

556 ERSHAD IN JAIL Setback for Bangladesh Opposition 12

THE complexion of Bangladesh politics is undergoing a sea change with the Bangladesh High Court having sent H M Ershad, chairman of the Jatiya Party and the former President of the country, back to prison for corruption. Most significant is his debarment from contesting elections for five years. It is a quirk of history that such a fate awaited the country's longest serving ruler; the founder of the Jatiya Party is not only its guiding spirit but also one of the main pillars of the BNP-led Begum Zia's four-party opposition combine which has vowed to oust Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. His party's secretary general too has been barred from contesting election on grounds of moral turpitude. The election bar will no doubt dishearten Ershad's followers. They had returned him to Parliament twice — in 1991 and 1996 — from five Rangpur seats with massive margins despite his being in jail on both occasions. For Rangpur voters he has been a symbol of protest against Dhaka's policy of neglect. But all this may change with Ershad no longer being in the poll fray. The greatest worry to Begum Zia and the leaders of two Muslim fundamentalist parties including the Jamat-e-Islam is whether an already truncated Jatiya Party will be able to stay together. Already it has suffered two splits which has sapped its morale and strength. With his blessing leaders of one of his party's factions had broken away to align itself with Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. In fact his once right hand man is now a key minister in Hasina's Government.

What is worrying Begum Zia and others of the four party combine is that Ershad is becoming a big liability. The mass image that he has does not help the combine. It was precisely because of this that the combine's liaison committee did not issue any statement sympathising with Ershad's plight for which his followers expressed considerable dismay. The electoral arithmetic had compelled Begum Zia to have Ershad as an ally since his party won 33 seats in the last parliamentary poll. But in the changed scenario any linkage with Ershad may do more harm than any good to the combine. For the combined opposition, which has not been able to get anywhere with its oust Hasina movement, this is a big setback.

THE STATESMAN

5 DEC 2000

Acquittals trigger protests

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, DEC. 14. The verdict in the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman murder case, in which one of the two judges acquitted five of the 15 accused persons, triggered instant protests all over Bangladesh, with scores of people, mostly belonging to the ruling Awami League and socio-cultural organisations taking to the streets.

The Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, who declined to comment on the judgment, appealed to the people to have "patience and not to resort to violence".

The Home Minister, Mr. Mohammad Nasim, rushed to the Dhaka University campus to defuse mounting tension after the judgment was pronounced. Students staged protests demanding execution of the all the 15 accused — all former army officials — and sentenced to death by a lower court.

The senior judge of the High Court Division Bench of the Supreme Court, Mr. Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin, upheld the 1998 trial court verdict of death penalty on 10 of the accused but acquitted five. "These five condemned convicts are acquitted of the charges levelled against them," Justice Ruhul Amin ruled.

The other judge on the bench, Mr. Justice A.B.M. Khairul Haq, upheld the entire trial court verdict handing down death sentences to all the 15 accused, saying, "The death reference No 30 (Bangabandhu murder case) of the 1998 is accepted in respect of all (the 15) accused".

Another bench will now hear the case because of the split verdict in line with the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, court sources said, adding that the case had been sent to the Chief Justice for action along that line.

Tight security was enforced in and around the crowded Supreme Court complex on Thursday. Justice Ruhul Amin pronounced his verdict first while Justice Khairul Haq followed his colleague with his verdict.

Both the judges took 20 minutes to read out the operative part of the judgment after they arrived at the courtroom around 10.45 a.m. A large number of lawyers, including the Attorney General, journalists, officials and relatives of the convicts were present.

The 10 who received the death sentence are: the former Lieutenant Colonels Syed Farook Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Khondoker Abdur Rashid, Shariful Haque Dalim, AM Rashed Chowdhury, AKM Mohiuddin (lancer), SHBM Nur Chowdhury, Mohammad Abdul Aziz Pasha, former Major Baziul Huda and Captain Abdul Mazed.

Only three of the 10, Farook, Shahriar and Huda, are now in Dhaka Central Jail. The rest have been absconding since the June 1996 general elections which brought back the Awami League back to power 21 years after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Legal experts, including the chief prosecution lawyer, Mr. Serajul Haq, and Defence Counsel said despite the unanimity on the punishment for the 10, the execution of the verdict would have to wait until the disposal the split part of the judgment by a third judge.

The five acquitted persons are: Former Lieutenant Colonel Mohiuddin Ahmed, Major Ahmed Sharful Hossain, Captains Mohammad Kismat Hashem and Nazmul Hossain Ansar and Risaldar Muslemuddin alias Moslehuddin. Except Lt. Col. Mohiuddin, all are fugitives.

The experts said a third judge, to whom the case would have to be referred, would decide the fate of the convicts. "The verdict is a verdict, we have nothing to comment, but this trial proved that the rule of law is there in the country," Mr. Serajul Haq said after the verdict. He, however, added that the prosecution struggle to prove the case would take some more days to yield result due to the split judgment "as the High Court part of the trial is yet to be ended". The defence lawyers, including Mr. Mahbubur Rahman, said they would file an appeal against the verdict after the disposal of the case by the third judge.

THE HINDU

15 DEC 2000

OPPOSITION REBUFFED

But Hasina has other challenges to meet

THE disposal of three contempt cases against Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by Dhaka High Court with a caution to be "more careful and respectful in making comment on judiciary" in future has set at rest the political controversy whipped up by the Bangladesh Opposition for political advantage. According to her the trial of killers obstructed and bail procured for them. Except for those blinded by hatred for Sheikh Hasina, there will be widespread support for her position. She is not wrong in seeking an explanation for the manner in which bail was granted for the asking for many of the murderers. According to official sources, 10 people on an average are murdered and 12 are raped daily. The figures project a frightful picture although the scene is much worse than officially admitted. There are numerous instances where criminals have committed worse crimes and gone into hiding after jumping bail. Sheikh Hasina articulates popular sentiment. After all it is her Government which is blamed for the rising crime graph.

The deplorable aspect of the three contempt cases was that they were filed to settle political scores with Sheikh Hasina rather than concern for the dignity of the judiciary. Most of the 449 petitioners, besides 110 Opposition MPs, have pronounced Opposition connexions. This is why 568 lawyers, mostly Awami League sympathisers, filed a separate petition seeking dismissal of all the cases. The issue was so highly politicised that at the meeting of the Supreme Court Bar Association lawyers of rival camps almost came to blows. As a result the focus of the issue, worsening crime scene and inadequate judicial response, was lost. The judiciary is suffering from a crisis of confidence since many judges are appointees of previous Governments and their actions, in popular perception, have seemed unfair. Unfortunately Sheikh Hasina has done little to reverse the trend. She has yet to honour her poll pledge to separate the judiciary from the executive. Recently her supporters sought to intimidate judges some of whom felt embarrassed to hear Sheikh Mujib's death reference case. She also needs to deal with her party leaders who are using criminals for personal gains. Law and order may be a deciding factor in next year's election.

THE DAILY STAR

9 OCT 2009

Court asks Ershad to surrender

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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Mr HM Ershad

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DHAKA, Nov. 7. — The Supreme Court of Bangladesh today directed former military ruler, H M Ershad to surrender within two weeks in connection with a High Court verdict handing him five-year jail term on a graft charge.

Earlier, the court rejected his plea allowing him not to surrender pending disposal of his appeal against the court's judgement. The judgement was given by Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, headed by chief justice, Mr Latifur Rahman.

The Supreme Court will hear the petitions filed by Ershad and the government on the High Court judgement, on 21 November.

Today's ruling comes after the Supreme Court had granted three extensions earlier for his surrender.

Ershad was found guilty of "criminal misconduct" by the High Court and handed a five year jail term and a fine of taka 5.5 crore in August last year. He was charged with purchasing a high rise building on government land, while in power thus accumulating wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income.

Reacting to the order, Ershad has said that he will abide by the verdict and surrender before the due date.

THE STATESMAN

8 NOV 2000

AD-12
17/12

Fresh unrest brewing in CHT

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, NOV. 16. The situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), wracked by tribal insurgency and counter-insurgency for nearly two decades, has become tense once again as the controversy over the implementation of the peace accord, signed two years ago, has taken a new turn.

The Chairman of the CHT Regional Council (CHTRC), Mr. J. B. Larma alias Shanto Larma, who is also the chief of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), recently threatened to go back to bush war owing to what he termed as the "failure of the Government" to implement the peace accord.

Mr. Larma, who enjoys the status of a State Minister, said that "despite our utmost sincerity" some sections of the Government did not want that the accord, which had ended the bush war, be implemented.

But the statement by Mr. Larma invited quick protest not only from the Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Mr. Kalparanjan Chakma, but also other top tribal leaders, including Mr. Bir Bahadur, MP. They described Mr. Larma's comments as "irresponsible" and said the Government was sincere in implementing the remaining clauses of the accord which remained unimplemented.

Meanwhile, a report compiled by the Ministry of CHT Affairs said that "98 per cent" of the accord had been implemented.

The comments of Mr. Larma made even the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, to say that despite some constraints, the pace of implementation of the treaty was encouraging.

Independent observers admit that there were some clauses that were not implemented. But they did not question the sincerity of the Government in this regard since many vital clauses were already implemented and the tribal-dominated Regional Council headed by Mr. Larma was functioning smoothly. This section is, however, anxious to know why Mr. Larma who knows the complexities and the mind of the Government, has become so vocal and even threatened to go back to insurgency.

It seems that the crux of the CHT problem, even after the signing of the landmark agreement, was not fully removed. Mr. Charu Bikash Chakma, a close friend of late M. N. Larma, the founding leader of the tribal insurgency, explained that the tribals are still worried about their cultural identity and exclusive right in the hills while Bengali settlers, majority of whom were brought to the region by military rulers, worried about their right to reside and earn their livelihood in the region.

Tribals, who now constitute slightly more than half of the 1 million CHT population, feel they are the original inhabitants of the hills and Bengalis had always ruled the CHT region only under special arrangements, by granting autonomy and exclusive rights to the 13 tribes in the area.

Incidentally, the opponents of the accord are the political opposition of the Sheikh Hasina Government. The anti-accord protagonists see things differently. They ask why tribals should enjoy exclusive rights or why citizens from other parts of the country should not enjoy rights in the CHT, which they enjoy else-

where, i.e. right to own property and to stand for election in local government.

For Bengali settlers, the issue is more of a bread and butter one as they were landless poor when they were brought to the CHT under a blueprint of the then military regimes to outnumber the tribals. For the tribals, however, the issue goes far more deeper. They fear their very identity is under threat.

As the anti-accord campaigners say, the special status for the CHT would mean the Bengalis would become disadvantaged and may even lose the right to buy and own land.

The hill people and the secular forces say that imposition of the will of the majority on a small but culturally distinct minority would in no way constitute a democratic way of doing things. They praise the Government for the bold measures in securing the rights of the tribals through signing the peace accord.

There is another striking factor that was apparently overlooked. Following the peace accord, the military administration has now almost wound up its network under the counter-insurgency wing. In the absence of effective functioning of that network, it is alleged that one "foreign intelligence" has found it convenient to rule the roost there.

There is also a new aspect that Awami League, the ruling party, is not in favour of the emergence of a separate identity for the PCJSS which is trying to become a regional party. Awami League and PCJSS had an understanding to work together but its possibility is reportedly fading since the hardliners in the PCJSS are now thinking in a different line.

THE HINDU

17 NOV 2000

Hasina Govt., HC on collision course

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, NOV. 17. Periodical rows between the executive and the judiciary are not new to Bangladesh, but the latest controversy is snowballing into a major confrontation between the two wings of Government.

The issue arose after a bench of the High Court granted anticipatory bail at midnight to a person who faces sedition charges brought by the State. Taking note of this unprecedented action, Parliament decided to hold a discussion on the issue, triggering a row with the High Court.

The bench, holding court at midnight, granted Mr. A.M.M. Bahauddin, editor of the *Daily Inqilab*, considered as the mouthpiece of the country's religious fundamentalists, bail after warrants of arrest were issued by a district court against the editor, publisher and the writer of an article for publishing a parody ridiculing the country's national anthem.

Warrants have been issued against them by other district courts too after many persons moved the courts.

The controversial order came from the bench reconstituted by the Chief Justice after another bench declined to hear the petition and sent the matter to him in the evening. To avert arrest, Mr. Bahauddin, backed by prominent lawyers supporting the Begum Khaleda Zia-led Opposition alliance, surrendered before the High Court and prayed for anticipatory bail which was granted.

The Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, addressing Parliament on Thursday on her return from abroad, questioned the "reason and urgency" that prompted the bench to sit at midnight.

"None can accept such a disgrace brought upon the national anthem, national independence and sovereignty... We can't and we'll not accept it", she said. Sheikh Hasina, who was twice warned by the High Court in the past against making comments against the court and judges, wondered how the court granted bail so hastily even without giving notice to the State or without the Attorney General's presence. Though the Government is a party to the case, the Attorney General was not informed when the night sitting of the court was held on Nov. 15.

The Home Affairs Minister, Mr. Mohammad Nasim, wondered about the "hasty midnight sitting" of the court. "Was it so urgent to sit at midnight to grant this bail while the nation had to wait for years to see the trial of the Bangabandhu (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman)

murder case?" Making a statement on the floor of the House, the Law Minister, Mr. Abdul Matin Khasru, supported Mr. Nasim saying, the High Court had set an "unprecedented instance" and urged the court to show similar urgency in pressing matters.

Parliament is yet to fix a date for the discussion on the issue but sources said it may be held any time next week. The House will be holding the debate in the absence of the Opposition which has been boycotting the session for more than a year and a half. The Opposition leader, Begum Khaleda Zia, has sided with the editor, accusing the Government of harassing the "popular and patriotic newspaper".

