of Shah's regime, and particularly the brutal methods of the Savak, rose in the western media, the US government continued to give loud and consistent support to Iran.—Substantial resources were also spent building up the Savak, the Iranian secret police force, which quickly developed a fearsome reputation. Imprisonment without trial, torture and execution were used on a large scale to deal with critics of the Shah and those close to him; in a few rare cases, fortunate opponents whose high profile kept them visible, like Khomeini, were placed under house arrest and exiled to remove them from the scene. The use of such tactics in the Soviet Union was the subject of vocal criticism by the US, denounced as the antithesis of democracy and a tool of totalitarianism; in Iran, it was passed over in silence.—At the start of 1979, Washington sent General Robert Huyser, Commander-in-Chief of US European command, to Teheran to demonstrate support for the Shah and specifically to impress on the army that the US continued to back the regime.” (Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*)

The similarity between the situation thus described and the present reality in Bangladesh is striking. We only need to replace the Shah with Hasina and the Savak with the RAB. I have seen many crippled young boys walking with crutches at Kashimpur Jail. They are all activists of opposition political parties. They were arrested, tortured and ultimately maimed by having their knee-caps blown with a shot gun inside the police station. But the poor boys consider themselves lucky because a large

number of their comrades were killed in custody in cold blood by police and RAB. At least the crippled are still alive.

The USA was equally wrong in assessing Saddam. Until 1989, Western leaders were of the opinion that they could 'do business with this man'. Donald Rumsfeld, during his visit to Baghdad in 1983, assured the Iraqi dictator on behalf of President Reagan: "The USA would regard any major reversal of Iraq's fortunes as a strategic defeat for the West." The same Rumsfeld, as Secretary of Defense under the younger Bush caused the deaths of over a million innocent Iraqi men, women and children and dismissed the massacre as collateral damage in the Gulf War, prosecuted to topple Saddam. Peter Frankopan writes about past collusion between the USA and Saddam:

"However, even when it became apparent that poison gas had been used against Iran in the course of Badr offensive in 1985, nothing critical was said in public—other than bland statements that the US itself was strongly opposed to the chemical weapons. As such, however, it was highly embarrassing that Iraq's production capability, as one senior American officer pointed out, was primarily derived from Western firms, including possibly a US foreign subsidiary. It did not take much to realize that this raised uncomfortable questions about complicity in Saddam's acquisition and use of chemical weapons."

Like Sheikh Hasina, the dictators of both Iran and Iraq were champions of secularism. The Shah was toppled in an Islamic Revolution led by Ayatullah Khomeini and the country is now an Islamic republic. The Iranian dictator died in exile in Egypt. Saddam was hanged on the day of Eid-ul Azha, a Muslim festival, in 2006 by the puppet regime of the USA in Baghdad. Iraq is still in turmoil, ravaged by a brutal civil war a decade after Saddam's execution. The fate of dictators always depends on the support of their foreign masters.

Alleged Islamic terrorist attacks have increased alarmingly in Bangladesh over last few years of Hasina's rule. The government has failed to provide adequate security for its citizens and foreigners even after resorting to the worst human rights abuses against the people of Bangladesh in its history. As with the Shah and Saddam, the West has mostly ignored the brutality of the regime, although all the human rights organizations around the world have repeatedly condemned the government of Bangladesh. Even US State Department raised serious questions about the human rights situation in its 2016 country report. The executive summary of that report says:

“Bangladesh is a secular, pluralistic, parliamentary democracy. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League (AL) have retained power since the January 2014 parliamentary elections, which most international observers characterized as controversial and falling short of international standards.

“Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Extremist organizations claiming affiliation to Da’esh and al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) increased their activities in the country, executing high-profile attacks on religious minorities; academics; foreigners; human rights activists; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community members; and other groups. The government responded with a strong anti-militancy drive, which human rights groups claim has resulted in increased extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions for the purpose of extortion, enforced disappearances, torture, and other abuses of human rights. The government further used counterterrorism efforts to justify restrictions of civil and political rights.

“The most significant human rights problems were extrajudicial killings, arbitrary or unlawful detentions, and forced disappearances by government security forces; the killing of members of marginalized groups and others by groups espousing extremist views; early and forced marriage; gender-based violence especially against women and children; and poor working conditions and labour rights abuses.

“Other human rights problems included torture and abuse by security forces; arbitrary arrests; weak judicial capacity and independence; lengthy pretrial detentions; politically motivated violence; official corruption; and restrictions on online speech and the press. Authorities infringed on citizens’ privacy rights. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) faced continued legal and informal restrictions on their activities. Discrimination against persons with disabilities was a problem, especially for children seeking admission to public school. Instances of societal violence against religious and ethnic minorities persisted. Discrimination against persons based on their sexual orientation increased.

“There were reports of widespread impunity for security force abuses. The government took limited measures to investigate and prosecute cases of abuse and killing by security forces, including through the Internal Enquiry Cell of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). Public distrust of police and security services deterred many from approaching government forces for assistance or to report criminal incidents. In several instances, the government blamed victims of extremist attacks, increasing the impunity of attackers.” (Cited from: Bangladesh 2016 Human Rights Report, bd.usembassy.gov)

The human rights report of the US government is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the horrendous abuses being committed every day by the security forces. In fact, since 5 January 2014, Bangladesh has been governed by a constitutionally illegal government, hell-bent on remaining in power without caring for people's welfare or their own mandate. In their effort to remain in power, the rulers have transformed Bangladesh into a brutal police state.

The government's current illegal term of office will end, according to the amended constitution, in December 2018. Sheikh Hasina will need another voter-less, farcical election to prolong her reign. Any fair election will be a death knell for the incumbents. It is a foregone conclusion that India will back their client in Dhaka whatever the circumstances. The Trump administration in the USA with its 'America first' policy has not given any indication that they care for democratic values anywhere in the world. The EU only pays lip service. India will again take care of the UN on behalf of their client government in Bangladesh. All of them will be happy to see 'secular' Hasina continuing her oppression of the people of Bangladesh in the name of fighting Islamism. The Bangladeshi Army will remain satisfied just so long their UN peacekeeping job is not jeopardized and the salaries and perks continue to increase every year. To attain liberty, the people of Bangladesh will, therefore, need to rise in unison against oppression. No fascist regime has ever ceded freedom as a gift to its people. It has always been achieved by making supreme sacrifices. Bangladesh is no exception.

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Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India delivering speech.



General M A G Osmany, Commander in Chief of Bangladesh Liberation Army.



General Ziaur Rahman, Liberation war hero and President of Bangladesh.



People in Bangladesh celebrating 1975 Sipahi-Janata revolution.



Begum Khaleda Zia taking oath as the first woman Prime Minister in Bangladesh on 20th March 1991.



Sheikh Hasina taking oath as Prime Minister in Bangladesh in 1996.



Editor Mahmudur Rahman, author of this book being arrested
from his newspaper office.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE UNFINISHED BATTLE OF FAITH

The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971 was a historical necessity in view of the demographic and geographical situation of East Bengal. The people of East Bengal had voted in favour of the creation of Pakistan in 1946, inspired by their Muslim identity. They wanted to live peacefully with pride in an independent homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. The same people, twenty-four years after realizing their dream of a Muslim homeland, fought a bitter liberation war against their fellow Muslims in West Pakistan to establish their separate ethnic and cultural Bengali identity. In addition to the cultural division, the geographical distance of more than three thousand kilometres between the two wings of Pakistan, separated by a powerful and hostile neighbour, made the country a crippled and unstable association from the very day of its inception. Even the founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, frustratingly described it as a 'moth-eaten Pakistan'. It was not possible for the people of Bangladesh to remain satisfied as Pakistani citizen because ethnically they were Bengali, with a separate and rich cultural heritage. The Pakistani rulers never tried to understand or respect the unique culture of the Bengali Muslim. The refusal of the Punjabi establishment of West Pakistan to give an appropriate share of power to the majority population of the united Pakistan, that is, to the Bengali Muslims, further weakened the already fragile union. However, upon achieving their victory against the Pakistani occupying forces in December 1971, the people of East Pakistan could not return to the fold of greater Hindu India because they were Muslim by religion. Bengali Hindus have no such problem. They consider 'Bharat Mata' as their sacred homeland. 'Bharata', a Sanskrit name, is the mythical founder of the Aryan race who settled in India in ancient times. Although not being Aryans, Bengali caste Hindus generally take great pride in Aryan civilization. Apparently, only Bengali Muslims suffer from an identity crisis.

Until 9/11, the USA did not find anything wrong with the Islamic flavour of the Bengali Muslim identity which represented the vast majority of the population of Bangladesh. Even after 9/11, policymakers in Washington continued for some time to identify Bangladesh in a positive

light, as a moderate Muslim country. From my personal experience in government from 2001 to 2006, I do not remember any US diplomat ever raising the issue of secularism, at least not with me. However, I definitely sensed considerable shift in their policy on South Asia from 2004 onwards. As the Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment, I had, on many occasions, to defend the then government's policy of not agreeing to give a unilateral transit facility to India. The pressure to provide such a facility was mounting, especially from the World Bank and the ADB. India's importance had grown enormously in Washington as President George W. Bush intensified his crusade, first against Afghanistan, and then Iraq. As the doctrine of 'either with us or against us' took deeper root in Western capitals, the importance of secular political parties in Muslim countries also began to rise.

The BNP-led four-party alliance was still in power in 2005. Stray incidents of terrorism by tiny extremist Salafi groups were coming to the surface. Names like Shayikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai also appeared in the media. The government initially adopted a mistaken policy of ignoring them as inconsequential. As the activities of these groups actually started during Sheikh Hasina's first term as Prime Minister, from 1996 to 2001, Begum Khaleda Zia probably thought that the movement would peter out for lack of public support and there would be no need to worry. She did not see the danger coming from a different source.

New Delhi, the arch enemy of nationalist and Islamic political forces in Bangladesh was waiting for an opportunity to discredit the government. Violence committed by the JMB under Shayikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai was exactly the opportunity they were waiting for. Extensive media campaigns across Western capitals were organized, targeting the alliance and, particularly, Jamaat-e-Islami, an important component in the four-party alliance. They were blamed for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh, even though Salafis in Bangladesh are vehemently opposed to Jamaat's political and religious doctrine. Furthermore, Jamaat had maintained close links with the USA since Pakistan days. As international pressure mounted, Begum Khaleda Zia finally saw the danger and gave a harsh dressing down to the entire security apparatus. This produced quick results. Both Shayikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai were arrested along with other members of terrorist organizations. They were later tried and executed. But for the USA, it was too little too late. India's idea of regime change in Bangladesh had by then found attentive ears in Washington.

The hawkish Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, visited India in 2005. The Congress Party was in power in Delhi at the time. It is not

difficult to imagine that regime change in Bangladesh would have been on the agenda for her visit. In the Indian capital, Condoleezza Rice publicly proclaimed the new strategic relationship between the USA and the South Asian power:

“The just concluded visit to India (March 16) by Ms. Condi Rice, the US Secretary of State may be deemed a landmark pointing to a deeper strategic underpinning between the two countries notwithstanding the divergences that were expressed over issues such as Iran and the sale of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan – which inadvertently received greater focus in the immediate aftermath of the Rice visit. While there is considerable symbolism in the fact that Ms. Rice chose to make Delhi the first stop on her whistle stop tour of Asia, her responses to the broad range of issues discussed with her Indian interlocutors indicate that the Bush 2 team is determined to rake forward the content in the bilateral relationship that had been hinted at in the first term of the Bush administration.” (Cited from: Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, www.idsa.in>[idsastrategiccomments](http://www.idsa.in))

The message was loud and clear for all India’s neighbours to hear, especially China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In the case of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina had always remained the favourite choice of India, irrespective of changes in the Delhi administration. But it was not legally possible to bring Sheikh Hasina to power straight away simply by toppling the BNP government. The need for a short-term, army-backed interim government was identified by the USA and India alike.

The Bangladeshi Army was entrusted to serve as midwife in the birth of a ‘secular’ government and also to prepare the stage for a triumphant Indian return to domestic Bangladeshi politics. In chapters 10 and 11, I have already narrated the role of the army in ensuring the Awami League’s victory in the eighth parliamentary election. The army, much hated by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and relentlessly vilified for three decades by Sheikh Hasina and her secular supporters, surrendered to the will of Delhi and did all it could to destroy nationalist and Islamic forces in the country.

Bangladesh today is a classic example of a police state. In the guise of tackling Islamic militancy, the present government has resorted to unprecedented repression of its citizens, by far the worst in the history of post-1947 East Bengal. In any country, state-sponsored violence is inevitable when the rulers try to crush all forms of dissent. The steep rise in the actual incidences of terrorist violence as well as government allegations of violence since 2015 have clearly been a reaction to the excesses committed by the ruthless, autocratic government. Let me go back to the night of 5 May 2013.

