

BANGLADESH: FROM AUTOCRACY TO DEMOCRACY
(A Study of the Transition of Political Norms and Values)

By

Golam Shafiuddin

THESIS

Submitted to
School of Public Policy and Global Management, KDI
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
the degree of

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ABSTRACT

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The political history of independent Bangladesh is the history of authoritarianism, argument of force, seizure of power, rigged elections, and legitimacy crisis. It is also a history of sustained campaigns for democracy that claimed hundreds of lives. Extremely repressive measures taken by the authoritarian rulers could seldom suppress, or even weaken, the movement for the restoration of constitutionalism. At times the means adopted by the rulers to split the opposition, create a democratic facade, and confuse the people seemingly served the rulers' purpose. But these definitely caused disenchantment among the politically conscious people and strengthened their commitment to resistance.

The main problems of Bangladesh are now the lack of national consensus, violence in the politics, *hartal* (strike) culture, crimes sponsored with political ends etc. which contribute to the negation of democracy. Besides, abject poverty and illiteracy also does not make it easy for the democracy to flourish.

After the creation of non-partisan caretaker government, the chief responsibility of the said government was only to run the routine administration and take all necessary measures to hold free and fair parliamentary elections. The factor that contributed most to the fairness and impartiality of the parliamentary elections in 1991 for the first time was

the non-partisan character of the caretaker government. Afterwards the parliamentary elections in 1996 and 2001 have reestablished the people's faith in the electoral process (however, the sincerity of the political parties and the people in holding the election in an atmosphere of unprecedented peace can in no way be underrated). The interim system of government is now a constitutional provision.

This paper emphasizes that even after the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh the major problems are still intolerance, practice of personality cult, factionalism, mutual distrust, and antagonism. For this reason, a social disorder is prevailing in the country. Now a research and policy recommendation is very much required as because social unrest and problems of democracy are interrelated. My key recommendations are: pass the torch to the new leaders, no strike policy, bringing transparency in all sphere of the society, integration between GO and NGO, creating post of the Ombudsman etc. This is the purpose of the present thesis.

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The moral of our democratic saga through the times has been that our people have had a firmer belief in democracy than our leaders and their capacity to take pains for democracy is far greater than the former's.

Dedicated to my friend and classmate:

Sayed Aminul Huda Tito

Who was a great martyr in the democratic movement of Bangladesh

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List of Abbreviations

AL	Awami (people's) League
BARD	Bangladesh Academy of Rural Development
BJP	Bharatiya Janata (Indian people's) Party
BKSAL	Bangladesh Krishak Shromik Awami League (Bangladesh Peasant Labor Awami League)
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CRI	Center for Research and Information
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DUCSU	Dhaka University Central Students Union
EC	Election Commission
FBCCI	Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry
JSD	Jatyia Samajtantrik Dal (National Socialist Party)
MP	Member of Parliament
MR	Modified Rationing
OMS	Open Market Sale
PMO	Prime Ministers' Office
PO	Presiding Officer
PSC	Bangladesh Public Service Commission
PSU	Public Sector Unit
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
UP	Uttar Pradesh (Northern Province)
VGd	Vulnerable Group Development
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council)
VR	Village Rationing

INTRODUCTION

A number of momentous events that have taken place in the last two decades that have radically changed the very nature of political ideas, practices and relations in the national, regional and international levels. These include chiefly, the disintegration of Soviet Union, democratization of its East European satellite states, the fall of Berlin Wall, breakdown of former Yugoslavian federation, communist China making slow but steady compromises with the capitalist economy (last of all joining WTO), formation of a multiracial government in South Africa and Asia, and so on. During the last few days of the 20th century, we have been observing the mournful burial of communism and ever increasing consolidation of capitalist economy.

With the end of the dictatorships, whether of the ‘proletariats’ or of the military generals, new democracies are now eagerly vying with each other to prove themselves to be more democratic, to make their domestic markets more open so as to get as much capital investments from outside as possible. And with this new emphasis on democracy being generally accepted as the basic tenet of political organization, a queer confusion has arisen about the definition of democracy. For though almost every country of the world now claims to be democratic yet the nature and characteristics of their political institutions and processes differ so widely that the meaning of the term ‘democracy’ has become almost obscure, a near cliché.

And again, it is really misleading to regard democracy as a particular structural set-up of government. The mere existence of a certain set of political institutions does not

constitute democracy. Democracy is a versatile principle, which may find expression in a variety of institutions in many different ways and in many different forms. Democracy is any form of government, which involves popular *consent* and popular *control*, but neither consent nor control need be absolute in that it is possible to conceive degrees of democracy.¹

There are those who argue that democracy is a practical impossibility in the mass societies because it demands a level of participation by the members of society which has seldom, if ever, been achieved. It may be true that in Bangladesh a majority of the electorate vote in general elections, in what other sense does a majority participate? Certainly various opinion polls have found majorities of their respondents claiming an interest in politics, but an interest falls far short of active participation. The legal guarantee of the opportunity to vote, the opportunity to express opinion and organize political activity freely and openly, the right of free speech and freedom of association are of little consolation if they never achieve anything or if people fear to use them. Economic and social deprivation, it is argued and been observed, can effectively nullify legal rights. Money, power and education may create a situation like that found in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others".

In the final analysis it has been concluded that 'underdevelopment', 'mass poverty' and 'social inequalities' constitute the major threat to democracy in most Asian countries which also provide a fertile ground for 'authoritarianism' to breed. But almost all the Asian countries are trying to build up modern democratic nation states after the end of

¹ Azfar Aziz, *Public deliberation: One way to strengthen democracy*, The Daily Star, 09 February 2000.

colonial rule. Nation building and socio-economic development should, therefore, play a decisive role with an active 'citizen participation in this direction'.²

The wave of democracy-building that swept the world in the previous two decades has stalled, with some countries slipping into authoritarian rule and political conflict, according to the UNDP report *'Deepening democracy in a fragmented world'*. The report (July 2002) said that the world is more democratic in terms of the 140 countries that hold multiparty elections than any time in history, but only 82 of countries out of a total of nearly 200 examined are considered full democracies. It called the level of global inequality 'grotesque', with the income of the world's richest 5% 114 times higher than of the poorest 5%.

Of the 81 countries that embraced democracy in the last two decades of the 20th century, only 47 are considered full democracies today. Many others do not seem to be transition or have lapsed back into authoritarianism or conflict, as in Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone. Myanmar and Pakistan have turned to military form of government. Failed states, like Afghanistan and Somalia, have become breeding grounds for extremism and violent conflict. The trend appeared strongest in the sub-Saharan region, with national armies intervening in political affairs in varying degrees in one in four countries since 1989.

Deepening democracy around the world would be vital in the battle against social injustice, providing a bulwark against terrorism. UNDP report added, recent research

² K. M. Tipu Sultan, *Government and Citizens in politics and Development: An Asian Case*, BARD, Comilla, 1978, p.110.

showed that established democracies are less prone to civil war than non-democratic regimes, and even countries that have embraced democracy only recently are more likely to cope with political upheaval.

Military-ruled Pakistan maintained its low ranking on a UN global development index. The non-democratic regimes fail to deliver economic growth and stability. Pakistan ranked 138 out of 173 countries assessed by the UNDP for its annual Human Development Index, which measures life expectancy, adult literacy, education and income per person.

The Islamic Republic of 145 million held the same ranking in 1999, the year in which army chief General Pervez Musharraf overthrew the civilian government in a bloodless coup.³ He declared himself president last year. He has repeatedly argued that the 11 years of democracy that preceded his overthrow brought economic ruin to Pakistan, and insisted that military regime was necessary to restore economic growth and stability. According to the index, Pakistan has made headway in tackling undernourishment, but is far behind in reducing infant mortality rates, where as the situation of country like Bangladesh is getting better.

It is also clearly expressed that there is no trade-off between democracy and development. In many countries military takeovers are justified often on the grounds that democratically elected governments are incompetent in managing social and economic

³ It was during his flight home from the Sri Lankan army's golden jubilee celebration in October 1999, the then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif tried to sack him, setting off a chain of events that ended with overthrowing the government in a bloodless coup.

life. Authoritarian regimes often argue that they can build strong states that can take tough decisions for the interest of the people, these arguments are not however, supported by empirical evidence. On the contrary, there are valid reasons to believe that democracy and growth are compatible. Most of the world's richest countries those with per capita incomes of \$20,000 (in 2000 purchasing power parity) are democratic nations. A systematic study conducted in 135 countries from 1950 to 1990 discredits the notion of a trade-off between democracy and development.

My paper is an analysis of political endowments, culture, and social aspects of a particular society. To identify the problem adequate knowledge in the concerned field is highly required. To fulfil this requirement selected books, journals, periodicals and newspapers were proved to be very useful. A research means, "a systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements or components (1) a question, problem or hypothesis; (2) data; (3) analysis and interpretation of data (David Nunan)".⁴ In this research work I routinely listed all possible observable implications of the hypothesis that was observed in the gathered information.

There are many methods in social research, such as: philosophical method, historical method, anthropological method, survey method, experimental method, case study method, content analysis method and so on. Methodology of my present research was the content analysis by a thorough literature review. Content analysis means a neutral and systematic analysis of published materials. That's why the analysis of the present study was based mainly on the secondary information. This work is descriptive as well as analytical and evaluative. It is obvious that every researcher is under limitation of knowledge and insight, and mistakes are unavoidable, yet such errors will likely be pointed out by the others.

After the analysis one may try to generalize the fact on the basis of his own viewpoint is the main problem of this method. There is no concrete measurement process in the social research. In this study, I sometimes faced the problem of contradictory findings. But there has been almost the intrinsic unity of research findings.

⁴ Monira Hossain, Educational Research (Dhaka: Bangladesh Open University, 1999), p.27

Democracy: The Concept

Democracy is a system of government in which the power to make important political decisions rests ultimately with the people. To use a famous phrase, democracy is "government of the people, by the people, and for the people".⁵

In common popular usage in the West, democracy is contrasted to forms of dictatorship or totalitarianism which actual power is in a small group of people. However, the term democracy has been used to include these types of regimes. Political scientists have used the term totalitarian democracy to point out that the ideological justification of totalitarian regimes comes from popular rule. In Maoist political theory, the Communist Party is part of the people's democratic dictatorship signifying that the Party's absolute rule came as a result of a popular revolution. Despite the technical usage, many English speakers would regard 'totalitarian democracy' as a straightforward contradiction in terms, however.

In order to be more precise, political analysts have created the concept of liberal democracy to distinguish what is commonly regarded as a democracy from dictatorship, which claims legitimacy from the people who may genuinely be popular. A liberal is characterized by civil rights and legitimate (actual, non-rigged) multi-party elections.

Democracies can be divided into different types, based on a number of different distinctions. The most important distinction is between **direct democracy** (sometimes also called 'pure democracy'), in which the people express their will by means of a direct vote on each particular issue, and **representative democracy** (sometimes called 'indirect

⁵ Abraham Lincoln, *The Gettysburg Address*.

democracy’), in which the people express their will through the election of representatives that make decisions on behalf of those who elected them.

Other important issues in democracy include exactly who are ‘the People’, i.e. who ought to be entitled to vote; how to protect the rights of minorities from the ‘tyranny of the majority’, and which system should be used for the election of representatives or other officials.

“Democracy is not a way of governing, whether by majority or otherwise, but primarily a way of determining, who shall govern and, broadly to what ends. The only way in which the people, can determine who shall govern is by referring the question to public opinion and accepting on each occasion the verdict of the polls”.⁶

Alternative Definition of Democracy

There is another definition of democracy from that given above, though it is less commonly used. According to this definition, the word ‘democracy’ refers solely to direct democracy, whilst a representative democracy is referred to as a ‘republic’. Using this definition, the United States' system of government is referred to as a ‘democratic-republic’, rather than a democracy.

The earliest origins of this definition can be found in the work of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle distinguished in his *Politics* between six systems of government, depending on whether rule was by the one, the few or the many, and whether this rule was just or unjust. He called an unjust system of rule by the many *demokratia* (democracy), and a just system of rule by the many a *politeia*, most commonly translated *republic* (from the Latin *res publica*, ‘public thing’). Aristotle's *demokratia* was closer to

what today we would call direct democracy, and *politeia* closer to what we call a representative democracy, though even a *demokratia* still had elected offices. A particularly interesting feature of Aristotle's *demokratia* is the choosing of public officials by lot, a technique common among Greek city-states, though not endorsed by Aristotle and mostly unknown in any modern political system. Although in some countries with the systems, in the highly unlikely case of two candidates for a seat receiving exactly the same number of votes, the seat is decided by flipping a coin.

The words 'democracy' and 'republic' were used in a similar way to Aristotle by some of the Founding Fathers of the United States. They argued that only a representative democracy (what they called a 'republic') could properly protect the rights of the individual; they used the word 'democracy' to refer to direct democracy, which they considered tyrannical.

Neither Aristotle's definition nor those of the American Founding Fathers are widely used anymore -- most political scientists (and most common English speakers) today use the term 'democracy' to refer to government by the people, whether it is direct or representative. The term 'republic' most commonly means today a political system with a head of state elected for a limited term, as opposed to a constitutional monarchy.

However that the older terms are still sometimes used in discussions of political theory, especially when considering the works of Aristotle or the American 'Founding Fathers'. This older terminology also has some popularity in Conservative and Libertarian politics in the United States.

⁶ R.M.MacIver, *The Web of Government* (New York: The Free Press, 1965) p-148

Direct and Representative Democracy

Direct democracy refers to a system in which citizens directly decide each issue by voting. In representative democracy, by contrast, citizens elect representatives at regular intervals, which then in turn decide the issues on their behalf.

Direct democracy becomes more and more difficult, and necessarily more closely approximates representative democracy, as the number of citizens grows. Historically, the most direct democracies would include the New England town meeting (within the United States), and the political system of ancient Athens. Neither system would scale well to a larger population. Though the population of Athens was reasonably large, most of that population were not citizens, and thus had no political rights.

It is questionable whether there has ever been a purely direct democracy of any considerable size. In practice, societies of any complexity always must contain a specialization of tasks, including administrative tasks; and hence even in a direct democracy there must be some elected officials. Though one can still attempt to have all important policy decisions made by a direct vote, with the officials restricted to merely to implementing them. Likewise, many modern representative democracies incorporate some elements of direct democracy, most commonly referenda.

We can view direct and indirect democracies as ideal types, with real democracies approximating closest to one or the other. Some modern political entities are closest to direct democracies, such as Switzerland or some American states, where frequent use is made of referenda, and means are provided for referenda to be initiated by petition (called 'referenda on popular demand') instead of by members of the legislature or the government. The latter form, which is often referred to as a plebiscite, allows the

government to choose if and when to hold a referendum, and also how the question should be worded. By contrast, Germany is much closer to an ideal representative democracy, in Germany referenda are prohibited, due in part to the memory of how Adolf Hitler used to manipulate plebiscites to support his rule.

The system of elections that was used in some Communist countries might be considered an extreme form of representative democracy, in which the people directly elected local representatives, who in turn elected regional representatives, who in turn elected the national assembly, who finally elected the rulers of the country. However, such systems were not in practice democratic at all, even though the people are permitted to vote, since the large distance between the individual voter and the government means that the system is easy to manipulate to give the desired result.

Which Form is Superior?

Many have argued in favor of direct democracy, on the grounds that it represents the will of the people most accurately; these people argue that by contrast representative democracy best represents the will of those privileged enough to be able to mount a successful election campaign.

The traditional, and to many still compelling, objection to direct democracy as a form of government is that it is open to demagoguery. It is for this reason that the United States was established as, in the terminology used at the time, a 'republic' rather than a 'democracy'. Thus Benjamin Franklin's famous answer, to the question as to what sort of government the 'Founding Fathers' had established, was: "A Republic, if you can keep it."

A cynic would point out that demagoguery and populism are two sides of the same coin. Demagogues appeal to people's baser instincts; populists allegedly appeal to their enlightened interests.