Interestingly, most other popular dailies of the country have demanded punishment for the editor, publisher and the writer of the parody. There was also a host of statements in the newspapers which wanted stern action against the daily, which is known for its stand in favour of politics which upheld anti-independence spirit.

The remarks of Government leaders, including some prominent legal experts who have questioned the "unprecedented nature" of the court sitting at midnight, have revived the old controversy over the "abnormal delay" in completing the hearing on the death reference in the murder case of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After a lower court passed the verdict sentencing 15 former army officers to death two years ago for assassinating the father of the nation, the High Court is yet to complete the process of hearing the reference. This has caused a commotion in the "pro-liberation lobby" in Bangladesh politics which questions the reason for such delay.

As the fresh controversy began, the death reference bench of the High Court took cognizance of the Home Minister's comments in Parliament and asked the Attorney General to ascertain whether the Minister's observations as carried in the newspapers were correct and report to the bench on Sunday.

Meanwhile, in another development, editors and publishers of 16 national dailies in a joint statement expressed concern over the issuance of show cause notices by the High Court *suo motu* and on the basis of complaints by the Attorney General against five leading dailies on charges of contempt of court. "We believe that the judiciary should not avoid or let go the matter uninvestigated over which the complexity has arisen, but the newspapers concerned reported it to draw the attention of the higher authorities of the State and the judiciary", the statement said.

THE HINDU

18 NOV 2007

Khaleda vows to form nationalist govt.

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, OCT. 2. The leader of the Bangladesh National Party, Begum Khaleda Zia, has virtually started her campaign for the next general elections with a call to the people to support the candidates of the four-party Opposition alliance. She said the alliance, if voted to power, would form a "nationalist government".

Begum Zia's call came at a public rally organised by the alliance's at Mymensingh one month after the Opposition leaders, in a rather hasty move, signed an accord on electoral alliance. On August 24, Begum Zia, the Jamaat-e-Islami chief, Prof. Golam Azam, and the IOJ leader, Maulana Azizul Huq, rushed to the residence of Gen. H. M. Ershad, the former dictator and now Jatiya Party chairperson, a few hours after he was sentenced to five years in jail by a High Court bench in a corruption case, and signed the deal.

Incidentally, the corruption case against Gen. Ershad was filed during Begum Zia's regime.

The Mymensingh rally which was fairly big, has raised the morale of the alliance, particularly of Gen. Ershad and the religious fundamentalists, because Begum Zia, for the first time, disclosed her plan to include even those politicians who still toe "one-Pakistan" concept, in her cabinet in the name of forming a "nationalist government".

The Opposition, now seemingly united, has made many charges against the Hasina Government, the most serious of them being deterioration in the law and order situation. Flinging charges of "corruption" against the ruling party, Khaleda Zia alleged that the Awami League was trying to hang on to power through rigging and use of money power. The ruling party responded by charging that the Opposition combine had prepared a blueprint to grab power through conspiracy and make

Bangladesh a "neo-Pakistan" with the help of "a foreign secret agency".

In her latest attempt to kick off the anti-Government agitation, Begum Zia called for a country-wide hartal on Monday to protest against "terrorism". The Opposition alliance had called a similar hartal on August 30 to protest enhanced fuel prices. However, they failed to draw public response.

The BNP chief, who returned home on September 23 from Saudi Arabia, announced several demonstrations, including a joint rally in northern Dinajpur on October 10. The Home Minister, Mr. Mohamad Nasim, alleged that Begum Zia had established contacts with a "foreign intelligence agency" during her trip to Saudi Arabia. In fact, the issue of the involvement of Pakistan's ISI in the internal affairs of Bangladesh is becoming more talked about than at any time before with the pro-liberation politicians and other leading personalities demanding shutting down of the Pakistan embassy in Dhaka. They allege that the embassy has become the centre "from where all activities of ISI are planned and executed."

Begum Zia asked for votes a few days after the Prime Minister instructed her party to get ready for the election that may be called at any time. Despite the strong Opposition alliance, Sheikh Hasina believes that her party will do well in the poll. But many sympathisers of the party believe that the party may be underestimating the alliance.

It is difficult to say when the election is going to be held. The Awami League must be waiting for an opportune time to call election, to catch the opponents unprepared. Sheikh Hasina's five-year term ends on July 12, 2001. Elections must be held within three months thereafter under a non-party caretaker government.

THE HINDU

3 OCT 2000

Ziaur killing: panel for revocation of sentences

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, OCT. 3. In a landmark decision, the Standing Committee of the Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) on the Ministry of Defence has unanimously recommended revocation of the court martial judgment on 37 army officers for their alleged role in the assassination of the late President Gen. Ziaur Rahman. Thirteen of the officers have been hanged.

The members of the Committee belonging to both the treasury and Opposition benches felt that the trial by the court martial was "illegal and unjust", aimed at eliminating freedom fighter officers from the army. They opined that the verdict should be nullified under Section 132 of the Army Act. Incidentally, all the parliamentary Committees have been working with the full participation of Opposition parties though they have been abstaining from Parliament for a long time. The legislators attending the meeting asked the Ministry of Defence to take necessary measures to implement the decision. The lawmakers observed that 13 army officers, all of them were liberation war heroes of the country, were hanged for their alleged involvement in the killing of Ziaur Rahman on May 30, 1981. They were not even allowed to defend themselves during the trial.

The legislators also decided to summon the former President, Gen. H.M. Ershad, to testify before the committee since he was the Chief of Army Staff when the trial was held. Ever since the executions, the pro-liberation lobby in Bangladesh has been demanding reopening of the case, stating that the hanging of the officers was a "conspiracy" to eliminate freedom fighters from the army.

There has been a civil case in a Chittagong court concerning Ziaur Rahman's assassination but the then Government led by Begum Khaleda Zia stopped all po-

lice investigations into the case. The Sheikh Hasina Government reopened the trial but said it was being delayed due to "non-cooperation" from the main Opposition party.

The parliamentary committee was probing the allegations of the widows of those hanged that the action against their husbands was *mala fide* and illegal. Earlier, a sub-committee of the legislators assigned to look into the court-martial submitted its report to the Standing Committee. The sub-committee expressed its dissatisfaction over the Army Headquarters' refusal to provide it with necessary documents regarding the trial. In its report, it asked the Standing Committee to take action against the Ministry of Defence for non-cooperation.

The Committee meeting was chaired by Maj. Gen. M. Shafiullah (Retd). The Defence Secretary, Mr. Idris Ali, and the Army Chief Lt. Gen. Mustafizur Rahman, also attended. The Defence Secretary said the army would provide the Committee with all the papers regarding the court martial.

The decision by the Committee came after the sub-committee headed by Col. Showkat Ali (Retd), submitted its report maintaining that the punishment given under the Martial Law was "pre-planned and the judgment was delivered without adequate witness and proof."

The sub-committee also said the accused were not allowed to defend themselves and there was only three defending officers for the 37 accused officers.

Maj. Gen. Shafiullah, a freedom fighter and the first Chief of the Bangladesh Army, said injustice was meted out to most of the officers. He said some of the convicted officers were not even at the place of the crime and one who was hanged was with Ziaur Rahman during the revolt.

THE HINDU

4 OCT 2000

HASINA'S STRATEGY

Rich Dividends For Bangladesh

15/10
51-8

THE Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, has of late adopted a strategy that appears to be paying dividends both externally and internally. It also shows that, at least for the present, the dividing line between the country's domestic and foreign politics has got blurred. A school of thought in international politics comprising Senator Fulbright, Hans J Morgenthau and Steve Smith says that "if ever the line

By **PARMANAND**

raf made an appeal to forget the past.

What prompted Hasina to adopt a new line vis-a-vis Pakistan? Relations between the two South Asian states had been, by and large, friendly after the formation of Bangladesh, despite the happenings of 1971 and Islamabad's failure to settle the question of around 250,000 Urdu-speaking Biharis stranded in Bangladesh who had opted for Pakistan after

through a mass movement. The ruling Awami League believes that if the plan masterminded by Khaleda Zia, HM Ershad and Gholam Azam works, Bangladesh will become neo-Pakistan and that will be the beginning of a process of "Pakistanisation" which freedom-loving Bengalis would not allow. Surprisingly, Khaleda Zia is now leading even those who had opposed and still oppose Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan. The failure of the four-

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JEST-20

to complete a pact on a tra-
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in Serbia.
Mr Kostunica must cut de
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Serb republic, whose admir
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night meeting between t
socialists and Mr Kostunica
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broke up today apparently o
with an outline of the pact.

ing off for Calcutta. A bird hit on the aircraft's
right engine led to it catching fire.
The frequency of bird hits on aircraft flying in
and out of TIA, Nepal's only international air-
port, has affected its credibility and put a ques-
tion mark on its safety standards. All the inci-
dents have taken place at the beginning of the
tourist season, and according to experts, this will
definitely have an adverse impact on the coun-
try's tourism sector.
Airport authorities have come up with a pro-
posal to start night flights to deal with the prob-
lem, which has been attributed to the presence
of huge piles of garbage and dirt in the vicinity
of the airport. "We are going to employ more bird
hunters to contain the problem," a senior TIA
official said.
But others said they were skeptical about this
measure being successful. "If the authorities
think bird hunters could solve the problem, they
are mistaken," said the officials.
International regulations prohibit the dumping
of garbage in a 13-km radius of any internation-
al airport, but at the TIA, garbage can even be
seen in the restricted areas.

aces airlines pullout

He told a press conference
100 that his party understood the
constraints faced by the PA in
bringing in a new constitution
and as it had failed to achieve two-
thirds majority.
However, it could still be
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parliament into a constituent
assembly and approving the
constitution with a simple
majority, Mr Hakeem said.
Such a process was politically
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Clinton-Hasina talks to focus on energy sector

110-16
By Haroon Habib 15/10

DHAKA, OCT. 14. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, will visit the U.S. from October 16 to 18 at the invitation of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton. She is the first Bangladesh Head of Government to visit that country. Dhaka sees the visit, following Mr. Clinton's trip to Bangladesh in March, as a historic one and also an opportunity to broaden relations. Bilateral, regional and global issues would figure in the talks. Agreements bolstering economic and bilateral ties are expected to be signed.

An official in the U.S. Department of Energy, Mr. Calvin Humphrey, has told mediapersons here that "This (the invitation) reflects the level and depth of friendship between U.S. and Bangladesh." The official "settled up some remaining snags" for unhindered U.S. investments in the energy sector.

Diplomatic sources here said that the Clinton-Hasina meeting would give the final shape

Bangladesh
to their discussions in Dhaka in March 20 focussing on several issues, more precisely, Bangladesh's energy assets, which are of considerable interest to the U.S. and Western oil companies. Sheikh Hasina expects that the U.S. would accelerate the opening of its market to Bangladesh readymade garments, the main export earning sector.

Sheikh Hasina and Mr. Clinton will hold a summit meeting at the White House. She will also meet the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, visit Pentagon and also meet the members of the Press Club.

Dhaka also hopes to make some progress in the extradition of the convicted killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the U.S. She is also scheduled to meet the U.S. Attorney General, Ms. Janet Reno. A luncheon will also be given in Sheikh Hasina's honour.

According to local newspaper reports, the U.S. is "pressing" Bangladesh to take decisions on a number of issues including that relating to

the export of gas to India, before the visit to Washington. However, the stand on gas export would be communicated to the U.S. during the summit meeting, sources said. Mr. Humphrey, however, denied putting "pressure" on Bangladesh saying they were in fact assisting Bangladesh "to take the right decision".

It appears that quota and GSP facilities to Bangladesh would largely depend on the Dhaka's decision on allowing trade union rights in the export processing zones. The U.S. is insisting on the right of workers to organise unions in the EPZs.

The debt relief to be sought would be around \$700 millions extended under PL-480. The U.S. is interested in increasing its investment in oil and gas sector of Bangladesh. But much would depend on Bangladesh's decision on gas export. Sheikh Hasina government is unlikely to agree to any proposal involving India before the next general election lest it should become a handle for the Opposition to beat it with.

THE HINDU

15 OCT 2000

Missouri governor killed in plane crash

GOLDMAN (Missouri): Missouri governor Mel Carnahan was killed in a plane crash along with one of his sons, who was flying the plane, and a campaign adviser, a relative of the adviser said on Tuesday.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's department said the plane crashed on Monday night in a hilly wooded area about 40 km south of St Louis in the U.S. Missouri highway patrol sgt Tim McDonald said debris from the crash was scattered, making it difficult to identify the plane.

The governor, son Roger, and campaign adviser Chris Sifford, all died in the crash, said Frank Sifford, a Stoddard county commissioner. He was adviser Sifford's cousin. "We don't have any information, just that (Chris) was on the plane with governor Carnahan and it crashed near Pevely and there are no survivors," said Frank Sifford. The governor had been expected at a campaign rally at 8 p.m. (local time) in New Madrid, about 240 km south of St Louis. (AP)

India calls for reforms in developing nations

By Dharam Shourie

UNITED NATIONS: Criticising the rich nations for their failure to help developing states lift themselves out of the quagmire of poverty and debt during the last decade, India has called for "dramatic improvement" in development efforts to ensure future generations are freed from hunger, disease and illiteracy.

Addressing a UN committee meeting here, India's representative M.M. Sankhdher urged the industrialised states to fulfil their commitments undertaken at various UN fora in 1990s in the fields of trade, financial assistance, transfer of technology and know-how, debt-relief and environment. Agreeing that sustained economic growth presupposes vigorous national effort, Mr Sankhdher pointed out that it also needed a favourable international environment.

He regretted that none of the goals set in declaration on international economic cooperation and the international development strategy, both

adopted in 1990, have been met.

