

Ershad's desperate

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Before the referendum, his regime held union parishad elections in 1983 and increased allocations to the local government body in its efforts to get support from the grassroots.

The controversial referendum failed to provide Ershad with the cloak of a legitimate ruler. There were allegations of large-scale vote rigging.

The regime claimed a voter turnout of 72 percent and Ershad obtained 94.14 percent "yes" votes in favour of his rule as the country's president, the position he grabbed in December 1983.

"But many local and foreign observers found the figure inflated and claimed that the turnout was not more than 15 to 20 percent," said a monograph titled "The Changing Forms of Government in Bangladesh: The Transition to Parliamentary System in 1991, in Perspective".

The monograph published in 2000, by Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies (BIPS) which is a parliamentary research organisation, also observed that supporters of the military regime viewed the referendum as an important milestone in Ershad's bid to legitimise his rule. The opposition parties said it was nothing more than a futile exercise, the study stated.

Failing to legitimise his rule through the extra-constitutional mechanism of referendum, Ershad decided to earn at least a veneer of legitimacy through a presidential election.

He endeavoured to hold a presidential election and become the president under Article-48 of the constitution, which he had suspended immediately after seizing state power.

But Ershad could not go ahead with his plan in the face of vigorous opposition of the Awami League-led eight-party alliance, BNP-backed seven-party alliance and the left-leaning five-party alliance.

He had to drop his plan for presidential election and conceded to his oppositions' demand for holding parliamentary elections on May 7, 1986.

Protest against Ershad's military rule went on with renewed vigour once the restrictions on outdoor politics were lifted on the first day of 1986, after four months short of three years when indoor politics was allowed.

However, around three years before the third parliamentary elections in 1986, Ershad wanted to float a political party and his men had started working into this end.

With his direct blessing a new political party, Janadal (People's Party), was launched in November, 1983. The Awami League (Mizan faction) and a faction of BNP led by Shamsul Huda Chowdhury emerged as nucleus of this party.

Later, Jatiya League, Democratic League (led by Shah Moazzem), NAP (led by Naser Bhasani) and a small group from Awami League (of Sheikh Hasina) led by Kurban Ali joined Janadal. The Janadal was renamed Jatiya Party in 1986.

"He [Ershad] was probably encouraged by Zia's remarkable success in a similar endeavour a few years before... by inducting stalwarts of the newborn Janadal into the cabinet, Ershad invited other politicians to defect to the government's party," political scientist Prof Muhammad A Hakim observed in his book "Bangladesh Politics: The Shahabuddin Interregnum".

The BIPS study observed that there was a post-1975 trend in Bangladesh politics which was to turn as many opposition leaders as possible into supporters of the rulers through persuasion, intimidation, concession and distribution of patronage.

To consolidate his power, Ershad introduced and effectively used the upazila parishad system. The system was introduced in 1982 but polls to the upazila parishads were held in May 1985 in which the government-backed Janadal candidates won 45 percent of the chairs in upazilas.

In the absence of a parliament, the upazila chairmen, being public representatives, enjoyed most of the power, prestige and status of lawmakers. The chairmen played active role in resisting opposition movements against the Ershad regime and started working for Janadal/Jatiya Party.

Before formally announcing the third parliamentary election date, Ershad met upazila chairmen on several occasions at divisional headquarters as well as in Dhaka and discussed opposition movements and the national polls.

Ershad also took some of the leaders of the Upazila Chairman Parishad on his international tours from time to time and they were always found beside the president in

most of his public appearances.

"If one looks at the political process of Bangladesh from 1982 onwards, the clear political role of the upazila system in consolidating the power base of military regime is not hard to mark. This was the only major programme the military rulers persistently and carefully handled from 1982 to 1985 and finally attained success," said a study published by Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), an autonomous body.

The study titled "Decentralisation and People's Participation in Bangladesh: A Political Perspective", said the upazila parishad chairmen cooperated fully with the government in organising the third parliamentary elections.

Finally, the third parliamentary election was held on May 7, 1986 smeared with violence and in total lawlessness that left at least 15 people dead.

"The government-backed Jatiya Party's musclemen captured many polling stations in different constituencies and massively terrorised the voters. There was no serious initiative on the part of the civil bureaucracy or police administration to resist the Jatiya Party hired thugs," said Prof Hakim of political science of Chittagong University.