Is Democracy a Good thing?

Almost all states today support democracy in principle, though often not in practice. Even many communist dictatorships call themselves democracies (e.g. the 'Democratic Republic of Vietnam', 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea'), even though they are by no means democratic by most Westerners' definition of the term.

Some ideologies have been openly opposed to democracy, for example Fascism. Communists have argued that democracies are not really democratic, but are in fact smokescreen for the ruling classes, who exercise the real power. In the Communist analysis, the working class in democracies does not really have a free vote, since the ruling class controls all the media and the general populace have been indoctrinated with ruling class propaganda. According to Communists, real democracy is only possible under a Socialist system.

At least some arguments against democracy amount more to a complaint that the outcome of democracy is different from what the critic desired. Support for democracy may, then, sometimes not be support for the principle or theory of democracy, but rather a hopeful confidence that democracy will yield the kind of society that the supporter hopes for on independent grounds.

Democracy in South Asia

The region of South Asia includes seven countries, namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and the Maldives. While Nepal and Bhutan are monarchies, other countries are republics. India is the largest democracy of course, but democratic system in a fragile form prevails in other countries in varying degrees. In some of the South Asian countries authoritarian systems came into being, but they had their termination after some time. For instance, the leaders of the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) succeeded in restoring democratic system in Pakistan in 1988; the Pro-Democracy Movement triumph in Nepal and a new constitution declaring sovereignty of the kingdom vested in the people of the country came into effect in 1990; the military rule of General Hussein Mohammad Ershad had its end in Bangladesh and a democratic government came into being there in 1991.

India occupies the most important place in this region because of her vast geographical size, demographic composition and her remarkable political and economic development. But some other factors must also be taken into account. Pakistan came into existence as a result of India's partition in 1947 and Bangladesh came into existence as a result of the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971. Though India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are now separate sovereign states, the life of the people of these three countries is very much marked by the traits of social and cultural homogeneity. Nepal and Bhutan are two small Himalayan states and here also the marks of social and cultural homogeneity with India may well be taken note of. Such traits of social and cultural homogeneity may also be discovered if we compare Indian social life with the life of the people of Sri Lanka and Maldives. As such, the bonds of social and cultural homogeneity linked all the seven

countries. The force of the religions – Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam – should also be taken into account in this direction. Politically, all the seven countries are separate and distinct entities; socially and culturally, they are closely related to each other.

One significant point that engages our attention is that all South Asian countries have a quite developed state apparatus, while the level of other social life and the political culture is quite low. The colonial masters established an effective system of administration on the pattern of their developed political system. They introduced representative government in doses and enabled the native people to make experiment with the institutions of parliamentary democracy. They also established a well-trained bureaucracy, disciplined armed forces and an active press as the media of communication. In short, they could establish, what Dicey calls, the ‘rule of law’ in these countries. The first generation of the national leaders had the advantage of apprenticeship and so they could run this ‘imported system’ more or less on the lines of a liberal democratic order. But they could not leave behind their worthy successors. As a result, the system started deteriorating and it ultimately saw its replacement by some kind of fascism or authoritarianism. In not much time, the ‘democratic state’ was replaced by a ‘garrison state’ under a military leader as Ayub Khan, slayer Yahya Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Mosharraf in Pakistan and Ziaur Rahman and H.M. Ershad in Bangladesh. However, it is a matter of satisfaction that while the leaders in power failed to consolidate the roots of a liberal democratic order, the leaders in opposition with the support of the people could do it by forcing the military leaders to quit. The reinstatement of democracy belied all dismal fears. In this direction, we appreciated the sensible approach of the monarch of Nepal, Birendra Bir Vikram Shahdev who read the pulse of the time and happily bowed

to the wishes of the people. Like his British counterpart, he reconciled his stand with the institutionalization of constitutional monarchy. But in last year (June 01, 2001) unfortunately the king and the queen Aishwarya including 11 members of Royal family were brutally shot dead by their own son and crown prince Dipendra. The massacre of King Birendra, nine other family members and Crown Prince himself is an unforgettable and horrific tragedy for the Nepalese people. Simultaneously Nepal is facing different kinds of realities. More than 4,000 people have died since the rebel Maoist guerrillas launched their 'people's war' from Rolpa in February 1996 to topple the constitutional monarchy and establish a communist state.

The political system can operate well if is congruent to the political culture of the people. It implies that a well-developed Western model of democracy cannot operate successfully in a country where the level of political culture is very low or, in the words of John Stuart Mill, the people are 'barbarian'. All South Asian countries are faced with this problem in varying measures. A big hiatus can be found between the developed state apparatus on the one side and the political awareness of the people on the other. The people, in general, have no knowledge of their political institutions, their constitution and laws, the mode of composition and working of their legislature, the accountability of their rulers for their acts of commission and omission, the sanctity of an independent judiciary, the necessity of an independent press etc. The introduction of the principle of universal adult suffrage has opened channels for undesirable elements to reach the corridors of power and then to degenerate the very system that has been designed to keep all perverted forces in check or at bay. Votes are bought in the black market, elections are rigged, polling booths are captured, ballot boxes are stuffed with fake ballot papers and, in addition to all this, the

voters are intimidated to vote, or not to vote, in a particular manner. Incidents of violence and case of manipulation take place at such a large scale that election becomes ill action of a gigantic farce. The sanctity of people's verdict or electorate's mandate is vitiated and the unscrupulous politicians happily thrive on the ways of sheer populism. In effect, political participation is replaced by political alienation. The machinery of law and order is broken down. The politicians, the bureaucrats and the criminals establish a nexus that can hardly be broken by the sincere and committed advocates of democracy. Some military leader suddenly emerges on the scene like a Figaro on the French stage. For sometime the people get relief from rising prices, increasing rate of crimes, and rampant corruption and misadministration. But the clock turns back. The evil forces of nepotism and corruption arise again and make the system highly unpopular. Ultimately the head of such a 'corrupt' system has his exit in the most inglorious manner. The new regime may award him a death sentence as happened with Bhutto in Pakistan or a term of long imprisonment as we have seen in the case of Gen. Ershad in Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, the sanctity of a democratic system has been the casualty in many south Asian countries. The reason for this should be traced in the low level of political culture of the people as well as in the unpardonable wrongs of the leaders. The people have high hopes from their nation-builders and founding fathers. But when they find that their aspirations are frustrated, they take to the ways of violence and insurrection. We may take note of this astounding fact that the leaders of some South Asian countries have had no hesitation in identifying opposition with 'treason'. The Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah designated his critics as 'the enemies of Pakistan'. In Sri Lanka the Singhalese

leaders thoughtlessly drove the Tamils out of their system and thus forced them to take the path of secessionism. In India Mrs. Indira Gandhi started the pernicious trend of 'personal loyalty' and desired that all party men and public servants must be loyal to her. It inaugurated the era of 'personalized politics' that weakened the foundations of a democratic system.⁷

In Pakistan President Zia administered a supplementary oath to his ministers and judges affirming their fealty to him. Such developments certainly militate against the spirit of constitutionalism. In Pakistan Governor General Golam Muhammed dissolved the Constituent Assembly in 1954; Ayub Khan scrapped the constitution of 1956, banned party system and made experiment with his plan of 'Basic Democracy' that was a mere euphemism for his personal rule. He established presidential system under the Constitution of 1962 and Bhutto replaced it by a parliamentary system under the Constitution of 1973. Later on, Zia-ul-Haq tempered it again with the provision for strong Presidency. In 1960 in Nepal the King abrogated the Constitution and established a new system without the role of political parties. It could run for a period of thirty years. In Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman introduced a parliamentary system that was subsequently substituted by the presidential system and after a continuous movement by opposition, the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has taken a resolve to switch over again to the parliamentary system in 1991. Sri Lanka had parliamentary system that was replaced by a new system under the Constitution of 1978. Like the system of France, is a mixture of two models in which the position of the President is far more important than that of the

⁷ J.C. Johari (ed.), *Governments and Politics of South Asia* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1991), pp. vii-ix.

Prime Minister. It may be described as quasi-presidential system. It is a pity that the provisions of the constitution are honored more in breaches than in observance. The constitution has sanctity of its own and when it is undermined, general lawlessness becomes the order of the day. The crisis of legitimacy is created. The ways of extremism and terrorism are restored to. Anti-national developments are not nipped in the bud and after sometime adoption of strong measures by the government invite serious retaliation from the side of the sworn disruptionists. Events of assassinations no longer remain in exception. Anti-national forces operating in different parts of the country recklessly indulge in killing innocent people, looting banks and treasuries, abducting influential public servants or their children, and causing a lot of harm to the peace and security of the country. The tragedies of Liaquat Ali Khan and Zia-ul Haq in Pakistan, of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman in Bangladesh, of S.W.R.D. Bandarnaike and Premadasa in Sri Lanka, and of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi in India may be referred to in this connection. It should also be noted that the father of non-malignant movement in India, *Mahatma* (great soul) Gandhi could not rescue himself from the bullet of assailant.⁸

A modern state is a nation state. As such, each state must solve the problem of its nation-building or national integration so that the crisis of identity does not arise. The forces of regionalism, communalism and infra-nationalism may exist, but the people in general must develop the habit reconciling their local, regional or communal interests with the overall interest of the nation. An unbreakable ring must tighten different parts. The leaders as well as the people should take it for granted that in case the outer ring is fragile,

⁸ "The spirit of democracy cannot be established in the midst of terrorism, whether governmental or popular" – Gandhi.

the pieces may fall apart. If the bonds of nationalism are weak, ethnicism may supersede nationalism. At the hands of the disruptionists and secessionists, sub nationalism may become nationalism. Thus the leaders of Pakistan are confronted with the problems of regional loyalty created by the *Punjabis*, the *Pashtus*, the *Sindhis*, and the *Baluchis*. Surprisingly, the ‘immigrants’ (called *Muhajirs*) are considered as non-Pakistanis by other segments of the native population and the followers of Mirza Golam Ahmed (called *Quadianis* or *Lahori* group) are officially regarded as ‘non-Muslims’ in Pakistan. The resentment against the domination of the ‘*Punjabis*’ forced the ‘*Bengalis*’ of East Pakistan to revolt and to have a state of their own. So the maltreatment given to the Tamils in Sri Lanka forced them to take to the path of violent secessionism. The Colombo government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), which has been fighting for an independent homeland for the island’s Tamil minority, have been observing an open-ended bilateral truce since February 23, 2002. The disgruntled and distracted elements have created problems in the States of Punjab, Jammu-Kashmir, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, UP, Gujarat etc. in India.

India and Pakistan are at their usual saber rattling again and this time with nuclear weapons in the picture. The tensions are very useful for both their leaders. For Musharraf it gives him the justification for bleeding the country dry to keep up the military. It also gives legitimacy to continue military rule and his own regime. For India it draws away attention from BJP’s recent electoral debacles and the BJP/VHP condoned programs of Muslim in Gujarat.

But the World Cup 2002 in Korea and Japan reminds us of something else. In the 50s and well into the 60s India was ahead of South Korea by most indicators. But where South Korea has gone on to develop into an economic powerhouse and a nascent but progressive democracy, India has languished. The tensions with Pakistan will hurt the Indian economy far more than it will hurt Pakistan because India has so much more to lose. These games should be a time of reflection on the errors that has brought India where it is now.

It is indisputable that only a liberal-democratic order can take South Asian countries out of these formidable problems and crisis. But liberalism has its essential part in secularism. Any move in the direction of establishing a theocratic or a pseudo-secular order would open Pandora's box and then there would be no end to troubles for a political system. The bigots and the fanatics would have an upper hand and force the enlightened leaders of the country either to be out of political arena or to run the system in the reverse direction. Positive liberalism accommodates the principles of socialism as well. No doubt, socialism is the best way to establish social and economic justice in a country ridden with acute poverty and backwardness. But its implementation should be done in a sincere way. As the developments of many countries of the Third World show, socialism has become a useful instrument in the hands of unscrupulous politicians to catch votes of the innocent people and then to convert the state into their private fief. As such a new class of unscrupulous politicians, callous idlers and work shirkers, insensible bureaucrats, and the social and economic offenders are created. All norms of merit, efficiency and quality are placed aside in the name of doing justice to a particular section of the people that constitutes the 'vote bank' of these opportunists leaders.

The states of South Asian region may derive many tangible results for their benefit by implementing proper suggestions though with necessary alterations or modifications in view of the typical conditions of the country. It is heartening to note that with the establishment of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, these state have come closer in the sphere of international cooperation. But much remains to be achieved in this regard. These states should not be misled by this mischievous propaganda of the critics. Does India seek to play the role of 'Big Brother' in this region? By all means India is expected as well as bound to play such a role for regions so obvious to all. But the implications of this term should be understood in the spirit of the norms of oriental civilization and not at all in the light of hegemonism of any kind.

Nature of Democracy and Democratic Movements in Bangladesh

The people of Bengal constituted the main spirit in the democratic movements launched against the British rule from time to time. Their role as torchbearers, as fighters in combating situations and their bravery in meeting the contending colonial power is historically significant. Most of all their sacrifices for the cause of democracy constitute the memories – to respect, to uphold and to inspire the people of this land in their democratic struggles.⁹

There was an active movement for establishing democracy in Bangladesh since Pakistan period. General Mohammad Ayub Khan emerged as strong man after the first military coup d'etat and ruled Pakistan for more than a decade, but he destroyed whatever consensus had developed in the country during 1955-56. For about 4 years – from October 1958 to June 1962 – Ayub was aided by senior military and civilian bureaucrats who ruled Pakistan through martial law. The 'constitutional autocracy' that Ayub introduced through his self-promulgated constitution in the middle of 1962 did not change the power pyramid built up during the martial law period. Ayub continued to depend on senior civil and military bureaucrats. The national Assembly, under the Ayub Constitution, had no control over the executive, nor did it have any effective legislative or financial powers. Moreover, the members of the Assembly were not elected by universal adult franchise but were instead chosen by 'basic democrats' who were in turn elected members of Union Councils and Town and Union Committees.¹⁰ Thus, the main political representatives of the Ayub government did not represent the public opinion of the

⁹ Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, *Role of Opposition in Bangladesh Politics*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1998, p.37.

¹⁰ Local Government bodies.

country. Indeed, under the Ayub system there was no scope for East Pakistanis (present Bangladeshis) to participate in decisions at the highest-level of state authority.

Emergence of a Charisma

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the East Pakistan Awami League came forward to provide a powerfully assertive leadership when Bengalis of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were desperately groping for it. In early 1966, he boldly presented to his fellow Bengalis secessionist platform in the guise of his famous 'six-point' formula for the autonomy of East Pakistan.¹¹ From all perspectives – political, economic and psychological – Sheikh Mujib's six-point movement became the embodiment of the nationalist movement as well as the movement for liberation of East Pakistan's Bengalis. Thus a movement against autocracy, inequality, and regional disparity also became a movement of final separation of the country. Sheikh Mujib, the founder of the state was first made a martyr and was then resurrected to lead his people to their Promised Land of freedom and independence.

Given the political atmosphere in East Pakistan and given the prophet hood with which Sheikh Mujib was consecrated, it was no wonder that Mujib's Awami League (AL) won by a landslide in East Pakistan in December 1970 general elections, capturing 160 of 162 seats allocated to East Pakistan in the National Assembly. In West Pakistan, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto – who had campaigned on the plank of a strong central government. Pakistan nationalism and 'thousand years war with Indian' – won the majority of the seats (82 out of 138) allocated to West Pakistan. The polarization

of political and ideological cleavages in Pakistan on a regional line of East and West had now received democratic vindication.¹² Unfortunately systematic shifting of the regime was not done by the authority of ruling Pakistani leaders. It resulted a 9 months long war for liberation and Bangladesh became an independent state in 16th December 1971.

Parent Killed the Child

The Constitution of Bangladesh introduced Westminster variety of parliamentary democracy. Thus a dream was brought into reality and the aspirations of the people who struggled to achieve such a democratic system during the days of united Pakistan were adhered to. On the part of ruling Awami League, it was a fulfilment of its pledge for establishing a pure democratic order in the country. It was for this system that Awami League had been striving since its birth in 1949.