No developing country has achieved the goal of seven per cent rate of growth, number of people living under poverty line has not decreased, international trading environment conducive to developing countries has not been created and the debt burden, instead of reducing, has gone up to \$2.5 trillion in 1999 from \$1.4 trillion in 1990, he told the delegates. Pointing to the specific goals set by last month's millennium summit of the UN general assembly for reducing poverty, and in the fields of literacy and health, among other areas, Mr Sankhdher said mobilisation of financial resources, besides the political will, would be necessary to achieve the targets.

So far only limited progress has been achieved in meeting the goals set by several international conferences on environment, population and development, social development and women's empowerment, he added. (PTI)

Sheikh Hasina's historic U.S. visit extended

WASHINGTON: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed flew into Washington on Monday, making history as the first-ever Bangladeshi leader to undertake an official visit to the U.S. Sheikh Hasina arrived at Andrews Air Force base after a stopover in London, and was taken by motorcade to Blair House, a residence opposite the White House often used by foreign leaders when visiting Washington.

She smiled at reporters but declined to answer questions as she walked from her limousine holding the hand of her three-year-old granddaughter Amreen Hossain.

The itinerary for the visit was hastily reshuffled after President Bill Clinton and other top officials rushed off to attend a West Asia summit in Egypt.

The President is now expected to see the PM on Thursday. A luncheon due to take place on Tuesday with secretary of state Madeleine Albright will now be hosted by her deputy Strobe Talbott, officials said.

Sheikh Hasina's visit is at the invitation of Mr Clinton, who visited Bangladesh briefly during his South Asian tour earlier this year.

Officials in Dhaka said the visit, which has been expanded to four days owing to Mr Clinton's West Asia trip, would transform relations with Washington.

"The historic visit to Washington by our Prime Minister will bring about a revolutionary change in bilateral ties, which will be further expanded," Bangladeshi foreign secretary Shafi Sami said.

Hours after arriving, Sheikh Hasina held talks with U.S. energy secretary Bill Richardson. No details were released of the meeting.

During the visit, agreements are expected to be signed on information technology, nuclear energy and the environment.

Sheikh Hasina will also meet U.S. attorney general Janet Reno, oil company executives and U.S. labour secretary Alexis Herman. (AFP)

Governor who accused Estrada of bribery is grilled

MANILA: A provincial governor, who accused President Joseph Estrada of taking bribes from illegal gambling bosses was grilled in the Senate on Tuesday, ahead of a bid to impeach the Philippine leader.

Governor Luis Singson, a former close friend of the President, stood firm on his allegations even as Senators alleged Singson misused government funds and was possibly linked to smuggling activities. Singson had claimed that he personally handed over to the President \$8.2 million collected from operators of "jueteng," an illegal gambling racket.

The opposition is using Singson's allegations as the basis for impeachment charges against Mr Estrada, which they plan to file in the House of Representatives on Wednesday. Singson said Mr Estrada and his allies tried to talk him out of making the charges, but he stood his ground.

Asked by Senator Rodolfo Biazon if he was aware he was committing an illegal act by acting as a bagman for Mr Estrada, Singson said: "Yes, I was. It was the order of the President. What could I do?" (AFP)

Indonesia fighting claims four rebels

JAKARTA: Security forces in Indonesia's war-torn Aceh province shot four rebels to death while fighting between military personnel and policemen in the Maluku islands left one dead, security officials said on Tuesday.

Lt-Col Irawan, a local armed forces commander in Aceh, said the insurgents were killed in a battle in the east of the territory on Sunday after guerrilla fighters ambushed a security patrol.

In a second fire-fight on Monday, two soldiers were shot and wounded. However, rebel spokesman Abu Khalifah said eight soldiers had been killed in Monday's fighting. The latest deaths bring to 156 the number of people killed in the province since a truce between the government and the rebels came into effect on June 2.

The Free Aceh Movement has been fighting for independence for its oil-rich homeland on the northern tip of Sumatra island since the mid-1970s. At least 5,500 people have been killed in the past decade. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 OCT 2000

Hasina to meet Clinton today

By Haroon Habib

40-19 19/10
WASHINGTON, OCT. 18. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, and the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina will hold talks tomorrow to follow up the discussions they held in Dhaka seven months ago to strengthen the bilateral relations.

The formal talks, scheduled for an hour from 12:25 local time, will cover important issues including U.S. investment in Bangladesh, particularly oil, gas and energy sectors, officials here said. Mr. Clinton visited Bangladesh on March 20 last beginning his South Asian tour from Dhaka. The two leaders will discuss regional and global issues.

After reaching here on October 16, following an invitation from Mr. Clinton, the Bangladesh Prime Minister met U.S. politicians, officials and dignitaries including the former U.S. Ambassadors in Dhaka and diplomats dealing with South Asia.

Sheikh Hasina also visited the U.S. State Department and the Pentagon, as the top U.S. functionaries appreciated her government's regional and global agenda.

During the maiden official U.S. trip, first by any head of state and government in the country's 30 years of political existence, Sheikh Hasina has been able to make the U.S. leadership understand the ideological and moral compulsions of her secular democratic party, that had led the nation to freedom from Pakistan in 1971 and returned to power after 21 long years following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with his family members in

1975. the then U.S. administration of President Richard Nixon had opposed independence for Bangladesh from Pakistan, but accorded recognition within four months of its sovereign existence.

Many Bangladesh and U.S. diplomats feel that Sheikh Hasina could make the U.S. policymakers realise the difference between a political party born out of historical needs and tradition and those others which were born out of the pockets of the military rulers. Sheikh Hasina, addressed the U.S. Council of Foreign relations at a breakfast meeting where she spoke about the state of democracy in her country expressing the strong hope that democratic institutions of Bangladesh will be strengthened despite what she termed the "intolerant attitude" of the Opposition leadership. If the Opposition waited for the verdict of the people through polls instead of adopting destabilising tactics, they could have served the cause of democracy better, she opined.

Reiterating her point, she also expressed the hope that a free and fair election under neutral caretaker government would be held in due time.

She also made a strong plea that the U.S. must extradite the convicted killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, some of whom, are staying in the U.S. to avoid trial. Such extradition is expected from a country like the U.S. where the rule of law and democratic values get priorities, she remarked. But it was stated by several officials that without an extradition treaty between the two countries, the U.S. government may not take an immediate step in this regard.

THE HINDU

19 OCT 2000

Bangla PM urges Clinton to hand over 'Mujib killers'

REUTERS

WASHINGTON, Oct. 20. — The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Mrs Hasina Wajed, urged the US President, Mr Bill Clinton, to extradite three Bangladeshis implicated in her father's death in a 1975 army coup.

"They are the killers," Mrs Wajed told reporters after meeting Mr Clinton in the White House yesterday, a session delayed by a day because Mr

Clinton attended a memorial service for victims of last week's suspected suicide bombing of the USS Cole.

In a joint statement issued after their meeting, the two countries said Mr Clinton and Mrs Wajed noted that progress has been made toward negotiating an extradition treaty between USA and Bangladesh "and agreed to facilitate an early conclusion of work on it".

Mrs Wajed played host to Mr Clinton last spring when he made a one-day visit to Bangladesh. Their meeting also touched on trade and investment relations.



Mrs Hasina Wajed

Mrs Wajed took office on 23 June 1996 after her Awami League won its first election in 21 years. The League lost power in August 1975 after its founder, independence leader Sheikh

M u j i b u r Rahman, Mrs Wajed's father, was killed in an army coup. The Clinton administration has expressed willingness to have the three men sought by Mrs Wajed deported. "We are aware of the importance of

this issue to Bangladesh," a state department official said.

Delhi stopover: Mrs Wajed today made a brief one hour stop in Delhi on her way home from Washington, adds SNS New Delhi.

Mr Ajit Panja met Mrs Wajed at the airport. She has wished Mr AB Vajpayee a speedy recovery after his knee surgery. Sources said Mrs Khaleda Zia too has written to Mr Vajpayee wishing him a quick recovery.

A media team from Bangladesh, here on a government invitation, today ended its visit after meeting Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Ajit Panja.

UNHCR criticism irks Thailand

THE NATION
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

BANGKOK, Oct. 20. — Harsh criticism by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Ms Sagato Ogata, on the condition of the Tham Hin refugee camp in Ratchaburi is "unfair" and could adversely affect the "good cooperation" between Thailand and the agency, a foreign ministry statement said yesterday.

The strongly worded statement of clarification said that "the Tham Hin Temporary Shelter area is, as its name suggests, a temporary shelter area. The Thai government has given these people (Burmese) refuge on a humanitarian basis". "Should the situation on the other side of the border be considered safe, they will have to be repatriated," the statement said.

"The interview by Ms Ogata showing displeasure with the way the Thai government is taking care of displaced persons is unfair to Thailand, which has consistently upheld humanitarian principles."

"Such criticism could affect the good cooperation between the two sides in solving the problem of displaced Burmese persons in the future." "If the agency really wants to help improve conditions, it should give the Thai authorities more financial assistance," said the statement.

THE STATESMAN

21 OCT 2000

Clinton promises extradition of Mujibur killers

Hasina wants convicts to be tried in Dhaka

Washington, Oct. 20: Bangladeshi Prime Minister Wajed Hasina has said that US President Bill Clinton promised her of expediting the issue of the extradition of three killers wanted in Bangladesh in connection with the murder of her father and former Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others.

During a 45-minute meeting in Washington on Thursday, Mr Clinton reiterated his sympathy for the victims, she told reporters.

The three men are convicted killers and they should face justice in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina said.

The wanted men are said to be three retired Bangladeshi military officers — Col Rashid Choudhury and majors Mohiuddin and Ahmed Sariful Hossain.

Senior US officials said at least two of them came to the US when the then Bangladeshi Par-

liament gave them an amnesty. This was withdrawn subsequently after Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister. The issue is now with US courts, they said.

Meanwhile, a joint statement said Mr Clinton pointed to the settlement of the Chittagong Hill tracts conflict and Ganges water sharing agreement as excellent examples of the peacekeeping and dispute resolution in South Asia.

He hailed Bangladesh as an important partner in regional security and peacekeeping, and noted that under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, some tensions are being eased in the region.

Mr Clinton also expressed sympathy for flood victims in Bangladesh and announced an immediate contribution of a million dollars for flood relief.

In a joint statement issued after their meeting, the two countries said they had made progress negotiating an extradi-

tion treaty and "agreed to facilitate an early conclusion of work on it." But US officials refused to discuss the case, citing "legal requirements."

Sheikh Hasina travelled to the United States for talks focusing on trade and investment, particularly in her country's energy sector. Total US investment in Bangladesh has risen to a cumulative \$800 million from \$45 million in 1996. "I hope it will increase more," Sheikh Hasina said.

She urged Clinton to give Bangladeshi garment makers increased access to the US market. Ready-made garments are Bangladesh's number one export, fetching around \$4 billion in 1998-99.

Earlier this year, Sheikh Hasina played host to Mr Clinton when he made a one-day visit to Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina took office on June 23, 1996 after her Awami League won its first election in 21 years. (PTI)



MEETING OVER SMILES: US President Bill Clinton with Bangladesh Prime Minister Wajed Hasina at the Oval Office in Washington DC on Thursday. (AP)

XD-19 **Hasina sees a new era** 27A 10

By Haroon Habib

Bangla
DHAKA, OCT. 22. The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, who returned home on Saturday after the completion of her four-day visit to the United States, said the wide-ranging talks she had with the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, would help strengthen bilateral relations.

"My visit to the United States has not only become fruitful in enhancing American investment but also earned the country a dignified position in the community of the democratic world", she said in her first press interview at the end of the visit.

A joint statement released after the October 19 talks at the White House said Mr. Clinton appreciated Sheikh Hasina's reiteration of her commitment to strengthening democracy and democratic institutions and the determination to make efforts for independent election monitoring and conduct of national elections under a caretaker government.

Mr. Clinton also appreciated Bangladesh's role in fostering international peace and cooperation, as well as Sheikh Hasina's efforts to reduce tensions in South Asia. The two leaders agreed to



The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, at a news conference in Dhaka on Sunday. — Reuters

take coordinated stands on major issues that come before the U.N. Security Council and other international fora. Mr. Clinton also praised Bangladesh's "significant commitment" to international peace-keeping.

Outlining the outcome of her visit, the Prime Minister said the U.S. would be a close friend of Bangladesh because of the strong

relations established with her visit that came 26 years after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited the White House in 1974.

She said her talks with Mr. Clinton had helped strengthen bilateral relations. The two discussed their common interest in promoting greater cooperation in regional fora such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Mr. Clinton also referred to the settlement of the Chittagong Hill Tracts conflict and the Ganga water sharing treaty with India as "excellent examples of peace-making and dispute resolution in the region".

In reply to a question on the extradition of the convicted killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, some of whom have taken shelter in the U.S., she said Mr. Clinton had said that his country could not be a heaven for such criminals. She was happy with the outcome of her efforts to get the convicted killers extradited. On this issue, the joint statement said the two leaders "noted with satisfaction that progress has been made toward the negotiation of an extradition treaty and agreed to facilitate an early conclusion of work on it"

THE HINDU

23 OCT 2000

HASINA'S US VISIT

Lessons that General Musharraf must learn

IT is an irony of history that the country that despatched its seventh fleet up the Bay of Bengal in December 1971 to attempt to scuttle Bangladesh's liberation war and whose then secretary of state variously described the new country as a "bottomless pit" and an "international basket case", today views it as a "partner in progress". Within a gap of seven months President Clinton not only met Sheikh Hasina twice, once by visiting Dhaka in March last and then by inviting her to Washington, but talked of evolving a new relationship intended to be different from the donor-recipient ties in the past. Clinton accorded this honour recognising the American investment in Bangladesh's gas sector. No wonder he promised Hasina to hike the American investment to \$8000 million soon. In 1996 it was only \$80 million. An important cooperation agreement in the energy sector was also signed to help further exploitation of Bangladesh's rich hydrocarbon reserves. For Bangladesh the economic and political spin-off from such a huge dose of investment will be considerable. Already UNOCOL has prepared a plan to export for two decades 7.2 trillion cft of gas to India from one of its richest gas fields in Sylhet. President Clinton and his State Department have been vigorously pursuing the export of gas to India even though both are fully aware of the hostility of Bangladesh's Opposition to such a move.