The election, as anticipated, was won by Jatiya Party with a simple majority of 153 seats despite active support from the Ershad-led military government. Awami League won 76 seats, Jamaat-e-Islami 10, independent candidates 32 and other parties won the rest of the 300 seats.

The Awami League accused the Jatiya Party of rigging the elections, an apprehension that made BNP boycott the polls.

Declaration of unofficial results through state-owned BTV and radio was also marked by irregularities, which was later dubbed a "media coup".

The BTV and radio were supposed to telecast and broadcast live announcement of unofficial election results provided by the Election Commission for 36 hours. But just after 29 hours, they suddenly stopped announcing the results.

When they were not broadcasting and telecasting, Jatiya Party won 78 seats while the Awami League bagged 54 seats. Such an incident never happened before or after the third parliamentary elections.

A British team of observers consisting of a former Labour minister, a Conservative lawmaker and a BBC journalist termed the elections a "tragedy for democracy" and a "cynically frustrated exercise", according to the BIPS study.

Soon after the parliamentary elections, Ershad again decided to hold the presidential election to become a "legal" president under the constitution.

He resigned from his post as chief of army staff and formally joined the Jatiya Party in August, 1986, putting aside the promise he had made when he took over that he would never enter the political arena.

As part of his continued effort to legitimise his rule, presidential election was held on October 15, 1986. Ershad contested the polls as the Jatiya Party candidate. Knowing how elections go under the military regime, all major opposition parties boycotted the presidential election.

Ershad was elected with ease.

Even though the third parliamentary election was dubbed a "tragedy for democracy", it served Ershad's purpose. He had a parliament that would ratify a bill, which he then thought would legalise the military regime, permit the withdrawal of martial law and make him a constitutional ruler.

He summoned the second session of the third parliament. The one-day session on November 10, 1986 was only for passing the constitution's seventh amendment bill to indemnify Ershad's taking over of state power and all of his regime's actions.

But initially, Jatiya Party did not have 220 votes needed in parliament to pass the bill. Later they garnered 30 women's reserved seats. Soon a larger number of independents joined the bandwagon and legislators from smaller parties joined the party allegedly in exchange for various benefits.

This way the government managed to get the 220 votes it needed to pass the bill. Parties other than Jatiya Party that supported the indemnity bill were Muslim League, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab faction), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Siraj faction) and Baksal.

Having indemnified himself for all his deeds, orders issued, decisions made between March 21, 1982 and November 11, 1986, Ershad lifted the martial law.

"The referendum, presiden-

tial and parliamentary elections did not help Ershad earn even a veneer of legitimacy. It can be rather argued that these only compounded the legitimacy crisis of the regime," the BIPS study observed.

The High Court's verdict on Thursday, declaring the seventh amendment illegal now proved his efforts to make his rule legitimate a futile exercise.

Moudud Ahmed, who held the posts of vice-president and prime minister in Ershad's regime, in his book "Democracy and the Challenge of Development: A Study of Politics and Military Interventions in Bangladesh" said, "His lack of public trust and credibility ultimately failed to earn him [Ershad] legitimacy as a leader."

Implement DAP

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Nimtoil fire tragedy that killed 124 people.

Presiding over the meeting BAPA President Prof Muzaffar Ahmed said the government would have to relocate elsewhere the chemical factories from residential areas.

"If necessary, we will go to the court to remove the factories from residential areas," he said.

Meanwhile, the government directed the authorities concerned to remove the chemical stores by September 30.

The BAPA president demanded that the existing laws about inflammable materials and chemicals factories be reviewed.

Muzaffar said, "We have to talk to the owners of chemicals factories and common people to make them aware of the terrible effect of setting up chemicals factories in the residential areas."

The environment ministry, industries ministry and the land ministry should work together to relocate the chemical factories, he added.

Speaking as the special guest Prof Nazrul Islam, chairman of University Grants Commission, suggested quick implementation of DAP and city's master plan to relocate the chemicals factories.

"DAP recommended using lands separately for commercial and residential purposes. If the DAP is implemented, different kinds of hazards will certainly be reduced," Nazrul said.

Presenting the keynote paper Zahedur Rahman, national expert on consumer affairs of Bangladesh Quality Support Programme, laid emphasis on proper handling of inflammable substances to reduce the risk of explosion and fire.

BAPA General Secretary Abdul Matin, Prof Mahbubur Rahman of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agriculture University, Citizen's Rights Movement Secretary General Tusher Rehman spoke, among others, at the function.

Attack on cops

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Medical College Hospital while the other two were released after first aid.