The organizational format therefore incorporated the trappings of the parliamentary system as practiced in Britain like cabinet government, leadership of the prime minister, collective responsibility to the parliament, ruling party's enjoyment of confidence of the majority in the parliament and the existence of organized opposition as alternative government. Although theoretically no stone was left unturned to retain the democratic characteristics of the governmental structure, different picture was visualized in practice.

The decline of the First *Jatiya Sangsad* (Parliament) was complete when the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution was brought before the House in the form of Constitution

¹¹ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *6-Point Formula: Our Right to Live* (Published by Tajuddin Ahmed, General Secretary, East Pakistan Awami League, March 23 1966).

¹² Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International 1980), pp 69-74.

(Fourth Amendment) Bill, 1975. This bill contained the following characteristics: switch over to presidential form from parliamentary system; introduction of single party rule (BKSAL¹³ system); an all powerful president; absence of independence of judiciary and suspension of the fundamental rights of the citizens. In those days of 1975, the principal external factor in determining what was to be the underling political and economic process in Bangladesh was the Soviet Union, which in the of pursuit of the Brezhnev Doctrine of Collective Security Pact in its contention with the United States, was acting autonomously and even independently of the Indo-Soviet axis. The axis had clearly won. The Moscow-roaders, most of whom have gone bourgeois after the fall of Kremlin, had a celebration to make.¹⁴ Through this amendment the democratic principles, which were highly valued by people and were incorporated in the 1972 Constitution were altered and replaced by a totalitarian semblance. But Sheikh Mujib termed this sudden change as the 'Second Revolution'.

Politics of Violence and Genocide

Since liberation and after the formalized autocratic rule, the actual threat, however, came from the left radical opposition parties for which the AL government was especially concerned and was greatly disturbed. These underground revolutionary parties posed a real challenge to the country's social and political order. Among such parties the more active were the *Purbo Bangla Sarbohara* Party led by Siraj Sikder (was shot dead by the

¹³ **Bangladesh Krishak Sromik Awami League.** Maniruzzaman stated, he learned from authoritative sources that the idea of a single-party system was sold by the embassy of the most powerful socialist country (Soviet Union).

Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Group Interests and Political Changes Studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh*, (New Delhi – Madras: South Asian Publishers, 1982), p-171.

¹⁴ Enayetullah Khan, "*But that I am forbid to tell.... of my prison-house*".

police under their custody during the said regime), the *Purbo Banglar* (Bangladesher) *Sammobadi Dal* (Marxist-Leninist) led by Mohammad Toaha, East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) led by Shukhendu Dastidar and *Purbo Bangla* Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) led by Abul Bashar and Deben Shikder. These parties had tactical and ideological differences. Nevertheless they had common opinion that the revolution of Bangladesh organized in 1971 was unfinished and incomplete.¹⁵

Of these parties, the *Sorbohara* Party became the special target of the regime due to its successful terrorist actions. This party strove to organize a movement of the people of this country against the following major menaces: Indian expansionism; Soviet social imperialism; collaborators of the imperialist powers; feudal lords; and the bourgeoisie.¹⁶

They started secret killing of the leaders belonging to the Awami League; they attacked the houses of the big farmers and looted their food grains in order to help the rural poor; and they targeted the agencies engaged in maintaining law and order in the countryside. Henceforth, local police stations and *Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini* (a special and politically motivated para-military force) came under regular attacks by the armed revolutionaries. In that difficult situation and state of emergency the military, police, *Rakkhi Bahini*, and *Mujibbadi* armed cadre killed innumerable opposition party workers including members

¹⁵ Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Group Interests and Political Changes Studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh*, New Delhi - Madras: South Asian Publishers, 1982), pp. 130-132.

¹⁶ Siraj Sikder. *Selected Works*, Vol. 1 (Dhaka: Cholontika Book House, 1980), pp. 5-17, M. Nurul Amin, "Bangladesher Sammobadi Andoloner Bibhinno Dhara", G. Hossain (ed), *Bangladesh Sarkar O Rajniti*, (Dhaka: Academic Publishers, 1992), pp.188-190.

of *Gano Bahini* of the JSD. They also murdered many suspected innocent people in an independent state.

The then US Foreign Secretary Henry Kissinger termed the country as a '*Bottomless Basket*'. A socio-economic anarchy was prevailing whole over the country, politically the country was almost bankrupt (**Appendix A**). The regime came to an end with the overthrow of AL government through a violent bloody coup by some alienated junior officers of the Bangladesh Army on 15th August 1975. *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujib was killed and the political order created by him was also renounced. Afterwards, political activities and parties were banned by the new regime for more than one year. Towards the end of the one-year period the army regime first permitted parlour politics and latter allowed activities of political parties within the framework of multi-party system.

Multi-Party System Under Masked Autocracy

Without any farther delay the military regime adopted a tough stand against *Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal* (JSD) and inflicted retributive measures. By late November 1975, the regime could reinstate order within the army ranks. Government atrocity against JSD resulted in arrest and imprisonment of JSD leaders along with a bulk of its workers and ultimate trial and execution of Colonel Taher and his associates in July 1976. As a protest against such coercion, JSD called a general *hartal* (strike) on 31 July but could not arouse the people's sentiment in its favor.

It is known that by the end of 1976, about sixty political groups applied for permission and duly submitted their constitutions and twenty one of them including the Awami

League were given government approval to operate as political parties under PPR (Political Parties Regulation). This at last created a situation for free play of party building and massive increase in the number of political parties in the country. It was noticed that more than a hundred political parties were operating at that time. There was a referendum under the regime, but the JSD stood up as the only opposition party to resist the referendum of General Ziaur Rahman. In the absence of the imprisoned leadership, JSD's young cadres in their political posters criticized the referendum as nothing but a 'political bluff' of the regime.¹⁷

Now we can think our democracy and its relevance for Pakistan. Recently (on 30th April, 2002) happened the same thing like Bangladesh, a one-horse referendum in Pakistan by military junta President Pervez Musharraf. Pakistan's political parties also applied to the military government for approval to contest national polls on October 10, 2002. Democracy remained a far cry due to, first, the evil designs of then ruling coterie consisting of civil-military bureaucracy, and second, by direct interventions by the military in country's political order. The fundamental difference would be that Bangladesh's transition to democracy from an authoritarian rule in 1991 took place due to the mass upsurge of 1990 and there was no scope for the army to negotiate and carve a role for itself in country's future politics. All throughout Pakistan's history (1971 to date) elections excepting two (1988 and 1993) have been rigged in favor of incumbency.

¹⁷ Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath*, (Dhaka: UPL, 1988), p-216.

In Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman's presidential system, which neither followed full-fledged American type nor the French pattern, established a typical parliament with its very existence depending on the pleasure of the President. Under this system, the appointment and the dismissal of the prime minister and the cabinet depended on the president's wish without making any provision for their responsibility to the elected *Jatiya Sangsad*. The opposition alleged that Zia's system was neither parliamentary nor presidential nor an amalgam of both, but rather an authoritarian one, in the Ayub style under the garb of presidential democracy.¹⁸

General Zia, as was observed, greatly succeeded in controlling the political affairs of Bangladesh according to political plans shrewdly prepared by him. It was very famous remark by Zia, once he told that *I will make the politics difficult for the politicians*. Although in the political sector he managed to fulfill his objectives to a large extent, crisis occurred within his own army organization several times in the form of abortive coups. Rise of rebellions and aspirants in the ranks of the armed force ultimately led to his brutal killing on May 30, 1981. Another chapter in the country's political history thus ended with the sudden demise of Zia.

Continuation of the Story with a Variation

As apprehended, army intervention in Bangladesh once again swayed the political courses of the country and, on 24 March 1982, under the leadership of General H. M. Ershad; the army formally captured state power. The inevitability of this action was

¹⁸ Kirsten Westergaard, *State and Rural Society in Bangladesh*, (New Delhi: Select Book Service Ltd., 1986), p.98.

defended on the grounds that the country's sovereignty and security were increasingly threatened by massive corruption, ailing economy, indiscipline in socio-political sectors, crisis of food, worsening of law and order situation and deadlock in administration.

Ershad's utterances for the institutionalization of the army's role in Bangladesh on the lines of Indonesia, Nigeria or Thai experience, were precisely analogous with that of late Pakistani military dictator General Zia-ul-Huq's attempts to ascribe central position to the army in the constitution as the ultimate custodian of Pakistan's integrity.¹⁹

With the granting of parlor politics, demands were increasingly raised by the major opposition parties to restore democratic politics in the country. Keeping their mutual opposition stands, the two political alliances came to an understanding by August 1983 to work together for projecting a resemblance of unity. Accordingly, they decided to launch the anti-Ershad movement together and formulated a common Five-point demand. These demands included: (a) withdrawing martial law immediately and permitting open political activities, (b) restoring fundamental rights, (c) freeing political prisoners, (d) holding parliamentary election before any other elections, and (e) punishing the individuals involved in the killing of students in mid-February, 1983.

On 10th November 1987, a young man wrote the slogan on his front and back: *Ganotantra mukti paak – Shoirachar nipat jaak*, which urged that not autocracy let democracy be the policy of our country. The police killed this young man, **Noor Hossain**. But he made the slogan as the main driving force of the anti-Ershad movement. After a

¹⁹ Veena Kukreja, *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), p-170.

prolonged movement against Ershad regime a Joint Declaration highlighted the process of democratic transition on November 19, 1990. The main features of the Joint Declaration including the following: the three political alliances would boycott and resist all elections sponsored by the illegitimate Ershad government: these alliances would participate in the elections only when conducted by a neutral non-partisan government; Ershad regime would be forced to resign and an interim caretaker government would be formed, Election Commission would be reconstituted by the caretaker government to hold free and fair elections and reestablish the electorate's voting rights ; the media would have to be free ; the newly elected parliament composed of people's representatives would be sovereign; and the fundamental rights of all citizens , rule of law and judicial impartiality would be ensured . This Joint Declaration added an unprecedented strength to opposition's anti-autocracy movement.

On December 6, 1990 the Parliament was dissolved and Ershad handed over power to a nominee of the combined opposition alliance, the Chief justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. The anti-autocracy movement and the mass upsurge, thus, finally succeeded in removing the praetorian autocratic regime from power. This victory of the opposition and the people paved the way for restoring democratic political order in Bangladesh.

Victory and Misfortune of the Nation

It was very unfortunate that within three years of the working of parliamentary system the national legislature turned into a non functioning and insignificant body due to lack of

consensus of the competing parties in observing parliamentary norms and, more importantly, continuous Sangsad boycott of the major opposition parties. This made the democratic transition process in Bangladesh highly difficult.

In the face of opposition's sustained boycott of the Parliament and the increasing demand for constitutional amendment to hold future national elections under a neutral caretaker government, the ruling party moved a bill to amend the People's Representative Order 1972 which aimed at strengthening the electoral process and the Election Commission. But such a concession from the government did not satisfy the opposition at all.

Alas Ninian! Where did You Come?

As a part of this process, both the government and the opposition accepted Commonwealth Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyoaku's offer of a formal dialogue. Subsequently, the former Governor General of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephen came to Bangladesh in October 1994 as the facilitator of the Commonwealth-brokered dialogue between the Treasury Bench and the parliamentary opposition on the question of caretaker government

Several rounds of dialogue proved a futile exercise as both sides kept their uncompromising attitude. Being unable to convince both sides to agree to a compromise formula, Sir Ninian formally gave up his mission. Side by side, the efforts of the foreign diplomats at Dhaka led by the US ambassador to bring the two sides to a common table also proved to be futile exercise.

Farce of an Election and People's Stage

The mainstream opposition thus resigned *en masse* on 28 December 1994 keeping their parliament boycott for 300 days and creating an unprecedented example in the world's parliamentary history. The people's hard-earned democracy became casualty in the midst of extreme stubborn politics, which was being played both by the Treasury and the opposition.

After the crisis there were polls on 15th February 1996. But the 15 February polls faced tremendous resistance from the combined opposition as they vigorously campaigned against the election and observed general strike before the day of the election and imposed people's curfew on the day of the polls.²⁰ In the midst of such hopeless situation the 15 February elections were held with tight security all over the country. The credibility of the polls was greatly reduced because of only 5-10 per cent voter turnouts,²¹ alleged widespread vote rigging by BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) workers, and other gross irregularities. The opposition therefore accused that any election under BNP could not be free or fair. As obvious, they denounced the 6th Legislature, which had been the product of a controversial, disputable election.

In retaliation, the opposition organized a massive showdown on streets. As part of the ongoing movement, the major opposition, Awami League, set up people's stage called the '*Janatar Mancha*' in the capital and other major cities. From this platform the AL forcefully propagated opposition cause through speeches and cultural programs, which

²⁰ Abdul Mannan, '*The February 1996 Parliamentary Election: A Quest for Constitutional Democracy*', *Asian Studies*, No. 15, 1996. pp. 67-83.

attracted huge audiences. Since February 15 election there was eventual precipitation of the political impasse and gradually the overall situation went out of the ruling party's control. The condition aggravated further in late March as quite a number of senior members of the civil bureaucracy in their demand for a caretaker government, started abstaining from their official functions and a handful of them expressed solidarity with the opposition.²² Under such deteriorating circumstances and massive opposition pressure, the head of BNP government, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia decided to quit which led to the dissolution of the 6th Parliament on March 30, 1996. With the unavoidable yielding to opposition demands and the dramatic exit from state power by BNP and subsequent formation of a caretaker government led by former Chief Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman, the two-year long opposition movement and political deadlock came to an end.

Caretaker Systems in the History

During the interim gap, other instances of establishing 'national government', 'interim government', or 'all party government' are found in established democracies to handle special condition or emergency situations. Carl J. Friedrich noted that Winston Churchill was called upon in 1940 to form a national coalition to manage an unprecedented emergency, which occurred as a result of the collapse of France and the danger of

²¹ The *Daily Star*, Mahfuz Anam (ed), 12 March 1996

²² The main propagator of the 'Janatar Mancha' and the former Member of Bangladesh Planning Commission Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir was imprisoned and lived under a painful police remand. He became Prime Minister's Secretary, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism & the State Minister for Planning during the previous government (after the fall of 'illegitimate' BNP government). Finally he is defeated in the gambling of politics. In view of the present government, he is just a secessionist.

imminent invasion that necessitated the reconstruction of a cabinet on a national basis.²³ In 1945, on the eve of the general elections, Churchill again led an all-party government, which was considered by scholars, like Sir Ivor Jennings, as ‘caretaker government’. In order to hold a fair election Churchill was given the charge of establishing a ‘caretaker government’ consisting of ‘Conservatives, National Liberals and a few non-party or National ministers who were prepared to continue in service’.²⁴ Similar examples are also not uncommon in the countries of the developing world. A neutral ‘caretaker government’ conducted general election of 1993 in Pakistan. There was the formation of some sort of ‘caretaker’ administration in South Africa during the 1994 elections. Elections organized by ‘caretaker government’ under the auspices of the United Nations were observed in Namibia in 1993 and in both Mozambique and Haiti in 1995.²⁵

In Bangladesh, it was known that the fundamentalist Jamat-i-Islami and leftist groups first raised the ‘caretaker’ demand in 1983 but it did not enlist any support during that time from the major parties including AL and BNP. Eventually ‘caretaker government’ became a common demand of the combined opposition in 1990 and it was formalized by the amendment of constitution in 1996.

²³ Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy*, (Kolkata: Oxford and IBH Pub. Co. 1996), p.385

²⁴ Mizanur Rahman Khan, *Sangbidhan O Tatabadhyak Sarkar Bitarka*, (Dhaka: City Prakashani, 1995). P-158

²⁵ Weekly *Bichitra*, Shahadat Chowdhury (ed.), April 12, 1996.