By stating that "America was not a safe haven for killers" President Clinton has shown understanding for Sheikh Hasina's demand that the killers of Sheikh Mujib hiding in the US be extradited. Knowing Hasina's sensitivity over the issue which figured prominently during her discussion, President Clinton ordered his attorney general Janet Reno to expedite matters. Rolling out a red carpet welcome to Hasina soon after Atal Behari Vajpayee's successful state visit to Washington was meant to convey the importance that Washington attaches not only to South Asia but the region's two functioning democracies vis a vis the military dictatorship in Pakistan while General Pervez Musharraf during the UN millennium summit could manage to talk to President Clinton only on the sidelines. In March last too the American President showed his open disapproval of the military regime by only making a flying visit to Islamabad whereas he spent almost a week in India and Bangladesh. Will this force an introspection among the generals in Pakistan? Doubtful.

CHECKING CHECKS

Airport security needs an overhaul

AIRPORT security in India has never been up to scratch but since the hijacking of the Indian Airlines' flight from Kathmandu to Delhi in December last year government have attempted to strengthen security. A ban on entry of visitors inside airport premises was imposed for a few months after the hijacking — but it lost precious revenue. A hike in the visitor's admission fee was expected to deter the large number of friends and relatives who make a habit of gathering to see off loved ones; all that happened was that the crowd gathered outside the entrance instead of in the lounge. These measures did nothing to improve security, a potential hijacker or terrorist is hardly likely to skimp on the visitor's admission fee. The problem is not the volume of people going through airports — airports elsewhere attract many more people — but with the calibre of those entrusted with security.

The CISF deployed post-hijack at a cost of Rs 400 crores a year has proved to be completely inept. They failed to detect live cartridges and toy pistols carried by passengers in cabin baggage but were picked up by the airline's own security staff during ladderpoint checks. The airline's security who are not meant to be as highly trained as the para-military force have proved to be more efficient. Official personnel whether from a central police force or the state police lack the intellectual equipment or motivation to deal with terrorists. Then there is the hype of VIP passengers who are regarded as above the law, and whom no job-fearing securityman will dare search. They have separate checking facilities, at once setting them from the rest with corresponding laxity and undue deference. A small well-trained and efficient force concerned with nothing but security needs to be developed if our airports are to come up to standards elsewhere. And it will cost much less.

THE STATESMAN

30 OCT 2002

LANDMARK DECISION / 10 LAKH FAMILIES MAY BENEFIT

Minorities in Bangladesh to get back seized property

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, SEPT. 3. The Sheikh Hasina Government today took a landmark decision on the return of the vested property confiscated by the erstwhile Pakistan Government from the absentee Hindu owners during the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965, to legitimate owners and formed a cabinet committee to draft a law in that line.

"The Cabinet has decided in-principle on the return of vested property and formed a committee to formulate an effective draft law in this regard," a press release, issued after the Cabinet meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister, said. The meeting was held prior to Ms. Hasina's departure for the United States to attend the millennium session of the United Nations.

The handout did not elaborate on the decision, which came amid a growing public opinion, particularly from the secular section of the society, for returning the property to the legitimate owners belonging to minority communities, essentially the Hindus. The erstwhile Pakistan government had confiscated the properties under a law called Enemy Property Act.

The properties were never returned but after liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, the

law was renamed Vested Property Act with certain amendments.

Political leaders, intellectuals and representatives of the Hindu community welcomed the decision saying laws like Vested or Enemy Property Acts were "gross violation of human rights".

A recent study showed as high as 10 lakh Bangladeshi Hindu families or 50 lakh members of the community were affected by the law.

The chief of the study team and general secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association, Dr. Abul Barakat, said 95 per cent of the Hindus, whose properties were confiscated, were staying home. Only five per cent of them left for India.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is yet to react but several opposition lawmakers personally said the "bad law" should be scrapped.

The main mouthpiece of the Bangladesh's religious fundamentalism, *The Inqilab*, in a banner headline accused the Sheikh Hasina Government of planning to handover properties left out much earlier to six lakh Hindus and warned the Government of "bloody clashes" if such a decision was implemented.

Leading constitutional expert and former Foreign Minister, Dr. Kamal Hossain, welcomed the decision saying "it was overdue for long time".

The Jatiya Sanajtantrik Dal (JSD) leader, Mr. Hasanul Haque Inu, called the decision "courageous" for equal rights and rule of law and said "the issue should not be linked with politics of election".

The former Speaker and key opposition BNP lawmaker, Mr. Shaikh Razzak Ali, praised the government in forming a Cabinet committee but warned any decision in haste might spark disputes and complications.

Key minority leader and the Awami League working committee member, Mr. Shudhanshu Shekhor Haldar, hailed the government initiatives saying it responded to a long-cherished demand of the minority Hindus.

The Communist Party (CPB) leader, Mr. Mujahidul Islam Salim, said the progressive parties including the CPB and Awami League had decided their stand "in-principle" on the issue even before the emergence of Bangladesh.

The Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad leader, Prof. Nim Chand Bhoumik, said though late, the initiative of the Cabinet was a positive indication. "The demand for repealing Vested Property Act has turned into a national demand," he said urging the Government to take necessary steps to repeal the Act in the coming parliament session.

Khaleda surrenders, granted bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DHAKA, Sept. 7. — Bangladesh's former Prime Minister and main opposition party leader Begum Khaleda Zia, who has been chargesheeted in a corruption case, was today granted bail by a Dhaka court after she surrendered before it.

Metropolitan session judge, Mr Ahmed Jamil Mustafa, granted bail to Mrs Zia under a surety bond of 100,000 taka.

The government's anti-corruption department submitted the charge-sheet against her to the court on Tuesday alleging she misappropriated 1,750 million taka in the purchase of two French Airbus for the national airline in 1995.

The bail plea for Mrs Zia was moved by party leader and lawyer, Mr Moudud Ahmed. He said the case was politically motivated, and there had been no irregularities in the purchase.

The public prosecutor opposed the bail, saying Mrs Zia had misappropriated the money "by abusing power when she was the Prime Minister".

Mrs Zia, head of the main Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, was Prime Minister between 1991 and 1996.

Besides Mrs Zia, nine others, including two of her former cabinet colleagues, a former cabinet secretary and six former officials of Bangladesh Biman,



Begum Khaleda Zia

were also indicted by the anti-corruption bureau in the case.

Of the nine co-accused, seven, including the two former ministers, were also granted bail under a surety bond of 100,000 taka each after they surrendered to the court. Two former Biman officials accused in the case, however, did not appear.

This was the third graft case filed against Mrs Zia by the present Awami League regime. The Prime Minister, Mrs Hasina Wajed, had earlier said those found guilty in corruption cases would be brought to trial.

The opposition alliance, which groups Mrs Zia's BNP, Mr Ershad's Jatiya Party and two Islamic groups, has accused Mrs Wajed of misrule and is spearheading a campaign to force her to step down and hold early elections.

THE STATESMAN

28 SEP 2000

Bangla-Pak ties under a cloud

PTI & AFP

11
Bangla 51-9
DHAKA, Sept. 10. — Relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan seem to have suddenly come under strain following cancellation of the meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf in New York yesterday, according to analysts and the media.

Gen Musharraf did not turn up for the scheduled meeting with Hasina at the UN headquarters, after a hard-hitting speech by Sheikh Hasina at the UN Millennium Summit.

Addressing the summit on Friday, Sheikh Hasina had

called for action against regimes that grabbed power by overthrowing elected governments. The Bangladesh foreign secretary, Mr Shafi Sami clarified that Sheikh Hasina's speech "was not directed against any particular country".

However, the United News of Bangladesh, quoting diplomatic sources, said sheikh Hasina's acidic remarks against military takeover might have prompted Gen Musharraf to abstain.

The meeting, on the sidelines of the summit, was set up at the request of the Pakistani military ruler who seized power last October overthrowing the government of Mr

11/9
Nawaz Sharif.

Bangladesh's UN representative, Mr Anwarul Karim Chowdhury said: "we are not sure what the reasons are, but it came as a surprise".

Speaking to AFP, Mr Humayun Kabir of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies said, "If it is linked to the Prime Minister's speech at the UN Security Council, then Bangladesh's efforts to work as a regional mediator to ease tension was likely to be hurt. I think he (Musharraf) did not like the speech, although I believe the Prime Minister did not have anybody specific in her mind".

THE STATESMAN

1.1 SEP 2000

Hasina wants Pak apology for '71

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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DHAKA, Sept. 12. — Bangladesh Prime Minister Mrs Hasina Wajed today asked Pakistan to apologise for the atrocities committed by its army during the 1971 Liberation War, and asserted that she would continue to oppose military coups irrespective of the reported displeasure of Pakistan's General Pervez Musharraf.

Rebuffing Gen. Musharraf's suggestion of "forgetting the past", Mrs Wajed said Bangladesh would rather learn from history. "I feel Pakistan should apologise for the crimes committed in 1971," she said and demanded a copy of the report of the Hamood-ur Rahman commission which probed Pakistani army's debacle in the 1971 war.

Accusing Pakistan of dilly-dallying in handing over the full text of the report to Bangladesh," the Prime Minister said: "it (Pakistan) fears exposure of the heinous crimes committed by its armed forces."

She refuted Islamabad's stand

that Dhaka had not formally requested for the report, saying "we've already asked for it".

Mrs Wajed demanded that commission report, which accused senior Pakistani army generals of mass killings and



Mrs Hasina Wajed

rapes in pre-liberation period, be made public.

Demands have also been raised by political leaders and army officers in Pakistan for action against officers indicted for the 1971 genocide.

Mrs Wajed strongly defended her speech at the recent UN Millennium Summit and dis-

missed the reported allegation by Pakistani foreign minister Mrs Abdul Sattar that it was made at India's behest.

"Why should we do so? Bangladesh is an independent and sovereign country," she said.

The speech urged action against regimes that grabbed power by overthrowing elected governments. This reportedly led to a sudden cancellation of the scheduled meeting between Mrs Wajed and Gen. Musharraf in New York.

Asked about Gen Musharraf's reported dissatisfaction over her speech, Mrs Wajed said: "This is nothing new. I have consistently opposed military generals capturing power in Pakistan as well as Bangladesh in the past."

Describing Gen Musharraf as a "self-proclaimed chief executive", Mrs Wajed wondered why he "took it personally" when she called for action against regimes that grabbed power by overthrowing elected governments." Using a Bengali proverb, she added "a guilty mind is always suspicious".

THE STATESMAN

13 SEP 2000

11-10

Hasina's Nightmare 1999

It might seem inappropriate that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should wait so long to seek an apology from Pakistan for the genocide and war crimes the Pakistani army committed during the 1971 liberation war. She has also asked for a copy of the Hamoodur Rahman report on the war. However, her demand is in tune with the spirit of the times. The UN is negotiating to bring members of the Pol Pot clique in Cambodia to an international trial for atrocities committed in the '70s — just a few years after the Bangladesh war. The war crimes in Bosnia, Burundi and Sierra Leone are being brought to trial before UN tribunals. The international aspect apart, the immediate impetus for Sheikh Hasina's demand would seem to be the recent leak of Hamoodur Rahman's supplementary report which has justifiably focused attention on the genocide of 1971. Justice Hamoodur Rahman was a Bengali who continued to live in Pakistan. In other words, there is every reason to expect that his report would be a balanced account of the war. It is also relevant because in Bangladesh, pro-Pakistani jihadi elements are still active and they continue to oppose the liberationists who are represented by the Awami party. The official history of the liberation war is being compiled by Dacca and the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report would be a valuable input into it. General Musharraf has, with typical arrogance, told Bangladesh to forget the past. Evidently, the irony of this position escapes the Pakistani ruling elite which is obsessed with Kashmir's accession — an event that took place 53 years ago and was complete in all respects.

India has its share of responsibility for allowing Pakistan literally to get away with murder. The Pakistani army officers charged with war crimes — some 180 of them — by Bangladesh authorities were released and repatriated unconditionally by Mrs Gandhi's government as a follow-up to the Simla agreement. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had to be persuaded by India to agree to it. In retrospect, it is quite obvious that the Simla pact and India's generosity at that time, including the unconditional release of Pakistani war criminals, were gestures that Pakistan took full advantage of. Indeed, Mrs Gandhi was taken for a ride by Z A Bhutto just as Prime Minister Vajpayee was by Nawaz Sharif after the Lahore summit. It is a case of those who forget the lessons of history having to go through the experience again. Unfortunately, our political and bureaucratic classes have no use for history. Otherwise, Indian historians should have been given all help to write the history of the 1971 war, complete with all details — the mass killing of Bangladesh Muslims, the planned slaughter of Bangladeshi intellectuals the day before the surrender, the largest ethnic cleansing in history, the displacement of ten million refugees and the wilful tolerance of all these crimes. Instead, the account of 1971 war compiled by official historians has been kept under lock and key by mindless politicians and bureaucrats.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 SEP 2000

Dhaka firm on demand

By Haroon Habib

19-12-79 *28/9* *Abul Hasan*
DHAKA, SEPT. 27. Seemingly strong in pursuing the Government's demand for Pakistan's apology, the Foreign Minister Mr. Abdus Samad Azad, has said Dhaka is going to formally ask Islamabad to apologise for the genocide committed by Pakistani forces on its soil during the country's war of liberation in 1971.