Police arrested Fazul's brothers Fazil Azim and Zakaria and Fazlul Haq, sources said.

New int'l airport

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level security concept cannot be employed which is mandatory as per the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) guidelines.

As the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport is surrounded by residential area and cantonment, its extensive future expansion is impossible. These make building another international standard airport near Dhaka an urgent necessity, mentioned the proposal.

Pakistanis too broken to rebuild in flood crisis

REUTERS, Madyan

Shah-e-Roon doesn't have the energy, money or support from Pakistan's government to help Madyan recover from floods that decimated the small town nearly a month ago.

He has been walking for two days with a 20-kg (44 lb) sack of wheat on his back. Food shortages caused by the disaster have sent prices soaring and the only market he can afford is many kilometers away.

"How can I think about rebuilding? I have no way of making money and I am just too tired," said the 50-year-old farmer.

Madyan, in the northwest Swat valley, looks more like an earthquake zone than a flood-stricken area.

Constitution

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end of last year. He requested the person to introduce him to a good lawyer who could help his brother.

"That person introduced me to lawyer Hassan Azim. I had nothing except the number of the case with Kotwali Police Station," said Shura.

"I returned to my village after giving the case number to lawyer Azim. I never met or contacted him again since then, but my brother got bail in April," said Shura.

But none of the two brothers knew anything about the progress in the case as of yesterday.

Siddique's family members or relatives were also clueless about the HC verdict that declared illegal the seventh amendment to the constitution until this correspondent conveyed it to the two brothers.

Siddique lives in a small thatched house with two wives and a six-year-old daughter.

He is unaware of big events for having no access to newspaper, television or radio now.

"I am a poor man. I pass my days struggling to maintain my family," said Siddique who earns nearly Tk 3,000 a month by teaching a few primary school students.

He started teaching at the age of 12. He used to give lessons to kids in exchange for board and lodging.

Siddique, son of a fisherman, passed Secondary School Certificate in 1972 but could not continue studies due to poverty.

He is the eldest among the six children of his parents. They inherited a plot of 2.5 katha where Siddique and Shura live with their families.

"We two manage to survive since our another brother and three sisters have not claimed their shares of the land," said Shura.

Siddique voluntarily teaches at a Bathua Primary School near his house.

He lived at Islam Colony at Asadganj when the murder case was filed against him and a few others.

Siddique was first arrested in 1985 in the case. He was released on bail from a Chittagong court after spending a month and 19 days in prison.

He later moved to his village home Bathua and appeared before a Chittagong court on different dates in connection with the case.

The case was transferred to a martial law court. But he did not appear before it. He learnt from a local newspaper that the court had awarded him life imprisonment just before the martial law was lifted in November 1986.

"I never went into hiding. I was living in the village and did not contact my lawyer anymore," Siddique said.

None from the police department turned up at his house until July 2, 2006.

Siddique claimed he did not know complainant Kala Mia or his son Abu Taher who was murdered in Chittagong in 1984.

"I believe it was a conspiracy against me. I still do not know who was behind it," he said.

Referring to the country's constitution he said, "Yes, I know we have a constitution but I know nothing else about it."

Commenting on the seventh amendment to the con-

stitution, Siddique said, "I never heard of it. When I was at a bazar recently, I heard some people talking about the fifth amendment. But I do not have any idea about it."

Referring to military rule, Siddique said he is witness to the military rules by Ayub Khan, Yahia Khan and Tikka Khan during Pakistan period, and Ziaur Rahman and Ershad in Bangladesh.

"We have democracy in our country, I personally believe military rule is illegal in a democratic country."

"No conscious citizen can support military rule that comes with the overthrow of an elected government," said Siddique, who was unaware that the HC declared Ershad's military rule illegal following his petition.

The HC also declared illegal the martial law court's conviction and trial against him.

"I am happy," said Siddique after learning about it yesterday.

The HC asked Siddique to surrender his bail bond to lower court from where he obtained it and explore other legal options for remedy.

DCC sleeps

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"The rickshaw drivers do not want to come here and demand double the usual fair if they come," he said.

Ismail, a resident of East Rayerbazar, said the road from High School Square to High School Dhal in Rayerbazar was not repaired though setting up of storm sewers was done two months back.

Waliullah Sikdar, drainage circle project director of Wasa, said Wasa has completed the work of the Jhigatala-Hajaribagh road two months back.