Demagogy After Twenty-One Year Exile

Under the formalized caretaker government AL came into power after 21 years. With 116 seats in the Jatiya Sangsad, BNP emerged as the second largest parliamentary party and became the official opposition. It was the first time in the country's parliamentary history that the House had such a numerically strong opposition. Earlier BNP chairperson and opposition leader in the *Sangsad*, Begum Khaleda Zia, rejected the government party's offer to join Sheikh Hasina's 'government of national consensus'. While rejecting such an offer, Begum Zia termed it as an evil design of Awami League with a view to reviving the ill-famed single party BKSAL rule as introduced in 1975. She thus opined that there was no scope of any system like 'government of national consensus' in Bangladesh Constitution and it was not at all consistent with the conception of multi-party democracy. Fundamentalist Jamat-i-Islami also did not support the concept of 'consensus government'²⁶

Sometimes MPs of both the benches were seen to behave in an indecent manner and failing to keep parliamentary norms. The leader of the house went to the extent of calling the opposition '*fertilizer thieves*' and the opposition leader could not stop herself calling the government MPs '*beadabs*' meaning disrespectful. It was thus noticed that the legislature's valuable time could not be meaningfully used due to unscheduled noisy debates between the government and the opposition, which forced the Speaker to suspend the business several times.

²⁶ Weekly *Dhaka Courier*, Enayetullah Khan (ed.) July 5, 1996.

*Repeated walkouts and abstentions of BNP from the very first session of the 7th Legislature and intolerant attitude of the ruling party confirmed that the major opposition had no alternative but to divert its anti-government role to the streets. In order to press for its demands, BNP followed the footsteps of the previous oppositions and adopted the strategy of waging agitational movements against the ruling party. It capitalized its anti-Indian stance and highly criticized the government for signing allegedly lopsided Ganges water sharing accord with India on 12 December 1996 and the Peace Treaty of Chittagong Hill Tracts. BNP's other anti-government actions which followed included, among others, demanding the formation of a parliamentary committee to investigate the **scandal at the share market** and announcing a long action program to protest Awami League's politicization of the administration and absence of constitutional rule in the country.*

The Year of Silent Ballot Revolution

2001 was the year of rule by the three governments – AL, Caretaker and BNP. After the formalization of caretaker system the last interim government played an active and vital role under the leadership of President (Justice) Shahabuddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser Justice Latifur Rahman and the Chief Election Commissioner M.A. Sayed. People called the year as the year of 'silent ballot revolution'. Here general people were the heroes, not the leaders.²⁷ In the October 01 polls, the voters consciously rejected AL and voted in the four-party alliance, an alliance that is pro-right fundamentalist/moderate Islamic leanings. During the election campaign, AL used the pro-Liberation War and anti Jamat trump card to the hilt, but it did not pay off. The people had decided in favor of a change and stuck to

their guns. But after the defeat Awami League blamed that the election was not fair and the Caretaker government was biased to the candidates of the four party alliance. AL and its allies convinced that their defeat has been part of a national and an international conspiracy. Afterwards they published a study report regarding election conducted under the Caretaker government (**Appendix B**) and observed this year's 1st October as a 'Black Day'.

As it appears now, the parliamentary elections held under the caretaker governments in 1996 and 2001 have had its positive and negative consequences. The positive consequence of it is that it has accomplished a great task of bringing back public confidence in the neutrality of the electoral process. The probable negative consequence is that it might provide a basis for movements and political deadlocks in future, which should also be taken into consideration.

Bangladesh Democracy: A Sisyphus Myth

Under the present BNP government of four-party alliance,²⁸ is democracy fully established and secured in Bangladesh? *The opposition party AL, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, was again showing their non-cooperation to the government party.* They have stayed off parliament proceedings for a long time and did not take part in any election conducted by the present ruling party. Following the passage of the repeal bill on display and preservation of Sheikh Mujib's portrait in public offices, the AL had decided in principle to resign from the parliament. But most AL lawmakers while submitting their resignation letters from the parliament to the party chief viewed that the party should

²⁷ Weekly *Jai Jai Din*, Shafique Rehman (ed.), 01 January 2002.

²⁸ Four party alliances consisted of BNP, Jamat-i-Islami, Jatiya Party (N-F) and the Islamic Unity Front.

reconsider the decision. In this situation government party published a white paper to reflect all corruptions and irregularities of the previous government. At the last, within 90 consecutive working days of their abstention, the opposition decided to join the parliament. But after joining they were frequently walking out from the parliament sessions. By this time Prime Minister desired the ban of student politics, other political parties were protesting against the declaration.

Simultaneously, the President resigned from his post (**Appendix C**). Opposition political parties denounced the government party move compelling President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury to quit office, saying it is ‘unconstitutional’, a ‘dishonor’ to the highest office of the country and a ‘bad precedent’ for the democracy. In this connection, Chief of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) Manjurul Ahsan Khan said this move has not only harmed the dignity of the office of president, but also tarnished the image of the country. It might even lead the country to ‘parliamentary autocracy’. Later on Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed was appointed as the president of the country.

Actually it does not matter which form of government should lead the country. Capability, sincerity and intention are the main things. This is the time to look into the famous verses of the following:

For form of government let fools contest

That which is best, administered is the best.

In this situation, one can think that democracy in Bangladesh has appeared as the Sisyphus Myth. In the Greek mythology the Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain whence the stone would fall back of its own weight.

Roles Played by Different Actors in Democratic Movements

By the middle of 1990 the opposition forces finally realized that without a combined effort, the regime would not fall. In short, despite their conflicts and contradictions, there was a consolidation of the objectives among the opposition and other forces. At that stage, the actors of different sectors played their roles as per their ability and situation aroused. These roles are as follows:

1. **The External Forces:** Ershad's premature announcement that he was going to stand in the presidential election closed the door on any negotiations with the opposition on the question of power sharing or other political and constitutional issues. The donor agencies and their representatives in Bangladesh also reacted to this announcement with some hostility. They did not want to deal with Ershad, who already had too much power, for another five or six years. His decision that not only every contract, but also the appointment of every foreign consultant would require his prior approval angered the donor representatives. They started to criticize Ershad openly as this not only delayed the decision-making process, but also was seen by them as a further inroad of corruption emanating from the highest office of the country.
2. **The Bureaucrats:** As a postcolonial state, Bangladesh has inherited two developed institutional groups – the civil bureaucracy and the military bureaucracy. As Hamza Alavi has mentioned, compared to the political parties,

these two institutions are 'over-developed'.²⁹ During the British rule in the Indo-Pak sub-continent, bureaucracy played a key role in the administration.

After independence, the basic premise of the government with regard to the bureaucratic elites was embodied in the First Five-Year Plan. The Planning Commission wrote: "They (the bureaucrats) can therefore, be neither innovator nor catalytic agents for a social change. It is only a political cadre with firm roots in the people and motivated by the new ideology and willing to live and work among the people as one of them can mobilize the masses and transform their pattern of behavior".

Actually the civil bureaucrats in Bangladesh did not bring any revolt against any of the autocratic regimes as they were the selfish community of the country. Ershad gave them monetary incentives, such as Higher Pay Scale, increased Festival Bonus, and Time Scale of salary etc., several times. Only in the climax of the movement, at the beginning of December 1990, they were thinking to resign collectively. But it did not come into reality. By the end of the movement they came down to the streets with the people.

Ershad's decision to continue in office through another election, in which no major political party would take part, also received an adverse reaction from a large section of military officers who wanted to protect the image of the army in the face of growing dissatisfaction amongst the people.

²⁹ Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh", in Kathleen Gough and P. Sharma (eds) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973. pp. 145-147.

3. **The Professional Groups:** The various professional groups already working to unite the major alliances emerged with a stronger voice on the national scene. The Citizen's Committee, the Open Forum, the conglomerate of a large number of cultural organizations called Combined Cultural Jote, the Bangladesh Medical Association, the Supreme Court Bar Association, the University Teacher's Association and many other professional groups were more organized and more vocal for a united movement to overthrow the government. All of them were actively participated in the movement against autocracy.

4. **The Student Community:** The student's elections, including that of the DUCSU,³⁰ were swept by the BNP-sponsored students forces throughout the country. Since the BNP had already adopted an uncompromising attitude towards Ershad, the student moved forward to organize themselves to spearhead a new movement. With the active support and encouragement of the professional groups, the student wing of the major political parties under the leadership of DUCSU, formed an All Party Students Unity, the first of its kind for many years. They were the 24 hours soldiers to the streets and demonstrated continuously. Like in 1952, then again in 1969 through 1971, the students again moved out from campus to the streets mobilizing against the tyranny of the autocrat in 1990.

5. **The Own People:** When the Constitution (Ninth Amendment) Bill was passed, Ershad made it clear both at home and abroad that he would not run for election again. While initiating the law which restricted the tenure of the President to two

terms, and creating the office of the Vice President who was to be elected directly by the people along the American lines, the impression he had given to the people including the Members of Parliament of his own party were invalidated by his sudden unilateral announcement to stand in the election.

Despite their differences, therefore, there was now genuine pressure on the major alliances, and particularly on the two leaders, to start a united movement against the regime. Consequently, they moved towards one single demand – the holding of a free and fair election under a neutral, caretaker government. In other word, both Khaleda and Hasina now agreed that they would not take part in any election under the hypocrite and that he must go. The political leaders overcame their differences, whatever; which lent further momentum to the movement. His back against the wall, the autocrat intensified attack on the agitators, but ultimately the people's power won, ushering in democracy.

³⁰ Dhaka University Central Students Union. People call the body as the Second Cabinet of the country.

The Referendums: Other Democratic Practices in the Country

After the unanimous adoption of the constitution amendment bill by the parliament, it was referred to a nationwide referendum as per Article 124 (1A) of the constitution. To give effect to the Article *Jatiya Sangsad* on August 7 unanimously passed the Referendum Bill, 1991. The referendum was the first of its kind since independence. In 1977 (by Zia) and 1985 (by Ershad) the people participated in referendums organized by the military rulers who came to power through usurpation. Those two referendums were extra-constitutional devices to lift the military regimes from the depth of legitimacy crisis. The referendums were viewed by the military rulers as elementary steps towards the ‘civilianisation’ of their military rule. So the purpose of the referendums in 1977 and 1985 was not to meet any constitutional requirement *per se*. But the referendum on September 15 (1991) was needed to fulfil a constitutional necessity.³¹

For a comprehensible reason the referendum could not generate mass enthusiasm. The issue of the referendum – should the President give his assent to the constitution (Twelfth Amendment) Bill, 1991 – was too complicated and too technical for the average voters of the country. Only a microscopic section of the population knew clearly what the 12th amendment was all about. The government-sponsored mass media chalked out elaborate programs to motivate the voters to participate in the referendum. Almost all political

³¹ Muhammad A. Hakim, *Bangladesh Politics: The Shahabuddin Interregnum*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1993, pp.80-81.

parties organized public meetings at different parts of the country to mobilize public support in favor of reversion to parliamentary system.³²

As anticipated, the turnout of voters in the referendum was very low. It was 20.16% lower than that in the parliamentary elections held only six months earlier. The turnout in the referendum was 35.19%. Low voter turnout in the referendum could be attributed to several factors. First, the constitutional issue involved in the referendum was far beyond the comprehension of a big majority of the population. Second, there was no personal initiative of the local influentials to motivate the voters to participate in the referendum. Third, many voters did not consider the referendum vital to their interest. Finally, flood in some parts of the country, especially in the northern districts, lessened the voters' response to the referendum. An overwhelming 84.38% of those who voted, favored the referendum.³³

The 12th amendment of the constitution was precisely aimed at covering a rubber-stamp parliament into a sovereign one. But experience with many developing countries, including Bangladesh, shows that even in a parliamentary system an ostensibly sovereign parliament may in practice be subservient to the personal whims of a despot. The parliamentary system in Bangladesh in the first three years of its independence was little more than a personal rule of Mujib. The AL and parliament were reduced into his personal institutions. It can, therefore, be argued that a mere change in the form of government can contribute very little to usher in an era of parliamentary supremacy.

³² The only party that campaigned for negative vote in the referendum was the Freedom Party, formed and chaired by Colonel (Rtd.) Sayed Farook Rahman who was later accused as one of the main killers of Sheikh Mujib and got death sentence during the AL regime, but they appalled to the Supreme Court.

Democracy, Autocracy and Development

It is fact that the Presidents of Third World countries like Bangladesh exercised unlimited power. Because at that time in Bangladesh the parliament was a ‘Rubber Stamp Parliament’. That’s why the presidents of Bangladesh were stronger than the president of USA. US president is always accountable to the Congress. Suppose, the Democrats in the US Congress were demanding an investigation into whether intelligence warnings prior to September’s (2001) suicide attacks by *Al-Qaida* were properly handled as Republicans accused them of playing politics.

“We need an inquiry, we need to know what information was given to the White House and what they did with it”, House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt said. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle urged President George W. Bush to turn over by stipulated time all intelligence information to a congressional investigation that might have warned of the September 11 attacks that killed around 3,000. But in our country in the presidential form of government presidents were never questionable which made them dictators and thus opened the door for development in their own ways.

The relationship between dictatorship and authoritarianism should be clarified. Dictatorship is treated as a sub-concept of authoritarianism. All dictatorship has traits of authoritarianism, yet all authoritarian rules are not necessarily dictatorial ones. The concept of dictatorship is classified into six categories, namely, (1) patrimonial dictatorship, (2) religious dictatorship, (3) predatory dictatorship, (4) military dictatorship,

³³ *The Bangladesh Observer*, September 19, 1991(K.M.A. Munim (ed.) and *Daily Sangbad*, September 19, 1991, Ahmadul Kabir (ed.).

(5) ideological dictatorship, and (6) development dictatorship.³⁴ Dictatorships in all regimes of Bangladesh simultaneously occupied 50% of the categories: military, developmental and the predatory (the last one) dictatorship.

When Ershad seized power, the economy was not in good shape: the growth rate of the GDP was down to 1.4% and savings and investment rates had fallen sharply. Since Zia's death, politics had displaced the priorities of the economic sector and the nation went through a frantic period of uncertainties. Where Zia hesitated and largely failed, Ershad was to succeed. This was in developing and implementing the policy framework for a vigorous privatization program and for the denationalization of industries that were expropriated by the ill-conceived socialist policies of the Awami League. The economic growth pattern was reversed and with this came a radical shift and a new direction was set for the entire macro-policy of the nation.

Ershad liberalized the economic laws of the land. The government's control and restrictions on the economy were withdrawn and deregulation was the main theme of the economic policy. In both the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, policies were adopted for the market to play a more dominant role. Other than a few restricted sectors, the rest of the economy was entirely open to investment. The ceiling on investment was totally withdrawn, not only the nationals but also for foreign investors. For increased and healthy competition, imports were liberalized under the Trade and Import Policy Scheme, rationalizing the duty structure and tariff regulations. Duties on imports of basic raw

³⁴ Hee Chae Chung, 1995, "From Development Dictatorship to Civilian Democracy: The South Korean Case" p. 155 in Eui Hang Shin and Yun Kim, eds, *Korea and the World: Strategies for Globalization*. Columbia, SC: Center for Asian Studies at the University of South Carolina.

materials were drastically reduced to encourage the growth of industries. Banks were now encouraged to make long-term investment in industries. The public corporations and enterprises were granted freedom to run their own affairs on a commercial and competitive basis and bureaucratic control was reduced.

Although food production remained almost static for several years, primarily due to recurrent floods in 1987(worst in forty years) and 1988, and other natural calamities, increased efforts were made to encourage farmer to produce more. One of the ways of achieving this was by formulating new policies concerning distribution of inputs based on the market mechanism. As far as the sale and marketing of food grain was concerned, due to the government's intervention at different levels because of the need to supply food grain through various ration systems (OMS, MR, VGD, VR and so on), the market could not work freely in Bangladesh. Despite his general macro-economic emphasis on the market economy, nothing much could be achieved in this area for social and political reasons.³⁵ A huge quantum of national resources was diverted as food subsidy every year through the budget, despite ever increasing food production.

