

Political Disasters in Bangladesh and Affairs of the ‘State of Emergency- 2007’

DÉSASTRES POLITIQUES EN BANGLADESH ET AFFAIRE D’ « ÉTAT D’URGENCE – 2007 »

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Abstract: On January 11, 2008 Bangladesh stepped into its second year under a ‘state of emergency’ with the army backed caretaker government reeling under a number of difficulties on the political and economic fronts. Although Bangladesh has been experiencing ‘state of emergencies’ since the Pakistan period the pattern of this ‘emergency’ is distinct one in nature. This is going to be the longest episode of ‘emergency’ the country experiencing with truncated fundamental rights. Before January 11, 2007 the political situation over a parliamentary election turned so chaotic that it called for such stern action. Major political parties, general citizens along with the civil society are now demanding the withdrawal of the ‘emergency’. This paper looks at the ground and outgrowth of the first year of the ‘state of emergency- 2007’.

Key words: Bangladesh, state of emergency, ground and outgrowth

Résumé: Le 11 janvier 2008, la Bangladesh est entrée dans la deuxième année sous un « état d’urgence » avec l’armée qui soutien le gouvernement de gardien dépassé par un tas de difficultés sur les fronts politique et économique. Bien que la Bangladesh a connu un « état d’urgence » dans la période pakistanaise, le modèle de cette « urgence » est bien différent par sa nature. Il va devenir l’épisode d’urgence le plus long que le pays connaît avec des droits fondamentaux tronqués. Avant le 11 janvier 2007, la situation politique après une élection parlementaire s’avère si chaotique que le pays recourt à une telle action sévère. Les partis politiques majeurs, les citoyens et la société civile exigent maintenant la retraite de l’ « urgence ». Le présent article examine la raison et la conséquence de la première année de l’ « état d’urgence - 2007 ».

Mots-Clés: Bangladesh, état d’urgence, raison et conséquence

INTRODUCTION

The first name of present Bangladesh was “East Bengal” from 14th August 1947 till 14th October 1955, when it was renamed as “East Pakistan” and the name lasted till 25th March 1971 when the independence was declared on 26th march 1971. Since the East Pakistan period Bangladesh has been experiencing military rules and ‘state of emergency’ several times. Seemingly this state of emergency is different from all previous emergencies. This ‘emergency-2007’ was declared by the President who was also the Chief Advisor of the

Non Party Caretaker Government. He was made President by his party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) – the last ruling party. He was doing everything in favor of BNP even after he himself made the Chief Advisor of the interim caretaker government. Fourteen party opposition alliance led by another big political party Bangladesh Awami League (AL) protested his nomination as the chief advisor and protested for cancellation of the national election scheduled for February 22, 2007 without ensuring a neutral environment for all party. But he alone was in the hard-line for holding the national election in favor of his part (BNP); he referred it as, ‘constitutional obligation’.

Unexpectedly he declared the ‘state of emergency’

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on January 11, 2007 just 10 days before the scheduled national election (January 22). As soon as the president declared a 'state of emergency', sacked himself as chief adviser along with his administration and promised to form a new government to hold participatory general elections, the public understandably breathed a collective sigh of relief. Even the declaration of 'emergency' and the formation of a new government were welcomed by the people at large and hailed by self-serving and civil society as a new dawn for the country. Some critics were also suspicious from the very beginning about the role of the military. Because it was not the president who himself declared the 'state of emergency', but it is believed that Bangladesh military forces enforced him for cancellation of the caretaker administration, scheduled election, and declaration of the 'emergency'.

To understand the affairs of 'state of emergency -2007', we must be familiar with some basic political concerns of Bangladesh. This requires a precise attention on crucial points of Bangladesh from its independence. I shall then explore the inevitability and outgrowth of the 'state of emergency- 2007'.

1. TIME LINE: A CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS

1.1 Partition from India

1947 - British colonial rule over India ends. A largely Muslim state comprising East and West Pakistan is established separated from India.

1949 - The Awami League is established to campaign for East Pakistan's autonomy from West Pakistan.

1952- Language movement against West Pakistan for establishing Bengali as the mother language of East Pakistan.

1969 - Mass uprising against West Pakistan.

