

1971 and politics thereafter

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1971 changed many things including politics, though not as radically as was expected to. The hope cultivated was that the state would change, making way for a social revolution of democratic nature. The state did, of course, change; it was no longer to be perceived as an enemy of the people. But that perception remained unfortunately, limited to a small and fortunate ruling class and did not reach the public, to whom the state remained as antagonistic as before.

The independence of 1947 was patently incomplete inasmuch as it had failed to give the people of East Pakistan their expected economic and cultural freedom. A new struggle was, therefore, inevitable; and it did begin in 1952, culminating in the liberation war of 1971, putting an end to the rule by the civil-military clique of West Pakistanis. In the new dispensation, those who had led the liberation struggle, the rising Bengali bourgeois, found itself suddenly free, those above it having left.

The bourgeoisie was quick to occupy all the vacant places, and turn itself into new rulers, behaving in no way differently from those who had been forced out.

Politics, which is essentially about state power, became the prerogative of the new ruling class, which continued to be powerful with the increase in its acquisition of state-control.

Very soon politics turned into a struggle within the ruling class

itself, comprising the politicians, civil and military bureaucracy, tradesmen and professionals, with the common man remaining where he was before. The rulers were bent upon, as was only natural for them to do, consolidating their hold on state power and began to impose autocratic rule through the elective as well as bureaucratic machinery. And what was even impossible to imagine in 1971, really happened; military occupation came into being, one after another. Government changed, but the politics of aggrandizement continued to be both relentless and naked. The anarchy encountered and complained of today is primarily a product of the plundering enterprises of the unhindered ruling class.

The state of Bangladesh has not failed it has, indeed, thrived, remaining bureaucratic in form and capitalistic in content as it was before giving the Bengali rulers opportunities to get rich. But the founding of a state by the Bengalis was not without a profound political significance, which was the discarding of the so-called two-nation theory on which the state of Pakistan was based. Having resolved the national question, the politics after 1971 should have aimed at the resolution of the most vital class question which had so long remained subordinated to the national question of the relationship between the Bengalis as a nation and the non-Bangali rulers of Pakistan. But the bourgeois had quite naturally, no interest in con-

fronting the class question. Fearing such a confrontation would eventually lead to a social revolution, which they knew, people expected to happen after the war and to which expectation the ruling class had to bend itself backwards, even if

believe in that principle, and had, therefore, no hesitation whatsoever in throwing it overboard at the earliest opportunity.

The newly opened-up class relationship should have been the basis of politics after 1971. And

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unwillingly, while framing the constitution of the new country. The inclusion of socialism among the four state-principles was not an imposition from above, its necessity had arisen from within. But the bourgeois did not, as it could not,

indeed it did become so; but in a totally negative rather than positive way. The people in general saw and felt the necessity of a change in that relationship, because for them liberation was not more than a catchword without emancipation

from subjugation by the rich and the powerful. But they did not have the political party to fight for their cause. The rulers, on the other hand, were, despite the quarrels amongst themselves, organised in the matter of safeguarding their class interests and united in their understanding that rise of people's politics would bring all of them down, irrespective of their political affiliations. To obfuscate the issue of class antagonism and divert the attention of the discontented public, they introduced ideas of Bangladeshi nationalism, promoted the use of religion in politics, encouraged madrasah education, marginalised the religious and ethnic minorities, and, what is more, repressed the leftist and left-leaning political parties. The media, controlled as it is by the bourgeoisie, denied information about these parties to the public.

Without exception, every segment of bourgeois politicians believes in, and is working for, the promotion of the capitalist ideology and interests. Needless to say that the ideology of capitalism is more pervasive and influential than the backward-looking and discarded two-nation theory could ever have been. Capitalism is, by its very nature, exploitative. It creates alienation and self-centredness; makes the individual turn into a being which eventually becomes not only unsocial but positively anti-social. Corruption is rooted in its very essence. Under it, inequality rises and patriotism declines, in inverse proportion. Unemployment, despair, insecurity and drug-addiction are peculiar, and

unavoidable, gifts of the capitalist system.

The rulers here need, as much as those in erstwhile Pakistan did, masters for themselves and they have found their masters ready at hand in the capitalist world led by the Americans. Everyone in that world had opposed the founding of Bangladesh for fear that it would go under the control of the extremists, meaning, of course, the leftists. The rulers today compete with each other in winning favour from the capitalist countries. Their surrender is total. In pursuing the harmful guidance of institutions like the World Bank and IMF, the ruling class has found it fit to transfer state owned industrial enterprises to private hands, leading most of them to ruin. This class has privatised many of our social properties and is collaborating with trans-national corporate bodies in handing over our mineral resources, electricity management, the Chittagong port and even archaeological artefacts to foreign powers. Thanks to their machination, the patriotic politics of 1971 has turned full circle, in the reverse gear. The collective dream of building a new society has been shattered and trodden by dreams of personal property. The Islamist extremist outfit, which was created to face the 'exigency' of the socialist movement, has turned, in the absence of the socialists, against its own creators.