During his tenure in office Ershad earned the reputation of being a builder, a reformer and a good administrator by constructing amongst many important and necessary buildings, more than 10,000 kilometers of metal roads as well as over 500 bridges. He committed the nation to the construction of the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge at the cost of other development projects and succeeded in convincing the donors of its priority for

economic integration. The generation of electricity rose from 650 MW to 2,250 MW during his regime and transformed many rural areas into vibrant small townships. Load shedding by the electricity authority, which had plagued industries and schools in the past, were reduced. At a later stage, he also had a law passed by the parliament making Bengali the compulsory language for the administration of the country – a major step which politicians and regimes in the past had failed to adopt.

Of all the programs for modernization and reforms that he introduced, the most significant were:

- a) The decentralization of the civil administration, aimed at accelerating economic development and particularly rural development activities.
- b) The decentralization of the administration of justice, aimed at dispensing justice in a quicker and cheaper manner for the benefit of the vast majority of the people in rural areas.
- c) A radical policy to ensure the production and supply of essential medicines within the country and to ban those deemed unnecessary or harmful for consumption. The policy aimed at making prescribed medicines most cheaply and easily available to the people.
- d) A policy for an effective land tenure system, aimed at guaranteeing certain rights to the tillers of the land in order to boost production in the agricultural sector (the

³⁵ It is true that without a well functioning legislative state, the **'invisible hand'** indicated by Adam Smith has no space to operate. The price functions only work under the assumption that there is no government intervention.

experience of distributing land amongst the landless has proved to be frustrating to all the past regimes).

The new administrative unit to be known as the *Upazila* (sub-district or sub-prefecture) was to be the central base of rural development and poverty alleviation. It was to be managed by the elected representative of the people. A total change in the perception of local government and administration was introduced in line with the commitment made in the Constitution. This new unit was to be headed and run by a Chairman, to be directly elected by the people under universal adult franchise. Ershad also transformed the sub-divisions onto Districts to improve the quality of project development work and civil administration for the welfare of the people.

A frequently asked question is whether or not an authoritarian government is justifiable or even essential to end the economic stalemate that prevails in less-developed countries. It is difficult to answer this question because authoritarianism varies so greatly in style and quality from case to case. The modern age abounds with examples of authoritarian regimes that produced utter failure in economic development, bringing economic misery on their people. On the other hand, there is a different style of authoritarianism, termed by Professor Scalapino 'authoritarian pluralism', in which control is mainly centered on the political sphere, allowing wide freedom in the other spheres of life and, more importantly, in which the free enterprise market system is highly respected. The experience of South Korea and Taiwan provide good examples of this model. In the case of Singapore, the style of leadership of Lee Kuan-Yew was considered by many to be

authoritarian. Yet he was able to complete more than 31 years of one-man rule without facing any notable challenge from the people to his political legitimacy, having led his small city-state to the highest level of economic well being among the 4 Asian 'dragons'.³⁶

General Park Chung-hee of Korea was different from many leaders of the newly independent states emerging from the colonial chrysalis. He exploited 2 important traditions: the old dirigiste concepts of the Confucian state, in which the leader is the father and knows what is best for the people, his children; and a powerful military command system. He centralized virtually all institutions and organizations and by nationalizing the banks created a monopoly on all institutional credit in the society. He rigidly controlled labor and its unions. He unified economic planning and budgeting in an Economic Planning Board under a deputy Prime Minister. He eliminated elected local government, placing military officers in key provincial positions and ensuring that local administration was intimately associated with the centrally controlled police. He instituted a far-reaching, often autonomous, and ubiquitous intelligence system. He owed no economic or political debts and could plug the loopholes and destroy the favoritism by which earlier regimes had allowed money to be made in the private sector through means other than production. He could, in essence, start afresh. The result was what has sometimes been called a 'bureaucratic authoritarian' state. Perhaps no other noncommunist society has experienced such pervasive economic control, reaching down

³⁶ Nam Duck Woo, 1994. "Korea's Economic Takeoff in Retrospect". P.15 in Seung Kwack, ed. *The Korean Economy at a Crossroad*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

even into the village.³⁷ For South Korea scholars evaluated the process as the *development dictatorship* was a thesis, industrialization was an anti-thesis, and these were combined in synthesis, that is, of democracy.³⁸

Internal and external politics and political will were important factors in Korean growth, and Park supplemented them with his personal attention to economic affairs. He met monthly with key industrialists and his economic team, and he resolved issues personally. He rewarded good economic performers with additional, often subsidized, credit, prizes, and public recognition but denied such largesse to nonperformers or those who did not play the economic game according to the government's rules. Forced onto the curb (informal) credit market with interest rates three or four times those provided by the state, they could not compete. Later, in the early 1970s, when Park founded the *Saemaul* ('New Village' or 'New Community') movement, to which he was particularly attached because of his rural background, he gave it the same personal attention.

³⁷ Steinberg, David. 1993. "The transformation of the South Korean Economy". Pp.34-37 in Donald N. Clark, ed. *Korea Briefing 1993*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

³⁸ Hee Chae Chung, 1995, "*From Development Dictatorship to Civilian Democracy: The South Korean Case*" p. 161 in Eui Hang Shin and Yun Kim, eds, *Korea and the World: Strategies for Globalization*. Columbia, SC: Center for Asian Studies at the University of South Carolina.

The Role of Pressure Groups in the Process of Democracy

Apart from the political parties, the representative system in the modern state is closely connected with the pressure groups, which are often called “interest groups”. Both the political party and pressure groups are, strictly speaking, associations. We are here to deal with the pressure groups that supplement the formal institutions of democracy in mediating between individuals and the State. While the political parties are more or less organized, groups of citizens who act together as political units, have distinctive aims and opinions on the leading political questions of controversy in the state, and who by mobilizing the party workers and the electorate seek to obtain the control of the government, the pressure groups, on the other hand, are not interested in winning elections or controlling governmental affairs directly, rather they tend to emphasize particular areas of interest of their own. They are specialists rather than generalists in the organization of opinion; and are oriented toward affecting policy, especially on the issues that touch them closely.³⁹

The organizations with which we now deal with fall under the category of pressure groups. They are primarily concerned with the economic well-being of their community. For instance, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Dhaka), The Bangladesh Medical Association and Trade Unions are a few of the many important pressure groups in Bangladesh who, considering the needs and desires of their members and advancing specific interests, exert considerable influence upon the government. Their

³⁹ Henry W. Ehrmann, *Interest Groups in Four Continents*, Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1958; and J. R. Pennock, D. G. Smith, *Political Science: An Introduction*, London: Collin-Macmillan Ltd., 1964, pp. 361-362.

activities are to be a large extent political in nature, but they perform, primarily the function of 'interest articulation'.⁴⁰

We are dealing only with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka, which is the largest, and the most important of the pressure groups in Bangladesh because of its strong economic backbone. It maintains the most effective channel of communication between the state's business community and the government. It is the only pressure group in the country, which is most intimately associated with the government.⁴¹ Some functions of the government are delegated to it: for example, in taxation, import/export policy, industrialization, tariff, customs etc., the chamber has played a crucial role in framing the annual budget of the country.

The Chamber primarily dedicated and devoted its resources for (a) promoting freedom in the trade and industry, and (b) projecting socially responsible business bias. With this end in view, the chamber has been struggling, since its existence, for the principle that the Governmental/State interference and controls in the sphere of business and industry must not be more than minimum required to achieve clearly identifiable social goals. It asserted that freedom in business, like freedom in religious and cultural affairs, is a necessary condition for turning one's talents into positive imputes for economic growth. It further maintained that business should contribute, as an element in the society, to

⁴⁰ Nazrul Islam (in J.C. Johari edited *Governments and Politics of South Asia*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1991), p-417.

⁴¹ Ex FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintu desired to have the nomination for the post of Mayor in the 2002 election of Dhaka City Corporation from the ruling party, but ultimately the Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Mr. Sadeque Hossain Khoka who is also a Member of Parliament, got the nomination. He played triple legal roles at a time in the politics of Bangladesh.

constructive social policies of the country. It is observed that the Chamber has made commendable contributions to and participated in the national affair from time to time.

To sum up, the Chamber's prime objectives are as follows:

- i) To protect and promote the interests of trade and industry in general and that of its member-firms in particular;
- ii) To act as a channel of communications between the country's business community and the Government; and
- iii) To bring business expertise to bear on the solution of the country's economic problems.

The Chamber's services to the development of trade and industry in the country were unique. It has rendering expert services to the government in specialized areas like taxation, import policy, trade practices, tariff and customs. The Chamber renders to the Government similar services regularly through its bodies like Advisory Council to the Ministry of Commerce, Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Industries, National Consultative Committee on Power, Import Advisory Committee, Transport Consultative Committee, High-powered Sub-committee under the Ministry of Industry, Inter-Ministerial Committee on Labor, Railway Board, Port Trust, Labor Advisory Board etc. In the international market as well, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been accepted as the only institution in Bangladesh eligible and entitled to arbitrate on commercial disputes. The chambers' arbitration over the period of last 50 years has been impartial that it has won tremendous confidence of the overseas clients. Thus the chamber has earned, over the years, a formidable position at home and abroad.

Sustained growth of industry, which is the prime need for economic development of Bangladesh, however, need more than the overhaul of the incentives and administrative formalities. It involves concerted and continuous efforts to gear up linkages of industry with agriculture, secure external and domestic markets, maintain a congenial and favorable investment climate and create increasing confidence among the investors. Being the pioneer in the commercial and industrial organizations of the country, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the main effective forum at national level, which extends the necessary support and assistance to the government in attaining the objective of a rapid growth of industrialization through private sector operations.

But now some influential leaders of the Chamber have negative images because of the bad loans from the government banks, they are chronic defaulters and are not repaying the money. On the other hand, the black money holders are giving huge donation to the political parties in order to get the nomination for elections and for their survival. FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry) President Yussuf Abdullah Harun said black money dominates the country's 50% economy, depriving the government of huge amount of revenue. Harun said a new wealthy class has emerged by using the black money over last few years, who are dominating markets, making business difficult for genuine businessmen.

According to him 25% of foreign goods come through smuggling and the amount would be around 15,000 crore (equivalent to 150,000 million) taka annually. "If this

criminalisation continues, it would be very difficult for genuine businessmen or industrialists to survive in the competitive markets as the cost of business is very high in our country”, Harun said. Regarding the black money, the FBCCI chief said only businessmen do not own this money the government officials also hold a large share of it.⁴² Actually in return of their contribution to the society, they try to influence the political circle of the country, as well as the decision making process of the government.

⁴² *The Daily Jugantor*, Golam Sarwar (ed.) and *Daily Star*, Mahfuz Anam (ed.), 21 May 2002.

Crisis of Democracy in Bangladesh

It is very hopeful that AUNG Sun Suu Kyi has finally been released after 19 months as house-arrested prisoner but over a decade in one sort of internment or other in Myanmar. Her release is a triumph of the human spirit and people's will. A free wind is flowing over one of the neighboring countries of Bangladesh. But the situations of other third world countries are remaining the same. The crisis of democracy that prevails in Bangladesh can be said to reflect the crisis of democracy in the 3rd World as a whole.

When we talk about society, do we mean the 90% of the people who are deprived of the fruits of democracy and politics, except the right to vote when the occasion arises? Or do we mean the 10% who are privileged and enjoy the benefits of democracy and human rights, the small section who can afford to talk and demand democracy, go to the law courts to assert their rights and generally live off the rest of the society? Does the crisis of democracy lie in the culture of the entire society arising out of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and economic deprivation? Why should the leaders, who have the opportunity, to practice democracy, fail to institutionalize its norms, values and principles? Does the blame rest with the opposition, the media, the judiciary or intolerance on the part of those who govern?

It would be both difficult and unwise to attempt to identify any one cause for the crisis of democracy in Bangladesh, nor would it be correct to blame it on the politicians. It is in this light that the issues relating to the crisis need to be addressed. The most redeeming and encouraging feature is that as a sovereign state the nation is now able to take

responsibility for the crisis itself. Its success and its failure will depend upon the people themselves. Having sacrificed so much to earn their freedom and independence, the people have the right to expect a democratic order in the country.⁴³

Since liberation Sheikh Mujib emerged through a democratic movement and claimed to be a liberal democrat, it was he who coerced the Parliament to switch over to a completely undemocratic system.⁴⁴ Just two years after the enactment of the Constitution, in a hurriedly introduced Bill known as the Fourth Amendment, the structure and character of the fundamental law of the land was changed and the country became a one-party monolithic state. All political parties were dissolved, including his own twenty-five year old Awami League. The only national party allowed to exist – with Mujib as Chairman was BKSAL. All newspapers were banned except four, which were retained and controlled by the state; all fundamental rights were suspended and made non-enforceable. The judiciary, stripped of its independent status, was reduced to a subservient agency of the executive branch of the state. The dreams, hopes and aspirations nurtured through the long and bloody struggle withered away; killed by legislation enacted by the Parliament in less than half an hour. Those who had so proudly promise to establish democracy not only failed to sustain it but also destroyed it with their own hand.

The change in the Constitution introduced by Mujib gave rise to authoritarianism in the country and although the struggle for democracy continued, autocracy became

⁴³ Moudud Ahmed, *Democracy and the Challenge of Development*, (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1995), P. 365.

institutionalized by the changes in the Constitution. Successive military rulers simply took advantage of the provisions in the amended Constitution to maintain a one-man autocratic rule in the country. Although Zia democratized the Constitution by re-incorporating fundamental rights, freedom of political parties, the press and the independence of the judiciary, the power and function of the chief executive of the country remained in the hands of the president. While the legislative powers of the Parliament were restored, it had no power whatsoever over the President or the executive branch. Thus any person becoming the President would generally behave as an autocrat because of the unlimited power attached to the office without any accountability. The crisis of democracy created by Mujib further deepened when the nation had to go through the Martial Law regimes for two long periods in its history.

With the military interventions in 1975 and 1982, the semblance of human rights was wiped away by force. The values and institutions of democracy (or whatever remained of them) were buried. Zia ruled the country under Martial Law for three years eight months and Ershad for four years and four months (total length of his regime was about 9 years, half of President Park Chung Hee of South Korea). A sovereign Parliament only functioned less than two years – from March 1973 to January 1975. The subsequent three Parliaments propped up by the two military leaders, and having no power over the executive, lasted about six years altogether, although each was elected for five years. The last two parliaments of Ershad's regime met the legal requirement but with no popular basis they suffered severely from the lack of credibility. Consequently, democracy had little opportunity to flourish. The behavior of the political parties and leaders, their lack

⁴⁴ Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1983).

of respect for the democratic institutions, their mutual suspicion and betrayal, the arrogance of power, intolerance of opposition and criticism, lack of democratic practices within the respective parties and the role of the press are all essential elements, which contribute to the negation of democracy.

The issue is much more complicated than generally recognized. The level of poverty, illiteracy, starvation, disease and malnutrition among nearly 80% of the population certainly does not make it easy for the democracy to flourish. With a population of 130 million, the growing rate of illiteracy and unemployment and their pressure on society as a whole, all tend to make democracy in the modern sense an irrelevant factor for the vast majority of the people. What the ordinary people receive from democracy and what they can expect to receive is a matter which social scientist will have to consider. The benefits of democracy seem to reach only the city-based elite groups and vested interests, leaving the silent majority outside the magic ring.

The state of underdevelopment in Bangladesh today must be understood not only from the point of view of the economy, but also from the social, political, cultural and historical points of view. It is under development in its true sense which the nation suffers from today: a people ruled by outsiders for hundreds of years have been ruined morally and culturally, their pride and self-confidence destroyed along with the essential qualities that constitute a nation.

In order to move out of underdevelopment into a period of enlightenment, rapid economic growth and improved economic opportunities are vital. Without reasonable access by the people to education, health care, food, clothing, housing and other basic needs, democracy cannot take root in any meaningful sense. A superficial democracy limited to some urban elite groups, cannot be regarded as democracy unless the opportunities and such rights are available to a larger section of the people. The opportunistic behavior of the elite groups in the period 1974-75, and the fact that the crisis of democracy has heighten since then, can be directly attributed to the overall state of the economy and the social condition of the country. Economic growth and democratic norms must therefore develop in parallel.