1970 - The Awami League, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, wins an overwhelming election victory in East Pakistan. The government in West Pakistan refuses to recognize the results, leading to liberation movement-1971.

1.2 Independence of Bangladesh

1971 - Sheikh Mujibur Rahman arrested and taken to West Pakistan. Before he was arrested he indirectly declared the independence of Bangladesh on historical 07 March speech.

In exile, Awami League leaders proclaim the independence of the province of East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Approximately 03 million people of

Bangladesh killed. The new country is achieved, called Bangladesh on 16 December.

1972 - Sheikh Mujib returns, becomes prime minister. Sheikh Mujib begins a program of nationalizing key industries in an attempt to improve living standards, but with little success.

1974 - Severe floods devastate much of the grain crop, leading to an estimated 28,000 deaths. A 'state of emergency' is declared as political unrest grows.

1975 - Political situation worsens. He is assassinated in a military coup in August 15. Martial law is imposed.

1976 - The military ban trade unions.

2. MILITARY RULE

2.1 Ziaur Rahman Era

1977 - Major General Ziaur Rahman assumes the presidency.

1979 - Martial law is lifted following elections, which Zia's Bangladesh National Party (BNP) wins.

1981 - Ziaur Rahman is assassinated during abortive military coup. He is succeeded by Abdus Sattar.

2.2 H. M. Ershad Era

1982 - Lt. General Hussain Muhammad Ershad assumes power in army coup. He suspends the constitution and political parties.

1983 - Limited political activity is permitted. Ershad becomes president.

1986 - Parliamentary and presidential elections. Ershad elected to a five-year term. He lifts martial law and reinstates the constitution.

1987 - 'State of emergency' declared after opposition demonstrations and strikes.

1988 - Islam becomes state religion. Floods cover up to three-quarters of the country.

1990 - Ershad steps down following mass protests.

3. RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY

3.1 BNP regime-1

1991 - H. M. Ershad convicted and jailed for corruption and illegal possession of weapons. Begum Khaleda Zia, Chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) (widow of President Ziaur Rahman) becomes prime

minister. Constitution is changed to render the position of president ceremonial.

3.2 Awami League regime

1996 - Awami League win power, President of Bangladesh Awami League Sheikh Hasina (the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) becomes prime minister.

1998 - Fifteen former army officers sentenced to death for involvement in assassination of President Mujib in 1975.

2001 (July) - Hasina steps down and hand over power to caretaker government.

3.3 BNP Regime-2 (Coalition government)

2001 (October) - Hasina loses at polls to Khaleda Zia's Nationalist Party and its three coalition partners.

2002 (June) - President Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury resigns after ruling BNP accuses him of taking an anti-party line.

2002 (September) – Professor Iajuddin Ahammed sworn in as president.

2002 (December) - Simultaneous bomb blasts in cinema halls in a town north of Dhaka kill 17 and injure hundreds.

2004 - Opposition calls 21 general strikes over the course of the year as part of a campaign to oust the government.

2004 - Bomb attack on Muslim shrine in north-eastern town of Sylhet kills two and injures UK high commissioner and 50 others.

2004 (August) - Grenade attack on opposition's (Awami League) rally in Dhaka kills 22 activists.

2005 (January) - Prominent Awami League politician Shah AMS Kibria is killed in a grenade attack at a political rally.

2006 (February) - Opposition Awami League ends year-long parliamentary boycott.

4. POLITICAL INSTABILITY

2006 (October) - Violent protests over government's choice of a caretaker administration to take over when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia completes her term at the end of the month. During her power hand over to the president at least seventy peoples dies in political clash. President Professor Iajuddin Ahammed steps in and assumes caretaker role for period leading to elections due in January 2007.

2006 (November) - A 14-party opposition alliance led by the Awami League campaigns for controversial election officials to be removed. Chief election commissioner MA Aziz steps aside.

2006 (December) - Election date set at 22 January. Awami alliance says it will boycott the polls. Awami leader Sheikh Hasina accuses President Iajuddin Ahammed of favoring her rival. Blockade aimed at derailing parliamentary elections paralyzes much of the country.

2006 (December 11) - Four advisors resign from the caretaker administration.