I was a prisoner in the BSMMU hospital, recuperating from torture in police custody and from my seven-day hunger strike in protest at police harassment of my octogenarian mother. It was nearly midnight. The silence was suddenly broken by the sound of ceaseless gunfire and grenades exploding. It was a violent day. Hefajate Islam, an organization of ulemas, had organized a protest rally in the city in support of their thirteen demands. Nearly a million ulemas and madrassa students had descended on the city from all over the country, defying barricades and other obstacles placed in their way by the government. Many of them had to walk hundreds of kilometres to reach Dhaka, as the authorities had closed down public transport in the country. There were day-long pitched battles in many places in Dhaka between the protesters and law-enforcement agencies. From the sketchy reports that I had been receiving from the members of the police contingent guarding me in the hospital, I had learned that more than ten lives had already been lost due to police gunfire amid the violence. Protesters had defied a government order to leave the city by six in the evening. Most of them had gone to various shelters to pass the night in the expectation that they would restart the demonstration the next morning. Only about fifty thousand ulemas and madrassa students stayed to pass the night at the roundabout called Shapla Chattar in Motijheel, the business district of Dhaka. They were all hungry and exhausted. Most of them were sleeping when the police operation started.

A combined force of ten thousand police, RAB, and BGB personnel in full battle gear took part in the operation that continued until the early morning. It was the worst massacre at Dhaka since 25 March 1971. Nobody knows the exact number of people killed that night. It could be any number from a hundred to a thousand. The British newspaper, *The Guardian*, reported that more than thirty were killed. Odhikar, a local human rights organization, confirmed at least sixty-one documented killings. According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, five hundred and seven people died in political violence in 2013. How many of this number were killed on the night of 5 May is not clear. The Asian Human Rights Commission claimed more than a thousand casualties. In an effort to hide the evidence of mass killing, water cannon was brought in on the morning of 6 October to clean the streets and the walls of nearby buildings of the blood of the victims. The following day the 'heroes' of the combined operation appeared before the media to give a briefing about their success in killing unarmed civilians. They were Benazir Ahmed, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner (now DG, RAB) and Colonel Zia, RAB Operations Director (now Brigadier General and Director, NSI).

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina personally congratulated them for their 'heroic' achievement. The USA, the UK, the EU and India also expressed satisfaction at the government's resolve in suppressing the Islamist revival. However, major human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch condemned the use of excessive force against unarmed protesters and demanded an independent investigation. Such calls fell on deaf ears. The story of Hefajate will remain incomplete without narrating the background to its rise.

As noted earlier, Jamaat-e-Islami, because of its collaboration with Pakistani regime during the liberation war of 1971, had remained the most controversial political party in Bangladesh. The follies of the Jamaat leadership had created a perfect situation for India-sponsored anti-Islamic forces in Bangladesh to denigrate Islam under the guise of opposing so-called anti-liberation political parties. In this respect, the USA has followed the most opportunistic role. The US administration in 1971 strongly supported General Yahya as the then Pakistani government was serving as a mediator in the clandestine peace talks between China and the USA. Both President Nixon and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, were vehemently against the division of Pakistan for strategic reasons. They also personally detested Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujib. But, the mood in Congress, especially the Senate, was different. The Sino-Indian war of 1962 provided the Indian lobby in Washington with a great opportunity to establish cordial relationships with US politicians, especially with the Democratic Party. Indira Gandhi was relatively more successful in the Senate in garnering support for her policy in 1971.

However, relations between the USA and India had never been warm until the fall of Soviet Union. The Indo-US relationship received a real boost during Clinton era in the 1990s. Then came 9/11. There was paradigm shift in US policy regarding South Asia. Since then, India has emerged as the closest strategic ally of the USA in the region. India had been trying to establish absolute hegemony over Bangladesh since its birth in 1971. But the fact that nearly 90 per cent of the population are Muslim has been a stumbling block to India's hegemonic dream. As part of its greater strategy, Delhi's aim had been to obliterate all Islamic parties in Bangladesh to weaken political Islam. After 9/11, this aim converged with the policy of the West. Alleged war crimes by Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamic parties during the liberation war provided the opportunity to pro-Indian secular elements to crush political Islam once and for all in Bangladesh.

A so-called International War Crimes Tribunal (ICT) was formed in 2009 mostly to try the Jamaat leadership for war crimes. All the judges on

the ICT were Bangladeshi and the law under which the alleged war criminals were being tried was also domestic. The government of Sheikh Hasina decided to call the tribunal international to hoodwink the global community. From the very inception of the ICT, it was considered biased and politically motivated by independent observers both domestic and international.

In the first week of December 2012, an e-mail containing recordings of nearly twenty hours of skype conversations between Justice Nizamul Huq, Chairman of ICT-1, and Ziauddin, a Belgium-based Bangladeshi citizen, was received at the Amar Desh office. The e-mail had come from an anonymous sender abroad. We checked the contents and found them to be authentic. Justice Nizamul Huq was heard in the tape discussing the legal technicalities with an outsider to decide on sentences against the accused who were being tried at his bench even before the all the witnesses had been heard. It was clear from the taped conversation that the defendants were not going to get fair trial. This represented a gross violation of the code of conduct for High Court Judges in any civilized country. Justice Huq was heard during conversation conceding that the government was applying pressure for quick verdicts. As the editor of the newspaper, once convinced of the tape's authenticity, I gave the green light to publish the contents of the e-mail in good faith and in the public interest.

The Economist in London also received the recording and published a couple of stories on 8 and 15 December 2012. On 8 December, under the heading 'Discrepancy in Dhaka', The Economist published the following story about the alleged misconduct of the said Bangladeshi judge:

"The war-crimes court in Bangladesh has some explaining to do; on 6th December 2012, the presiding judge of Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal, Muhammad Nizamul Huq, passed an order requiring two members of The Economist to appear before the court, demanding that they explain how we have come by e-mails and conversations between himself and Ahmed Ziauddin, a lawyer of Bangladeshi origins based in Belgium. The tribunal was established in 2010 to consider accusations of war crimes committed in 1971, during Bangladesh's war of independence from Pakistan.

"The Economist has heard 17 hours of recorded telephone conversations and seen over 230 e-mails between the two men. This material is confidential and we are bound by law and the British press's code of conduct not to reveal such information except in matters of the most serious public interest. We did not solicit the material, nor pay for it, nor commit ourselves to publish it.

“These e-mails, if genuine, would raise questions about the workings of the court and we are bound to investigate them as fully as we can.” (Cited from: Discrepancy in Dhaka-Bangladesh-The Economist: <https://www.economist.com> > 2012/12)

Justice Nizamul Huq was forced to resign from the ICT on 9 December as the public outcry at his misconduct made his situation untenable. The Economist, in its printed version on 15 December, published the story of Justice Huq’s resignation from the ICT and the findings of their further investigation. The London weekly starts the report with the following heading and sub-headings:

“Trying war crimes in Bangladesh

The trial of the birth of a nation

This week the chairman of Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal resigned. We explain the background to his action, our role in the story, and what it all means for his country’s search for justice”

The report went on:

“At the last moment, however, the presiding judge, Muhammad Nizamul Huq, resigned as chairman of the tribunal, following questions put to him by *The Economist* and the publication in Bangladesh of private e-mails which cast doubt upon his role and upon the court proceedings. Recordings of him speaking by telephone were also available on YouTube. *The Economist* has seen these, and other materials, and has been investigating their accuracy and significance. This week, we publish the results of those investigations.

“The e-mails and phone conversations we have seen raise profound questions about the trial. The material suggests the government tried to put pressure on Mr. Nizamul, albeit he seems to have resisted it. It seems to show he worked improperly with a lawyer based in Brussels, and that the lawyer co-operated with the prosecution – raising questions about conflicts of interest. And in Mr Sayeedi’s case it points to the possibility that, even before the court had finished hearing testimony from the defence witnesses, Mr Nizamul was already expecting a guilty verdict.

“These concerns are so serious that there is a risk not only of a miscarriage of justice affecting the individual defendants, but also that the wrongs which Bangladesh has already suffered will be aggravated by the flawed process of the tribunal. That would not heal the country’s wounds, but deepen them.”

The Economist was absolutely correct. Since then, the wounds have actually deepened in Bangladesh as outlined by The Economist in the above report. We are a fractured and polarized society with no possibility of healing in sight.

A case was filed against me under the notorious section 57 of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act on 12 December for having the audacity to publish a true story. The ICT Act is frequently used by the current government in Bangladesh to silence dissident voices. The maximum sentence under the act is fourteen years' imprisonment. For reasons, best known to them, the police, instead of making an immediate arrest, decided to keep me under unofficial house arrest in my newspaper office until my eventual arrest on 11 April 2013. I remained confined in my office for exactly four months.

The first judgement of the International War Crimes Tribunal was given against Abdul Kader Mollah, joint secretary of Jamaat-e-Islami on 5 February 2013. He was given a life sentence. The next day a handful of young men and women formed a human chain in protest at the judgement, calling it too lenient. The protesters identified themselves as 'bloggers' and demanded the death sentence for Kader Mollah. Within a couple of days, the number of protesters grew significantly with active support from the Awami League and their leftist allies. The location of the demonstration was also shifted from the Press Club to Shahbag Chattar, a roundabout of four busy avenues adjacent to Dhaka University. The bloggers and young activists from the ruling party gave the name 'Gano Jagoran Mancha' to their movement. They expanded their demands to include death sentences for every alleged war criminal in kangaroo courts and the closure of all media that did not support their movement (which was fascist in nature). This was a god-sent opportunity for pro-Indian and anti-Islamic media houses in Bangladesh. The television channels started round-the-clock live broadcasts from Shahbag Chattar in their efforts to attract more participants to the demonstration. The Western press, like BBC and CNN, also gave extensive and positive coverage. How they could support the demand to legalize extra-judicial killing in place of fair trials is another issue. Seeing demands for public lynchings being eulogized in the domestic and Western media came as a shock to the nation. Surprisingly, American, British and other Western diplomats based in Dhaka described the demands for mob justice as a peaceful, democratic movement. Most of the diplomats who supported the demands for capital punishment without trial in Bangladesh belonged to those countries where capital punishment had been abolished long ago. They apparently did not suffer from any moral qualms. Not so surprisingly, India publicly praised

the movement. Visiting Indian President, Sree Pranab Mukherjee, personally hailed the organizers and said publicly that he fully endorsed their demands. The ruling party high command in Bangladesh gave the necessary instructions to the party machinery to supply more people to the movement to make the carnival look like a popular, mass upsurge. The large local business houses were instructed by the government to arrange for food, drinks and sufficient cash for the participants so that the movement could be sustained.

Gano Jagoran Mancha emerged as the cultural front in the vanguard of efforts to implement the de-Islamization strategy of the Indo-US axis in Bangladesh in the guise of an anti-Jamaat movement. For a short while it seemed that all non-secular political forces would be annihilated and Islamic culture uprooted entirely from the soil of Bangladesh. Then came the inevitable backlash. It was reported in a couple of newspapers, including Amar Desh, that the 'Bloggers' were not only atheists but rabid haters of Islam. Most of them post regular criticism in their blogs of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the most insulting and vulgar language possible. Stunned and angry ulemas rose with one voice to denounce the activities of the anti-Islamic clique. They quickly formed a platform under the name Hefajate Islam. The leaders of this newly formed Islamic movement put forward a thirteen-point charter which included a demand that the bloggers who had had the audacity to insult the Prophet Muhammad be arrested and put on trial. The government initially ignored the ulemas, treating them with contempt. The Hefajate leaders called for a mass gathering in Dhaka on 6 April 2013. They mobilized religious people from all over the country. The administration did everything in its power to prevent the ulemas converging on the capital. All public transport was either requisitioned by the police or closed down. Government-operated train services were also suspended from the night before. Launch terminals were guarded to prevent people using river transport. The capital resembled a fortress defending itself against some invading army. But all the efforts of the panicking government failed as over a million ulemas, madrasa students and religiously minded citizens simply walked into the city chanting Allahu Akbar (Allah is great). Most of them had walked fifty kilometres or more. Local residents in the capital welcomed the tired, unending streams of protesters with generous supplies of water and fruit. Before noon, Dhaka had witnessed the largest gathering in its history. Aljazeera reported:

"Hundreds of thousands of people have held protests in Bangladesh to demand that the government introduce an anti-blasphemy law that would include the death penalty for bloggers who insult Islam.

“Protest organizers called Saturday’s rally the ‘long march’, with many travelling from remote villages to the capital, Dhaka’s Motijheel area that became a sea of white skullcaps and robes.” (Bangladesh protesters demand blasphemy law, www.aljazeera.com/asia/2013/04)

It was a very disciplined and peaceful demonstration that ended before sunset. The organizers concluded the meeting by formally announcing their thirteen-point charter of demands and with a call for another mass rally on 5 May unless their demands were met by the government before that date. On 11 April 2013, I was arrested for the second time by Sheikh Hasina’s government and my newspaper was closed down. Then came the night of the massacre on 5 May.