So the nation must face this challenge of transformation from underdevelopment to reasonable economic growth within the shortest possible time in order to defeat other disruptive factors like rapid population growth, unemployment and landlessness. This will require a special effort, conscious sacrifice, a rigorous and dynamic plan, national awareness and commitment and finally a clear vision of how one would like to see Bangladesh twenty years hence. There are countries like Korea, Taiwan, and now Thailand and Indonesia who have been successful in shortening this transition period, and unless Bangladesh can act in similar manner, it will remain in its present state of underdevelopment for a long period of time, with more hunger, poverty and suffering.

We have seen how, through the period of Mujib, Zia and Ershad, the various social, economic and political forces have, in conflicting ways, operated and influenced the

course of democracy. Not only did these leaders create a crisis, but also they then aggravated it by trying to shape events to suit their own exigency while disregarding the urgent need for economic growth. Their commitments were limited to speeches and the ritual of annual plans drawn up and implemented by a bureaucracy, itself a victim of under development – slovenly, old fashioned and utterly and non-committal. No political effort was made to inspire the people towards sacrifice and growth and no serious national plan was envisaged to deal with these problems. The leaders remained too busy with small, peripheral, petty personal politics and ignored the fundamental issues of development and democracy.

Transparency International (TI) Bangladesh Chapter said on 22 August, 2002 that parliament members earned disrespect of the people because of their election by ‘spending black money’. “Election by means of squandering black money gave rise to a big question about the honesty of MPs and thus transparency of parliament itself ”. Analyzing proceedings of last three sessions of present parliament, a member of the TI trustee board Prof. Mozaffar Ahmed said that the MPs spent most of the time either praising their leaders or criticizing their opponents.

The report said only a little over 14 hours were spent out of 258 hours in the three sessions for law making purposes while more than 16 hours spent for unscheduled discussions. “Quorum crisis was a regular phenomenon”, said the TIB report, adding that the House sat everyday roughly 34 minutes behind the schedule. One day, the sitting began one hour and five minutes behind the schedule. “No sitting of the third session

could begin on schedule”. About the first two sessions, which were not attended by the major opposition party AL, the report said the Prime Minister attended the sitting on time for a day only, out of 55 sitting days. In the third session, the opposition walked out six times on different issues – four times in protest against gagging their voice.

How to Overcome?

In order to ensure that the foundation of democracy, however fragile, are sustained, the political parties and leaders who claim to represent the wishes and aspirations of the people must accept their responsibilities. Democracy is a continuous political process, which can only be sustained and developed by giving the due attention to certain institutional issues.

1. The first and foremost task is to maintain the continuity of constitutional rule. Under the circumstances should the constitutional process be disrupted? Regardless of whether a party is in power or in opposition, the democratic order must be sustained. In other words, any military or extra-constitutional intervention must be resisted and a law introduced to punish not only those who seek to intervene but also those who would support the illegal regime.

2. Secondly, the system of government enshrined in the Constitution has to be such that democracy can flourish with a government acceptable to the people. The executive must be continuously accountable to the Parliament, with a check and balance system institutionalized through an effective and strong parliamentary committee system. From this point of view a parliamentary form of government may be more suitable despite the fact that the party system and political leadership is still not strong or matured enough to sustain such a system.⁴⁵ Although a presidential system, as an alternative to the parliamentary form, can also be democratic it must

subject itself to the severe scrutiny of a committee system as practiced in the USA. Otherwise the system will always give rise to autocracy, however democratic the chief executive may be at the time of assuming office. Whatever the chosen system, it must come through a constitutional process based on consultation. Since the nation finally opted for parliamentary system, it is important that the accountability of the government, including that of the office of the Prime Minister, must be effective and also seen to be so. On the strength of the institution of Parliament, its values and tradition, will depend the quality of democracy in the country.

3. A major weakness, which tends to precipitate the crisis of democracy, is the fragmentation of the exiting parties. Among the hundred or so political parties currently in the country, there are three to four major parties and the rest are based around individuals. Although some have strong political views or leanings, most do not have any grass roots organization or sufficient support to public representation. The leaders of these smaller parties were nearly all members of major parties in the past and as a result of factionalism and mutual suspicion they adopted a more individualistic line and left to form a new party. The activities of these smaller parties are generally limited to issuing statements and, since most of them get free newspaper coverage, they may even create confusion amongst the people on important issues. To retain some sort of influence and to obtain house and money, they also resort to extortion and blackmail.

⁴⁵ It is already cited that Bangladesh now has a parliamentary system of government introduced unanimously by the Parliament election in 1991 through a constitutional amendment known as the Twelfth Amendment.

Political parties often spring up mainly because politics is not institutionalized in the country and, in addition, is still a very attractive business proposition. Most of the leaders of these parties have no profession of their own and no known source of income. They live primarily on hands-outs from others. In the name of politics or party they collect funds or donations, and live comfortably without paying any tax to the state. This has done nothing to improve the image of politics and leaders among the people. Secondly, some leaders and parties operate simply to feel self-important by delivering speeches and seeing their names in the newspapers (**Appendix D & E**).

In a democratic society the right to form an association whose objectives are legal is guaranteed. But from the point of view of developing the institution of democracy, there should be a legal and political process of elimination and recognition of leaders and parties in order to associate them in nation-building activities. The only way this can be achieved is by holding regular elections, for the number of parties' increases whenever there is a political vacuum in the country. With regular elections the number of parties will naturally diminish. However, laws could also be passed to accord official recognition to those who enjoy sufficient public representation in the Parliament. Political parties would then develop as institutions, ushering in the new dignity to politicians and political institutions.

4. Political parties are considered to be the key to the development of democracy. As already mentioned, those that exist today are for various reasons weak institutions. In particular, those who talk about democracy do not uphold democratic values within

their parties. Any individual or leader who talks about democracy should first ask himself or herself. **‘Am I a democratic person in any behavior with others in my own house, association or party? Can I stand criticism and tolerate the views of others? Is the political party I belong to a democratic party?’**

This issue of democracy within the party is crucially important. How can the nation expect a democratic order in the country from political parties or leaders who do not respect the values or democracy within their own organizations? They are all quick to criticize anything, which is authoritarian, autocratic or dictatorial in the behavior of the government, but they rarely consider how they behave within their own party structure.⁴⁶

This is perhaps the most important factor contributing to the crisis of democracy in the country. The nature, character and composition of major political parties reveal a disappointing state of affairs. Each major party is headed by a person who is omnipotent in the management of the party, including the formation of central and executive committees.⁴⁷ The party structures and committees are filled by nomination and not by election.⁴⁸ Council meetings and annual meetings are not held regularly and parties are run at the dictate of one person without any process of consultation or discussion. Loyalty to the leader becomes more important than the loyalty to the party or nation and country.

⁴⁶ Dr. Kamal Hossain, a post-election review of the role of the Awami League in *Weekly Agami*, 22 March 1991.

⁴⁷ The constitution of the BNP and Jatiya Party are absolutely monolithic in nature. The party chairmen can make and dissolve any committee from the highest to the lowest level.

Although this is a sensitive subject, one can ultimately ask that if the parties are not democratic and the leaders do not follow democratic principles in running their own party, how can they be expected to behave democratically once they are in government? The urgent task of correcting this state of affairs within the political parties must be undertaken not by the rank and file but the leaders themselves on their own initiative.

5. Another great impediment in the growth of democracy is the hereditary nature of leadership developed in the party system, particularly in the two most important political parties of the country. Khaleda Zia became leader because she is the wife of an assassinated President Ziaur Rahman and Sheikh Hasina because of her father, who was also assassinated.⁴⁹ The leaders of these two political parties are now permanently settled in their respective positions canceling all the possibilities of emergence of any new leadership in their respective parties. If there is any possibility, it comes of their own families. For instance, Tarique Rahman, the son of the present Prime Minister became Joint Secretary General-1 of the ruling party. The leader of opposition already remarked that the prime minister is trying to create a political dynasty. In order to remove this anti-democratic dynastic phenomenon in the party system, effective measures are needed in the party constitutions to allow change in the leadership after each specified term or terms of office and this initiative for change has to come from the leaders themselves.

⁴⁸ Although the structure of the Awami League represents a slight semblance of democracy, ultimately all powers are concentrated in the hands of the party leader.

⁴⁹ This is a common phenomenon of the subcontinent. In India Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister because of his assassinated mother Indira Gandhi. And after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi his wife Sonia Gandhi became a leader, the chairperson of the Congress Party. On the other Hand, after the assassination of President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, his daughter Benazir Bhutto became the party (Pakistan People's Party) leader and Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Future of Democracy in Bangladesh

Is the future of democracy in Bangladesh so gloomy? It is really difficult to answer. Because people are becoming conscious and to some extent government is trying to be transparent. For instance, in a UNDP sponsored workshop, parliament members from both treasury and opposition benches recommended holding pre-budget discussion to ensure maximum participation of people in the budgetary preparations.

Referring to defense expenditure in the budget, Colonel (Rtd) Shawkat Ali MP of AL said there should be no secret in the annual budget as people have the right to know. He added, "Discussion on defense expenditure should be open as there is no scope to conceal anything". Winding up the discussion, BNP lawmaker Abdul Mannan stressed the need for pre-budget discussion to make it more transparent and accountable to the people.

Besides, the budget for fiscal 2002-2003 will aim at making earnings and expenditures of autonomous bodies and public sector units (PSUs) transparent. The expenditures and earnings of the PSUs used to be reflected in the budget document on a netting-out basis. This bred ambiguity and people often did not know which organization is guzzling how much fund and giving what in return. Loans, both foreign and domestic, taken by the PSUs and the interest accrued on them would also be clearly laid out in the budget to bring about transparency in expenditure.

We can say here more about transparency. The previous AL government went for amending the parliamentary rules of procedure for replacement of ministers by non-minister lawmakers as head of different standing committees on ministries to ensure transparency. And still now it is continuing even though committees of present parliament are not yet (within one year of present government) formed.

On 30th of May 2002, the national Election Commission has meet a number of time to look into loopholes regarding restrictions on electioneering of those holding office and other issues which cause controversy. This was particularly noted as complaints have risen that MPs and Ministers are often active in campaigning which influences the results. The fact that known and, listed and most wanted criminals were also on the candidates' list and many actually were elected caused criticism of the EC and this needs urgent repairing. Reports suggest that the EC plans to look at a whole range of issues concerning its work including how elections are going to be managed at the *Upazila* level. Amendments to the Code of Conduct governing the participants will also be examined.

The voters have certain major concerns, which needs immediate addressing. The blatant spending of money violating all rules is a serious matter. Elections are swiftly becoming game, which only the rich can play, and not a contest to win the right to legislate on public behalf. This is a major issue and the EC must be able to rein this in and install some regulatory mechanism. It must control this spending spree and thereby enable everyone including the non-wealthy to be a candidate. Otherwise the

House has a danger of becoming a rich man's club and the EC a facilitating agency of the same. The other point is to be plugged those legal loopholes that allow criminals to become part of the local government structure. The arrest of two most wanted Ward Commissioners immediately after oath taking and violent deaths of two (actually four) other newly elected Commissioners show that the existing system is out of date with contemporary social situation. Obviously the EC is operating under laws, which were adopted when criminals didn't strive *en masse* for public office or were encouraged by powers that be to do so.

However, the EC is to be congratulated for deciding to review the polls systems and its attendant laws. This is a country with an extra-ordinary pressure on EC, political protocols and ultimately issues that ECs in other countries may not have to face. All the more why it needs to be on its toes and be beyond the reproach of being slow to reform. One hopes whatever possible will be done knowing fully well that this is one body that is under constant scrutiny.

The main opposition Awami League is going to propose introduction of a Westminster style weekly 'Opposition Day' in the parliament through amending the rules of procedure. Considering the less opportunities it gets on the parliament floor, the AL wants to give the idea a chance to make the country's 11-year old parliamentary practice since 1990 more functional. The proposed provision of having a designated weekday exclusively for the opposition lawmakers would help avert the unnecessary chaos in the House over allocation of time for the MPs on the floor **(Appendix F)**.

Conclusion

At the end of the thesis we can say that nowhere absolute democracy is prevailing in the world. “If we apply too exacting a standard of ‘true democracy’, we will find there are no true democracies in the world; that does not mean there is no difference worth considering between England and Iran, between India and China, or between Frei’s and Pinochet’s Chile”⁵⁰ Regrettably we note that functioning democracy in South Asia, especially in Bangladesh, even in countries where it has flourished for many years, have not been able to sustain good governance. This has led to the degeneration of democracy and has compromised its sustainability. Whilst our observations are more specifically addressed to South Asia the bizarre events of 2000 in Florida suggest that even the oldest functioning democracy in the world provides cause for concern over the fragility of its democratic institutions. Who would have thought that the state of Florida did not have a politically independent mechanism to oversee elections; that the US judiciary was politically partisan; that civil society in the US would tamely tolerate disenfranchisement of a segment of the Florida electorate to a point where it could influence the election.⁵¹ The turn out of this election was also dissatisfactory. It fell from 95% in 1960 to 51% in 2000.

This is one aspect; another aspect is one’s own external political reality. Our much-vaunted democracy is still tied with foreign aid and still characterized by patron-client relationship. Finance and Planning Minister of Bangladesh M. Saifur Rahman once remarked, “During the colonial period, foreign rulers used to determine what to do,

what should not do. Now donors interfere in our everyday matters, even in the independent Bangladesh”.⁵² He also pointed out that donor agencies like the World Bank and IMF slapped preconditions on the basis of lack of good governance in the country and mismanagement in the economy.⁵³ Robert Kerr, a senior US diplomat in Katmandu, Nepal, while talking to fortnightly PROBE clarified, “Our role is basically as a friend. Over the years we have provided development assistance and now we are providing security assistance. This is a young democracy and deserves protecting. Both in Bangladesh and in Nepal, we are eager to see the democracies work. If it takes the military to resolve the problem in Nepal, so be it. Our support is for the elected government”.

The distinct aspect of our democracy is the lack of tolerance, which must be disappeared from the national politics. The nature of party politics in the country with its lack of internal democracy, practice of personality cult, factionalism and internecine conflicts is such that the windows of opportunities created since 1990 were not utilized because both BNP and AL, failed to bring about a national solidarity and consensus through the art of negotiation, compromise and accommodation for the national interest. This has been mainly due to the political atmosphere between the two major political parties that is characterized by mutual distrust, intolerance and antagonism.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ David Halloran Lumsdaine, *Moral Vision in International Politics The Foreign Aid Regime, 1949 – 1989*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) p -32.

⁵¹ Rehman Sobhan, *Making Democracy Accountable: The South Asian Dilemma*, Daily Star, 30 Jan. 2001.

⁵² Daily *Prothom Alo*, Motiur Rahman (ed.), 16th January 2002.

⁵³ *The Financial Express*, Moazzem Hossain (ed.) January 16, 2002.

⁵⁴ Dilara Choudhury, *The Future of Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh*, Daily Star, 30 January 2001.

The leaders of political parties never accept defeat. If there is a competition, naturally one will win and the other will lose. But that does not happen with Bangladeshi politics. Everybody wants to win. This attitude pampers the image of politics. But what about the general people? The so called ordinary people don't show any interest in anything and by doing so encourage the leaders to do whatever they like or in some circumstances passively and blindly support one of the leaders and remain in their shadows. We blame the leaders when things go wrong as if we have no responsibilities at all.

Let's try to remember what the great philosopher Machiaveli said. He said, "Leaders couldn't behave badly if they have to lead good people". There are many intelligent and well-meaning people in Bangladesh. We hope some good advise will come from them, which will be the way forward for our nation. We have been blaming AL and BNP for a long time. This has not taken us anywhere. We badly need something more constructive.