2007 (January 3) - Awami League announced that they would boycott the January 22 parliamentary elections. The Awami League took a series of country-wide general strikes and transportation blockades.

2007 (January 6) - It is constitutional obligation to hold the election on January 22, 2007 (President's speech).

2007 (January 9) - Blockade of *Bangobhaban* (president's residence) starts.

5. 'STATE OF EMERGENCY'

2007 (January 11) - A 'state of emergency' is declared on January 11 amid violence in the election run-up. President Iajuddin Ahammed postpones the 22 January poll. Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed takes over as head of the army-backed caretaker administration.

2007 (July-September) - Arrests of former two Prime Minister Sheikh Hasian on July 16, and Khaleda Zia on September 03, charged with some extortion and corruptions.

2007 (August) - Government imposes a curfew on Dhaka and five other cities amid violent clashes between state forces (military-police) and students demanding an end to emergency rule.

2007 (December) – Price hikes of basic essentials almost two times, such as rice, oil, and others. Economy is stagnant through out the country.

2007 (December 26) - One advisor resigns from the caretaker government.

2008 (January 08) - Four advisors of the caretaker government resign.

2008 (January 11) – Army-backed new caretaker government passes its first one year duration of 'state of emergency-2007'.

6. BIRTH OF BANGLADESH

The history of Bangladesh is a history of reversal of what was achieved through the blood of millions of martyrs and a regression back to the blood soaked days of East Pakistan. The East Bengal renamed East Pakistan turned into a perpetual colony of Pakistan. The political movement that was launched for Bengali language in 1952 and for democratic rights on different occasions subsequently turned into a freedom movement and war of Bangladesh liberation in 1971. East Pakistanis felt exploited by the West Pakistan-dominated central government. Linguistic, cultural, and ethnic differences also contributed to the estrangement of East from West Pakistan. Bengalis strongly resisted attempts to impose Urdu as the sole official language of Pakistan. Responding to these grievances, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led the Bengal as leader of the Bengali autonomy movement. After the Awami League won almost all the East Pakistan seats of the Pakistan national assembly in 1970-71 elections, West Pakistan opened talks with the East on constitutional questions about the division of power between the central government and the provinces, as well as the formation of a national government headed by the Awami League. The talks proved unsuccessful, however, and on March 1, 1971, Pakistani President Yahya Khan indefinitely postponed the pending national assembly session, precipitating massive civil disobedience in East Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib was arrested again; his party was banned, and most of his aides fled to India and organized a provisional government to organize and continue the liberation movement.

After the Pakistan Army cracked down on the innocent people of the than East Pakistan and committed the most heinous crime by committing a genocide on the night of March 25, 1971 the Bengalese stood up as one to defend their freedom and fight for their liberation. On March 27 Ziaur Rahman, a young Major in the Pakistan Army posted in Chittagong volunteered to fight against this injustice and made the declaration of Independence from the Chittagong radio station, on behalf of *Bangobondhu* (often referred as, Friend of Bengal) Sheik Mujibur Rahman. Millions of Bangalees began to leave their home after the Pakistan began their reign of terror. As fighting grew between the army and the Bengali *mukti bahini* (freedom fighters; mostly general people), an estimated 10 million Bengalese sought refuge in the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal. Most of the young and able bodied ones determined to fight back joined the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Forces). Thus a rag tag Liberation Force was formed which ultimately turned out to become a disciplined force that jointly with the Indian Army defeated the more superior Pakistan Army. The Bangladesh Liberation War lasted for roughly nine months (from March to December 16, 1971).