1971 was an uprising of the entire people. It had its beginning long ago, indeed in the revolutionary uprising of the sepoys in 1857.

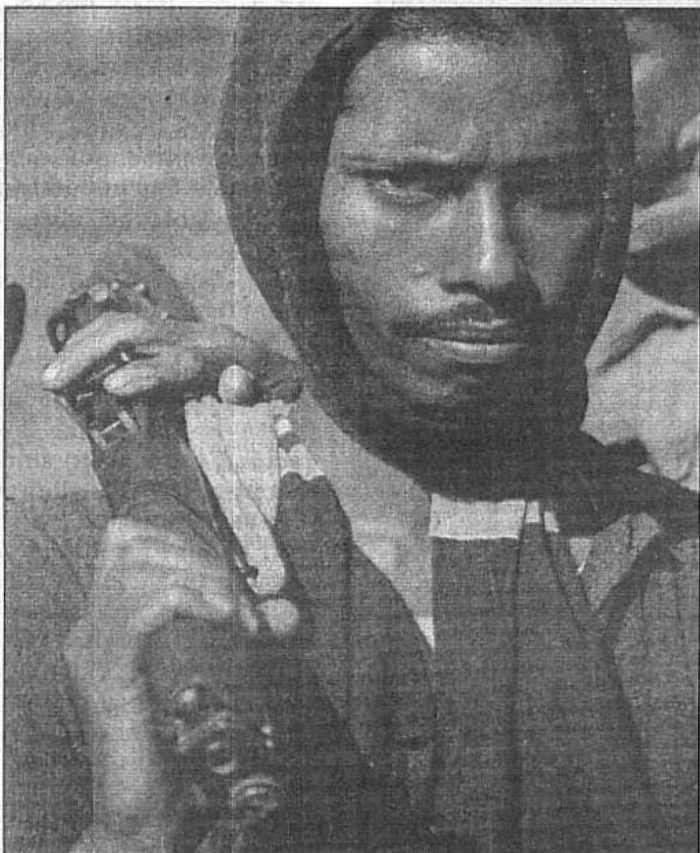
Since then politics in the sub-continent has moved in two parallel and really antagonistic channels -- the one of bourgeois petitions and protests, and the other of a determined struggle for a social revolution. Owing to obvious historical reasons and state patronisation, the bourgeois stream flourished to the detriment of the one carried on by the anti-imperialist revolutionaries.

The liberation war of 1971 represented a stage in the revolutionary struggle but was halted before it could reach the goal of democratising the state and society through the ensuring of equality of rights and opportunities for all, decentralisation of power and rule by elected representatives in all spheres. This happened because the leadership was taken over by the bourgeois nationalists and not by the leftists, who, on their part, had failed to realise that during the days of Pakistan the principal contradiction was between the state and the Bengali people, and that the class question could not be brought to the fore without the resolution of the national question.

The nationalists have done what they wanted to do and were capable of doing; but the leftists have not been able to carry the nationalist uprising further ahead to the goal of achieving real democracy. That in brief, constitutes the scenario of politics after 1971 and accounts for many of our miseries.

The writer is a former professor of English at Dhaka University.

Countdown to victory...



The last days of the Liberation War saw the pace of events accelerating all of a sudden. Victory was in sight...

December 03, 1971

The Liberation War of Bangladesh entered the final phase with full-blown hostilities beginning on all fronts between the Pakistan army and the allied forces. The Indian army units and the Mukti Bahini prepared for the final push into Bangladesh territory. The Indian Air Force quickly established its supremacy in the air through repeated strikes on key installations in the then East Pakistan.

December 04

Second day of the war. The Indian forces and our freedom fighters started proceeding towards the main battlefields in the eastern theatre.

President Yahya Khan officially declared war against India. He also ordered the Pakistani army to cross the border and fight against the enemy.

In Rawalpindi, one Pakistan government spokesperson

announced that war was going in both parts of Pakistan. In the East Pakistan borders they were facing the pressure from India. He also spoke about China's promise to help Pakistan.

December 05

The third day of the war when the airspace of Bangladesh was freed from the enemy combat aircrafts.

The Joint Commander of the Naval Forces appealed to the neutral ships to leave the territorial water of Bangladesh for safety. People around the world realised that the Pakistan government had lost control over Bangladesh.

December 06

India recognised Bangladesh as a free, independent nation.

In the Security Council Soviet Union exercised veto for the second time on the US resolution on India-Pakistan ceasefire.

December 07

The United States decided to cancel all economic assistance to India.

The Soviet Union called for

a peaceful solution of the Indo-Pak conflict and appealed to the international community not to exert any influence on the issue.

The joint forces captured Chandina ad Jafarganj. Still fierce battles were going on in Comilla and Laksham.