But we are not pessimistic. The country has achieved significant progress towards a viable democratic transition while many observers terming Bangladesh's experience as a role model of 'moderate Muslim democracy'. On many counts, Bangladesh's performance has been better than the initial anticipations after the country's political independence, according to a report of the Economic Relations Division (ERD). The report said, notwithstanding the early negative predictions, Bangladesh has achieved

considerable success in several sphere such as population control, reduction in child mortality and malnutrition, mainstreaming women in the development process, catalyzing grassroots activism through NGOs and CSOs and in making democratic transition.

These successes show the importance of undertaking public action through the government and non-government sectors at low-income level to realize higher social possibilities. Ensuring free and fair elections through non-partisan caretaker government has been a noteworthy political innovation in the backdrop of weak democratic institutions in the country. There have also been important gains in terms of increased political and electoral participation of women, enhanced press freedom and increasingly active civic movements.

Bangladesh's progress also stands out in cross-country comparison and supports the proposition that higher social and human development outcomes can be achieved even at a lower level of per capita national income. Notwithstanding the relatively slow per capita income growth of about 2% per annum and modest pace of income, poverty reduction, Bangladesh's achievements in the broad are of human development were faster and, in some respects, remarkable.

Bangladesh witnessed significant success in overcoming the phenomena of mass starvation and the threat of famine syndrome in the backdrop of endemic vulnerability to natural disaster. Bangladeshi women, have played an important role in the success

of micro-credit, readymade garment exports, reducing population growth, increasing child nutrition, and in the spread of primary education.

Recommendations:

A)

1. From Cacophony Towards Symphony

If every musician starts to play simultaneously a tune to their heart, very melodious but different from all others, or if they part into a number of separate ensembles and start to play different concertos at the same time, in both cases the outcome will be music. It will be mere cacophony, disturbing and maddening noise, nothing else. But all these thousands of musicians can be made to produce superb symphonies if they communicate, agree on a composition and their roles in it, select an able conductor, do adequate rehearsals and finally perform.

In light of the above simile, the political hall of this country is definitely full of cacophony. All of us are working hard in our own separate ways, but only to increase confusion. So let us also start to communicate, deliberate, decide, and come to agreements about immediate and long time performances, select worthy conductors, rehearse well and then we also will definitely be able to produce a singularly exemplary political symphony. Because we have some potentials that very few countries have. Ours is a homogeneous people with a single language, race, culture, geographic figures and predominantly a single religion, except those ethnicities in Chittagong Hill Tracts, and other mountainous and plain parts of the country. What is needed is to exploit and utilize these potentials to our fullest advantage.

2. Listen to Aristotle

Bangladesh should heed Aristotle and change leaders regularly. Aristotle once remarked that all form of government – democracy, oligarchy, monarchy, and tyranny – are inherently unstable, that all political regimes are inherently transitional, that the stability of all regimes is “corrupted by the corrosive power of time”. To prolong the viability of democratic institutions, his advice had been rapid turnover of leaderships – “constant changing of guards before rot creeps in”.

Aristotle believed that only through constant change, democracy could renew itself. What was true to the Periclean democracy in ancient Greece remains germane in the world today. There is a tendency for political leaders to try to prolong their rules at the expense of change and renewal. In most developing countries, democratically elected leaders tend to think that they have right to govern as long as they could. They even try to create dynastic rules as sons and daughters and even wives of erstwhile popular leaders. Even in a long-standing democracy like India, there was an attempt to create a dynastic rule as we have seen in the dominance of Nehru-Gandhi family. Now the old leader like Atal Behari Vajpayee continues to dominate the political scene at the expense of new leaders. In Pakistan, deposed Benazir Bhutto has been trying to govern mostly because of the popularity of her father.

Even in Canada, a matured and highly advanced democracy, Prime Minister Jean Chretien, after a decade of rule, refuses to give up, although 70% of Canadians want him to leave. Instead, he has fired the most popular political leader in the

country, Finance Minister Paul Martin, because of his leadership ambitions. Bangladesh is no exception to the trend. Two politicians seem to have become a permanent fixture in the political landscape. But it is clear that the country needs a new generation of leaders. Present Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should listen to the great sage of antiquity and pass the torch to new leaders in the next election.

3. Stopping *Hartal* and Culture of Parliament Boycott

A climate of distrust led to the creation of a caretaker government in Bangladesh. We think another unique situation demands a similar legislation. Now a climate of indifference has bred this 'parliament boycott culture'. We believe there is a simple and effective solution to this aberrant behavior. Since a bad precedent has become a regular practice we need to put an end to it for once and for all through legislation. Parliament members whether individually or collectively better have a valid reason for not attending the parliament for an extended period of time or else their seats should be declared vacant and by-election should be held for such seats. If our politicians want to act so undemocratically then we the people need to do something to set things right. They have done enough disservice to the nation. In the same way, imposing law and enforcement will ban *hartal* tendency, which has a severe negative affect on our economy.

4. Give Share of the People

Langol, nouka, palla, shish

Shob shaperi ek bish

It means that no matter which party comes to power, they are all venomous. We believe this slogan reflects the peoples' lack of confidence in the country's politicians that has taken root in the recent years. People are tired of *hartals* and movements (**Appendix G**). They expected so much from democracy, but the politicians are still busy fighting for power so that they can earn something. Enough is enough, they just want some peace, and social justice and real development taking place. But will the politicians read this line on the city walls and do something about it or will this be just a prelude to another uprising of the people. Politicians, be warned. People have already spent 30 years after the liberation. They are tired of seeing how you pamper yourselves and how you reward yourselves for your so-called sacrifices (as if the people did not make any sacrifice in 1971, the year of liberation war or in the anti-autocratic movement). So give people their share now. Otherwise the situation may turn into a social revolution.

B)

In a truly representative democracy, policy makers need to make themselves accountable to their voters. To build such a representative and accountable polity, a significant segment of the deprived sections of the electorate, who constitute the voting majority in the country, need to be elected to parliament. No process of

policy reform or agenda for poverty alleviation can be made credible as well as sustainable if the deprived remain without direct voice in our electoral institutions.

Accountable governance does not limit itself to the machinery of the state. In an increasingly privatized, market driven economy, those who operate in the private sector need to also make themselves accountable to their shareholders, to the communities where they operate, to the workers in their enterprise and to the environment which needs to be sustained. This concept of corporate responsibility is now an important part of the contemporary discourse on governance. As with the state and private sector, the NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) also need to keep themselves accountable to their members and clients through the practice of transparency in their transactions. We should not delude ourselves into thinking that accountability applies only to the state. To establish full accountability in a working democracy we need transparency both within the government, the private sector and civil society.

To establish a system of accountable democracy, the cloak of secrecy and obscurity which shelters misgovernance must be lifted. Let's illustrate some of the measures of transparency, which need to be put in the place to establish accountability:

i) All official records, except those which affect the security of the state (and this too should be subject to judicial review), should be open to public scrutiny.

Affected parties, the press and public interest litigants should have, on request, automatic access to all files and documents of government departments.

ii) All public tenders and documents relating to the final decision-making process should be made available for public scrutiny.

iii) The financial status and income tax records of all those contesting for public office must be placed with the Election Commission at the time of nomination who should release these to the press. A similar statement for all elected representatives should be tabled on the floor of parliament during the budget session.

iv) Party political finance should be regulated by law where all contributions as well as expenditures should be audited and made public.

v) Senior bureaucrats may also be exposed to a similar process of scrutiny demanded of politicians.

vi) The private and NGO sector may be exposed to a similar process of transparency as to their records and finances.

In the process of establishing accountability and demanding transparency, civil society has to play an activist role, which goes beyond holding seminars and publishing research papers. Credible and sustainable civic activism is a labor and skill intensive task with a high attendant risk factor. Thus, CSOs have to be grounded in the felt needs of affected and concerned citizens for better governance. A civil society constructed by aid donors and built as an extremely funded livelihood activity cannot sustain itself and exercise an impact on

entrenched vested interests. Sustainable democracy as well as a stable market economy demand the design of an inclusive and participatory polity as well as economy.

There were long discussions and debates in the parliament sessions for creating the post of Ombudsman, but it could not be decided even though this is our constitutional provision. We may conveniently refer to Ombudsman working in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark. These Scandinavian countries have been using this instrument for many years with great success in safeguarding the rights of the ordinary citizens. Many other countries of the world have followed them in adopting this technique in this or that form. Our country also has made provisions for Ombudsman in our constitution (Article 77, 1972). Accordingly the parliament passed the necessary Act providing for the office of Ombudsman. But this has not yet begun to function. It is highly desirable that the Ombudsman should start functioning without further delay. The Ombudsman shall be a person of known legal or administrative ability and conspicuous integrity.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ali Ahmed, *Basic Principles and Practices of Administrative Organization: Bangladesh* (Dhaka: National Institute of Local Government, 1981), pp. 186-187.

Glossary:

Quadiani: A Muslim groups who beliefs that Mohammad (SM) is not the last prophet of Islam.

Jatiya Sangsad: National Assembly, the Parliament.

Purbo Bangla Sarbohara (Party): East Bengal Proletariat, A political party, leded by Comrade Siraj Sikder who was assassinated during the Mujib regime.

Sammobadi Dal: A Communist Party of Bangladesh, headed by the late Comrade Mohammad Toaha.

Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini: National Security Troops, a politically motivated para-militia force, claimed that it was influenced by India; the allocation for the JRB during 1975-76 was increased about 190%.

Mujibbadi: Mujibist, believer in Mujibism, during the liberation fight of Bangladesh it was a revolutionary force even though Sheikh Mujib himself was not a revolutionist.

Gano Bahini: People's Force, the parent organization of it was the JSD, an influential political Party of the 70s.

Bangabandhu: The Friend of Bengal, honorary title of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of the state.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal: National Socialist Party, the main dreamer and theorist of this party was Sirajul Alam Khan.

Hartal: The strike, way of protesting, non-cooperation.

Janatar Mancha: The People's Stage, an opposition platform of political agitation and propaganda.

Upazila: Sub-district or sub-prefecture, a local government unit or tier of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Pourasava: The Municipality, a Local Government unit.

Al-Qaida: A Muslim armed group, guided by Osama Bin Laden, main accused by the USA for the terrorist attack of 11 September, 2001.

Langol: the Plough, a symbol of the National Election, which was allocated to the Jatiya Party.

Nouka: The Boat, a symbol of the National Election, allocated to the Bangladesh Awami League.

Palla: The Balance, measurer of weight, the symbol of justice, and an electoral symbol allocated to the Jamt-i-Islami.

Shish: The ear of Paddy, the electoral symbol used by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Bish: The Poison, indication of any dangerous thing, the poison of mal-politics.

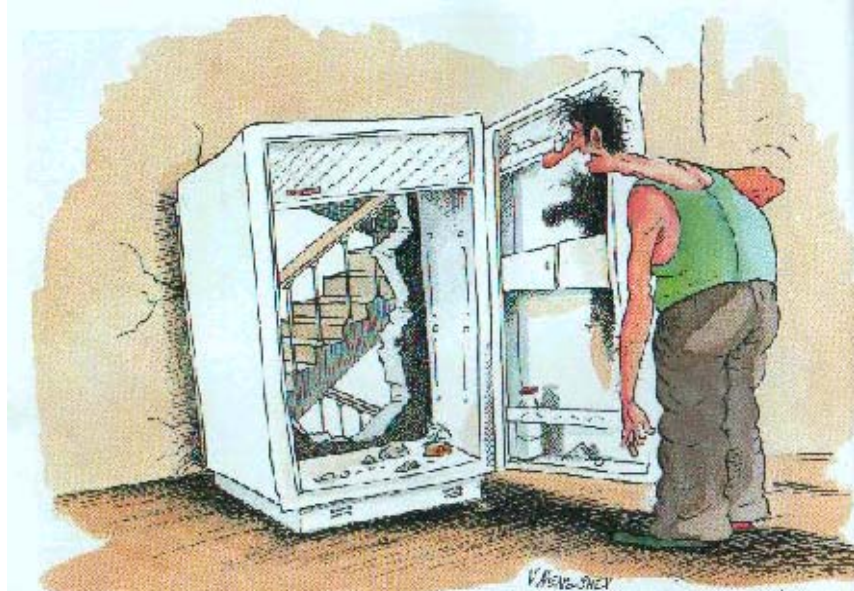
Mastan: The Musclem, widely used as the tool of politics in the Third World countries.

Shantrashi: The Terrorist, miscreant.

Rin Shantrashi: Loan Defaulter, those who are not intentionally repaying the money to the bank and other financial institutions, chronic loan defaulters have emerged as one of the main forces of politics and other sphere of the state.

APPENDIX A

An Image of both Anarchy and Bankruptcy



For whom the Russian cartoonist Vladimir Nenashev has drawn the picture?

APPENDIX B

Rigging Methods: the Awami Inventions

An Awami League sponsored research publication says that as many as 17 ‘fraudulent methods’ were employed in the last parliamentary election to hand out defeat to the AL. The defeated AL candidate AMA Muhit edited book entitled, ‘A Rigged Election: An Illegitimate Government’ was published by the Center for Research and Information. AL President Sheikh Hasina launched the book at a ceremony on 02 May 2002 at the Hotel Sheraton where the general people cannot easily enter. The study report identified the methods based on 22 case studies carried out in 22 parliamentary constituencies where the AL nominees lost out.

Basically the case studies are reports on their perspective constituencies, mostly written by defeated candidates themselves, which may not be authentic. With some exceptions, the candidates’ brothers or lawyers or AL leaders prepared the reports. The methods in brief, as the CRI book shows:

- 1) **Using Money:** The winning candidate in Sylhet-6 constituency reportedly spent Taka 100,000 per center.
- 2) **False Voting:** The Election Inquiry Committee confirmed ‘heavy false voting’ at several centers of Sunamganj-5 constituency.
- 3) **Presence of too many polling agents:** ‘Dummy’ candidates were deliberately stationed at the centers to crowd the booths along with the alliance (four parties) polling agents.
- 4) **Large number of national election observers:** They crowded the polling booths ‘conducive’ to false voting. Some actively canvassed for the alliance and cast votes for the alliance candidates in the name of assisting voters. Many observers stuffed boxes with false ballots.
- 5) **Threats on Hindu voters:** In Comilla-6 constituency, 30,000 Hindus were denied their franchise by ‘*mastans*’ and law enforcers.
- 6) **Inclusion of candidates in the list of criminals:** In Kishoreganj-6 constituency, the name of AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman (former Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives), who was also party candidate from the same constituency, was included in list of suspected criminals supplied to the army unit on patrol.
- 7) **Anomalies in voters’ list:** At some polling centers, the reference voters’ list (the list supplied to the presiding officers by the Election Commission) was different from the one supplied to the AL candidates, whereas the alliance candidates had the right copy.
- 8) **Partisan polling officials:** BNP and Jamat hardliners were appointed presiding and polling officers.

- 9) **Secretive acts:** There are instances of surreptitiously stuffing boxes with ballots, taking advantage of the crowded polling stations or some minor disturbances that temporarily drew the attention of polling agents away.
- 10) **Suspension mechanism:** In Comilla-8 constituency, voting was stopped and the candidates and journalists were informed accordingly, later, voting resumed without the agents.
- 11) **Counting fraud:** At the PTI center of ward No. 7 in Sylhet-1 constituency, the presiding officer provided the AL polling agent with a statement of 470 votes cast in favor of the AL. But the agent also obtained a copy of the calculation sheet signed by the PO, which showed that the AL candidate polled 957 votes and the BNP candidate 470.
- 12) **Lost ballots:** A day after the election, three sealed bags of valid ballots were found at the wayside of the road from Dohar (Dhaka-1 constituency) to Dhaka.
- 13) **Cancellation of voting:** Voting was cancelled at 3 centers of Munshiganj-4 constituency. Polling was stopped at the four centers but the margin of victory made the re-polling irrelevant. When the victory went to the AL candidate, the returning officer cancelled voting at 7 centers at the request of the alliance candidate. The AL candidate did not get any redress from the High Court, which considered that it was a matter for the Election Commission. Characteristically, the EC remained indifferent and held the re-polling.
- 14) **Dubious way of result announcement:** The EC first announced the victory of alliance candidates. The victory of AL candidates was announced after there was a reasonable tally giving the impression of the alliance's landslide.
- 15) **Excess supply of ballots:** More ballot papers than required were supplied to many constituencies.
- 16) **More votes cast:** At Rasulpur polling center of the Naogaon-3 constituency, 4080 were cast against 3,941 votes in total.
- 17) **Ballot-stuffing in remote areas:** In many remote areas, goons stuffed boxes with the false ballots in connivance with the election officials. At 26 centers of Patuakhali-1 constituency, the cast votes were 99 or 100%, although it was only 61% for the constituency as a whole.