7. TRAGEDY OF THE FATHER OF THE NATION (JATIR JANAK)

The first government of the new nation of Bangladesh was formed in Dhaka with Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury as President, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - who was released from Pakistani prison in early 1972 as Prime Minister. The first parliamentary election held under the 1972 constitution was in March 1973, with the Awami League winning a massive majority. Relying heavily on experienced civil servants and members of the Awami League, the new Bangladesh Government focused on relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of the economy and society. Economic conditions remained precarious. His programs of nationalization and industrial socialism suffered from lack of trained personnel, inefficiency, rampant corruption and poor leadership. In December 1974, Mujib decided that continuing economic deterioration and mounting civil disorder required strong measures. Political unrest gave rise to increasing violence, and in response, Mujib began increasing his powers. On January 25, 1975 Sheikh Mujib declared a 'state of emergency' and his political supporters approved a constitutional amendment banning all opposition political parties. On August 15, 1975, a group of junior army officers invaded the presidential residence with tank and killed Sheikh Mujib- the father of the nation, his all family members and the personal staff. Only his two daughters Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, who were on a visit to then West Germany were left alive. They were banned from returning to Bangladesh. The coup was planned by disgruntled Awami League colleagues and military officers, which included Mujib's colleague and former confidante Khondaker Mostaq Ahmed, who became his immediate successor.

8. MILITARY RULES IN BANGLADESH

Almost immediate after killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman two military rulers ruled the country almost for 15 years. One was, Major General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981), and the second one was Lt. General Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990). Both generals assumed the power when Bangladesh was facing a crisis situation after killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, and Major General Ziaur Rahman in 1981. In fact, in that period political activities were either banned or strictly controlled. During Zia's period killing of opponent inside the jail was a new phenomenon. Four national leaders were killed in the jail who was the rulers of exile government of Bangladesh during the independence movement period (1971). The killers of Sheikh Mujib were patronized during that military rule. During Ershad's periods general peoples' life was almost same as Zia's period.

Mass arrest of political leaders' in those two long periods was a very common phenomenon. Both generals enforced 'state of emergency', banned political rights. Both military ruler offered and controlled the national election to legitimate their power. Major Zia established a political party named Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and H. M. Ershad's party's name is National Party (*Jatiyo Party*). Among the two military leaders, Ziaur Rahman was comparatively popular. He was also the announcer of the Independence of Bangladesh on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. His wife, present chairperson of BNP became two times Prime Minister of Bangladesh (1991-1996; 2001-2007). In May 1981, Zia was assassinated in Chittagong by dissident elements of the military. And amid the mass protests like frequent general strikes, increased campus protests, public rallies, and a general disintegration of law and order on December 6, 1990 Ershad offered his resignation. He handed over the power to an interim caretaker government to hold a free and fair national election.

9. RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY

9.1 State of democracy 1: Period 1 of BNP Government

The center-right BNP won a plurality of seats and formed a coalition government with the Islamic party Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. Khaleda Zia (widow of Ziaur Rahman) obtained the post of Prime Minister (1991-1996). In 1996 the opposition, including the Awami League pledged to boycott a constitutional controversy national election scheduled for February 15, 1996 that made Khaleda Zia second term prime minister. But it lasted a very short time. In March 1996, following escalating political turmoil, the sitting parliament enacted a constitutional amendment to allow a neutral caretaker government to assume power conduct new parliamentary elections; former Chief Justice Muhammed Habibur Rahman was nominated as the Chief Advisor (a position equivalent to prime minister) of the interim caretaker government.

9.2 State of democracy 2: Period 1 of Awami League Government

A new parliamentary election was held in June 1996 and was won by the Awami League; party chief Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister (1996-2001). Sheikh Hasina formed what she called a "Government of National Consensus" in June 1996. The latter part of Awami League's tenure was marked by opposition boycott of the parliament and increasingly violent attempts at forcing early elections. However, Awami League completed its five year tenure. In July 2001, the

Awami League government stepped down to allow a caretaker government to preside over parliamentary elections. National parliament elections were held on October 1, 2001 under the aegis of a caretaker government as enshrined in the constitution of Bangladesh.

9.3 State of democracy 3: Period 2 of BNP Government

The caretaker government was successful in containing the violence, which allowed a parliamentary general election to be successfully held on October 1, 2001. The four-party alliance led by the BNP (Jamat-i Islami Bangladesh was another strong part of this alliance) won over a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Begum Khaleda Zia was sworn in on October 10, 2001, as Prime Minister (1996-2001) for the third time (first in 1991, second after the February 15, 1996 election). The second phase of BNP government's rule was quite different. Although from 1991-1996 BNP applied somewhat modern policy, but during 1996-2001 BNP-Jamat government ruled the country in very primitive manner. Jamat-i Islami is a party which played anti-state policy during the independence period of Bangladesh. They even co-operated the Pakistani army (the opponent of Bangladesh) and killed many Bangladeshi peoples including intellectuals. Still Jamat do not recognize the glorious freedom fighting of Bangladesh. Being a part of the government this anti-liberation party attempted to destruct almost all important institution of Bangladesh. Being a lion partner of the alliance force, BNP played the same role too, which was quite unacceptable from BNP.