Pakistan will also be asked to supply Bangladesh the "full text" of the statement made by its Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, recently in which he passed some comments on Bangladesh's liberation war and also on the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina.

"Bangladesh will not compromise on the question of principle," said Mr. Azad at a press briefing here yesterday. He faced a volley of questions on the recent developments in Dhaka-Islamabad relations following the cancellation of a meeting between Sheikh Hasina and Gen. Pervez Musharraf in New York.

Newspersons sought Mr. Azad's comment on the Pakistani Foreign Minister's statement at a press briefing in Islamabad on Monday where he advised the Bangladesh leadership to forget the "traumatic" events of 1971 and build friendly ties between the two countries, forgetting the past. Mr. Sattar also claimed that the slain independence hero, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had called upon his people in 1974 to "forget the past and make a fresh start." He also expressed surprise that Mujib's daughter (Hasina) "appears to be ignoring her father's advice."

Asked whether the Bangladesh Government considered such remark an "aspersion" on Sheikh Hasina, the Foreign Minister said: "We have decided to ask for a full text of the statement made by the Pakistani Foreign Minister." Dhaka's comments will follow.

Ignoring the Pakistani Foreign Minister's advice, Mr. Azad categorically said: Bangladesh cannot forget the past, in 1971, when our three million people were butchered and thousands of women raped and killed.

THE HINDU

28 SEP 2000

KHALEDA BLUNDERS

5/20/97 Needs to play responsible politics *Handwritten*

THE return to Parliament after a year's boycott by Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party and two of her allies has brought immense relief. While this signals the end to a prolonged stand-off between the Opposition and the ruling Awami League, harmony between the two is not round the corner. With its movement against the government getting nowhere and all attempts to pull it down having failed miserably, the Opposition had no option but to return to Parliament with considerable loss of face. Even its *hartal* calls were ignored, being viewed as disruptive tactics undermining national interests. Not only Bangladesh's foreign donors but Bangladeshis in general and the business community in particular were in no mood to support the Opposition whose movement had little mass appeal. The Opposition forgot that the Awami League's Parliament boycott followed by resignation of its MPs in 1995 in support of free and fair parliamentary poll under a neutral caretaker government had mass support. In fact that was the reason why the BNP government was forced to give constitutional sanction to the Awami League demand.

The BNP and its allies are now suffering from a serious credibility problem. It has been made acute by mischievous utterances and periodic recourse to falsehood. Recently the BNP called a *hartal* claiming that the newly appointed chief election commissioner was an Awami League functionary. It did not apologise publicly when its claim turned out to be false. While everyone knew that the reason for Opposition's return to Parliament was to save its seats in House as the boycott was about to cross the 90-day deadline, which would precipitate by-elections, Begum Zia said that the return was forced by Hasina's conspiracy to "banish *Bismillah*" by amending the Constitution. The ludicrous thing about the boycott was that Opposition MPs were drawing their pay and perks and even going abroad as part of official delegations. The credibility problem has been made more acute by the feud between rival BNP factions. The nationalist pro-democracy faction opposed to the boycott had been under constant attack from the fundamentalist pro-Pakistani section whose sole objective is to capture power. For this the section does not mind repeating the "bloody August of 1975". Sheikh Hasina should do everything within her power to bring a dispirited and directionless BNP back to the parliamentary track. She should try to engage the opposition on the floor of the House rather than in the streets. She now has the upper hand.

THE STATESMAN

2 JUL 2000

Hasina declares war on Jamaat

By Haroon Habib *Handwritten*

DHAKA, JULY 24. The Awami League of Bangladesh, in its fifth and final year of rule, has declared war against the militant cadres of the country's main fundamentalist organisation, Jamaat-e-Islami. The law-enforcing agencies have begun a countrywide swoop against the students wing of the organisation, Islami Chhatra Shibir, especially after the murder of nine people, including seven leaders of the pro-Awami League students outfit in Chittagong recently.

The Chittagong carnage has revived the demand by the country's pro-liberation forces to ban fundamentalist parties, particularly the Jamaat-e-Islami, which had opposed Bangladesh's independence and collaborated with the Pakistani army during the War of Liberation in 1971. The Jamaat leader, Prof. Golam Azam, an ardent supporter of pro-Pakistan elements in Bangladesh, is a one of the main leaders of the Begum Khaleda Zia-led opposition alliance.

The Chittagong killings were a major incident in the port city which is a den of Chhatra Shibir. The cadres of the Shibir reportedly possess scores of automatic guns supplied to them by unknown sources. The carnage has not only shocked the ruling party but also

Handwritten: KD-17
alarmed the pro-liberation camp which considered the incident a planned assault on it. The killings cause concern particularly because religious fanatics have formed a strong political alliance under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia.

An alarmed Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, visited Chittagong and issued a stern warning against the "Razakars" who took up arms to defend Pakistan during the Liberation War. She declared that atrocities by "Razakars" would no longer be tolerated. Her Cabinet decided to flush out armed activists of the Shibir from all parts of the country.

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The word "Razakar" was coined in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, when pro-Pakistani elements formed a paramilitary force against the integration of Hyderabad into India in the wake of the 1947 Partition of British India. The Pakistan army also formed a "Razakar" force by inducting local collaborators against Bangladesh's independence in 1971. In both the cases, however, the "Razakars" were defeated.

The Government's decision to flush out Shibir activists has led to a massive police drive in all parts of the country. The fundamentalist cadres are facing a tough time ever since Jamaat-e-Islami got its

political rights back in the late seventies after it was banned soon after Bangladesh's independence. The husband of Begum Khaleda Zia, Gen. Ziaur Rahman, who was the then President, allowed Jamaat-e-Islami and other fundamentalist parties to enter politics after their political rights were scrapped by the first Bangladesh government charging it with fanaticism, anti-liberation activities and genocide.

But the drive against the "Razakars" is now facing difficulties mainly due to lack of support from the Opposition parties like the BNP and Jatiya Party. The leaders of the two major parties, Begum Khaleda Zia and Gen. H. M. Ershad, while condemning the Chittagong murders, have accused the Government of carrying out "repression" against the Shibir.

Jamaat-e-Islami is a strong cadre-based party but lacks mass support and has only two seats in the present Parliament while its main source of power is the armed activists. The war against the "Razakars" by the Awami League is crucial because its failure may make the base of the fundamentalists stronger. It is also crucial for Awami League because unless Jamaat-e-Islami is contained, the secular fabric of the society may be affected.

THREAT TO HASINA

2/2 Need to counter fundamentalists *grb*

THE planting of a 76kg time bomb near the rostrum from where Sheikh Hasina was to address a public rally in her native Kotalipara leaves no doubt that anti-liberation forces, who have publicly vowed to "finish" the Awami League rule through violent means, are pursuing their goal doggedly. Had it not been for the chance discovery of fuse wires, another tragedy of the 1975 proportions would have been enacted. This was not the first time that an attempt on Hasina's life was aborted in time. But surprisingly the attempts have never been condemned by any of the Opposition leaders including Begum Khaleda Zia although her husband too fell to assassins' bullets. Having gunned down in broad daylight eight young supporters of Awami League in Chittagong on 12 July followed by the murder of a leading journalist in Jessore, anti-liberation forces led by the Jamat-e-Islam and other fundamentalist and terrorist outfits are manifestly on the warpath. Their present objective is to create lawlessness just when Mahmud Ali, General Pervez Musharraf's minister without portfolio, is trying to mobilise support for one nation two states theory to justify a loose Pakistan-Bangladesh confederation. Octogenarian Ali, a member of the East Pakistan provincial assembly who bitterly opposed the liberation war, has been visiting north America and Britain to enlist support obviously with General Musharraf's approval. With exquisite timing Musharraf urged Bangladesh to forget Pakistan's "mistakes" as "raking up the past is not helpful since both Pakistan and Bangladesh are brothers."

The danger to Bangladesh's political stability lies in the fact that while the Islamic fundamentalists with foreign help are clear in their objective of establishing Islamic rule, the pro-liberation forces, comprising democratic, secular parties and organisations, are divided which makes the Hasina Government vulnerable to conspiracies. The fundamentalists have been encouraged to unleash attacks on the democratic forces which seem to be on the defensive. Tuesday's decision by 11 Left parties to cooperate with the Awami League in forming a secular democratic front in next year's parliamentary elections is welcome. To take on the formidable fundamentalists both Awami League and the Left parties will have to be magnanimous and readjust their priorities. Any selfish shortsighted move will spell disaster for them.

THE STATESMAN

HD-17
11/6

Bangladesh Opposition to continue stir against CEC

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MAY 31. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of Bangladesh, Mr. M. A. Syed, took office a week ago, but the Opposition alliance led by Begum Khaleda Zia, has continued its criticism of his appointment, branding the former civil servant, who served as Home Secretary even during Begum Zia's tenure, as a ruling party activist.

The four-party alliance, comprising rightists and religious fundamentalists, has announced its plan to gherao the CEC on June 4, as part of its agitation programme against his appointment. The Opposition parties allege that the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, had nominated Mr. Syed unilaterally, "to rig the next general election". The alliance opposes the CEC on the ground that he was not chosen by consensus.

The leaders of the alliance, with support from several smaller parties, had demanded that the post be filled by consensus after discussions with the President. Begum Zia, Gen. Ershad of Jatiya Party and Prof. Golam Azam of Jamaat-e-Islami were categorical that if there were any talks they



must be convened by the President and not by the Prime Minister.

The Government too had wanted to hold discussions on the appointment of the CEC with the Opposition. The Prime Minister formally invited Begum Zia, Leader of the Opposition, for talks on the issue, but the offer was rejected.

The Constitution clearly states that the name of the CEC be sent to the President by the Prime

Minister, and the latter would only act under the advice of the head of the Government. The ruling party argues that the Prime Minister had acted in accordance with the Constitution only after her offers to hold talks with the Opposition were rejected.

Though the Prime Minister has put Begum Zia on the defensive, the issue is likely to remain unresolved and may come up more vigorously after the next general elections.

By all indications, the Election Commission will go for holding the upazila (sub-district) election before the end of the year. But the Opposition parties are likely to boycott it, though they may find it difficult to restrain local leaders from participating in the poll. Bangladesh has 464 upazilas and their elections are almost like the general election, though constitutionally they are local bodies.

Political observers believe that if the Government is able to complete the upazila elections successfully, defying the "resistance" being planned by Opposition, it would score yet another point over the alliance.

THE HINDU

21 JUN 2000

Bangla Opp boycotts budget

51.7 session 6/6

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DHAKA, June 5. — Opposition parties in Bangladesh today boycotted the opening day of the Parliament's budget session, as part of their campaign to oust Prime Minister Mrs Sheikh Hasina's government.

"There is no environment (to join back)", said Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, secretary-general of the main Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Speaker Mr Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, on the other hand, brushed aside allegations of the Opposition of not having given them the opportunity to speak.

Regretting continued absence of the Opposition from the House, the Speaker said their allegations pertaining to denial of opportunity to speak were aimed at confusing people.

He said participation of the Opposition in the proceedings of the House was vital to give the "hard-earned democracy" an institutional shape.

Refuting the Opposition charges, he read out the record of a detailed account and said the main Opposition BNP has been given more time than the Treasury Bench to speak on various issues.

5 JUN 2000

Many Bangladesh MPs may lose membership

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, JUNE 9. The Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) of Bangladesh has been facing a crisis for a long time now with the lawmakers of the mainstream Opposition parties abstaining from its proceedings despite repeated efforts by the Government to bring them back.

The prolonged abstention has created a big worry for a large number of MPs belonging to these parties as they are in danger of losing their membership of the House.

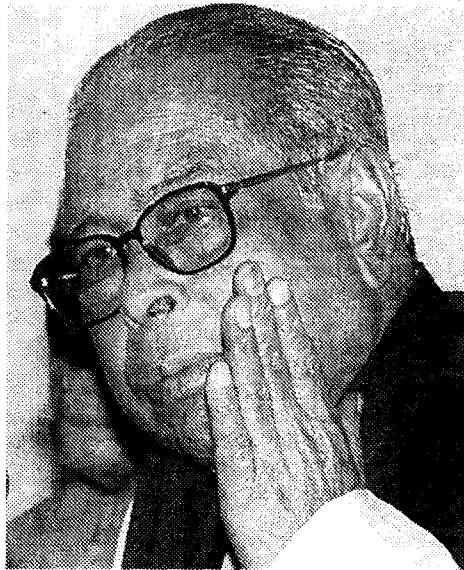
Article 67 (b) of the Bangladesh Constitution says that an MP will lose his/her seat for abstaining from Parliament without leave of the House for 90 consecutive days of sitting. Parliament records show that a large number of MPs, including the Leader of the Opposition, Begum Khaleda Zia, and the Jatiya Party chairman, Gen. H. M. Ershad, have been abstaining for long periods.

The Awami League Government led by the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, presented its fifth budget in Parliament on Thursday amidst the boycott by the Opposition which had not attended the House even during last year's budget presentation.

Observers say that the ruling party may be trying new tactics, after repeated failures, to bring the Opposition back to the floor. Western representatives of donor countries have also been trying to persuade the alliance to return to Parliament.

It is expected that the Speaker, Mr. Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, will act according to the Constitution. As soon as the members cross the 90-day mark, Article 67(b) will automatically apply. The seat of an Opposition lawmaker, Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed, was recently declared vacant by applying the provision.