"But there were few points where we had to remove earth and dump sand and we have completed that task too by August 16," he said.

Superintending Engineer of DCC Muhammad Abul Hasnat said Wasa dumped earth on the pipelines instead of sand after completing its work and DCC asked Wasa on August 14 to remove earth and dump sand as per the requirement, and that is the reason behind the delay.

DCC will soon start repairing the road, he said.

Regarding violation of the guidelines, the Wasa director said it was not possible to complete the huge work within the 28-day timeframe.

ROAD DIGGING IN DHANMONDI

DCC has been digging earth for the last 15 days in a Dhanmondi road to set up storm sewers, in violation of the provision in the 2003 guidelines which say all digging must be done before May.

Itefakhar, a resident of the area, said the initiative of DCC was good as the road goes under water even after mild rain but such development works should take place before the monsoon.

When asked as to why DCC has taken up the task during the rainy season, Hasnat, the DCC engineer, said they failed to start it before the monsoon since it took a long time to get the approval for the work.

He, however, said DCC will be able to complete the work by September.

S'pore offers job

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The Southeast Asian country is interested to recruit workers from Bangladesh as the Filipinos and Indonesians, who traditionally work as domestic workers in Singapore, are now gradually shifting to the European countries and demanding higher pays, the BNET director said on Tuesday.

They will draw a monthly salary equivalent to Tk 16,000, Islam said, adding that the legal system in Singapore is quite good, and that there is lesser possibility of exploitation.

As many as 60,000 Bangladeshi female domestic workers work abroad, mainly in the Middle East, and earn a monthly salary of Tk 10,000-12,000 on an average.

However, to get the job in Singapore workers must obtain education at least up to grade VIII with general English language skills. They would also have to take a test in Singapore, the delegation said.

"We said it would be better if the tests are conducted in Bangladesh, because if anyone fails the test, she has to return," said an official of the expatriates' welfare ministry.

Nurul Islam said it would be even better for the workers to

have education up to SSC level.

Asked if the Bangladeshi women having SSC-level education would like to work as domestic workers for socio-cultural reasons, Nurul Islam said it is not a problem at all. "There are many women having education of this level interested to go abroad," he noted.

The government wants that Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL), the state-owned recruiting agency, initially arrange the jobs considering that private agencies may indulge in irregularities.

Baira General Secretary Ali Haider Chowdhury said the proposal Singapore made is good. He requested the delegation to discuss the matter in detail with the government, as the government itself wants to handle the process.

A Baira member, however, said the AEAS delegation was more interested to hire the jobseekers through private arrangements.

Abdul Alim, who processes jobs for female workers, said this would be a lift in the immigration of Bangladesh's female workers, because until now Bangladeshi women mostly go to the Middle Eastern countries.

Govt moves

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overseas job and growth of inward remittance from the Bangladeshi expatriates witnessed a decline. Currently, seven million Bangladeshi expats send home over \$10 billion annually helping the country's balance of payment.

However, in 2009 foreign jobs for Bangladeshis declined to 4.75 lakh, which was 8.75 lakh in 2008 and 8.32 lakh in 2007. Though the decline was reasoned by global economic recession, its trend continued till now when the recession is approaching end.

Up to July 29 this year, only 231,171 workers joined overseas jobs with the experts saying that the total number by this year-end would be around 4 lakh.

Meanwhile, remittance growth last fiscal year was only 13 percent against the 22 percent in 2008-09. Last year the remittance inflow was \$10.97 billion, up from \$9.69 billion in 2008-09.

In three previous fiscal years, the growth of remittance ranged from 24 percent to 32 percent. Experts say the decline of remittance growth last fiscal was mainly caused by decrease in flow of jobs abroad.

Though the job decline was substantiated by economic recession, businesses say irregularities in the recruitment process also caused the downturn.

For example, a recruiting agent says Kuwait, home to 4 lakh Bangladeshi workers, stopped hiring them late 2006 citing illegal activities in recruitment business.

Malaysia in March last year imposed freeze on Bangladeshi workers citing economic recession, while Saudi Arabia, the largest labour market hosting around 20 lakh Bangladeshis, significantly reduced the number.

Expatriates' welfare ministry Joint Secretary Begum Shamsunnahar said it is learned unofficially Saudi Arabia will not allow more than 20 percent Bangladeshis in any company.

Zafar Ahmed Khan said Southeast Asia and the Middle East are traditional markets and follow-up efforts will be there to maintain these, or to recover those having freeze on Bangladeshi workers.