More than four years have passed since then. Sheikh Hasina’s de-Islamization strategy has failed to achieve its goal. In a dramatic shift of policy, she recently invited the leaders of Hefajate Islam to her official residence to prove that she also adheres to the Islamic faith and respects its religious leaders. These are the same people who were fired upon by her RAB and police on the night of 5 May. Many were also arrested and tortured in custody. Most alarmingly, incidents related to militancy have increased many times during the current regime despite the government’s extremely repressive measures. The police have been given a licence to kill, even innocent women and children, in the name of fighting Islamic militancy. However, nothing can match the barbarity of the heinous suicide attack that was carried out against foreigners by alleged Islamic terrorists in an upmarket restaurant in Gulshan, the diplomatic quarter in Dhaka.

On the evening of 1 July 2016, five or six alleged militants identified themselves as members of the Bangladesh chapter of ISIS, a ferocious Islamist militant outfit based in Syria and Iraq, entered the Holy Artisan restaurant, famous for Italian cuisine. Over the next six to seven hours they allegedly killed and dismembered the bodies of seventeen foreign nationals and a couple of Bangladeshi citizens. This operation of gruesome violence was recorded in gory detail on cell phones and went viral on the internet. A huge contingent of army and police kept the place completely cordoned off during the night. In the early morning of the following day, the militants either committed suicide or were killed by the army rescue team. As none of the alleged militants was captured alive, we have only the police version of the story to go on. There is no way to corroborate that version.

However, the fact that all the members of the terrorist death squad were educated either in local secular private universities or in foreign universities and were children of rich parents sent a chilling message to

Sheikh Hasina and her patrons abroad. Interestingly, many of the accused militants, captured or in hiding were children of Awami League leaders and retired army officers. The long-held theory of the so-called seculars and Sajeeb Joy, son of the Prime Minister, that madrassas are the breeding ground of Islamic militants is left threadbare by this revelation. It is very difficult to explain what motivates young men and women, educated in secular institutions, to join a vicious and immoral militant organization like ISIS. But, in the case of Bangladesh, the most probable cause is the oppression meted out by our anti-Islamic fascist regime. The hegemonic policy of the jingoistic Hindu India against a country with a 90 per cent Muslim population and the tacit approval of the West in this blatant aggression definitely provide incentives for young people to convert to senseless and suicidal religious extremism. The short-sighted approach of the Indo-US axis, without understanding or appreciating the rich Islamic heritage developed over the faith's thousand-year journey and the glorious fusion of Islam with local cultures in Eastern Bengal is destined to end in disaster.

Nearly a century ago, M.N. Roy, one of the earliest Marxists in India, wrote about the historical role of Islam in the subcontinent and especially that in Bengal:

“The apparently sudden rise and the dramatic expansion of Muhammadanism constitute a most fascinating chapter in the history of mankind. A dispassionate study of this chapter is of great importance in the present fateful period of the history of India. The scientific value of the study by itself is great, and the meritorious quest for knowledge is sure to be handsomely rewarded. But with us, a proper understanding of the historical role of Islam and the contribution it has made to human culture has acquired a supreme political importance. (2011: 5) ...

“No great people, with a long history and old civilization, can ever succumb easily to a foreign invasion unless the invaders command the sympathy and acquiescence, if not active support, of the masses of the conquered people. Brahmanical orthodoxy having overwhelmed the Buddhist revolution, India of the eleventh and twelfth centuries must have been infested with multitudes of persecuted heretics who would eagerly welcome the message of Islam. (2011: 72) ...

“As regards the spread of Islam in India, an ardent admirer of ancient Hindu culture like Havell (E.B. Havell, *Aryan Rule in India*), who cannot be suspected of any sympathy or even fairness to the Muslims, gives the following highly interesting testimony:

“Those who did so (embraced Islam) acquired all the rights of a Mussalman citizen in the law courts, where the Quran and not Aryan law and custom decided disputes in all cases. This method of proselytism was very effective among the lower castes of Hindus, especially among those who suffered from the severity of Brahmanical law with regard to the impure classes.’

“This is certainly not a very complimentary remark wrung from a firm believer in the perfection of Brahmanical law. In any case, it is clear that at the time of Muhammadan conquest, there lived in India multitudes of people who had little reason to be faithful to Hindu laws and the traditions of Brahman orthodoxy, and were ready to forsake that heritage for the more equitable laws of Islam which offered them protection against the tyranny of triumphant Hindu reaction.” (Roy, 2011: 74)

Samuel Huntington propagated his famous theory of the clash of civilizations in the 1990s. George W. Bush and his team of ultra-conservative neo-cons did everything within their power to create a sharply divided 21st century world. In the guise of fighting Islamic terror, Bush invented the ‘with us’ or ‘against us’ theory, based on an extreme hatred for and mindless bashing of Islam. According to Huntington, after the decisive victory of the West in the cold war against the Soviet Union, the Islamic world and China remain the only formidable enemies to Western civilization. George W. Bush evidently decided to take on the Islamic world first in his attempt to establish the complete hegemony of the West. His ‘coalition of the willing’ devastated four Muslim countries in a decade-and-a-half-long war that still rages as I write this book. Afghanistan and Iraq lay in ruins when he left the White House on the completion of his two terms in office. The Obama administration, during its eight years, destroyed Libya and Syria.

President Bashar al-Assad has clung on to his presidency in the free-for-all that is Syria. Muammar Gaddafi was brutally murdered by the agents of the West in front of live television cameras. There is no effective government today in any of the four countries that I have mentioned. But nature abhors a vacuum. In Afghanistan, the Taliban controls nearly 70 per cent of the country. ISIS, far more deadly, ruthless and brutal than both Taliban and al-Qaeda, have arisen from the ashes of Iraq. They have already taken their fight to European capitals killing innocent civilians with total disdain and disregard for human life. As a result, the horror of al-Qaeda is now almost forgotten except on the day of remembrance for the destruction of the twin towers in New York on 9/11. No sensible Muslim can support ISIS and I am confident that they will also be eliminated in the not too distant future. But if the reasons for its existence

are not eliminated, then there will always be the possibility of other militant groups emerging. The crusaders of the 21st century have little to show for their efforts but many trillions of dollars in spending, the deaths of millions as collateral damage, and making the world dangerously unstable. Unfortunately, without learning from the mistakes made in the so-called war against terror, the USA is in the process of creating a new cauldron in South Asia.

India is by far the greatest power in South Asia if we place China outside the region. Its GNP is the fifth largest in the world. India is not only a nuclear power but also has the third largest regular army, after China and the USA. India also aspires to becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council. However, the great nation has got its own share of problems, some of which are self-inflicted. The country's blatantly hegemonic policy has caused resentment among most of her neighbours. Both China and Pakistan have fought wars with India. Sri Lanka has suffered from two decades of civil war because of India's active military support for rebel Hindu Tamils. Even fellow Hindu Nepal cannot always avoid the wrath of its mighty big brother. Nepal is a land-locked Himalayan state, sandwiched between India and China. Any attempt on Nepal's part to improve bilateral relations with China is met with an inevitable backlash from India. The policy of arm-twisting smaller neighbours is common to both the secular Congress Party and the Hindutvabadi BJP. As a result, anti-Indian sentiment is today strongest in Nepal among probably all South Asian countries with the exception of Pakistan. Anti-Indian left-wing parties trounced their pro-Indians opponents in the last general election in Nepal. The other Himalayan kingdom, Bhutan, has recently started to show uneasiness at India's blatant meddling in its affairs. Anti-Indian feeling is also at its peak in the Maldives, a tiny island nation in the Indian Ocean with a population of just over four hundred thousand, according to 2016 figures. In relation to Bangladesh, India has always treated us as a client state because of her assistance during the liberation war in 1971. This patronizing and hegemonic attitude increases especially when the Awami League comes to power in Dhaka.

Credit must be given to the Indian leadership for being able to retain the unity of a huge country of ethnically diverse peoples. There are at least twelve major languages and more than twenty-five ethnic groups among the country's population of 1.3 billion. Their love for democracy and the game of cricket is probably the thing that most binds Indians together more than anything else. However, cracks in the federal structure have recently begun to appear. A dispute regarding sharing of the Narmada

water has recently triggered communal violence between Kanada and Tamil speaking peoples in the south. Nitish Kumar, the Chief Minister of Bihar, demanded in August 2016 the demolition of the Farakka Barrage. The construction of the barrage was completed in 1972 to divert water from the Ganges to improve navigability of the river Bhagirathi (old Ganga Channel) which West Bengal considers essential for the operation of Calcutta port. Nitish Kumar claims that the Farakka Barrage is responsible for the disastrous annual flooding in upstream Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The Farakka Barrage has also been a contentious issue between Bangladesh and India since 1972. However, this is the first time that a senior Indian politician has publicly criticized the barrage. Insurgency has been going on in various parts of India for a long time. Naga, Mijo and Bodos have been fighting against the federal army in the north-east for nearly five decades. Maoists are waging guerrilla war along the long stretch of land dubbed the 'red corridor' from Andhra in the south up to West Bengal in the east.

However, the militarily strategic and politically most turbulent state of Kashmir is the *casus belli* of India. The popular Himalayan destination is right next to the historic silk route. This is the state which India annexed in 1948 against the wishes of the Muslim-majority Kashmiris. A resolution was passed by the UN Security Council, calling for a plebiscite to be conducted in the wake of Indo-Pakistani war over Kashmir in that year. Instead of implementing the UN resolution for a plebiscite, India has since kept seven hundred thousand military personnel in Kashmir to control a population of about ten million people, making the valley the most militarized region in the whole of South Asia.

Kashmiri Muslims have been fighting their liberation war since 1948. The plight of Kashmiris is similar to that of the Palestinian people suffering Israeli occupation for, coincidentally, an almost identical period of time. Kashmir is a unique place where the borders of three nuclear powers meet in an environment of extreme hostility. India and Pakistan have already fought two wars, in 1948 and 1965, over status of Kashmir, an issue largely ignored by the international community for far too long. The next war over Kashmir between the old rivals runs the risk of destroying all of South Asia and beyond as both Pakistan and India are armed with nuclear weapons. Nandita Haksar, a famous human rights lawyer and writer from New Delhi, recently commented on these insurgencies in her article, 'My Discovery of India' on 15 August 2016, the anniversary of India's independence:

“The Indian government’s response to the Northeast has alienated more and more people. In 1950s, there was just one armed group in the region. There are around 23 armed groups in Manipur alone ...

“It is not only the peoples of the Northeast that are alienated. The Kashmiris have been on the streets ever since the Indian armed forces shot Burhan Wani, commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen on July 8. The Indian media is not able to explain why a man they call a terrorist is so beloved of his people. Why did so many hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris come out on the street despite the deaths and injuries of so many in the firings by pellet guns?

“Shujat Bukhari, a respected Kashmiri journalist, said it was a completely alienated generation. What do the Kashmiris want? Afzal Guru, who was executed for his role in the 2001 Parliament attack, wrote in a letter to me many years ago: ‘Economic packages cannot bring peace in Kashmir. The people who are constantly living in the flux of humiliation and fear do not need bread for which Allah has given every person two hands for a single mouth. What people need is a political framework in which they do not feel themselves vulnerable, humiliated or terrorized. The people of Kashmir want an honourable space to live on this planet. They are not demanding stars.’” (Cited from: My Discovery of India: <https://scroll.in> > Opinion > Opinion)

Though now highly volatile, India remains a strategic ally of the USA in South Asia. Militarily the USA made its first entry into the South Asian theatre in 2002 leading the invading coalition forces in Afghanistan. President Barack Obama did not fulfill his promise to withdraw fully from Afghanistan. With the signing of a military pact with India, the USA has expanded its sphere of influence in the region. The current scenario puts the Indo-US axis toe-to-toe with the China-Pakistan alliance. Turkey, Iran and Russia are waiting in the wings and will probably join with Pakistan and China. A point to be noted here is that although the present Afghan government is a client of the USA and India, the opposition Taliban are known to be friends of Pakistan. On the eastern front, India has her own client state in Bangladesh. In any regional conflict, New Delhi could probably rely more on Sheikh Hasina’s absolute loyalty than that of some of her own Chief Ministers. But, what is the position of the people of Bangladesh? Are they going to sacrifice national interest and jeopardize the nation’s security, as the current government in Dhaka has done, to satisfy the imperialistic ambitions of New Delhi? Sheikh Hasina has already made Bangladesh vulnerable by giving a practically free transit facility to her mentor country. In a futuristic model of the region, assuming Sheikh Hasina remains in power in perpetuity, we might end up in a

situation where India and the USA – along with their client governments in Afghanistan and Bangladesh – form a military alliance to fight against the combined forces of China, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. In such a complex and dangerous situation, it could not be ruled out that the Muslim-majority populations of Afghanistan and Bangladesh might rise up against their respective puppet governments.