Even as Opposition leaders criticised what they termed as the "Government's blueprint" to strip them of membership, the threat of Article 67(b) has caused panic in their camp. Press reports say that the back-benchers of the BNP



The Bangladesh Finance Minister, Mr. S.A.M.S. Kibria, listens to questions from reporters at a post-Budget news conference in Dhaka on Friday. — Reuters

and JP do not want to lose their membership, but their top leaders are sticking to their stance.

The Speaker, who has been the prime target of the Opposition ever since he assumed office, said the MPs had walked out of Parliament 89 times during the last three and a half years.

The Jatiya Party, at a meeting on June 4, decided to take up the matter with its alliance partners — the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, after the overwhelming majority of MPs supported attending the budget session. But there was no breakthrough. The BNP leadership, although facing pressure from its back-benchers to end the boycott, is yet to call its parliamentary party meeting.

10 JUN 2000

10 JUN 2000

Bangla strike against budget

55-12 11/6
REUTERS

DHAKA, June 10. — Bangladesh Opposition parties have called for a nationwide strike on Monday to protest against the government's 2000-01 budget, saying it would hurt ordinary citizens and the economy.

"The Opposition has been forced to go for the shutdown on Monday because the budget does not reflect the interests of the people, especially the farmers, workers, teachers and government employees," Abdul Mannan Bhuyan, secretary general of the main Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party said yesterday.

Finance minister SAMS Kibria has proposed a 45.65 billion taka (\$890 million) surplus in the budget, envisaging expenditure of 196.33 billion (\$3.84 billion) and revenue of 241.98 billion taka (\$4.74 billion) for fiscal 2000/01 beginning on July 1.

But the opposition is protesting against 35.14 billion taka (\$680 million) in planned government borrowing from commercial banks.

"This new provision for government borrowing is unprecedented and it will go against the interest of the people and the economy," Mr Bhuyan said.

Bangladeshi industry leaders today praised the new budget, saying it would help boost the country's industrial growth and the economy.

"We appreciate the proposed incentives for industrial growth, capital market development, relief for small taxpayers and widening of the tax net," said Latifur Rahman, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

But he expressed his concern over government borrowing from banks, saying: "Borrowing from both local and foreign sources to meet a bigger share of total development expenditure is a matter of concern."

Monday's countrywide strike is the latest of a series of opposition shutdowns aimed at forcing the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign and call early election.

11 JUN 2000

Bangla Opposition parties to put an end to Parliament boycott

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, JUNE 18

929 19/6

BANGLADESH'S main opposition parties, including Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), who have been boycotting Parliament for nearly a year, have decided to join the session at least for a brief period to evade losing their membership for uninterrupted absence in the house.

Top opposition leaders, after an emergency meeting last night, have decided that their lawmakers would join 'Sangsad' (Parliament) in order to save their membership which the ruling party is "planning to snatch away in collusion with the Speaker", citing continuous absence from the house for 90 days, opposition sources said today.

The members of the four-party alliance, which command 130 plus seats in the 330-member house have been boycotting its proceedings to protest "government's inept handling of the administration" and calling for fresh polls, may enter the house any day, they said.

Bangladesh Constitution stipulates that membership will be stripped off if anyone remains absent for 90 days in a row without furnishing valid grounds.

According to data furnished by Speaker of the 'Sangsad' Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury on the opening day of 18th session of the house on June 5, several MPs including BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia, former president H M Ershad were nearing towards the "danger mark" of 90 days.

It is apprehended that they might be stripped of the membership if the current budget session was prolonged and carried out till end of July.

Besides losing membership, the opposition parties are also apprehensive of the ruling party that they might go for amending the Constitution to suit their desire by raising its strength through holding bye-election in the seats vacated by opposition due to their continuous absence.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuyian told reporters after the last night's meeting of top opposition leaders that "alliance lawmakers would not allow anybody" to declare their seats vacant and insisted that atmosphere has not been created for their return to the parliament.

Sensing opposition move Prime Minister Sheikh has in a renewed the appeal to her political rival to join Parliament and "say what ever they want to say", BSS news agency quoted her as telling a public meeting in North Bengal yesterday.

Emerging from the talks, Ershad, leader of one of the factions of the Jatiya Party, told reporters, "we will not allow them (government) to amend the Constitution and implement their plan."

The opposition began their boycott claiming they were not allowed to speak in Parliament, a charge which the Speaker has denied.

The opposition alliance is campaigning to force Hasina to step down and hold fresh elections. She was elected for a five-year term in 1996 and general elections are likely sometime in the first half of next year.

INDIAN EXPRESS

19 JUN 2000

Bangladesh **Women's quota in Bangladesh House may lapse** *HD-17 20/6*

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, JUNE 19. The Constitutional provision of 30 reserved seats for women in the Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) has come under uncertainty though the Government has introduced a Bill, seeking extension of the provision for 10 years.

The Bill was introduced in Parliament on Saturday by the Law Minister, Mr. Abdul Matin Khasru, seeking an amendment to the Constitution. But developments are not going in favour of the Bill. The major obstacle to its passage is the absence of the Opposition from Parliament for nearly one and a half years. Unless the Opposition supports the Bill, it will not see the light of the day because any such Constitutional amendment requires two-thirds majority which the ruling Awami League lacks.

Women's organisations and the intelligentsia are not, however,

satisfied with the 30 reserved seats, arguing that the system of nominated women members in Parliament will not help ensure empowerment of women. They suggest that the seats must be made elected, and their number increased to 64 so that all regions of the country could be covered.

The Constitution framed in 1972 made a provision of 10 seats for women and later increased them to 15. In 1978, the number was raised to 30 and the provision was made valid for 15 years.

The system was introduced to remedy poor representation of women in politics and elected bodies.

The reserved seats, in reality, have not proved very useful, particularly in terms of empowerment of women. But it has definitely encouraged women's participation in politics, in whatever limited form it may be.

Surprisingly, Bangladesh has

achieved remarkable success in the empowerment of rural women, especially at the grassroots level. More than 45,000 women took part in the last elections to the Union Parishads (local bodies), and more than 13,000 of them defeated their male rivals in the poll. This has clearly proved the beginning of a significant change in Bangladesh's social pattern where women are subjected to social and religious subjugation.

The Jatiya Sangsad has 300 general seats and 30 seats reserved for women. The provision of reserved seats expired in 1987 and there was no reserved seat in the fourth Parliament of 1987. However, in 1990, with the 10th amendment to the Constitution, the provision was restored for a period of 10 years. If there is no Constitutional amendment now, the present provision will lapse in April 2001.

THE HINDU

20 JUN 2000

The Bangladesh factor

If Bangladesh uses even a portion of the opportunities the US has now provided it, S Asia will never be the same again, says Narendar Pani

As President Clinton's visit draws to a close it is evident that there has been little progress on the more contentious issues facing India and the United States. The vision statement merely reiterates well known positions. But if we look beyond individual issues at the changing equations between the US and South Asia, the significance of the visit increases substantially. Indeed, this visit may well be seen in the future as the beginning of US efforts to activate the Bangladesh factor not just in South Asia but on the global scene as well. It is tempting to dismiss the possibility of Bangladesh playing a significant role on the international stage. As one of the poorest countries in the world it has neither the economic nor the military muscle to be taken seriously on its own. And yet to treat President Clinton's visit to that country as no more than an attempt to remove misgivings about the US role in Bangladesh's struggle for independence may be misleading. Rather than any preoccupation with the past Mr Clinton's decision to become the first US President to visit Bangladesh suggests a belief that Bangladesh has something to offer the United States in the emerging world order.

The direct economic benefit to the US from closer cooperation with a country like Bangladesh is bound to be somewhat limited. There could be an effort to tap the natural resources available in Bangladesh. But sub-continental xenophobia would be a stumbling block. For instance, US companies have been negotiating with the Bangladesh government for natural gas explo-

ration and the contracts were expected to be signed during President Clinton's visit to Dhaka. But not all the deals could be concluded by the time Mr Clinton arrived.

The real attraction may lie in the indirect benefits that Bangladesh offers the US. There are trends emerging in both the political and economic spheres that could enhance the value to the US of having Bangladesh as an ally.

After the Cold War there has been considerable speculation over the new global alliances that could emerge. For a while conventional wisdom appeared to be veering around to the view that the world would move towards groupings based on religion, setting the stage for the so-called clash of civilisations. But there has been an alternative view that religious groupings are not always as cohesive as they appear from outside. A senior American official once insisted that to talk of an Islamic world was as misleading as to speak of a cohesive, completely united, Christian world. And if differences within the Islamic world get more pronounced, it is in the interest of the US to wield influence within that bloc. In such situations, the traditional ally of the US from South Asia has



been Pakistan. But the costs of retaining this role for Pakistan are mounting. Too close a link with Pakistan tends to alienate India. And Pakistan is moving in a direction that does not suit the US. The US could turn a blind eye to those changes in Pakistan's polity that do not directly affect it. It has in the past dealt with military regimes in Islamabad and Mr Clinton has not let the new military dictatorship deter him from visiting Pakistan. But there are also trends in Pakistan that directly affect the US. The dominance of terrorist groups as well as their links to drug trafficking have a direct impact on American society. The US thus has reason to look for an alternative South Asian Islamic ally.

In this role Bangladesh has several natural advantages. As a country that has been traditionally moder-

ate in its Islamic views, it is easier for the US to justify supporting it. President Clinton has also endorsed its democracy, though others may believe its record is somewhat tainted. It is then in the interests of the US to get Bangladesh to play a more prominent international role. And the US is willing to help it do so. It has highlighted Bangladesh's signing of the CTBT. And it is to provide the technology that will substantially improve Bangladesh's links with the rest of the world.

This political rationale for closer ties between the US and Bangladesh is supported by trends in the global economy. As the world gets more competitive, the developed countries believe that their producers are at a disadvantage because they are forced to adhere to higher environment and labour standards. President Clinton's push towards linking trade with environment and labour standards could thus be reinforced by the next American administration. But for this link to emerge within the multilateral trading system the alliance of developing countries resisting this link would have to be broken. One way of doing so would be to focus on the least developed countries within the larger group of developing

countries. If these countries soften their position on issues such as the link between trade and labour standards, the relatively better off developing countries would lose much of their clout. And Bangladesh would prefer being a leader of an alliance of Least Developed Countries rather than a minor player in the group of developing countries.

When seen in this context President Clinton's actions in Bangladesh fit into a clear pattern. His emphasis on helping the poorest nations eradicate poverty shifts the focus to the Least Developed Countries. He also identified a role for the US in both labour standards and the environment within Bangladesh. He announced funds to be spent on keeping children out of factories and in schools. And his offer to write off international loans in return for greater afforestation is already being referred to in a more generalised form as a debt-for-nature swap.

The growing closeness between Bangladesh and the United States will not leave India unaffected. Any distancing of the US from Pakistan, even if it is in favour of a third country, would suit India. And given the current preoccupation with Pakistan there will be a tendency to interpret this as a pro-India tilt in US policy. But the simultaneous consolidation of a pro-US Least Developed Countries alliance led by Bangladesh could hurt India's bargaining position in international economic organisations. If Bangladesh uses even a portion of the opportunities the US has now provided it, South Asia will never be the same again.

Discourage illegal change of govts., Hasina tells Clinton

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MARCH 20. The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, today urged the visiting United States President, Mr. Bill Clinton, to continue to lend support to democratic governments and discourage unconstitutional and illegal change of governments across the globe.

"The U.S., as the champion of democracy and human rights, should continue to send strong messages to the world in support of democratic governments and strongly discourage unconstitutional and illegal changes of government," Ms. Hasina said during official talks held between the two leaders at the Prime Minister's Office here this morning.

Ms. Hasina has emphasised that democracies, particularly in developing countries, must feel reassured by such messages.

Earlier, Mr. Clinton arrived on a day's visit — the first by a U.S. President in the country's 29-year-old history.

Ms. Hasina told Mr. Clinton about her firm commitment to democracy and said "ballot, rather than bullets, should be the means of electing a government". She, however, regretted that democracy in Bangladesh had been the story of military interventions, phoney elections and fake votes.

Gas export

Making a statement before the 400 or so members of the local and international press, in the presence of the American President, Sheikh Hasina reiterated Dhaka's position on the question of export of gas. Her country would think of exporting natural gas only after meeting the local needs for half a century. "After fully meeting our domestic re-

quirements and ensuring reserves for 50 years" the remaining surplus will be available for export, she said. The airport ceremony over, a motorcade carrying the U.S. President left for the Prime Minister's Office. Mr. Clinton boarded a jeep instead of the limousine which was to carry the honoured guest.

New deals

Reuters reports:

The U.S. Commerce Secretary, Mr. William Daley, said American investment might sharply increase in Bangladesh's energy sector, provided the country introduced the right policies. "Let me say, that with the right policies in place, we could see a sharp increase in American investments in your rich energy resources," Mr. Daley told a conference of U.S.-Bangladesh Chamber officials in Dhaka.

Mr. Daley, who was accompanying Mr. Clinton, said U.S. oil companies, Unocal Corp. and Pangea Energy, signed new deals on gas exploration. Unocal is already producing around 100 million cubic feet of gas in its northeastern blocks.

He said Worldtel would agree to build and operate a new phone system in Dhaka and another deal would be for an undersea fibre optic system between Bangladesh and Singapore to be built by Tyco Submarine Systems.

Clinton lauds Bangladeshi culture: Page 13

Everything in a name

NEW DELHI, MARCH 20. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton's decision not to visit Joypura village in Bangladesh today created a misunderstanding that he was dropping Jaipur from his itinerary because of security reasons.

Following concerns raised by members of the U.S. Secret Service accompanying him, Mr. Clinton was advised to cancel the trip to Joypura village during his visit to Bangladesh today.