"But we are searching for new destinations as a supplementary, as we have surplus workforce," he said. Some of these countries already hired some workers from Bangladesh, while others showed their interests.

It is imperative that Bangladesh strengthens links with these countries and improve Bangladeshis' skills to capture job markets, he said.

Asked if Bangladeshis have the skills as required by these countries, Khan said those seeking overseas jobs have certain skills and there are training centres for them. If required, advanced and varied trainings will be provided, he added.

Alongside searching markets, the government is also taking measures to curb malpractices and indiscipline in the sector, said Begum Shamsunnahar.

Jamaat leader

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forced to wear veil or religious attire at the educational institutions and offices across the country.

Following the HC order, the education ministry in a circular on Wednesday directed the authorities concerned of all educational institutions not to force female students to wear veil or religious attire at the institutions.

In yesterday's statement, Jamaat said the education ministry virtually took its stand against the holy Quran by issuing the circular, as wearing hijab (veil) has been made mandatory for women in the holy Quran.

After the issuance of the circular, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told The Daily Star they have taken the decision following the directive of the High Court.

Now, no one would be forced to wear veil or religious attire as everyone has his or her own personal freedom, he said.

The statement reads that every educational institution has some specific rules and it is mandatory to wear special dress in some institutions.

Wearing a decent dress as per Islamic ideology is mandatory in religious educational institutions, it said, adding that wearing hijab is a religious right of Muslim women.

"Resisting this right is apparently an interference to religious right," Azharul Islam said in the statement.

The education ministry's circular interfered with the religious rights of Muslim female students, the statement added.

Worker dies

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police-inspector of Kadamtoli Sub Station, said Madan's body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Wednesday's furnace explosion left Billal, a worker, dead on the spot and 15 others injured.

Of the injured, Ataur Rahman, a junior manager of the Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd, succumbed to his injuries Thursday.

Judgments

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Ershad eras remember well the anguish the democracy loving people of the country suffered. The dream of a Sonar Bangla suddenly felt like a plaything in the hands of ambitious generals who could take over state power, do whatever they felt like, and then amend the constitution with retrospective effect to give legal cover to their illegal actions.

When Bangladesh was born, it was the dream of every freedom loving Bangalee that ours would be a country where we would never ever have an army rule. We would be fundamentally different than Pakistan in that we would never be governed by an un-elected leadership.

This dream was shattered with the brutal murder of Bangabandhu along with his family, followed by the killing of our four national leaders when Khandaker Moshtaque and a few majors started the politics of killing, and captured power by force.

The arrogant voice of Maj Dalim still resonates in this writer's ears, when he announced in the morning of August 15, 1975, "Sheikh Mujib ke hottya korahoe kille" [Sheikh Mujib has been killed]. Col Taher's so-called Nov 7 uprising brought Ziaur Rahman to power, spilling the blood of many officers and soldiers.

Zia's tenure itself later faced many coup attempts, which were all brutally suppressed, and hundreds of officers and soldiers were court martialled and put to death. Zia himself fell victim to one such coup, and was gunned down in Chittagong. Court martial of his killers led to the deaths of several other officers.

Bangladesh not only saw her democratic dreams evaporating into thin air, she also appeared to have entered into a phase of illegal power grabs, and killings and counter killings. Those who did not live through those days cannot fully appreciate the despondency and frustration suffered by the people at that time.

Of all the actions of Ziaur Rahman, the one for which perhaps he will be most condemned, is the Indemnity Act, by which he gave constitutional protection to self-confessed killers of Bangabandhu. By this single action Gen Zia made Bangladesh perhaps the only country in the world where killers were protected by the country's constitution.

Gen Ershad's capturing of power was a follow through of the politics set afoot by Zia. However, Gen Ershad started in quite a unique way. Few days before he actually replaced the elected government of Justice Sattar, he held a press conference claiming that the constitution should be amended so the army could be given a permanent share in state power, and a say in running the state affairs.

His was a veiled threat, and

One held

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Customs officials recovered the currencies from his bag after scanning around 10:45pm.

Mostafa Jamal, assistant revenue officer of customs, filed a case in this connection with the Airport Police Station.

Rana was handed over to the police yesterday afternoon after primary interrogation.

Hasina invites

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that it would facilitate the smooth journey of democracy.

"The two historic verdicts will ease the constitutional path of consolidating democracy," Hasina said at an iftar party hosted by Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) at