The strong and effective Indian lobby in Washington and other Western capitals has succeeded in projecting India as a stable democracy, by comparison to an unstable Pakistan troubled by Islamic extremism and the bitter Shia-Sunni divide. The truth is that India is probably equally unstable, if not more so, under the veneer of apparent stability. It is undeniable that astute political leadership and its people's dedication to democracy has kept the military out of politics in India. But psychological fragmentation over language, ethnicity, religion, caste, economic disparity and untouchability has spread deep throughout the country. In fact, at present there is no single political party in India that can claim nationwide appeal. The ruling party, the BJP, with its rabidly communal Hindutva philosophy, enjoys support mainly in the Hindi heartland and in some peripheral states like Gujarat and Maharashtra. Three decades ago, the party had only three seats in the Indian parliament. The dramatic rise of the BJP is more due to the decay of the Indian National Congress, the only party in India which could boast national appeal in the 20th century. During the last thirty years, on the other hand, regional parties have amassed tremendous political clout. This could definitely trigger centrifugal tendencies over time to challenge the present federal structure of India. Intolerance against minorities has increased to breaking-point during the last four years of BJP rule making India internally at its most vulnerable since 1947.

Across the northern border, the situation in Pakistan never stabilized following her humiliating military defeat to the arch-rival India in 1971. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, followed by the rapid growth of the Taliban have added elements of instability and caused immense damage to the internal security of Pakistan. The fragile domestic situations in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh thus make South Asia a powder keg waiting to be ignited. The entry of the USA into the region has also significantly raised the possibility of a future clash of civilizations especially between the West and China, leaving three Islamic countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan – to choose sides. Recent belligerent intent shown by Russia in Ukraine and Syria has challenged the basic premise of Huntington's theory that the demise of the Soviet Union leaves the field open for only USA, China and Islam. Putin's

phenomenal rise as a modern Tsar is a stark reminder of the rich military heritage of both the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. Russia has its strategic interests in South Asia as well. India is Russia's historic ally and China its large neighbour, global power and an important economic partner. The political jigsaw puzzle in this region is rather more complicated than was envisaged by Samuel Huntington while propagating his theory of the clash of civilizations. It is highly probable that Russia will be sucked into the developments in South Asia the moment US forces begin to use Indian naval and air bases on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. The Pentagon and the foreign policy establishment in Washington should learn a lesson from events in Syria and see that the days of Russia remaining a mute spectator on issues relating to her strategic importance are over. Already Pakistan and Russia are putting their previous estrangement behind them and talking seriously about rapprochement. They are on the verge of finalizing a strategic understanding to commence joint military exercises as a reaction to the Indo-US defence agreement. Russia and China have also recently concluded joint exercises in the South China Sea.

Robert Gates, former Secretary of Defense under both the Bush and Obama administrations, gave his assessment of possible US military operations in an article published in the Wall Street Journal under the title, 'Sizing up the next Commander-in-Chief'. According to his hypothesis, there is potential for US military action in Ukraine, the South China Sea, North Korea and Iran. If the situation along the Kashmir border deteriorates further, then the USA may be forced to possibly add South Asia to Gates's list. Pakistan has explicitly warned that the ever-increasing military relationship between India and the USA may encourage New Delhi to act more aggressively. The USA like any other imperialist power has used Pakistan in the past when it suited its strategic interests, especially in the period between the 1950s and the 1980s. Washington's policy planners apparently now consider Pakistan to be expendable and a thorn in their flesh. Some of their Congressmen and Senators may also push for another balkanization of the sole Islamic nuclear power. This time Baluchistan is being targeted to be the secessionist battle ground. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the most hawkish flag bearer of Hindutvabadi communal forces in India's history, publicly threatened to instigate a secessionist movement in Baluchistan in his independence-day speech on 15 August 2016. The Indian leader was once *persona non-grata* in Washington as a result of his role in the massacre of the Muslims in the Gujarat riots. But that changed with his stupendous election victory in 2016. Since then, the bear hug of Modi has melted the heart of Obama and

Trump in succession. In spite of anti-Pakistan rhetoric, neither New Delhi nor Washington can ignore the reality on the ground. Pakistan has a huge nuclear arsenal. What is more, Pakistan and China have completed the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This modern-era silk route is patrolled around the clock by regular troops from the two nuclear powers under a joint command. The strategic imperative to defend the CPEC could see China becoming involved at an early stage in any future India-Pakistan war.

I do not want to digress more than necessary from the theme of this book which is rather limited to Islam's historic progress in Eastern Bengal and its future challenges. However, we also need to understand those issues of regional politics that are relevant for the survival of Bangladesh as an independent homeland for Bengali Muslims. Ten per cent of the population who call the country home are of other faiths. However, we cannot deny the fact that the aspiration of our forefathers in joining the Pakistan movement was to create a homeland in eastern India where Bengali Muslims could live independently and with honour in a majority. Furthermore, it was the minority Bengali Hindus who first decided to divide Bengal in 1947 as they felt that an independent, Muslim-majority Bengal would not serve their communal interests. In the light of Indian economic, cultural and political aggression, our experience of the forty-five years since independence has taught us that the battle of faith is after all a continuous struggle.

Bangladesh is probably the only Islamic country in the world today where keeping the Quran, the Hadith and other theological books on Islam in one's own home is considered sufficiently criminal for the police to justify the arrest of those living in the house. Even the British colonial administration never attempted to do half of what Sheikh Hasina has been doing in Bangladesh in the name of fighting Islamic terrorism. While India has officially and publicly endorsed the policy of persecuting Muslims, Western powers have also been providing tacit encouragement by keeping silent on the issue of gross human rights violations. Bangladesh is a unique example of the persecution of the religion of the majority community by a government consisting mostly of people of the same faith. Buddhism in Bengal suffered similar persecution during the reign of Shashanka in the 7th century, and the kings Sena and Barman in 12th century. But in these cases, the rulers and their subjects were followers of different faiths.

We will not be able to appreciate the seriousness of the threat to Islam in Bangladesh without referring to the context of the demise of Buddhism, the most dominant religion in this region from as early as 500 BC until the beginning of the last millennium – a very long period indeed. The ancient

history of Bengal is not very clear due to a paucity of information. However, there is little doubt among historians that among the three major Aryan religions, evidence of Aryan Vedic or Brahmanism could not be found in Bengal prior to the Gupta dynasty in the 4th century. Most probably, during the 4th or 5th century, Brahmans from North and South India started to settle in some parts of Bengal bringing the Vedic faith with them. Jainism and Buddhism made the earliest contact with the people of Eastern India who were then mostly pagans. According to Jain mythology, Manbhum, Singbhum, Birbhum and Burdawan, all in West Bengal, were major places of preaching for Jain monks. However, the first attempt of Mahaveer, from whom Jainism had originated, to preach the new Aryan religion in Bengal was not very successful. The Jains and the local population viewed each other with contempt and hostility.

Again, if we accept the narration in Buddhist mythology as historical fact, then it was Gautama Buddha himself who visited and stayed at Pundranagar (present-day Bogra in Bangladesh) for about six months. The timing of Gautama's visit could not be ascertained with any degree of certainty, but in consideration of his life history, it might have happened in the 5th century BC. Whether Gautama Buddha personally visited Pundranagar is not the moot point here. We need only to acknowledge that it was Buddhism which succeeded as the first major religion to convert the majority of people in ancient Eastern India, long before the arrival of the Vedic faith. At the time of great Emperor Asoka, in the 3rd century BC, Buddhism was not only the state religion of Magadha, it had also spread deep into different parts of Bengal. Thereafter, for the next six hundred years, Buddhism had hardly any competition other than from insignificant Jainism, at least in Bengal. Even while the Vedic faith or Brahmanism was gradually taking root during the middle of the first millennium, Buddhism never suffered any lack of royal patronage except for short intervals. Royal patronage did not significantly stop until early in the 12th century when Brahman-Khatriya Sena became the ruler of Lakhnauti, Gaud and East Bengal or Bang. Political Islam arrived in Bengal nearly a century later.

What then was so catastrophic that it caused the rapid extinction of Buddhism after nearly two millennia of dominance? The theory of persecution alone is clearly inadequate to explain the demise of Buddhism in this region. The persecution of Christians during the early Roman Empire failed to eradicate Christianity from Europe. Today the Vatican is situated in the heart of Rome and most Italians are now Catholics. The Pope is respected equally in Catholic and Protestant countries. He may be slightly less revered in the countries where Orthodox Christianity is practised. What I am trying to say here is that Christianity not only

survived the worst kind of persecution under the Roman Empire but grew to enjoy today the largest number of followers of any religion. Why then did Buddhism perish so easily in the Indian subcontinent?

In fact, signs of decay in Buddhism were becoming evident even during the four hundred years of the Pala dynasty. Most if not all of the kings of Pala were themselves Buddhists and the religion was almost venerated as a state religion. But, fundamental differences started to creep in during the rule of the Pala dynasty, as Buddhist monks tried to assimilate Brahmanical doctrine into Buddha's teaching. Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy writes:

“The decline of Buddhism had already commenced at the time of Huan Tseng. He did not experience the previous vibrancy of Buddhism as was seen by Fa-Hien. Huan Tseng found many Stupas, temples and monasteries in ruins, some were deserted, holy places like Kapilavastu, Kusinara, Srabasti, and Kousumbi had lost their old charm. Plenty of Buddhists accepted the dominance of idolatry. Active support and patronage of Harshavardan caused some resurgence of Buddhism in Kanauj and central zone. But this was not sufficient to arrest the trend of decline in other parts of India. Dominance of Brahmanism was everywhere. Bangladesh was also no exception. Taranath states, immediately before and during Gopala Dev, the founder of Pala dynasty, the condition of Buddhism in Bangladesh was extremely poor, many Buddhist temples and viharas were either in ruins or occupied by Tirthiks (a sect belonging to Vedic religion), dominance and influence of Brahmanism was on the rise.” (Roy, 1993: 508)

A more recent study by Richard M. Eaton gives credence to the scholarship of Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy. Eaton writes in his ‘The rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier’:

“Contact between Indo-Aryan civilization and the delta region coincided not only with the rise of an imperial state but also with that of Buddhism, which from the 3rd century BC to the seventh or eighth century AD experienced the most expansive and vital phase of its career in India. In contrast to the hierarchical vision of Brahmanism, with its pretensions to the social exclusion and ritual purity, an egalitarian and universalist ethic permitted Buddhists to expand over great distances and establish wide, horizontal networks of trade among ethnically diverse peoples. (2013: 9) ... Yet, Buddhism in Eastern India, as it evolved into an imperial cult patronized by traders and administrators, became detached from its roots in non-Aryan society. Rather than Buddhists, it was Brahman priests who, despite taboos about residing in ‘unclean’ lands to the east, seized the initiative in settling amidst Bengal’s indigenous peoples from at least the fifth century AD on.” (Eaton, 2013: 10)

After the death of Gautama Buddha, his religion suffered from continuous ideological debates. These differences among leading theologians ultimately caused a major division in the form of Hinayan and Mahayan schools of Buddhism. With the arrival of the Vedic religion in Bengal, a kind of fusion took place. Vedic idols gradually entered Buddhist temples and monasteries. The rituals of Buddhism also moved towards Brahmanical ways of idol worship. The religion, in fact, started shedding its philosophical uniqueness to accommodate more and more Vedic culture. Buddhist theologians probably thought that by adopting this approach, Buddhism would be able to absorb Brahmanism within its fold. During the initial stage of this fusion process, Buddhism actually prospered by attracting more people to the fold. A majority of the indigenous population were used to worshipping some form of idols – stars, mountains, rivers, large trees, stones, and so forth – before embracing Buddhism. The converts were probably more attracted by the new Mahayan school of idol worship in the Buddhist religion. However, ultimately the policy of accommodation on the part of Buddhist theologians resulted in reverse cultural absorption. Once idol worship was allowed to enter into the teachings of Buddha, the floodgates for further compromise opened to submerge the sublime message of Nirvana.

Without the moral strength of its original and undiluted philosophy, the religion did not have the capacity to survive the persecution, first of Shashank's brief rule and later the century-long Sena dynasty. Persecution reached its extreme limit at the time of Ballal Sena, the father of Lakhsana Sena. He used to be hailed by the Brahman priests as 'avatar' born in Kaliyug for the destruction of atheists (as the Buddhist known in the 12th century). It was Ikhtiyar al-Din's conquest that provided the persecuted Buddhists with a breathing space. But the religion was in such a state of decay and corruption through the infiltration of Vedic culture that it was not possible for Buddhists to withstand the onslaught of Islam, a new, vibrant and dynamic religion for the age. Monotheist philosophy offered a refreshing spiritual explanation of the 'creator' and the 'created', and its message of equality succeeded in winning the hearts of the oppressed.