During this period two most popular senior leader of Awami League were killed in separate meetings. Besides, on 21 August a massive Grenade attack attacked on opposition Awami League rally in Dhaka to kill the main opposition chief Sheikh Hasina (also the daughter of Sheikh Mujib); she survived. Her trustworthy body guard was killed while he was escaping her; the attack also killed at least 22 Awami activists including senior leaders. Islamic terrorist killed two prominent university professors. The BNP rule is also marked by crossfire, organized killing, and growth of so-called 'Islamic' militancy. It is noticed that, whenever BNP government expires its tenure it create immense problems regarding hand over of power and formation of caretaker government. In 1996 they presented the nation a controversy national election. In 2007 they ultimately rewarded the nation the inevitability of the 'state of emergency'.

10. CARETAKER GOVERNMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

One of the more interesting constitutional innovations of recent times is the Bangladeshi Non-party caretaker government. After Bangladesh returned to civilian leadership (in 1991) following 15 years of military rules, main political parties agreed that the incumbent party would step down a couple of months before every election. A neutral non-party caretaker government would briefly run the country and the election commission until a new government was elected. Under Bangladesh's unique system, when an administration comes to the end of its term it hands over to an unelected interim government which has 90 days to organise elections. The constitution stipulates that the last retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court lead the caretaker government as its Chief Advisor (with status of Prime Minister) and would appoint a maximum of ten advisors (with status of ministers) to assist him.

What happened in 2006 regarding the formation of caretaker government? The 13th Amendment of Bangladesh Constitution required the president to offer the position of the Chief Adviser to the immediate past Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice K.M. Hasan, once the previous parliamentary session expired on October 28, 2006. According to the constitution [58C. (3)], The President shall appoint as Chief Adviser the person who among the retired Chief Justices of Bangladesh retired last and who is qualified to be appointed as an Adviser under this article:

“Provided that if such retired Chief Justice is not available or is not willing to hold the office of Chief Adviser, the President shall appoint as Chief Adviser the person who among the retired Chief Justices of Bangladesh retired next before the last retired Chief Justice.”

The AL including other 13 parties opposed Justice Hasan, alleging that he belonged to ruling BNP in his past life and that the BNP government in 2004 amended the constitution to extend retirement age for the Supreme Court judges to make sure that Justice Hasan became the Chief Adviser during the next elections to help BNP win the election. But president did not hear their demand; the situation became more hazardous. About 20,000 wounded as activists of ex-ruling four-party coalition and the then main opposition Awami League-led fourteen-party opposition combines clashed in an escalation of violence across the country. Administrations imposed section 144 on public gatherings in different parts of the country to check the movement, but the political activists carried on with their program defying the ban. The 14-party opposition combine was in opposition to the appointment of former Chief Justice K.M. Hasan as the chief adviser of the interim non-party caretaker government because of his prior political affiliation with BNP. But after the killing of more than seventy peoples former chief justice opposed to take the responsibility of the Chief of the Caretaker Government, and Chief Election Commissioner also went on leave for three months to aloof from the election process.

Then, BNP-nominated President he himself took the oath as the Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government violating the constitution amid the opposition's remonstrations even though major political parties' protested it. The oppositions' another main demand was the removal of the controversial Chief Election Commissioner Justice M A Aziz. To implement his removal oppositions took several programs including blockade and strikes. More than seventy peoples were killed from 28 October to 22 November 2006 while opposition's struggled to meet their main demand— a neutral environment to hold a fair, free and impartial national parliament election- 2007. President paid no heed to oppositions' demand at any stage.

