

AMIRUL RAJIV

accessible to everyone. Our food source and price must not depend on factors outside the country. Therefore we subsidised our farmers and fertiliser production and encouraged new technologies such as genetically engineered seeds in order to enhance production.

The BNP, on the other hand, believed that we could procure grain and fertiliser cheaper on the world market and so it was wasteful to subsidise our farmers. This has the added benefit of giving a few businessmen close to the ruling establishment the opportunity to profit in importing these items. Of course, this only works as long as world market prices do remain lower. World market prices tend to fluctuate and are difficult to predict at best. If and when they do go up, the price of food in Bangladesh goes up as well. This is precisely what happened.

On other economic fronts, the Awami League is the party responsible for greatest share of our innovation and progress. We privatised the mobile telephone network which made cellular telephones affordable for the masses. The previous BNP government kept it a monopoly owned by one of their own ministers! This kept prices well out of reach of the common man.

We privatised power generation and left the country with a surplus of power production capacity. Once again, the next BNP government promptly turned this into a severe deficit. This deficit, combined with the unprecedented corruption of their government, severely hurt our businesses and, as a consequence, our economy.

The Awami League privatised the media, airlines and banks, just to name a few others. All this led to increased competition, better products and lower prices for consumers. It also brought about a boom in the business climate which allowed companies to flourish. These in turn created new jobs, reduced unemployment, and grew the middle class. As the middle class grows, the consumer market within the country grows. This in turn drives increasing business profits and the cycle continues upwards. If the Awami League's policies could have been maintained, our economy would have grown exponentially. Unfortunately for the vast majority of our people, this was not to be.

Whatever your opinion on the 2001 elections, I would like to point out that they were in fact very close. In terms of the popular vote, the BNP and Awami League were virtually tied. Moreover, the Awami League did not lose any popular support. Rather, its share of the popular vote had increased over the previous election in which it had won.

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Just as in nature's evolution, the Awami League is now in a period of change. A large number of new leaders and parliamentary candidates have emerged. This evolution was not dictated. Rather, all the new candidates were nominated by the party grassroots. The new leaders rose by earning the respect and support of the party workers in defending the party against the attacks of those who attempted to destroy it. The people most popular in their constituencies got nominated and the leaders most capable of defending the party rose. This is the perfect example of political evolution improving the party. Now the party is even stronger.

Going back to the topic of the economy, you will see more of the same from the Awami League. I consider our economic policies a resounding success. If we win these upcoming elections, as I believe we shall, you will see us take them even further. We will open up our economy even more, but we will do so in a planned manner with a long-term