Jawaharlal Nehru offers another theory of mutual action and reaction as the reason for what he called the 'natural death' of Buddhism in India. He writes in 'Discovery of India':

"Brahminism and Buddhism acted and reacted on each other, and in spite of their dialectical conflicts or because of them, approached nearer to each other, both in the realm of philosophy and that of popular belief. The Mahayana especially approached the Brahminical system and forms. It was prepared to compromise with almost anything, so long as its ethical

background remained. Brahminism made of Buddha an avatar, a God. So did Buddhism. The Mahayana doctrine spread rapidly but it lost in quality and distinctiveness what it gained in extent. The monasteries became rich, centres of vested interests, and their discipline became lax. There was a progressive degeneration of Buddhism in India after the first millennium of its existence.” (Nehru, 2002: 179)

On the conclusion of the above brief discussion on the demise of Buddhism in India, we return to the present situation of Islam and its challenges in Bangladesh, leaving West Bengal out of my thesis. We may find many similarities between the current situation in Bangladesh and the state of Buddhism under the Senas in the 12th century. Muslims are persecuted so much by the RAB and the Police in today’s Bangladesh that young men are afraid to either grow a beard or go to mosques for prayers for fear of being identified as militants. The security forces in Bangladesh have sweeping powers to arrest anyone on the flimsiest of excuses. Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances are daily events. Almost all the victims are activists or supporters of either Islamist or Nationalist parties opposed to Indian hegemony. Sheikh Hasina’s government openly patronizes all the elements of Hindu culture in the guise of promoting secular Bengali nationalism. The media are totally controlled by pro-Indian and anti-Islamic journalists and intellectuals. Any attempt to promote Islamic culture is considered a criminal offence. Dissenting literature is not tolerated. Islam is being projected as a mediaeval and intolerant religion in government-controlled media of which Indian clientele have taken total control. Since coming to power in the stage-managed election of December 2008, the Awami League government, with its pro-Indian allies, have been gradually implementing the strategic designs of India to either incorporate Bangladesh within the boundary of the Indian federation or, at least, colonize the people culturally. One of the India’s leading defence historians, Ravi Rikhye made no attempt to disguise the ambition of Indian imperialists in his book titled, ‘The war that never was’, published by Chanakya Publications in 1988. Khodeza Begum in her article, ‘Indian move to establish United India through United Bengal’, published in The India Doctrine quotes the following piece from Ravi Rikhye:

“India should, at the earliest opportunity, incorporate Pakistan into the Republic, followed by the territories that composed the India before independence. The natural boundaries of India encompass the present-day states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Our geo-strategic imperative requires a subordinate Sri Lanka, Burma and Bhutan, and a buffer Tibet and Afghanistan. No matter what the cost, we must start the process of

reintegration. The later we put it off, the more the eventual cost. Once Pakistan returns to the fold, the other states will return at a fraction of the cost and effort. Reintegration can be conducted either peacefully or by war. In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated. Though Mrs. Indira Gandhi first considered intervention and alerted three Army divisions, in the end the government hesitated and the moment passed. The result: our chance to keep Bangladesh in our camp vanished. India would have been fully justified in intervening under the same doctrine that lets the Soviet Union intervene in Poland and Afghanistan and the Americans in Nicaragua and Grenada.” (Begum, 2007: 160)

The language of Ravi Rikhye is of course his own. But the message that he has conveyed is a reiteration of the same romanticized fundamental position of Nehru and Patel. Pakistan’s possession of nuclear weapons has perhaps created enough deterrent for India to forego the dream of incorporating her western neighbour. Ravi may amend his strategic vision on that count in any future edition of his book. But the position of Bangladesh definitely remains highly vulnerable.

Firstly, we are surrounded by India to our west, north and east except for a short land border with Myanmar and the coast along the Bay of Bengal to the south. Secondly, as a consequence of cultural aggression for about half a century, India has succeeded in cultivating a sizeable section of people sympathetic to it among the so-called elites and professionals who seem happy to play the Trojan horse at opportune moments. Thirdly and most importantly, the secular political forces that have been nurtured assiduously by our powerful big brother would not hesitate to repeat the Sikkim operation in Bangladesh. This small Himalayan state was annexed by India in 1974 during the premiership of Indira Gandhi. The parliament of the then semi-independent country passed a bill under Prime Minister Lendup Dorje authorizing its complete union with India by surrendering sovereignty. He continues to be known as “desh bechua” or seller of one’s own country in Sikkim.

However, the demographic conditions continue to favour the Muslims of Bangladesh. It would not be easy for any power to coerce 90 per cent of the population of a country to accept external domination, as happened in Sikkim. Buddhism lost the battle of faith because the religion itself lost its vitality and was corrupted by the influence of Brahmanism, another dominant religion of the time. Abdul Mumin Chowdhury, a scholar on the subject writes:

“In goading the followers of Gotama Buddha into a circuitous Vaisnavism and from thereon to the thrall of Brahmanism, Chaitanya and his Vaisnav movement had finally succeeded in seeing off the over two millennium long

Buddhist led ‘mulbasi’ resistance to Brahmanical hegemonism.”
(Chowdhury, 2008: 319)

Luckily for the people of present-day Bangladesh, Islam is still not only a vibrant religion, but also the fastest growing in the world. In spite of all the efforts made by Indian agents to weaken and corrupt Islam by aiding in sustained cultural aggression, the majority of Muslims in Bangladesh remain firm believers in the faith and practise the religion with devotion. Islam as a religion emerged victorious even after the defeat of political Islam by the British in 1757. For the next one hundred years, the occupying forces tried with all their colonial power to suppress Islam, aided by the forces of political Hindu in Bengal. But all their efforts were for nothing. The Muslims’ devotion to their faith has never waned or deviated.

The 21st century has created new challenges for the faith all around the globe. The hostile attitude that emerged in Europe against Muslims during the era of crusades in the 11th and 12th centuries still exists among the fundamentalist Christian communities although the way it is expressed may have changed with time. Senseless and barbaric terrorist attacks on innocent civilians in European countries by misguided young Muslims have caused enormous harm to the Muslim Ummah. Support for ultra-conservative politicians in Europe is on the rise. Islamophobia and Muslim bashing is increasing alarmingly. In this hostile world, it is becoming more difficult for the Muslims of Bangladesh to maintain the purity and uniqueness of their faith. The expansionist policies of India pose a constant threat. US policymakers suffer from a kind of romantic fascination with India. They seem to assess the situations of India’s smaller neighbours through the prism of Delhi. There is apparently no cure for this chronic pro-India bias in Washington and other Western capitals. Western trade interests in the huge domestic market of India are also a decisive factor in determining their South Asia policy. The strong Indian lobby on Capitol Hill and at the White House is always active in seeking to guide US policy on South Asia in favour of India. The recently concluded Indo-US defence agreement has the potential to eventually turn against Muslim interests in South Asia. This development needs to be assessed in juxtaposition with the US occupation of Afghanistan. Kabul is now a hotbed of insurgency targeting Pakistan, Iran, Muslim-majority Central Asian countries and China. The USA is either an active or a silent actor in facilitating Indo-Israeli joint operations in different strategic locations inside Afghanistan. The announcement of the US State Department as far back in 2006 that, “Afghanistan, which has been part of Central Asia geopolitically, henceforth will be considered as part of South

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Asia” was clearly made to bring Afghanistan under Indian influence. Historically, US policy has only brought destruction to the Islamic world. The policy of persecution of so-called Islamists in Bangladesh that Sheikh Hasina has adopted since coming to power in 2009 enjoys the full support of Washington and there has been no sign of any change to the Muslim-bashing policies of Washington under President Trump. After all, it is the Pentagon, the foreign policy establishment, the CIA and Capitol Hill that matter along with the President in the decision-making process in Washington. The Indo-Jewish lobby enjoys a virtual stranglehold over each of the policymaking bodies in Washington. More importantly, the entire presidential campaign of Donald Trump was based on Muslim bashing, an approach eerily similar to the political philosophy of India’s ruling BJP.

We, the Muslims of Bangladesh, need to appreciate the fact that the battle of faith goes on. It is a continuous phenomenon. The original spectacular rise of Islam in eastern India is no guarantee that the religion is not in danger of being eclipsed under radically changed regional and global geo-political circumstances. We have learned from the history of the fall of Buddhism that unity among the faithful is necessary to face internal and external threats to the faith. The realization that there is a challenge and the recognition of who the enemy is are of utmost importance. However, there is no need to panic. Islam’s resurgence against the odds is a global phenomenon. The religion was revealed by Allah to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) at a time when social injustice and repression were rampant in the world and there was a perceptible decay in human nature. Furthermore, Islam was not an entirely new religion. Rather, it was a continuation of the teachings of Hazrat Ibrahim (Abraham to Christianity and Judaism). Therefore, it is imperative that all Muslims acknowledge both Moses and Jesus as prophets sent by Allah at different junctures in human civilization. We believe our prophet to be the last messenger of the Almighty and the Seal of the prophets before him. The message of Islam is equally relevant even today, a millennium and a half later, as a form of protest against injustice, the skewed distribution of wealth, corruption, imperialism and other present-day social ills. By adhering to the fundamental principles of Islam and avoiding the trap of innovation and extremism in religion, the people of Bangladesh will be able to face all forms of cultural and political aggression with courage. At the end of the day, absolute faith and moral strength matter most in all issues relating to religion. In the case of Bangladesh, the issue of Islam should also be considered beyond religion. The faith of 90 per cent of the population of this country is the insurance of our independence against

external aggression. Anybody trying to weaken Islam is, in fact, working against the independence of Bangladesh. We neither want to rule over others or pass judgement on their cultures and religions. Bangladeshis are known to be tolerant of all religions and to respect them. We only wish that all our adversaries would recognize the uniqueness of the culture of Bengali Muslims. Above all, we want to be free to choose our faith and destiny.

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EPILOGUE

I completed this manuscript as one continuous project before my release from prison on 22 November 2016. It took me the next three months to partially recuperate from ill health and adjust to home life again. Local doctors advised me to travel abroad to consult specialist physicians for advanced treatment of my injured spine and frozen shoulder. That was, however, easier said than done. I was granted bail by the Supreme Court on the condition that I surrendered my passport to the government. My lawyer submitted a petition to the apex court to release the passport on medical grounds. A new legal battle commenced.

The Supreme Court convened a medical board to ascertain whether I was genuinely ill and in need of emergency treatment abroad. On conducting a series of tests, the medical board agreed with the prior opinion of the hospital where I had been treated immediately after my release from long internment. As per the recommendation of the board, the Supreme Court accepted my petition with the following uniquely strange and blatantly unconstitutional conditions:

1. I can only travel to the UK for a specified period of 30 days.
2. During my stay in the UK, I could neither participate in any gathering of a political character, nor make any political statements.
3. I had to surrender my passport within twenty-four hours of returning to Bangladesh.

I applied to the British High Commission in Dhaka for a visa which was surprisingly denied. I have been travelling frequently to UK since 1986 for business, medical and holiday purposes. In fact, I had surgery on my temporo-mandibular joint in London Bridge Hospital as recently as 2012 after completing my first prison term of nearly a year. During my early professional career, I worked in senior positions in British Oxygen and Duncan Brothers, both of which are British companies. But to my utter astonishment, the UK Home Office refused my visa on the grounds that, according to their valued judgement, I might seek asylum at the ripe old age of sixty-three (at the time of applying for visa), abandoning my wife and octogenarian mother, leaving them at the mercy of a vicious fascist regime! It may be no coincidence that the refusal came from New

Delhi where the UK visa section for Bangladeshi nationals is now based. After all, I am widely known in diplomatic circles in Dhaka as a strong nationalist and therefore, anti-Indian. The British government is generally vocal on human rights, at least in public. I do not know how they can justify refusing a visa to an elderly victim of the worst possible human rights abuses whose only intention was to seek medical treatment.

In the light of this development, my lawyer decided to return to the Supreme Court with another petition. They appealed for a waiver of the first condition to allow me to travel to any country of my choice for treatment. An embarrassed Supreme Court amended their earlier order accordingly. I decided to travel to Singapore and obtained the necessary visa without delay. At last, on 2 December 2017, I was finally able to board a flight to Singapore. The time required to go through all the formalities and receive the emergency treatment was a mere three hundred and seventy-five days! I used this time to finish editing my manuscript and to knock it into shape ready for publication. I received continuous encouragement from family members and a few friends, although I was not very sure whether my study would interest publishers in the West. After all, one has to be aware of the present situation in Bangladesh and genuinely appreciate the relevance of the book's political and historical context in the regional politics of South Asia before accepting it for publication.

My friends never lost hope and tried unceasingly to find a suitable publisher. At last, contact was established with Mr. Adam Rummens of Cambridge Scholars Publishers who took the trouble to process my proposal. This morning I received the final nod from the editorial board and here I am in front at my desk, finishing a couple of concluding pages. One year and five months have passed since I walked out of Kashimpur prison. A lot has happened in Bangladesh and the wider region during this period. Genocide has taken place against the minority Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar with the UN, as usual, paying lip service to the issue but unable to prevent the catastrophe. Minority Muslims have also lost their lives and property in communal riots in Sri Lanka. The majority Buddhists in both countries have resorted to extreme violence, visiting inhuman sufferings on the victims. Half a million Rohingya Muslims have fled Myanmar and taken refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh. Are the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity not the followers of Gautama Buddha, the avatar of non-violence? Muslims in India are living under constant threat and extreme humiliation from a rabidly communal Hindutvabadi regime which claims India is only for the Hindus. The India-sponsored government of Bangladesh is also persecuting Muslims, in this

case the majority, in the name of fighting Islamic terrorism. Let me quote here a statement to the 37th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council by the Asian Legal Resource Centre on the situation in Bangladesh:

“The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) is highly concerned over the human rights situation in Bangladesh.