A section of the media here reported that it was Jaipur that Mr. Clinton was giving the skip, sending off panic signals among the authorities in Rajasthan who had made elaborate arrangements for the VIP guest. The media, which too had made all plans covering the visit, made frantic calls only to find that there was no change in his schedule. "There is no change in his official programme," a U.S. Embassy official said. — UNI

THE HINDU
21 MAR 2000

Bangla president avows inability to stave off bill

DHAKA: Bangladesh president Shahabuddin Ahmed has said that constitutional limitations do not allow him to prevent a controversial anti-crime bill from coming into effect.

"After 15 days of presentation of the bill, it becomes automatically an Act if the president does not assent to it," Mr Ahmed told former premier Begum Khaleda Zia, who led her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) delegation Monday evening to request him not to assent to the public safety bill, already passed by the parliament.

A release from the president's house said Mr Ahmed gave a patient hearing to the delegation and reminded them of his constitutional limitations.

The *Independent daily* quoted Begum Zia as telling the president that the bill was passed "defying protests by all political parties including a partner in the 'government of consensus'.

"It's primarily intended to suppress the democratic rights of the opposition," she said, adding human rights organisations, lawyers, professional groups and a section of the press had also opposed the bill.

Meanwhile, BNP-led four-party alliance today braced for "torchlight" processions to be held Tuesday evening and a 36-hour nationwide shutdown from Wednesday to protest the bill and to press for resignation of Sheikh Hasina government.

The government says the new legislation is intended to curb growing crimes and terrorist activities.

The public safety (special provisions) bill, 2000, passed in parliament in the last day of the "millennium session" on Monday, was referred to the president for his assent, parliament secretariat sources said.

The women and children repression prevention bill, passed on Monday, was also sent to the presidential house, they said.

The constitutional provisions did not leave room for the president to return the public safety bill to parliament for reconsideration as it had been introduced as "money bill", sources said, adding money bill or that involves expenditure from public money is introduced in parliament after obtaining prior recommendation from the president.

According to the country's constitution, the president is either to assent a bill other than a money bill within 15 days after it is presented to him or return the bill to parliament with, requesting its reconsideration or of any particular provision. But if he fails to do so, he shall be deemed to have assented to the bill.

Opposition said the public safety law, which envisages a jail term upto 14 years for crimes like halting traffic and damaging vehicles, was aimed at dealing with political opponents.

Besides the BNP and its allies, small Left-wing alliance of 11 parties has also been opposing the bill. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 2 FEB 2000

Shahabuddin gets tough with Jamaat

By Haroon Habib **10.15**
DHAKA, FEB. 11. The Bangladesh President, Mr. Shahabuddin Ahmed who has often voiced controversial views on crucial national issues during his three-and-a-half years in office, recently made a crucial decision concerning an appointment with the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami chief, Prof. Golam Azam, who is well-known as a war criminal for his anti-Bangladesh role during the war of liberation in 1971.

The President's quiet but resolute stand has earned him overwhelming acclamation from pro-liberation groups, but has created a ripple in the four-party Opposition alliance led by Begum Khaleda Zia. The new development not only brought an old issue of "pro" and "anti-liberation" to the fore, but also honoured a president of Bangladesh who has displayed a regard for the spirit of independence, though it has been largely ignored by the Bangladesh heads of state

before. The latest decision came when the Jamaat-e-Islami, in line with its alliance partners, the BNP and Jatiya Party, sought an appointment with the President to request him not to assent to the controversial Public Safety Bill passed by parliament. The move has been severely criticised by most of the Opposition parties. The Jamaat sent a list of its leaders which included the party chief, Prof. Golam Azam. But the Bangabhaban (President House) cut short the list, dropping the name of the party chief. This enraged the Jamaat, which made a second request to the Bangabhaban the next day to include its chief in the delegation. But the Bangabhaban remained adamant.

"By doing so the President has demeaned the prestige of his office... The nation does not expect it," Mr. Qamaruzzaman, a central Jamaat leader, said. Even the Opposition BNP secretary-general, Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, has

requested the President to grant the appointment to the Jamaat leader.

In an official clarification, the Bangabhaban verified that Prof. Golam Azam's name was dropped from the list. As the controversy raged, officials at the Bangabhaban said Prof. Azam was not invited to Bangabhaban for his role in the liberation war. "He is never invited on any national day at Bangabhaban, showing respect to the sentiments of the freedom-loving people of the country." Finally, Jamaat did not go to the Bangabhaban without its Ameer.

The President's move jolted the BNP-led Opposition camp and took aback its vital partner, the Jamaat, which over the years could prove politically useful in anti-government movements.

After independence from Pakistan, which Jamaat opposed, the first Awami League Government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman banned the Jamaat, the Muslim League, and other

religion-based parties. After the political change-over of 1975 that toppled the Awami League Government through bloodshed, the military government of Gen. Ziaur Rahman, the late husband of Begum Khaleda Zia, promulgated Political Party Regulations (PPR) giving licence to political parties on applications. For strategic reasons, the Jamaat did not apply for registration, but started doing politics with the then Nejam-e-Islami and the Muslim League under the banner of the Islamic Democratic League (IDL), the Jamaat, however, emerged as an independent party following the withdrawal of the PPR.

The development is said to have greatly influenced the BNP think tanks belonging to the "pro-liberation group" in the party. This group believes that Begum Khaleda Zia-led BNP will achieve nothing but dissolution by taking an anti-liberation and fundamentalist party as its close political aide.

Bangla Opp. chiefs share rally platform

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DHAKA, Feb. 13. — The chiefs of four Bangladesh opposition parties today held their first joint rally and a combined street march in Dhaka, with the aim of launching a new drive to force the Sheikh Hasina government to step down.

The four top leaders who shared a platform for the first time, since launching their anti-government campaign three years ago, were Bangladesh Nationalist party chief, Mrs Khaleda Zia, former military ruler, Mr Hussain Muhammad Ershad, Jammate-Islami party chief, Ghulam Azam and Maulana Azizul Huq of the Islami Aikkyo Jote.

Mrs Khaleda announced a 36-hour general strike and road and railway blockade from 16 February, to press for the Prime Minister's resignation and to protest against the new anti-crime bill.

She warned that the Opposition would bring the country to a halt by enforcing strikes and blockades, also enforcing work to stop in ports during the strike. The new programmes for strikes and transport shutdowns came as part of their campaign to topple the Prime Minister.

THE STATESMAN

14 FEB 2000

Bangladesh President's nod to disputed Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DHAKA, Feb. 14. — The Bangladesh President, Mr Shahabuddin Aahmed, today gave assent to the controversial Public Safety (special provision) Bill 2000, even as one person was killed and scores seriously injured in violence ahead of an Opposition-called three-day nation-wide shut-down from tomorrow, protesting it.

The official news agency, BSS, quoting police and eye-witnesses, said, Pulak Biswas, a local leader of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, Awami League's student wing, was shot dead at his home in Chittagong port city by armed miscreants.

Bangladesh Chhatra League activists protesting against the killing went on a rampage.

At least 50 people were injured and dozens of vehicles damaged during clashes between police and Opposition supporters in Dhaka yesterday.

A press statement issued from the presidential palace said, Prime Minister Mrs Sheikh Hasina Wazed called on President Mr Ahmed, requesting him to give assent to the Bill.

The President pointed out certain objectionable provisions of the Bill, particularly one which prohibits bail during pendency of appeal against conviction.

Mrs Wazed assured him that the said provision will be deleted by an Ordinance soon after the Act comes into force, it added.

The President's move ended a fortnight-long suspense over the enactment of the controversial Bill, passed by Parliament in a session boycotted by the Opposition last month.

The President also signed the Women and Child Repression Prevention Bill, 2000.

The Bill on public security had triggered violent street protests by the Opposition, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of former Premier Begum Khaleda Zia.

It provides for setting up a special tribunal for swift trial of people suspected of crimes including extortion, kidnapping, hijacking, damaging vehicles and public and private property.

The suspects could also be denied bail, an option the Opposition fears the government could use against political opponents.

THE STATESMAN

15 FEB 2000

Opposition strike hits Bangladesh

Dhaka, February 15

THOUSANDS OF extra police and paramilitary soldiers today patrolled Dhaka as the opposition launched another strike to try to bring down the government.

The national strike, the latest bid to topple Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is scheduled to last for three days and transport officials said it is expected to block highways, although trains and flights look set to operate normally.

In the violent run-up to the strike on Sunday and yesterday angry activists flipped cars and trucks over, smashed the windcreens of at least 50 vehicles and set two on fire, police and witnesses said.

The police said a 25-year-old pro-government student was shot dead at his home in Chittagong yesterday by suspected activists from the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami Party.

The latest strike was called by opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia, head of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and her allies in a four-party Opposition Alliance.

Begum Khaleda has led a campaign of 55 major strikes aimed at toppling the government since Hasina's Awami League won the election in June 1996 against the BNP. Analysts say the strikes have seriously damaged the impoverished nation's fragile economy and driven away investors.

The last opposition-led strike on February 2-3 also paralysed much of Bangladesh.

Many senior officials stayed in their offices overnight or moved in before today's strike began at 6 a.m. (0000GMT).

Begum Khaleda turned down Sheikh Hasina's recent offer to try to resolve their differences, saying she wants Hasina's resignation first. She routinely accuses Hasina's government of arresting opposition leaders and activists "on political grounds" and subjecting them to "punishment and harassment meted out to criminals."

Opposition leaders were further angered by a public safety law, which was passed by Parliament without the participation of opposition lawmakers, who have boycotted proceedings since mid-1999.

(Reuters)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 FEB 2000

Bangla Opp calls another strike

REUTERS

5F-11/19/12
DHAKA, Feb. 18. — Bangladesh's Opposition parties are calling for yet another strike, in their efforts to force the government out of power.

"The strike on 28 February will be preceded by demonstrations and protests by the four-party Opposition alliance," Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, secretary-general, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, told reporters yesterday.

Meanwhile, a three-day countrywide strike against a new security law ended yesterday evening.

The Opposition has led more than 55 strikes since 1996, trying to oust Sheikh Hasina's government. Police say strike-related violence has killed more than 30 people, and injured thousands, since then.

They accuse Sheikh Hasina of bad government and demand that she resign and allow parliamentary elections soon. Polls are due next year.

However, Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the Opposition was making an uproar against the new law "because they themselves harbour criminals and want them protected from the law."

The law provides for jail terms of up to 14 years, for crimes ranging from obstructing traffic to damaging property. The government says the law aims to crack down on lawlessness. Critics say it is designed to tame the Opposition.

THE STATESMAN

19 FEB 2000

FIGHTING ANARCHY

Hasina must tread cautiously

FOR the first time in three and a half years, Sheikh Hasina's Government will put itself to test by enacting the Public Safety (Special provisions) Act 2000, which has generated considerable heat and given a boost to opposition attempts to oust her. The Act was in response to the business community's demand for exemplary action against those who create anarchy during *hartals*. But to many Hasina well-wishers the new law has other serious implications. After similar legislation in 1974 to deal with lawlessness, Sheikh Mujib, fell victim to a conspiracy which cost him his life. Ironically, Ziaur Rahman used this law to decimate the Awami League-led Opposition, thousands of leaders and workers were jailed and killed even after he vowed to rid the country of such "black laws". Ershad, used it to silence dissent. Khaleda Zia instead of rescinding it, as promised, enacted a more draconian measure — the anti-terrorist law — to neutralise opposition. Between 1975 and 1996 when Ziaur, Ershad and Begum Zia ruled, the Bangladesh High Court declared nearly 14,000 of 20,000 detentions under these special powers, illegal. Seldom was the law used for its professed objective — maintaining peace. The ruling parties' armed gangs were not touched while those of rivals were bludgeoned into submission.

Hasina is aware of the pitfalls. The question is, will she enforce it by rising above party interests? In a country where patronising armed gangs is a part of political culture and survival, she will have to set an example by ridding her party of such elements or putting them behind bars. But this is difficult as the Opposition, especially Begum Zia's BNP and the Jamat, which maintain heavily armed cadres — will not reciprocate and will continue to pressurise the Awami League with violent *hartals*. They used terror tactics to make the unprecedented 120 hour *hartal* in Sylhet followed by a nation-wide 72 hour *hartal* "successful". It is imprudent on Hasina's part to arm herself with laws which were used by the Muslim fundamentalist-led Opposition to fan anti-Awami sentiments. Hasina has not ruled out the possibility of its misuse by those in the administration hostile to her. Then why did she do this? Couldn't she have dealt with the situation by "strengthening" the existing penal code? Why did she walk into the Muslim fundamentalist trap? Having taken the plunge she has to be cautious. Or else, it will be a disaster for her and Bangladesh.

THE STATESMAN
20 FEB 2000

Rift between President, Govt. in Bangladesh

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, FEB. 28. A rift has developed between the President, Mr. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, and the Government of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina. The "misunderstanding" between the titular head and the executive is being allegedly widened by the Opposition which has found the moment suitable for their gain.

Such a situation has never arisen in Bangladesh's 29-year-old political history. The debate over the recently enacted Public Safety Act (PSA), a controversial piece of legislation to which the President gave his assent only after the Prime Minister personally requested him to do so, has also raised a pertinent question: whether any government in future would nominate a "neutral person" such as Mr. Ahmed to become the head of the country.

Under the Constitution, a bill passed by Parliament becomes an Act after the President gives his assent to it. Even if the President does not give his assent, it becomes an Act automatically after 15 days. But in the case of the PSA, the President gave his assent not only after 14 days, causing an embarrassment for the Government but he also allegedly allowed the Opposition parties, which are strongly opposed to the Bill, to strengthen their anti-Government campaign.

But the Government had to swallow the bitter pill, may be in the hope of defusing the political tension on which the Begum Khaleda Zia-led Opposition was about to capitalise. The Prime Minister, according to a statement from the President's House, promised to delete the objectionable provision of the Bill by promulgating an ordinance and accordingly, the Law Ministry drafted the ordinance and sent it to the President for approval.