The above fraudulent practices apart, the book questioned the roles of the last Caretaker government and the EC. And it particularly focused on the post-polls violence unleashed on the political opponents of the four party alliances. It has a topic on the just-held (25th April 2002) city corporation polls and included reports on violence and pressure on newsmen, prepared by the Amnesty International and the Reporters Sans Frontiers.

(Source: Center for Research and Information)

APPENDIX C

On President's Resignation

Within a month of his assuming the presidency on November 14, 2001, certain actions by former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury had irked BNP leaders and their workers. As president, Badruddoza violated the norms by visiting the Prime Minister's residence a few days after his assumption of office. However, this did not trigger any criticism in the ruling BNP, but in the opposition.

This violation led to the opposition's allegation that he was biased. The next day, president visited the Awami League presidium member Abdus Samad Azad – apparently to persuade the opposition to join parliament. This move was criticized by some BNP leaders who felt that president was trying to prove his 'neutrality' as president.

Earlier this year, Mahi B. Chowdhury, son of the president, accorded a grand welcome to opposition chairperson Sheikh Hasina in Munshiganj when she visited the area. This also was viewed negatively by BNP leaders who felt that Badruddoza should have deterred his son from organizing the reception. The disgruntled BNP leaders also noted that the president in various government supplements gave message that did not end with 'Bangladesh Zindabad' (long live Bangladesh) – a political cliché symbolizing one's allegiance towards the BNP.

In another issue, the president 'angered' Prime Minister Khaleda Zia when he rejected the file she sent on appointment of Dr. Aftab Ahmed as the Public Service Commission (PSC) chairman. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) had approved it but the president had reservation about the selection. Later, the Prime Minister selected Dr. Zinnatunnesa Tahmida Begum as PSC chairman and he approved it. The incident strained the relationship between the Prime Minister and the president.

Badruddoza also ran into the controversy over television coverage. A few months ago, the BNP leaders felt president was getting too much TV coverage. Accordingly, the PMO asked Bangladesh Television (BTV) to reduce coverage on him. In early May 2002, when president came to know about this, he decided to curtail his own coverage further, limiting it only to the events at the *Bangabhaban* (office of the president).

Once again, Badruddoza was severely criticized by BNP leaders when they noticed that during Prime Minister's month-long stay in the USA for medical purposes, he did not call her or inquire about her health.

Finally on May 30 – the day of the 21st death anniversary of BNP founder and ex-president Ziaur Rahman, Badruddoza whipped up a wave of criticism in the BNP when he did not visit the grave of Zia. Besides, in one of his messages in the newspapers, there was no indication that the late president Ziaur Rahman proclaimed the independence of the country in 1971. With all the issues combined, the disgruntled BNP leaders at a meeting on 20th May of the BNP Parliamentary Party (BNPPP) wanted his resignation for trying to be a 'neutral' person.

APPENDIX D

**Parliamentary Election Results
October 01, 2001 Election**

Serial No.	Party	No. of Valid Votes	No. of Seats Won	% of Seats Won
1	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Conservative)	22,833,978	193	46.33
2	Bangladesh Awami League (Social Democratic)	22,365,516	62	20.76
3	Jamat-i-Islami Bangladesh (Fundamentalist)	2,385,361	17	5.66
4	Islamic National Unity Front (Ershad and allies)	4,038,453	14	4.66
5	Non-partisan/ Independent candidates	2,262,073	6	2.00
6	Bangladesh <i>Jatiya</i> (National) Party (Nazir-Firoz)	621,772	4	1.33
7	Islamic Unity Front	376,343	2	0.66
8	<i>Jatiya</i> Party (Manzu)	243,617	1	0.30
9	<i>Krisak Sramik Janata</i> League (Peasants' and Workers' People's League)	261,344	1	0.30
10	Bangladesh Communist Party	56,991	0	0
11	Bangladesh <i>Gono Azadi</i> League (Samad)	780	0	0
12	Bangladesh Hindu League	922	0	0
13	Bangladesh Islami Front	30,761	0	0
14	Bangladesh <i>Janata</i> Party	1,703	0	0
15	Bangladesh <i>Jatiya Dal</i>	441	0	0
16	Bangladesh <i>Khelafat Andolon</i>	13,472	0	0
17	Bangladesh <i>Krisak Sramik Janata</i> Party	197	0	0

18	Bangladesh <i>Krisak Sramik Mukti Andolon</i>	1,248	0	0
19	Bangladesh <i>Krisak Sramik</i> Awami League (BKSAL)	59	0	0
20	Bangladesh <i>Manobadhikar Dal</i> (Bamad)	237	0	0
21	Bangladesh Muslim League (Jamir Ali)	582	0	0
22	Bangladesh Peoples Congress	1,155	0	0
23	Bangladesh Peoples Party (BPP)	382	0	0
24	Bangladesh Progressive Party (BPP)	3,734	0	0
25	Bangladesh <i>Sarbohara</i> (Proletariat) Party	44	0	0
26	Bangladesh <i>Vasani Adarsha Bastabayan Parishad</i> (Implementation Council of the thoughts of Mowlana Vasani)	58	0	0
27	<i>Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal</i> (BSD-Khalequzzaman)	21,164	0	0
28	<i>Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal</i> (Mahbub)	2,308	0	0
29	<i>Bangladesher Sammobadi Dal</i> (Marxist-Leninist)	972	0	0
30	<i>Bangladesher Workers Party</i>	40,484	0	0
31	<i>Bhasani Front</i>	76	0	0
32	Communist Center	1,042	0	0
33	Democratic Republican Party	364	0	0
34	<i>Deshprem</i> (Patriotism) Party	366	0	0
35	<i>Ganotantri</i> (Democratic) Party	3,190	0	0
36	<i>Gano</i> (Peoples) Forum	8,494	0	0
37	Islami <i>Shasantantra Andolon</i> (Islamic Constitution Movement)	5,944	0	0

38	<i>Jaker Party</i>	1,181	0	0
39	<i>Jamate Ulama Islam Bangladesh</i>	19,256	0	0
40	<i>Jatiya Janata Party (Hafizur)</i>	30	0	0
41	<i>Jatiya Janata Party (Sheikh Asad)</i>	148	0	0
42	<i>Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)</i>	119,382	0	0
43	<i>Jatiya Janata Party (Advocate Nurul Islam Khan)</i>	657	0	0
44	<i>Liberal Democratic Party</i>	170	0	0
45	<i>Liberal Party Bangladesh</i>	3,976	0	0
46	<i>National Awami Party (NAP)</i>	3,801	0	0
47	<i>National Awami Party (Bhasani)</i>	442	0	0
48	<i>National Awami Party (Vasani)</i>	79	0	0
49	<i>National Patriotic Party</i>	551	0	0
50	<i>Pragotishil GanotantriK Shakti (Progressive Democratic Strength - Pragash)</i>	136	0	0
51	<i>Qran Darsan Sangstha Bangladesh (Agency for Study of Holy Quran)</i>	161	0	0
52	<i>Quran and Sunnah Bastabayan (Implementation) Party</i>	77	0	0
53	<i>Sa-Samaj Ganotantri Party</i>	131	0	0
54	<i>Samriddha Bangladesh Andolon (Prosperous Bangladesh Movement)</i>	429	0	0
55	<i>Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal</i>	391	0	0
Total		55,736,625	300	100%

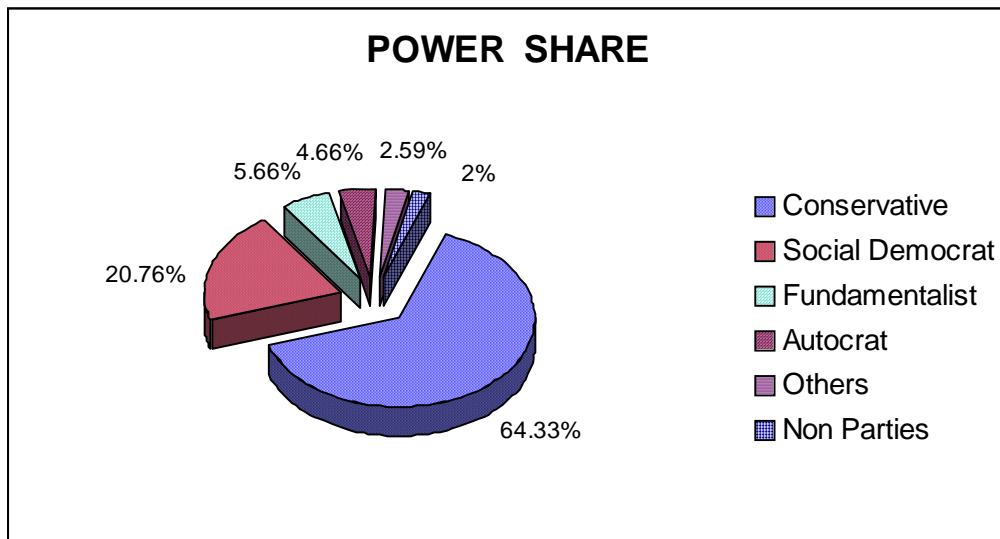
Source: Bangladesh Election Commission

In the above table, 46 parties/ alliance did not get any seat in the last Parliamentary Election. But they are satisfied to see their names in the newspapers and other mass media.

APPENDIX E

Power Sharing in the Parliament

Conservative:	BNP	-	193 seats	-	64.33%
Social Democrat:	AL	-	62 seats	-	20.76%
Fundamentalist :	Jamat	-	17 seats	-	5.66%
Autocrat:	JP (Ershad)	-	14 seats	-	4.66%
Non-Partisan			6 seats	-	2%
Others:					
	1. JP (N- F)	-	4 seats	-	1.33%
	2. IUF	-	2 seats	-	0.66%
	3. JP (Manzu)	-	1 seat	-	0.30%
	4. KSJL	-	1 seat	-	0.30%



APPENDIX F

UNDP's Involvement for Bangladesh Democracy

The AL conceived the idea of a weekly 'Opposition Day' in the parliament in the light of a project styled "Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy" undertaken by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). At the fag end of the last (seventh) parliament, the UNDP placed a set of recommendations, which also included the idea of an 'Opposition Day' to the then Speaker of the Parliament. The former Speaker had asked a sub-committee to look into the matter. But the 7th parliament expired before the committee prepared its report.

The UNDP also is planning to submit the recommendations afresh to the authorities concerned and ask for their implementation to strengthen the parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh.

In Britain, the opposition lawmakers usually get a chance to speak 20 days out of at least 130 sitting days a year on those designated days. The UNDP recommends a Westminster style of democracy as a role model for Bangladesh. As envisaged in line with the British parliamentary system, the opposition would set the tone on once a week 'Opposition Day' in the parliament. It would reign over the Treasury Bench during that particular day's business, enjoying a maximum time to speak on various public issues.

Under the present system, the non-minister lawmakers have their day in the parliament every Thursday designated as 'Private Members' Day' when any MP can pilot any proposed law or resolution. Similarly, lawmakers belonging to the opposition parties could also enjoy some exclusive time on the 'Opposition Day'.

When the AL was in office during 1996-2001, it brought amendments to the rules of procedure, making provisions for non-ministers to head the parliamentary standing committees. The change resulted in greater accountability of and transparency in the functioning of the important committees. Likewise, the opposition now hopes that all the parties would agree to the proposed 'Opposition Day' to further strengthen the parliamentary system and minimize bickering over allocation of time for the opposition.

Note: The combined opposition would ask for chairmanship of some 12 to 15 standing committees out of the total 49. The formation of the committees is pending due to differences over proportional representation of the opposition.

APPENDIX G

Hartal Culture: An Explanation

It means strike. Politicians say that it seems to be a way of protesting. But do we really know why *hartals* are held? During the period when Ershad was in power, BNP (also AL) launched a furious movement, which included every form of agitation. It established the might of the street. Street agitation received an anointment of legitimacy that was greater than any parliamentary practice. On that day the parliament and the street became one in the process of protesting against martial law. All the state forces including the military and the civil politicians assassinated parliamentary democracy through that period and it has never been able to get a chance to stand upright again.

It was published in several newspapers that after the defeat of 1991 election (due to intolerance and breaking of dream) our opposition leader remarked, *Ami ek din-er jonno-o BNP-ke shanti-te thakte dibo na* (I will never allow BNP to run in peace). Then on she called strike again and again, and made the people fed up. But when AL was agitating against the BNP when it gained power soon after, BNP was in turn livid. It criticized AL and said that this was a ‘conspiracy against democracy’. It also said other things to the party and the leader, which would generally be called rude and vulgar.

When she was in power Sheikh Hasina promised that she would never ever call *hartals*, even if she were in the opposition. Hasina knows it doesn’t matter in Bangladesh if she breaks her word. But when she is in the opposition said, the need of the people is greater than the words of a politician and the country needs her and so in the interests of the people she must break her promise. Thus in fact it is a patriotic act.

During the period when Hasina was in power Khaleda rarely went to the parliament. She boycotted the parliament and said that it made no sense because she wasn’t allowed to speak. She took the streets and called *hartals*. They dragged on for days even when there was no public support for them. It was then her public duty, her patriotic act. Now (2001) that she has gained power, she shows propaganda stuff on a promise breaking Hasina. But Khaleda has nothing against *hartals* as her past shows. Both did the same thing when ever in the opposition: Took to the streets, boycotted the parliament and allowed the most ruthless brand of killers to control student politics (*Are AL and BNP the same: We deserve what we voted for*, AFSAN CHOWDHURY).

The Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party are two wings of the same party. Barring minor differences there is nothing to show any difference. Those who state the differences do so to hoodwink the people. In other country, the divisions within a party are far wider than the differences between AL and BNP. How can we expect them to behave differently? They can’t even if they want to. The bi-polar system is the best way to ensure the permanent control of the class that rules us no matter who is in power.

We should think about the following lines:

- The economic policies of both are the same. Both parties are run directly or by the super rich.
- No matter what changes happen, the business operations are undisturbed of both the parties' leaders.
- Both carry out *hartals* and street agitation no matter what they promise. Both boycott parliaments and in turn win large electoral victories.
- Both completely ignore the parliament and depend on street agitation for power mongering.
- Both encourage 'personality worshipping' and manipulate facts about the past. Both focus on hate politics at the street level and crony capitalism at the highest levels.
- Both patronize *matans* and *santrashis* and know that people have no power to resist them.
- Both use *mastans* to cow down people if they protest. Both allow crime as a system to pay *mastans* for political acts – drugs or tenders – so that criminal recognizes the value of loyalty to political parties and the system and support this politics in return.
- Both parties have large number of loan defaulters – *rin santrashis* – and people with criminal rerecords are allowed membership.
- Both have family members as part of the ruling party leadership.
- Both parties allow party line crossing during elections or later or earlier and at all levels so that powerful are thrown outside the system.
- Senior politicians of both sides have common business interests and know that corruption charges can never be prosecuted to the full because of systematic inefficiency and so they are always safe.

Of course there has to be *hartals* or else how will we be kept busy? And live a difficult life and hope that the differences between the two will sink and we shall have peace? Meanwhile the leaders buy another ranch in the USA or Singapore, send their children to study in a foreign university and go to the roof of their Gulshan-Baridhara-Uttara model town residence on a *hartal* day and wonder why can't the city be so free of pollution throughout the year.

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