“There have been 421 enforced disappearances, 1480 extrajudicial executions, 120 deaths due to torture from January 2009 to February 2018 by the law-enforcement agencies under the incumbent government. Most victims are the activists of the opposition parties.

“On 6 March 2018, the police arbitrarily arrested an opposition student leader named Jakir Hossain. After three days’ police remand, the detainee was sent to prison. On 12 March, he died in custody. Jakir’s body had marks of bruises, as photos captured by journalists from morgue revealed. His finger and toenails were found removed. In contrast, the Magistrate failed to record the mark of bruises in the inquest report.

“Last year, Bangladesh removed Chief Justice S K Sinha: forced him to exile after the Supreme Court’s judgement declared Constitution’s 16th Amendment for impeaching judges in parliament illegal, questioning the legitimacy of the Parliament referring to the sham election of January 2014.

“In 2017, a British newspaper reported that the highest number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean to Italy were Bangladeshis.

“The next election is scheduled by December 2018. The circumstances suggest that the situation will deteriorate further.

“In fact, the Bangladesh government is hiding its worrying human rights records behind the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. The Council needs to concentrate on this alarming situation before it is too late.”

A German organization has recently listed Bangladesh as one of the five new autocracies in the world. Bertelsmann Stiftung in its latest Transformation Index released on 23 March 2018 said that they had observed a setback in terms of democracy in Bangladesh. The report says: “Due to the worsened quality of elections, the formerly fifth largest democracy is classified as an autocracy.”

We in Bangladesh are on the eve of another single-party, farcical election in December 2018 to prolong the fascist regime. On 8 February, the current regime put the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia in prison

on trumped-up charges with the help of the dysfunctional judiciary. I may also follow her to prison at any moment. Thirty-six new and fabricated cases have been filed against me in the last one and a half years for speaking truth which went against the regime. The total number of such cases now stands at one hundred and twentyfive. However, this time I will return to Kashimpur Jail with a sense of personal accomplishment as I have finished telling an important story to the nation. I do not know how long it will take for my readers to be able to read the book. I stop here on the afternoon of 25 March 2018 with the hope that the wait will not be long. Adieu.

APPENDIX A

THE CABINET MISSION PLAN, 1946

The Mission studied the Congress and League proposal and came out with its own recommendations on May 16, 1946.

The Mission, after advancing various arguments concluded: 'We are unable to advise the British government that the power which at present resides in British hands should be handed over to two entirely separate sovereign states.'

The Cabinet Mission, therefore, recommended that the constitution should take the following Basic form:

- (1) There should be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States, which should deal with the following subjects: (a) Foreign Affairs, (b) Defence and (c) Communications. The Union should have the powers necessary to raise the finances required for the above subjects.
- (2) The Union should have an Executive and a Legislature constituted from British Indian and State representatives. Any question raising a major communal issue in the legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as a majority of all the members present and voting;
- (3) All subjects other than the Union subjects and all residuary powers should vest in the provinces;
- (4) States shall retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union;
- (5) Provinces should be free to form groups with executives and legislatures and each group could determine the provincial subjects to be taken in common;
- (6) The constitution of the Union and of the groups should contain a provision whereby any province could, by a majority vote of its Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the

constitution after an initial period of ten years and at ten-yearly intervals thereafter.

The Mission divided the Indian provinces into three sections into which the Constituent Assembly would be split up and the sections would proceed to settle the provincial constitution for the provinces and would also decide whether any group constitution would be set up for those provinces and, if so, with what provincial subjects the group should deal. Provinces would have the power to opt out of the groups on the vote of the first legislature elected under the new constitution.

The provinces were classified into three sections as follows. Against each province was given the representation allowed to it in the Constituent Assembly.

Section	Total	Muslim	General	Sikh
Section A Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Province and Orissa	187	20	167	x
Section B NWFP, Punjab and Sind	35	22	9	4
Section C Bengal and Assam	70	36	34	x

To Section A was to be added one representative each from New Delhi, Ajmer, Marwara and Coorg. The Princely States were to be given seats not exceeding 93.

After the provincial and group constitutions had been formed, the Sections and the Princely States would reassemble for the purpose of settling the Union Constitution.

The Mission also announced that an interim government having the support of the major political parties.

(Source: Jaswant Singh, *Jinnah India-Partition Independence*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2009)

APPENDIX B

THE AWAMI LEAGUE'S SIX-POINT FORMULA, 1966

The text of the Six Point Formula as originally published and subsequently amended in the Awami League's Manifesto.

POINT 1

Original: The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense on the basis of the Lahore Resolution, and Parliamentary form of Government with supremacy of legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.

Amended: The character of the government shall be federal and parliamentary, in which the election to the federal legislature and to the legislatures of the federating units shall be direct and on the basis of universal adult franchise. The representation in the federal legislature shall be on the basis of population.

POINT 2

Original: Federal government shall deal with only two subjects, viz. Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residuary subjects shall vest in the federating states.

Amended: The federal government shall be responsible only for defence and foreign affairs and, subject to the conditions provided in (3) below, currency.

POINT 3

Original: 1. Two separate but freely convertible currencies for two wings may be introduced, or

2. One currency for the whole country may be maintained. In this case, effective constitutional provisions are to be made to stop flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Separate Banking Reserve is to be made and separate fiscal and monetary policy to be adopted for East Pakistan.

Amended: There shall be two separate currencies mutually or freely convertible in each wing for each region, or in the alternative a single currency, subject to the establishment of a federal reserve system in which there will be regional federal reserve banks which shall devise measures to prevent the transfer of resources and flight of capital from one region to another.

POINT 4

Original: The power of taxation and revenue collection shall vest in the federating units and the Federal Centre will have no such power. The Federation will have a share in the state taxes for meeting their required expenditure. The Consolidated Federal Fund shall come out of a levy of a certain per centage of all state taxes.

Amended: Fiscal policy shall be the responsibility of the federating units. The federal government shall be provided with requisite revenue resources for meeting the requirements of defence and foreign affairs, which revenue resources would be automatically appropriable by the federal government in the manner provided and on the basis of the ratio to be determined by the procedure laid down in the Constitution. Such constitutional provisions would ensure that the federal government's revenue requirements are met consistently with the objective of ensuring control over the fiscal policy by the governments of the federating units.

POINT 5

Original: 1. There shall be two separate accounts for foreign exchange earnings of the two wings.

2. Earnings of East Pakistan shall be under the control of East Pakistan Government and that of West Pakistan under the control of West Pakistan Government.

3. Foreign exchange requirement of the Federal Government shall be met by the two wings either equally or in a ratio to be fixed.

4. Indigenous products shall move free of duty between two wings.

5. The Constitution shall empower the unit Governments to establish trade and commercial relations with, set up trade missions in and enter into agreements with, foreign countries.

Amended: Constitutional provisions shall be made to enable separate accounts to be maintained of the foreign exchange earnings of each of the federating units, under the control of the respective governments of the federating units. The foreign exchange requirements of the federal government shall be met by the governments of the federating units on the basis of a ratio to be determined in accordance with the procedure laid down in the constitution. The regional Governments shall have power under the Constitution to negotiate foreign trade and aid within the framework of the foreign policy of the country, which shall be the responsibility of the federal government.

POINT 6

Original: The setting up of a militia or a paramilitary force for East Pakistan.

Amended: The governments of the federating units shall be empowered to maintain a militia or paramilitary force in order to contribute effectively towards national security.

(Source: Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1997)

APPENDIX C

THE PROCLAMATION OF INDEPENDENCE, MUJIBNAGAR, BANGLADESH DATED 10TH DAY OF APRIL, 1971

WHEREAS free elections were held in Bangladesh from 7th December, 1970 to 17th January, 1971, to elect representatives for the purpose of framing a Constitution,

AND

WHEREAS at these elections the people of Bangladesh elected 167 out of 169 representatives belonging to the Awami League,

AND

WHEREAS General Yahya Khan summoned the elected representative of the people to meet on the 3rd March, 1971, for the purpose of framing a Constitution,

AND

WHEREAS the Assembly so summoned was arbitrarily and illegally postponed for an indefinite period,

AND

WHEREAS instead of fulfilling their promise and while still conferring with the representatives of the people of Bangladesh, Pakistan authorities declared an unjust and treacherous war,

AND

WHEREAS in the facts and circumstances of such treacherous conduct Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of 75 million of people of Bangladesh, in due fulfillment of the legitimate right of self-determination of the people of Bangladesh, duly made a declaration of independence at Dacca on March 26, 1971 and urged the people of Bangladesh to defend the honour and integrity of Bangladesh,

AND

WHEREAS in the conduct of a ruthless and savage war the Pakistani authorities committed and are still continuously committing numerous acts of genocide and unprecedented tortures, among others on the civilian and unarmed people of Bangladesh,

AND

WHEREAS the Pakistan Government by levying an unjust war and committing genocide and by other repressive measures made it impossible for the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh to meet and frame a Constitution, and give to themselves a Government,

AND

WHEREAS the people of Bangladesh by their heroism, bravery and revolutionary fervor have established effective control over the territories of Bangladesh,

We the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh, as honour bound by the mandate given to us by the people of Bangladesh whose will is supreme duly constituted ourselves into a Constituent Assembly, and

Having held mutual consultations, and

In order to ensure for the people of Bangladesh equality, human dignity and social justice, declare and constitute Bangladesh to be a sovereign People's Republic and thereby confirm the declaration of independence already made by Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and

Do hereby affirm and resolve that till such time as a Constitution is framed, Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman shall be the President of

the Republic and that Syed Nazrul Islam shall be the Vice-President of the Republic, and that the President shall be the Supreme Commander of all the Armed Forces of the Republic,

Shall exercise all the Executive and Legislative power of the Republic including the power to grant pardon,

Shall have the power to appoint a Prime Minister and such other Ministers as he considers necessary,

Shall have the power to levy taxes and expend monies,

Shall have the power to summon and adjourn the Constituent Assembly, and

Do all other things that may be necessary to give to the people of Bangladesh and orderly and just Government.

We the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh do further resolve that in the event of there being no President or the President being unable to enter upon his office or being unable to exercise his powers due to any reason whatsoever, the Vice-President shall have and exercise all the powers, duties and responsibilities herein conferred on the President,

We further resolve that we undertake to observe and give effect to all duties and obligations that devolve upon us as a member of the family of nations and to abide by the Charter of the United Nations.

We further resolve that this proclamation of independence shall be deemed to have come into effect from 26th day of March, 1971.

We further resolve that in order to give effect to this instrument we appoint Prof. Yusuf Ali our duly Constituted potentiary and to give to the President and the Vice-President oaths of office.

Prof. Yusuf Ali

(Source: Constitution of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh)

APPENDIX D

INSTRUMENT OF SURRENDER OF THE PAKISTANI ARMY, 1971

The Pakistan Eastern Command agree to surrender all PAKISTAN armed forces in Bangladesh to Lieutenant General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA, General Officer Commanding in Chief of the Indian and Bangladesh forces in the Eastern Theatre. This surrender includes all PAKISTAN land, air and naval forces as also all paramilitary forces and civil armed forces. These forces will lay down their arms and surrender at the places where they are currently located to the nearest regular troops under the command of Lieutenant General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA.

The PAKISTAN Eastern Command shall come under orders of Lieutenant General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA as soon as this instrument has been signed. Disobedience of orders will be regarded as a breach of the surrender terms and will be dealt with in accordance with the accepted laws and usages of war. The decision of Lieutenant General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA will be final, should any doubt arise as to the meaning of interpretation of the surrender terms.

Lieutenant General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA gives a solemn assurance to personnel who surrender in accordance with provisions of the Geneva Convention and guarantees the safety and well-being of all PAKISTAN military and paramilitary forces who surrender. Protection will be provided to foreign nationals, ethnic minorities and personnel of West Pakistan origin by the forces under the command of Lieutenant General JAGJIT SINGH AURORA.

Jagjit Singh Aurora
Lieutenant General
General Officer Commanding in Chief
Zone B and

Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi
Lieutenant General
Martial Law Administrator

India and Bangladesh Forces in the
Command (Pakistan)
Eastern Theatre
16 December 1971.

Commander Eastern
16 December 1971

(Source: Junaid Ahmad, Creation of Bangladesh: myths exploded, AJA Publishers, Karachi, 2016)

APPENDIX E

GENERAL YAHYA KHAN'S UNDELIVERED ADDRESS TO THE NATION, DECEMBER 1971

Rawalpindi, 17 December 1971

The following is the text of President General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan's statement issued here today:

As you may recall, in my address to the nation of 12th October, I had apprised you of the details of my plan of transfer of power and had stated that the new Constitution will be published by the 20th of December. In spite of treacherous aggression by India which she had hoped would completely disrupt my plan and despite certain serious set-backs that we have suffered, I am determined to keep to my programme of transfer of power. For its implementation, I have already invited the leaders of the major parties representing both wings to form a coalition government. The government of the elected representatives of the people will assume the responsibility to guide the nation through this hour of crisis. The Constitution which I will briefly outline now will be released shortly, and will provide the framework for the representative government to discharge its responsibilities to the people.