In the early morning, Indian army units arrived at the airport near Sylhet and then launched an all-out attack on the Pakistani army positions.

At around 11:30am the Indian troops reached the Jessore Cantonment and were surprised to see that there was no resistance. The retreating Pakistani soldiers left behind a huge amount of arms, ammunition, foods and even the operational maps of their control room.

December 08

The Indian army chief General Manekshaw appealed to the Pakistani army units in Bangladesh to surrender and the news was broadcast through Akashbani several times in different languages during the day. General Manekshaw also assured them that if they surrendered then they would be treated with dignity according to the Geneva Convention.

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution and formally proposed to the governments of India and Pakistan to take all steps required for an immediate end to the war. In the General Assembly, the Indian representative Samar Sen declared that Pakistan had to recognise Bangladesh. He also added that to establish peace in the subcontinent Bangladesh leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had to be freed.

December 09

The allied chief of the Eastern Command, General Aurora, informed the media in a press conference, "We are now ready for the battle. Our troops and tanks have already crossed the rivers and entered Bangladesh".

The Pakistani representative

to the General Assembly, Mahmud Ali, returned to Pakistan and met President Yahya Khan. He criticised the role of the Soviet Union and told the press that the Soviets should discontinue their support for India. He also added that Pakistan was very grateful to the US and China for their bold and historical support to its cause.

General Manekshaw sent the message to the Pakistani troops in Bangladesh, "If you want to survive, surrender with your arms, otherwise you will perish."

December 10

Lt. General AAK Niazi planned to flee the then East Pakistan, sensing the impending defeat, but he could not keep the plan secret. Mr. Niazi then called a press conference in a city hotel and informed the foreign journalists that he would not abandon his fellow soldiers.

Combat planes of the allied forces continued bombing Dhaka Radio Station and Kurmitola and successfully established their control over the places.

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in a press briefing at New Delhi, informed that the Indian government neither rejected the UN proposal nor accepted it. She further added that in that situation victory would only be possible without forming the Bangladesh government and ensuring the return of 10 million refugees to that country.

December 11

A White House representative called upon India and Pakistan to accept the UN resolutions and go for a ceasefire. He also said that President Nixon was consulting with his Security Advisor on the sub-continent issue.

To show respect to the UN appeal, the allied forces temporarily stopped the air attack, so that the foreign nationals could leave Bangladesh. The airport also needed repairing. In the evening, Pakistani Maj. General Rao Forman Ali

appealed for a ceasefire to evacuate the Pakistanis from Dhaka. Curfew was clamped in the capital city.

December 12

Maj General Rao Forman Ali held a meeting with the chiefs of Al-Badr, Al Shams and made the blue print of the killings of intellectuals. He also gave them the details of the intellectuals' whereabouts.

Radio Peking declared that the Soviet Union was trying to resist China through helping India and attacking Pakistan. The reason behind supporting the so called "Bangladesh" was to extend their control over the world, it added.

Journalist Nizamuddin, Managing Editor of API, was taken away to an unknown destination by Al-Badr members. He never returned.

December 13

The joint forces comprising Indian army units and Mukti Bahini changed their war tactics to capture Dhaka. Because only then they could claim formal victory in Bangladesh.

At night the joint forces took control of Bogra. Hundreds of Pakistanis surrendered throughout the country.

General Manekshaw repeated his call to the Pakistani troops to surrender.

December 14

Intellectuals were killed in Mirpur and Mohammadpur by the Al-Badr members.

General Manekshaw issued his final call to the Pakistanis to surrender.

Indian Air Force planes once again started bombing the enemy positions.

December 15

On the proposal of ceasefire from General AAK Niazi the air attack was stopped. At the same time on behalf of Bangladesh and India it was stated that no ceasefire would be possible until the Pakistani soldiers surrendered. They were also told that if they didn't surrender by 9:00am on December 16, they would again face air attacks.

In the afternoon, the joint forces conquered Savar with-

out any resistance.

December 16

The Pakistani soldiers prepared themselves for the surrender since the early morning. At around 8:00am, General Niazi requested the allied commanders to extend the time of surrender by at least six hours. General Jagjit Singh Aurora and General Jakob came to Dhaka at around 1:00pm.

The meeting for drafting the instrument of surrender was held at Niazi's headquarters and it was decided that General Jagjit Singh Aurora would sign it on behalf of the joint forces and from the defeated side General Niazi would sign.

At quarter to five, the defeated General Niazi came to the Race Course and as per the military norm was given a guard of honour. At 5:00pm, General Jagjit Singh Aurora and General Niazi proceeded to the signing table and at 5:01, General Niazi signed and recognised Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign state.

Source: Liberation War Museum, Dhaka.



Lieutenant General Aurora and General Niazi signing the Instrument of Surrender on December 16, 1971 at Race Course Maidan, Dhaka.