On January 03 the Awami League announced that they would boycott the January 22 parliamentary elections. President, also the Chief of the caretaker government was adamant to hold the election On January 22, 2007 as he said, it is the binding of the constitution (January 06). During his tenure the administration was basically controlled by the BNP staffs. Even he was not co-operating to other advisors. Eventually, four giant advisors were resigned on December 11, 2006. Awami League took a series of country-wide general strikes and transportation blockades. They also took some other programs including the blockade of the Presidents' Residence (*Bangobhabon*) from January 09. At last, the Chief of the interim government President Iajuddin Ahammed reigned on January 11, 2007 declaring 'state of emergency' amid the continuous protests of grand-alliance of oppositions. There is not impossible that, he was convinced to resign from his post of the Chief of the caretaker government by the army of Bangladesh and foreign ambassadors. After his resignation Chief Election Commissioner resigned from his post on January 21. These all rational demands could be resolved without killing of countrymen and even avoiding of the inevitability of the 'state of emergency'. Professor Iajuddin Ahammed had enormous power as both the head of state and government to act decisively, broker a negotiated settlement between the feuding political camps and put the country on the road to the general elections. Regrettably, he was indecisive and failed to put his power to good use. Ultimately, it was his failure to act neutrally and decisively at such a crucial juncture that fuelled the already volatile political situation and led the country closer to a freefall into the depth of uncertainty and disorder, so much so that military intervention became inevitable.

11. EPISODE OF THE 'STATE OF EMERGENCY'

From the history of Bangladesh it is noticed that Bangladesh has been experiencing 'state of emergency' from 1974. But 'state of Emergency-2007' is very

different from the previous 'emergencies'. Constitutionally caretaker government is formed for three months to hold a free and fair national election. President Professor Iajuddin Ahammed took the oath as the Chief Advisor of the caretaker government on October 29, 2006. Ten other advisors took oath on 31 October. But because of his (Chief Advisor's) controversial role four advisors resigned on December 11, 2006. Then after his resignation as the chief advisor and declaration of the 'state of emergency' (January 11, 2007) Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed took oath as the Chief Advisor of the army-backed new caretaker government on January 12, 2007. Before ending a one year of its tenure five of ten advisors of the administration have resigned (four on January 08, another on December).

But in this time (October 2006-) two caretaker governments have been ruling the country consecutively and till today the number of advisors increased to at least 29 instead of the maximum number of 10. The maximum tenure of the caretaker government has been fixed as three months by the Bangladesh constitution. But till today already one year and almost three months have been past. Although, Election Commission has declared a roadmap about the upcoming national election by this year 2008, people of Bangladesh are not sure whether the present government would stay in power even after December 2008.

The public reaction to the proclamation of a 'state of emergency' by the president has apparently been positive. The reason is obvious: days, weeks and months of political uncertainty and concomitant social disorder have been put to rest, albeit for the time being. Moreover, the 'state of emergency', this time around, has so far been less intrusive, the curfew has been withdrawn within 24 hours of its imposition; the print media has been allowed to work without visible interference; the electronic media has gone back to regular news coverage.

There is no doubt that when the 'state of emergency' was declared by the president, the country was passing through a period of crisis. A complex political and economic situation had been created due to the confrontational stances taken by our major political parties in the build-up to the parliamentary elections slated for January 22. The declaration of emergency, which had brought to an end a period of senseless political chaos and violence, was welcomed by almost all sections of society, even though the fundamental rights of citizens had been suspended as a result of it.

People want to believe that armed forces of Bangladesh have no political ambition. In fact, the strong and neutral role of the army saved the country from an anarchic situation during a transition moment. The country has had the experience of martial law, more than once in the past, and, needless to say, the experience has been anything but pleasant. Military intervention, as the nation has learnt the hard way, not

only makes no positive impact on the overall quality of governance but also impedes and debilitates society efforts for democratic growth. The army did intervene at a time when the apparently irreconcilable and increasingly hostile political camps led by the two major political parties of the country had pushed the country to the brink of a sustained period