It is a matter of some sorrow for me that the process which I had initiated for the Constitution to be prepared by the elected representatives of the people was upset for reasons which are known. This unfortunate development has not deterred me in my resolve not to delay the transfer of power and it is this compulsion which has prompted me to present the Constitution to the people of Pakistan. At the same time, I have no wish to impose a Constitution. The Constitution, therefore, provides for the association and the participation of the elected representatives of the people through an easy amendment procedure in the first 90 days involving a simple majority and a consensus of 25 per cent of the representatives from the federating units.

I have been in constant touch with political leaders in the country and have taken into account numerous concrete suggestions which emanated from various sources. The object was that the Constitution should reflect the consensus and should meet the expectations of the people and the needs of the country.

I find that in the public debate on the subject general consensus exists on the following four broad elements which the Constitution reflects:

1. It should preserve and promote the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.
2. The country needs a federal parliamentary system of government enshrining fundamental rights of the people.
3. There should be maximum provincial autonomy within the concept of one country.
4. It should be an effective instrument for translating the new expectations of the people in the social and economic fields into a concrete reality.

The Constitution provides a parliamentary form of representative government both at the Centre and in the Provinces. The President will appoint as Prime Minister a person who can command majority support in the National Assembly. The other Ministers will be members of National Assembly, although a person who is not a member may be a Minister for a maximum period of six months. All will be responsible, as a Cabinet, to the National Assembly. The Prime Minister may be removed on only one ground, namely, that he has ceased to command the confidence of a majority in the National Assembly.

The Prime Minister will be assisted by a Vice-Prime Minister, who should belong to the other wing from that to which the Prime Minister belongs. The President is required to act in accordance with the advice of his Council of Ministers, except where such advice involves violation of his oath of office or interferes with the organization of the defence force of country or their maintenance in a high state of efficiency.

The fundamental rights in this Constitution go beyond the provisions contained in previous constitutions. The directive principles of state policy have been reworded and strengthened in many respects. The state is to give special attention to improvement of the living and working conditions of the workers and the peasants.

Another major departure from earlier constitutions is the provision of a Vice-President. It has been provided that the Vice-President should belong to the other wing from that to which the President belongs and that his headquarters should be at Dacca. His principal function will be to be the Chairman of the senate and this new House of Parliament forms the next major departure from the previous constitutions. A second House is a necessary feature of a federal state, and it has been missing from our constitutions for too long. Ordinarily, the function of a second House is to provide equal representation to the units constituting the federation and the Constitution provides that each of the provinces shall have elected representatives in the Senate. In addition, to secure representation from among persons eminent in public and professional life, I have provided for nomination of fifteen such persons, of whom ten shall be from East Pakistan and the remaining five from the West Wing. The Vice-President of Pakistan, besides being the Chairman of the Senate, may have other functions conferred upon him by law and other duties may also be assigned to him by the President. The President and the Vice-President are to be elected normally by an electoral college composed of the senate, the National Assembly and all the provincial Assemblies by the method of the alternative vote.

The Parliament of Pakistan will thus consist of two Houses, but the principal law-making body will be the National Assembly. The senate has not been provided with a veto on legislation by the National Assembly, but may, nevertheless, propose amendments to any bill passed by the National Assembly which shall be transmitted to the latter Assembly through the President, who will have his ordinary powers of making suggestions for amendments himself. Thereafter, the power of putting the law into final shape is placed in the hands of the National Assembly. There will be joint sittings of the Houses for legislative purposes only when the Senate has disagreed with the National Assembly regarding amendment of the Constitution. In that case, there will be a joint sitting and besides a majority of two-thirds of the total membership of the two Houses of Parliament, there will be required a consensus of not less than twenty-five per cent of the total number of representatives from the constituent units to pass such an amendment. Among other occasions on which the two Houses will sit together will be when there is a motion for impeachment of the President or the Vice-President.

As I have spoken of the amendment of the Constitution, I may mention here that for the protection of the large measure of autonomy, which the

new Constitution has given to the Provinces, it has been provided that any bill to amend certain specified provisions of the Constitution conferring such autonomy, when passed by the National Assembly, shall be forwarded not only to the Senate, but also to the Assembly of each of the Provinces for their consideration and recommendations. The views of the Provinces will be placed before the Senate which will thereafter formulate its own proposals for amendment and these will be passed back to the National Assembly by the President. In the event of disagreement between the two Houses of Parliament, there will be a joint sitting for resolution of the matter. A further safeguard for provincial autonomy has been provided by giving power to the President to withhold his assent if in his opinion any objection raised by a provincial Assembly has not been substantially met.

Before I mention the matters in which provincial autonomy has been extended I would like to give a brief survey of the major features in relation to the provincial Governments. An Assembly for each of the provinces has already been elected. The Constitution provides that each Governor shall have a Council of Ministers and shall act in accordance with the advice which he receives from his Council. The leader of the majority in the provincial Assembly is to be summoned to form a Ministry, and shall hold office subject to only one condition, namely, that he may be removed if he ceased to command the confidence of the majority in the provincial Assembly.

Elaborate provisions have been made in that part of the Constitution which deals with relations between the Centre and the Provinces, which have the effect of transferring a large number of subjects from the central field to the provincial field. In relation to a few subjects such as post offices, stock exchanges and futures markets and insurance, where indeed central control is essential, it has been provided in the Constitution, in appreciation of the special position of East Pakistan, that at the request of that Province that central government shall transfer its executive functions to the government of that province. The powers of the Central legislature have been expressly confined to matters which are provided for in this particular part of the Constitution. The provisions in the 1962 Constitution empowering the Central legislature to make laws on provincial subject under certain contingencies have been withdrawn. These purposes can now be served by the Central legislature only upon request made by a province or provinces. In the financial field, very substantial powers of taxation have been transferred to the provinces, but with this and with

certain other matters such as the treatment of the subject of foreign trade and foreign aid, the making of grants to provinces, inter-provincial trade, etc., I shall deal separately a little later.

The West Pakistan Dissolution Order 1970 provides that six autonomous bodies in the West Wing shall be managed by the President on behalf of the four provinces. In the light of their operations during the course of the year it has been found that it should be possible to dissolve three of these corporations and have their functions transferred to the four provinces. These autonomous bodies are the Agricultural Development Corporation, the Small Industries Corporation, and the Associated Cement Company. The arrangements envisaged in the Dissolution Order will now be restricted to the West Pakistan Railway, the West Pakistan Power and Development Authority, and the West Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation with a restricted role confined to such important and basic industries which are of common interest to the four Provinces in the West Wing.

By the Constitution, the Centre will assume responsibility for protecting each province from external aggression and internal disturbance, and for ensuring that its operations are conducted in accordance with the Constitution. For the implementation of this responsibility, two special provisions have been found necessary. One is that whenever the central government is satisfied that the government of a province cannot be conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, it may authorize the Governor of the province to assume to himself all the functions of the provincial government. Such a condition will not be permitted to last beyond one year. A Provision has also been made for the central government to exercise a measure of control over a province when it is afflicted with financial instability. As you are aware such provisions exist in many constitutions.

The subject which has most agitated the minds of the people concerns the relations between the Centre and the Provinces and the extent of provincial power consistent with the integrity and unity of the country. Consequently, it provides the Centre with responsibility in specified fields while all the residuary powers are with the provinces.

Financial autonomy is an essential element in any scheme of provincial autonomy. Provinces should have command over their financial resources. The present position where the elastic sources of revenue were mostly

with the Centre giving little scope to the provinces to mobilize resources for their development has been radically changed under the new Constitution. The extremists, have, no doubt, advocated that the Centre should have no authority to levy any tax. This position is obviously unacceptable because if financial independence is essential for the provinces, it is equally essential for the Centre to enable it to discharge its obligations under the Constitution. The new arrangement in the Constitution, therefore, provides for the complete transfer of the following sources of taxation to the Provinces in addition to the existing provincial sources of taxation:

1. Sales Tax.
2. All Excise Duties other than those on petroleum and tobacco manufacture.
3. Estate and Succession Tax.
4. Gift Tax.

Beside the complete transfer of the above mentioned central sources of taxation in favour of the Provinces, the Constitution also provides that the following three taxes will be collected by the Centre for the purposes of convenience but will be passed on in their entirety to the Provinces:

5. Export Duties.
6. Excise on unmanufactured tobacco.
7. Tax on natural gas and crude mineral oil.

In other words, the Centre will retain only the following sources of taxation:

8. Income, Corporation, and Wealth Tax.
9. Excise duties only on two items, viz. petroleum products and tobacco manufacturers.
10. Custom duties excluding export duties.

In addition to the transfer of these major sources of taxation to the provinces, the Constitution provides for special grants from the Centre to the less developed provinces. These grants will be not less than Rs.70 crores a year, of which Rs.60 crores or the entire amount of custom duties collected in East Pakistan whichever is higher, will be earmarked for East Pakistan. The NWFP and Baluchistan province will get grants in aid of not less than Rs.5 crores each.

The large special grant in favour of East Pakistan has been made to assist the development of that province. The central government is on average collecting roughly Rs.130 crores per annum from East Pakistan through central taxes. The arrangements made in the Constitution will give East Pakistan over Rs.100 crores out of 130 crores which are collected from East Pakistan through central taxes. This will mean that East Pakistan's contribution to the central expenditure will be around Rs.30 crores a year or about 5 per cent of the Centre's current total expenditure. This is indicative of the extent of the financial support which the Constitution provides to the resources of East Pakistan.

The allocation of these resources to the provinces is now covered by constitutional provisions. The necessity for the establishment of a finance commission for periodic review will, therefore, not arise.

It has also been provided in the Constitution that provincial Governments will be able to borrow internally within broad limits laid down by the Centre. This will obviate reference to the Centre every time a loan has to be raised. East Pakistan has been given a constitutional guarantee that it will be authorized to raise at least 54 per cent of the total public borrowings in the provinces.

In the field of external aid, which is an adjunct of the country's foreign policy, the Centre's role is restricted to the negotiation of the overall aid for the country. Here again, the province of East Pakistan has been assured the minimum allocation of 54 per cent of the total aid negotiated in any one year. Within such allocations the provinces will be free to negotiate directly specific projects and programmes.

The foreign exchange earnings of the country provide backing to the currency and, therefore, must be retained as a central responsibility. The Constitution, however, provides a system by which both East and West wings would use their own foreign exchange earnings after meeting the common liabilities.

The provincial Governments would have powers to frame their own export promotion programmes and would be entitled to frame import policies in line with the availability of foreign exchange to their credit after meeting common needs and foreign aid allocated to them. These arrangements for West Pakistan will obviously be managed on a regional basis, since, however, foreign trade is an inseparable part of the overall

foreign policy, the central government would retain powers to legislate and to lay down the framework within which the trade policies have to be implemented by the provincial Governments. The necessary institutional and administrative changes to implement this constitutional provision would be made by transfer of institutions like the Jute Board to East Pakistan and the setting up of a Trade Board for coordinating trade policies in West Pakistan. In the case of East Pakistan there is also a provision for appointment of trade representatives abroad with the approval of the central government.

Inter-wing trade would be guided and regulated by a specially constituted inter-wing trade board. It would be composed of representatives of all provinces, half of which would be from East Pakistan. The board would examine any questions referred to it on the initiative of the provinces. Thus, the provinces would be able to ensure that inter-regional trade is carried on in a fair and mutually advantageous basis.

The currency has obviously to remain a central responsibility under the state Bank of Pakistan but for the decentralization of other central banking functions the Constitution provides for establishment of two regional Reserve Banks, one in each wing. The provincial Governments will be fully represented on these regional reserve banks which will control commercial and cooperative banks in their respective areas and will manage credit policies within the overall ceiling laid down by the State Bank of Pakistan.

In the field of planning there will be decentralization permitting provinces to prepare their own development plans on the basis of external and internal resources on which they will have full control. The Centre will consolidate provincial plans for the preparation of a national plan for any period specified by it. The decentralization in planning will involve the disbandment of the Central Development working party for the provinces and of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council as well as the National Economic Council. The provincial Governments will, therefore, have full authority to formulate and approve their plans without any monetary limits.

As regards the system of election, I might say that all the Assemblies are to be those which have been elected by adult franchise under the Legal Framework Order, and the same system of election is to continue under

the Constitution. The Senate however will be elected by the provincial Assemblies by the method of the single transferable vote, thus ensuring a wider representation than could be achieved by the single vote under the party system.

I may mention too in relation to elections that provisions have been made in the Constitution to discourage multiplicity of political parties or their growth on narrow regional basis. I consider this reform necessary for the healthy growth of the parliamentary system and for the encouragement and growth of national outlook. These provisions would naturally apply to these elections.