The Government is having the impression that Mr. Ahmed, whom the ruling party had nominated for the presidency after he retired as the Chief Justice, has compounded the political tension not only by "delaying" his assent to the Bill, but also involving his office in a new controversy with the Government on a technical matter — whether it is a money bill or not.

Sheikh Hasina, who on February 25, replied to a series of direct and provocative questions relating to the PSA in a televised "face-to-face with the people" programme, has said that the President had signed the Bill as money bill before it went to Parliament for passing. The next day, the President's House issued a statement refuting it. The same day, several leading newspapers published the Law Ministry's version defending the Government's action and also the photocopy of the presidential signature to the summary of the money bill proposal.

al, which created a further gap between the Government and the President.

There is no denying that the President's House has caused an "embarrassment" for the Government. The debate, therefore, is sure to continue whether Mr. Ahmed should have gone to such an extent as to issue controversial statements particularly when the Opposition parties were out to bring the Government down "by all means".

Under the existing scenario, "rumours" are rife that Mr. Ahmed may resign. If that happens, it may cause further embarrassment for the Government but that will not obviously bring the regime down. Moreover, the ruling party thinktank believes that the Government may be "saved" from further embarrassment if the President resigns.

The Government strongly believes that "politically motivated quarters" are out to widen the gap between the titular head and executive. "We have profound respect for the President, but a quarter with an ulterior motive is trying to create a distance between President and the Government," the Law and Justice Minister, Mr. Abdul Matin Kharsu, said on Sunday. He said there was no scope for any controversy now since PSA was already a "settled matter" after the presidential assent.

Bangla may buy Chinese fighters on 'easy terms'

Dhaka, December 31

Handwritten: *HT-122* *1/1* *Bangla*

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BANGLADESH IS considering buying eight sophisticated Chinese fighter aircraft on "easy financial terms", despite the controversy triggered by its purchase of MIG-29 combat planes from Russia.

Sources said China has offered to supply supersonic F-7 MB "all purpose" fighters, suitable for both attack and defence. The Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) already has some F-7 MBs that are specially designed for the country, B standing for Bangladesh.

In October 1997, the Awami League Government approved the purchase of multi-role fighters. Top officials at the time gave a go-ahead to the plan to buy eight Russian MIGs and eight Chinese F-7 MBs to add a squadron to the air force's existing five squadrons.

But when the director general of defence purchase (DGDP) was considering various options, a proposal came from Russia for supply of MIG-29s at "a cheaper price and on convenient financial terms". The authorities decided to buy the MIGs and deferred the purchase of the Chinese F-7 MBs for two years.

Sources said the Ministers of Finance and Defence are now considering approving purchase of the Chinese fighters. Although the Ministers are tight-lipped, it was learnt they would insist on fresh offers and on a government-to-government deal.

Defence sources hinted that the Chinese Government was interested in making a revised offer and could reduce prices "considerably" and agree on "easy and convenient terms". They said the Chinese

Government may even offer to supply eight F-7 MBs on deferred payment, considering the "friendly ties" between the two countries.

The BAF currently has fully trained pilots and a set-up to fly five squadrons, each with 16 fighters. However, its depleted fleet now has only three operational fighter squadrons. The fleet comprises Chinese A-III ground attack aircraft, F-7 MB attack and defence fighters and Czech manufactured L-39 jets. It has some obsolete MIG-21s procured long ago and some US-made Bell and Russian MI-17 helicopters.

Bangladesh will boost its fleet by adding half a squadron of fighters by March with the arrival of all eight MIG-29s, the first two of which reached the country on December 25.

Dhaka signed a deal worth 124 million dollars with Russia in June for the eight aircraft. The purchase sparked a political controversy with the Opposition questioning the need for such expensive defence purchases. There was criticism from abroad as well, including from the US which said it failed to see why a poor nation like Bangladesh needed to

buy costly fighter jets.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chief Khaleda Zia said beggars should not purchase expensive fighter planes. Other Opposition leaders said the country faced no military threat from its neighbours India and Myanmar.

But Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed had earlier said in Parliament that the need for an upgrade of Bangladesh's armed forces could not be over-emphasised. Her government therefore went ahead with the MIG purchases. (IANS)

The Chinese Government is interested in making a revised offer and could reduce prices "considerably" and agree on "easy and convenient terms," Defence sources hinted

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 1 JAN 2000

40-17 Dark clouds over Dhaka 2/1



Riot police block anti-Government demonstrators in Dhaka... squaring off.

THE POLITICAL scene in Bangladesh has not changed significantly though Sheikh Hasina Wajed's Awami League is going to complete four years in office in next few months. The scenario is almost the same as when the Awami League began its second term after long 21 years out of government following 1975's bloody political change-over.

But certain developments have given rise to a new polarisation in politics. Rightists and religious fundamentalists have united and pledged to "overthrow" the Government before its stipulated five-year tenure. They recently formed a four-party alliance under the stewardship of the former Premier and now main Opposition leader, Begum Khaleda Zia, chairperson of the BNP. Begum Khaleda's long-time arch enemy, Gen. H. N. Ershad, is now also with her on the same mission — remove Sheikh Hasina come what may. Their argument is that the Hasina Government is not only repressive but is also sacrificing national interests to India.

The coming together of Begum Zia, Gen. Ershad, a former President who heads the Jatiya Party, Prof. Golam Azam, Ameer of the Jamaat-e-Islami leader, and Maulana Azizul Huq and Mufti Fazlul Haq Aminee of the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) is seen as the ultimate and natural culmination of their political positions since they all believe in Islamisation of the state and share a strong anti-India view. In fact, their main charge against Sheikh Hasina is that she is appeasing India. Other charges are that the ruling party has resorted to terrorism, rigged byelections and not allowed the Opposition to speak in parliament. But the fact is that the Opposition parties started boycotting the sessions from the day the seventh Jatiya Shangsad — parliament — began.

But the polarisation has also possibly started sharpening the feelings on the other side which believes in the secular and pro-liberation spirit, the spirit behind Bangladesh's coup-

In Bangladesh, rightists and religious fundamentalists have united and pledged to overthrow the Sheikh Hasina Government.

HAROON HABIB takes a look at the scene.

aration from Pakistan. Besides the Awami League, smaller left-leaning parties and groups too have become alarmed following the recent unity of fundamentalists and anti-liberation forces.

For the last one year, the BNP and its partners have conducted what they termed the "One Point Movement" — to oust Sheikh Hasina from power through a mass movement. At the end of November, they formalised their alliance and issued a joint declaration asking the Government to quit and declare general elections under a neutral caretaker dispensation.

The politics of agitation the Opposition alliance has so far pursued to force the Government to step down was mainly concentrated on hartals (general strikes) — they were organised for days on end. But the hartals, which cripple the economy, increase social unrest and worsen law and order, are earning widespread condemnation from the public. As a political weapon, the hartal is gradually losing its edge due to overuse. Therefore, it is almost certain that mere hartals cannot possibly bring the Government down, particularly when it has been mandated by the people to run the country for five years. The Sheikh Hasina Government has earned both bouquets and brickbats during its four years in office. Many of its landmark achievements, acclaimed

worldwide, have been condemned by the Opposition, mainly because the policies are totally different from those of the past. There is also a fundamental shift in Dhaka's policy towards its neighbours, particularly India. And, the Government, despite shortcomings, is trying to boldly re-establish the secular, pro-liberation spirit which the country lost after the 1975 coup.

The Begum Khaleda-led front is most likely to emerge as an electoral alliance. But many political commentators do not agree with the calculation that the BNP-led alliance is certain to sweep the polls given the electoral arithmetic so far. They point out that the alliance is now almost entirely guided by political and religious extremists, many of whom are branded as "pro-Pakistan". These elements will not find it easy to get popular mandate. The main Opposition BNP has also a substantial number of leaders and workers who will never vote for the Jamaat-e-Islami or the Jatiya Party.

The Ameer of the Jamaat-e-Islami recently led an *Iftar Munazat* (prayer) at a city community centre which Begum Khaleda, Gen. Ershad and other fundamentalist leaders attended. Here, Prof. Golam Azam expressed his desire to lead the four-party alliance to re-establish the spirit of 1947's partition of India — that is the Two Nations Theory — which was, however, discarded through the emergence of Bangladesh in the 1971 war of liberation. In fact, the formal launching of the alliance in late November, 1999, has given rise to new hope among the divided religious extremists, who have finally found a platform under Begum Khaleda's leadership.

On December 29, Sheikh Hasina expanded her Council of Ministers raising the strength to 45, inducting a number of senior party leaders. It was a major shakeup and also an indication that the ruling party is getting ready for elections. By all available indications, the general elections in Bangladesh are likely to be held ahead of schedule.

CRISIS IN DHAKA

Asad
S.S. Begum Zia does not help *21*

IT is tragic that Bangladesh is awash in confrontation, chaos and uncertainty as an integral part of its political culture. The hopes and promises that this nascent nation aroused at the time of its birth are fading. There seems no way this trend can be reversed. Already BNP's Begum Zia has made it known that she is not going to rest until her one point agenda — ousting her sworn enemy Sheikh Hasina from power — is fulfilled. And she does not care less if in the process the country faces political and social anarchy and economic ruin. Her refusal to come on the line despite Hasina ringing her up thrice this week shows that she is in no mood to compromise. Hasina wants a one to one dialogue on ending the stand-off between Government and Opposition. But Begum Zia and leaders of three other extreme right Islamic parties — in the out Hasina movement — have not responded. Unending series of hartals during the holy Ramzan month have caused widespread suffering. Using hartal as an instrument of coercion has already provoked a public outcry. The British High Commission has warned that if the political situation deteriorates, foreign investment will stop. Unfortunately this has triggered no introspection, no mending of ways. Letting the slide go on means Bangladesh's existence will be on the line.

There is little doubt that Begum Zia wages a no holds barred movement in frustration at having lost power in a fair election. Her current movement is mainly aimed at saving the lives of self-confessed killers of Mujib and other senior Awami League leaders. The High Court is yet to confirm the death sentences. General Zia's complicity in these killings is well known as also the importance of these killers to the fundamentalist parties which have vowed to snuff out the spirit of the liberation war. The Jamat-I-Islami has sent death threats to leading Bangladeshi intellectuals and shut down the country's leading technical university as one of its students' halls was named after a liberation war hero. The Jamat glorifies General Niazi for "fighting to keep Pakistan together". But the worry is the Awami League's failure to provide strong governance which sustains opposition. Hasina must draw lessons from the past, else she and her party will fade into oblivion.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 JAN 2000

DANGEROUS TURN

Hasina must take up the challenge

IS Bangladesh falling prey to Islamic fundamentalism? Last week three events which jolted Bangladesh suggest this. The country's secular and democratic parties and intellectuals are apprehensive about the latest turn of events which if unchecked may change the character of the state, life and polity. The violent attack on freedom fighters by the Jamat-I-Islami in Sylhet and public announcement by Jamat's Amir Gholam Azam that the two-nation theory would not be supplanted by democracy, secularism and Bengali nationalism — the ideals of the liberation war — have caused widespread concern. The arrest of 17 heavily armed Harkatul Mujahideens with Pakistan and Taliban connections has added another dimension. Gholam Azam, who collaborated with the Pakistanis in the 1971 genocide, has branded the three ideals of the '71 war as "Gaur, Gobinda" or Hindu ideas unacceptable to Muslims. Begum Zia too has taken an identical line. The Jamat has been emboldened by its alliance with Begum Zia's BNP and two other Islamic parties to oust Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. The Islamic parties have not forgiven it for spearheading the liberation war and splitting Pakistan.

The turmoil in Bangladesh is not because of a clash between the two *begums* but of two opposite identities. While the pro-liberation forces are for establishing a secular Bengali nationalist identity, Begum Zia, the Jamat, Ershad and the Islami Oikya Jote are for declaring Bangladesh a Muslim Bengal, an Islamic state which would revalidate the two-nation theory. This is why democratic processes and institutions are unable to make headway and strengthen themselves. Islamic parties which ruled Bangladesh for 21 years after Mujib's killing find it hard to tolerate a government which is anathema to their creed. General Zia, Ershad and Begum Zia dealt with the freedom fighters ruthlessly and sought to destroy their ideology. Their endeavour continues even in opposition by pursuing a confrontationist line. It is to restrict free thinking and the spread of modern education that fundamentalists have terrorised Sylhet University and its faculty members and closed it down. It is unfortunate that the Awami League, although the ruling party, is unable to pick up the gauntlet. Its dithering has encouraged the fundamentalists. Hasina must realise that any compromise will not only prove to be her own undoing but strike at the roots of the nation state.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 JAN 2000

Bangla Opp. fears govt crackdown

Dhaka, Jan. 30 (AP): The main Opposition today boycotted Parliament, which adopted a tough law to punish those disrupting businesses and attacking motor vehicles and government and private buildings. (17A 9A)

The Opposition called for a 36-hour general strike next week, expressing the fear that the new law will be used against the Opposition protesters who have been organising general strikes to press for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation and fresh elections. The new law stipulates speedy trial by special courts within four months and those found guilty could be jailed for life. The minimum punishment would be five years in jail.

"This is clearly designed to stop the democratic movement against the government," Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, an Opposition spokesman, said in Dhaka.

The four-party Opposition alliance, led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, organised 30 days of crippling strikes last year.

Convictions by the trial court can be challenged in the high court. The alliance accuses the government of corruption, incompetence and harassment of political opponents. Hasina denies the charge and has offered to meet the Opposition leaders to end the confrontation.

THE TELEGRAPH

31 JAN 2000