The present caretaker government is very much powerful since it is backed by the army forces. This government has done some admirable works, such as, separation of judiciary from the executives, freedom of the Election Commission, and formation of Anti Corruption Commission (ACC). By this time ACC already arrested at least fifty former ministers including two powerful prime ministers. The interim government is in essence different from any of the past caretaker administrations. It has done some remarkable jobs but also made some mistakes in the past one year. They took some wrong attempts, such as the present government is killing the sources of non-formal economy, a strong sector of Bangladesh economy. It is said that the government took a 'minus-two theory' (exclusion of former two prime ministers from the politics) which if true would worsen the overall political situation. Even though it is undeniable that the Awami League president, Sheikh Hasina, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party chairperson, Khaleda Zia, are primarily, and the president & the then Chief advisor are responsible for the degeneration of the politics, it is absurd to think that their mere ouster from the political process, that too by a military-controlled government through the political use of its anti-corruption drive, would lead to democratization of the state and society. Although the main challenge for the government is to hold a truly neutral national election, the government has been rather busy trying to break the established political parties and undermining the political process. They are harassing the civil society's life including university teachers for their freethinking. Today print and electronic media have been subject to continuous supervision. The government closed down one private television channel, put a bar on talk-shows for a few days and cancelled declaration of nearly 200 small newspapers and periodicals published from outside Dhaka. The government allowed arbitrary detention of tens of thousands of people as part of its anti-corruption campaign. The army-led joint forces put more than 200 leading politicians behind bars.

Because of indiscriminate arrest of politician and businessmen, businessmen lost their trust. They are always afraid of being arresting. Confidence is directly related to investment. Long-term investors are still waiting for a clear picture of the political scene. The business community suffered a lack of confidence because of the government's subjective actions. That is why the present economy of Bangladesh is stagnant. The present economy of the country is absolutely inactive. Government's inefficiency to run its affairs has made economic insecurity. The insecurity has

intensified because of an economic slowdown compounded by dipping foreign and local investments, rising inflation, food price hike, shrinking job market and declining foreign trade besides political uncertainties. The country's overall consumers' price index (CPI) inflation crossed double digit further and stood at 10.06 per cent on a point-to-point basis in October, 2007 from 9.60 per cent in September 2007 because of raising the prices of both food and non-food items (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)). The prices of major essential commodities increased by 26–70 per cent in the past one year of the interim government in comparisons between goods prices of January 11, 2007 and January 10, 2008. The retail prices of coarse rice increased by 68 per cent in the period, and flour increased up to 61 per cent. most sensitive essential food items — rice, flour, milk, cooking oil, sugar, lentil, red chillies, onions and potato had become dearer by 26 per cent to 70 per cent in the period. The interim government has failed to contain the price spiral of essential commodities. The prices of food items had gone out of the reach of the poor and the limited income people while the middle class was hit hard by the price increase. It is a failure of the government's planning and implementation that has resulted in the price hikes. The government is failed to foresee the market's need and plan in advance for timely procurement from international sources since local production was badly hampered.

CONCLUSION

2007 was a landmark year for Bangladesh. Although it is not untrue that the politicians have hardly ever lived up to the expectations of the people and the irresponsible behavior of the political establishments pushed the country to such a pass that a 'state of emergency' had to be imposed, suspending the democratic rights of the people; however, it is also true

that, the politicians are the ones who, despite whatever limitations that they have had held on to the democratic norms, maybe largely in style rather than substance, over the past 15 years or so. However, no one should forget that the economy had grown steadily in that period despite rampant corruption. The GDP growth in those years was higher than it was in the preceding years of military and quasi-military rule, and should be higher than it has been during the emergency rule. Nevertheless, the politicians should be condoned for their past misdeeds. Politicians who have been involved in corruption and abuse of power while in government should be taken to charge, but definitely after effective and credible prosecution in the court of law. The present interim government must realize that, since the current crisis is political and it has to be resolved politically. Therefore, the most sensible step for it to take would be to engage in talks with the political parties to reach consensus on how best to return the country to a true democratic fold, to be governed by the peoples' elected representatives.

Today people of Bangladesh don't want anymore from political uncertainty. But given the present scenario, it is not at all surprising that there is a greater uncertainty now regarding the future of the politics and democracy. Even if election is held as per the government's 'roadmap,' there is a question whether it will be participatory, free, fair or credible? What will be the future course of Bangladesh? Since democratic norms have not yet been wiped up from Bangladesh, it should adopt the true democratic characters. In fact, the future path of Bangladesh depends generally on the general people, but particularly on the present military-controlled caretaker government including the politicians.

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