The Islamic institutions which existed under previous constitutions are being maintained and it is also provided that branches of the Islamic Research Institution may be established in each province if requested by the provincial government. In the principles of policy, at many places, the Islamic provisions have been strengthened.

At the end, I may mention that the Constitution provides that the Republic shall have two capitals at Islamabad and Dacca. The description 'Second Capital' in respect of Dacca has been abolished, and it has been provided that an adequate establishment shall be maintained at each capital for the discharge of the functions of the central government. The principal seat of parliament will be located at Dacca.

These are the main features of the Constitution, and its printed copies will be available on the 20th. I have attempted to synthesise the demands for maximum provincial autonomy with the imperatives of national unity. I have given fullest weight to the desire for decentralization of functions and have accommodated this genuine desire up to the point beyond which I feared that system would become unworkable. Decentralization is required and has been provided but it obviously cannot be carried beyond a point which would become the starting point of disintegration. I feel that this Constitution is a bold measure in advance of almost any other constitution. But then our problems are unique and we have to find unique and bold solutions for the problems which this country faces. I earnestly hope and pray that this Constitution will help remove mistrust and bitterness which led us to the brink of a precipice and will herald a new era strengthening the unifying forces currently lying dormant in the national life.

(Source: Herbert Feldman, *The end and the beginning; Pakistan 1969–1971*, Oxford University Press, Lahore, 1975)

APPENDIX F

TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP, COOPERATION AND PEACE BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH. DHAKA, 19 MARCH 1972

INSPIRED by common ideals of peace, secularism, democracy, socialism and nationalism,

HAVING STRUGGLED together for the realisation of these ideals and cemented ties of friendship through blood and sacrifices which led to the triumphant emergence of a free, sovereign and independent Bangladesh,

DETERMINED to maintain fraternal and good-neighbourly relations and transform their border into a border of eternal peace and friendship,

ADHERING firmly to the basic tenets of non-alignment, peaceful co-existence, mutual cooperation, non-interference in internal affairs and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty,

DETERMINED to safeguard peace, stability and security and to promote progress of their respective countries through all possible avenues of mutual cooperation,

DETERMINED further to expand and strengthen the existing relations of friendship between them,

CONVINCED that the further development of friendship and cooperation meets the national interests of both States as well as the interests of lasting peace in Asia and the world,

RESOLVED to contribute to strengthening world peace and security and to make efforts to bring about a relaxation of international tension and the final elimination of vestiges of colonialism, racialism and imperialism.

CONVINCED that in the present-day world international problems can be solved only through cooperation and not through conflict or confrontation,

REAFFIRMING their determination to follow the aims and principles of the United Nations Charter, the Republic of India, on the one hand, and the **People's Republic of Bangladesh**, on the other, have decided to conclude the present Treaty.

Article 1

The High Contracting Parties, inspired by the ideals for which their respective peoples struggled and made sacrifices together, solemnly declare that there shall be lasting peace and friendship between their two countries and their peoples, each side shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other side.

The High Contracting Parties shall further develop and strengthen the relations of friendship, good neighbourliness and all-round cooperation existing between them, on the basis of the above-mentioned principles as well as the principles of equality and mutual benefit.

Article 2

Being guided by their devotion to the principles of equality of all peoples and States, irrespective of race or creed, the High Contracting Parties condemn colonialism and racialism in all forms and manifestation and are determined to strive for their final and complete elimination.

The High Contracting Parties shall cooperate with other States in achieving these aims and support the just aspirations of peoples in their struggle against colonialism and racial discrimination and for their national liberation.

Article 3

The High Contracting Parties reaffirm their faith in the policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence as important factors for easing tension in the world, maintaining international peace and security, and strengthening national sovereignty and independence.

Article 4

The High Contracting Parties shall maintain regular contacts with each other on major international problems affecting the interests of both States, through meetings and exchange of views at all levels.

Article 5

The High Contracting Parties shall continue to strengthen and widen their mutually advantageous and all-round cooperation in the economic, scientific and technical fields. The two countries shall develop mutual cooperation in the fields of trade, transport and communications between them on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the most-favoured nation principle.

Article 6

The High Contracting Parties further agree to make joint studies and take joint action in the fields of flood control, river basin development and the development of hydro-electric power and irrigation.

Article 7

The High Contracting Parties shall promote relations in the fields of art, literature, education, culture, sports and health.

Article 8

In accordance with the ties of friendship existing between the two countries, each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declare that it shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party.

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall refrain from any aggression against the other party and shall not allow the use of its territory of committing any act that may cause military damage to or constitute a threat to the security of the other High Contracting Party.

Article 9

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an armed conflict against the other party. In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure the peace and security of their countries.

Article 10

Each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declares that it shall not undertake any commitment, secret or open, towards one or more States which may be incompatible with the present Treaty.

Article 11

The present Treaty is signed for a term of twenty-five years and shall be subject to renewal by mutual agreement of the High Contracting Parties.

The Treaty shall come into force with immediate effect from the date of its signature.

Any differences in interpreting any article or articles of the present Treaty that may arise between the High Contracting Parties shall be settled on a bilateral basis by peaceful means in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

Done in Dacca on the nineteenth day of March, nineteen hundred and seventy-two.

Sd/-

INDIRA GANDHI

Prime Minister

for the Republic of India

Sd/-

SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

Prime Minister

for the people's Republic of Bangladesh

(Source: Avtar Singh Bhasin, India-Bangladesh Relations: Documents-1971–2002, Volume 1, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, 2003)

APPENDIX G

TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA, BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN FOR THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS IN THE SUBCONTINENT. NEW DELHI, 9 APRIL 1974

1. On July 2, 1972 the President of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of India signed an historic agreement at Simla under which they resolved that the two countries put an end to the conflict and confrontation that have hitherto marred their relations and work for the promotion of a friendly and harmonious relationship and the establishment of durable peace in the subcontinent. The Agreement also provided for the settlement of “their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon”.
2. Bangladesh welcomed the Simla Agreement. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh strongly supported its objective of reconciliation, good neighbourliness and establishment of durable peace in the subcontinent.
3. The humanitarian problems arising in the wake of the tragic events of 1971 constituted a major obstacle in the way of reconciliation and normalization among the countries of the subcontinent. In the absence of recognition, it was not possible to have tripartite talks to settle the humanitarian problems as Bangladesh could not participate in such a meeting except on the basis of sovereign equality.
4. On April 17, 1973, India and Bangladesh took a major step forward to break the deadlock on the humanitarian issues by setting aside the political problems of recognition. In a Declaration issued on that date they said that they “are resolved to continue their efforts to reduce tension, promote friendly and harmonious relationships in the subcontinent and work together towards the establishment of a durable peace”. Inspired by this vision and “in the larger interest of reconciliation, peace and stability in the subcontinent” they jointly proposed that the

problem of the detained and stranded persons should be resolved on humanitarian considerations through simultaneous repatriation of all such persons except those Pakistani prisoners of war who might be required by the Government of Bangladesh for trial on certain charges.

5. Following the Declaration there were a series of talks between India and Bangladesh and India and Pakistan. These talks resulted in an agreement at Delhi on August 28, 1973 between India and Pakistan with the concurrence of Bangladesh which provided for a solution of the outstanding humanitarian problems.
6. In pursuance of this Agreement, the process of three-way repatriation commenced on September 19, 1973. So far nearly 300,000 persons have been repatriated which has generated an atmosphere of reconciliation and paved the way for normalization of relations in the subcontinent.
7. In February 1974, recognition took place thus facilitating the participation of Bangladesh in the tripartite meeting envisaged in the Delhi Agreement, on the basis of sovereign equality. Accordingly His Excellency Dr. Kamal Hossain, Foreign Minister of the Government of Bangladesh, his Excellency Sardar Swaran Singh, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India and His Excellency Mr. Aziz Ahmed, Minister of State of Defence and Foreign Affairs of the Government of Pakistan met in New Delhi from April 5 to April 9, 1974 and discussed the various issues mentioned in the Delhi Agreement in particular the question of the 195 prisoners of war and the completion of the three-way process of repatriation involving Bangalees in Pakistan, Pakistanis in Bangladesh and Pakistani prisoners of war in India.
8. The Ministers reviewed the progress of the three-way repatriation under the Delhi Agreement of August 28, 1973. They were gratified that such a large number of persons detained or stranded in the three countries had since reached their destinations.
9. The Ministers also considered steps that needed to be taken in order expeditiously to bring the process of the three-way repatriation to a satisfactory conclusion.
10. The Indian side stated that the remaining Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees in India to be repatriated under the Delhi Agreement, numbering approximately 6,500, would be repatriated at the usual pace of a train on alternate days and the likely short-fall due to the suspension of trains from April 10 to April 19, 1974 on account of Kumbh Mela, would be made up by running additional trains after April 19. It was thus hoped that the repatriation of prisoners of war would be completed by the end of April, 1974.

11. The Pakistan side stated that the repatriation of Bangladesh nationals from Pakistan was approaching completion. The remaining Bangladesh nationals in Pakistan would also be repatriated without let or hindrance.
12. In respect of non-Bangalees in Bangladesh, the Pakistan side stated that the Government of Pakistan had already issued clearances for movement to Pakistan in favour of those non-Bangalees who were either domiciled in former West Pakistan, were employees of the central government and their families or were members of the divided families, irrespective of their original domicile. The issuance of clearances to 25,000 persons who constitute hardship cases was also in progress. The Pakistan side reiterated that all those who fall under the first three categories would be received by Pakistan without any limit as to numbers. In respect of persons whose applications had been rejected, the Government of Pakistan would, upon request, provide reasons why any particular case was rejected. Any aggrieved applicant could, at any time, seek review of his application provided he was able to supply new facts or further information to the Government of Pakistan in support of his contention that he qualified in one or other of the three categories. The claims of such persons would not be time-barred. In the event of the decision of review of a case being adverse, the Governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh might seek to resolve it by mutual consultation.
13. The question of 195 Pakistani prisoners of war was discussed by the three Ministers, in the context of the earnest desire of the Governments for reconciliation, peace and friendship in the subcontinent. The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh stated that the excesses and manifold crimes committed by these prisoners of war constituted, according to the relevant provisions of the UN General Assembly Resolutions and international law, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and that there was universal consensus that persons charged with such crimes as the 195 Pakistani prisoners of war should be held to account and subjected to the due process of law. The Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs of the Government of Pakistan said that his government condemned and deeply regretted any crimes that may have been committed.
14. In this connection, the three Ministers noted that the matter should be viewed in the context of the determination of the three countries to continue resolutely to work for reconciliation. The Ministers further noted that following recognition, the Prime Minister of Pakistan had declared that he would visit Bangladesh in response to the invitation of

the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and appeal to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past, in order to promote reconciliation. Similarly, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh had declared with regard to the atrocities and destruction committed in Bangladesh in 1971 that he wanted the people to forget the past and to make a fresh start, stating that the people of Bangladesh knew how to forgive.

15. In the light of the foregoing and, in particular, having regard to the appeal of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh stated that the Government of Bangladesh had decided not to proceed with the trials as an act of clemency. It was agreed that the 195 prisoners of war may be repatriated to Pakistan along with the other prisoners of war now in the process of repatriation under the Delhi Agreement.
16. The Ministers expressed their conviction that the above agreements provide a firm basis for the resolution of the humanitarian problems arising out of the conflict of 1971. They reaffirmed the vital stake the seven hundred million people of the three countries have in peace and progress and reiterated the resolve of their Governments to work for the promotion of normalisation of relations and the establishment of durable peace in the subcontinent.

Signed in New Delhi on April 9, 1974 in three originals, each of which is equally authentic.

Sd/-
(Kamal Hossain)
Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Government of Bangladesh.

Sd/-
(Swaran Singh)
Minister of External Affairs,
Government of India.

Sd/-
(Aziz Ahmed)
Minister of state for
Defence and Foreign
Affairs, Government
of Pakistan.

(Source: Avtar Singh Bhasin, India-Bangladesh Relations: Documents-1971–2002, Volume 1, Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, 2003)

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Bangladesh, the eastern half of earth's largest delta, Bengal, is today an independent country of 163 million people. Among the 98% ethnic Bengali population, above 90 percent practice Islam.

Surprisingly, Buddhism was the predominant religion of the region until the beginning of the 2nd millennium. In the midst of a long and fierce Brahman-Buddhist conflict, political Islam arrived in Bengal in the very early 13th century.

Against the background of the above history, this book tells the story of successive religious and political transformations, touching upon the sensitive subject of Bengali Muslim identity. Encompassing a period of more than a millennium, it narrates a political history beginning with the independent Muslim Sultanate and closing with the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh. The book concludes by discussing the present day, here termed "Authoritarian Secularism".

Mahmudur Rahman is one of the most vocal dissidents against autocracy in Bangladesh. An engineer and MBA by profession, a former energy advisor to the government and former executive chairman of the Board of Investment, he is a well-known author and editor. He has suffered imprisonment and torture in custody for his principled stance on human rights, freedom of expression, independence of the judiciary, and democracy.

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