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The Politics and Economics of Bangabandhu’s Six Points



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OUR independence was not accomplished overnight; the path to the freedom struggle was not smooth. Through carefully crafted political strategies and their appropriate implementation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gradually took the Bengali nation to the goal of independence. The historic Six-Point Programme was one such strategy.

There are two distinct traits of the Six-Point Programme. One relates to the state’s politico-administrative structure; the other is economic. However, one is complementary to the other: the economic feature was the focus, and the political trait was the ultimate goal.

Reactions to Six Points

Bangabandhu presented the Six-Point Programme at an all-party roundtable meeting in Lahore in February 1966. Whatever the political motive might have been behind the implementation of the Six-Point Programme, strategically Bangabandhu put the focus on the economic disparity between East and West Pakistan, and emphasised the idea of a federation of the two provinces as its solution.

Bringing the economic side to the fore was a formidable strategy. One must realise that the Awami League was still

negatively by commenting that the six-point formula was a “secessionist move,” and he threatened to resist with a strong hand if necessary. At the convention of his political party, the Pakistan Muslim League, held in Dhaka in March 1966, he warned the people of East Pakistan, “If necessary, the government of Pakistan will use the ‘language of weapon’ against those elements who talk of the Six-Point Programme” (Ahmed, 1991, “Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy 1950-1971,” Pg 87).

Like Ayub Khan, General Yahya Khan also branded the Six-Point Programme as “nothing more than an unjust plan to divide the country” (Zaheer, 1994, “The Separation of East Pakistan,” Pg 127). At that time, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s People’s Party of Pakistan (PPP) was the main political party in West Pakistan. Bhutto always alleged that the six points were tabled due to India’s manipulation. He wrote in a book published during the Liberation War about what he saw as a “... well and long-planned conspiracy with India that came to light after 25th [of March 1971]” (Bhutto, 1971, “The Great Tragedy,” Pg 57).

Political implications of Six Points

The first two points of the Six-Point Programme stated that Pakistan should be formed as a federation with a parliamentary system of government. The federal government would deal only with the subjects of defence and foreign affairs; all other residuary subjects would be in the hands of the provinces.

The objective of Point 1 was to replace the Basic Democracy system introduced by General Ayub Khan with a directly elected parliamentary system of government. After coming to power



▲ Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announces the Six Points in Lahore in 1966.

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suppress it will be bad for the country. Our ruling class is going to make the mistake... By the time they come to realise that they are making a mistake, there will be no more time left.” (Rahman, 2018, “The Prison Diaries,” Pg 141). It took only five years for Bangabandhu’s prophecy to come true.

Referring to the Cabinet Mission Plan, Bangabandhu stressed that limiting the responsibilities and powers of the central government did not necessarily make a nation weak. Rather, it provides an opportunity to build efficient and strong provinces that make a federation. Bangabandhu reiterated his belief that “... what makes a federation strong is not heaps of subjects under it [the central government]. A federation becomes strong by loyalty and affection... The happy and strong people represented through efficient and strong units [provinces] that make the federation are the real source of its strength.” (Rahman, 2018, “The Prison Diaries,” Pg 328-329). In convincing the people of West Pakistan about the necessity of limiting the role of the central government, Bangabandhu stated his antithesis: unity in diversity.

However, the government of Pakistan as well as the political parties in West Pakistan perceived things differently. They were of the opinion that having two subjects (defence and foreign affairs) would make the central government weak. For them, a weak central government meant a weak Pakistan.

Moving from one economy to two

The second trait of the Six-Point Programme related to economic management, as indicated by Points 3, 4, 5, and 6. In brief, they were: there shall be separate but freely convertible currencies for each wing, or should a single currency be used, there should be means to prevent the transfer of resources from one wing to the other (Point 3); the fiscal policy would be vested in the provinces (Point 4); separate accounts would be maintained for the foreign exchange earnings of each province (Point 5); and each province should be permitted to raise and maintain a militia (Point 6).

To assess the essence of the economic traits of Six Points, it is necessary to evaluate the extent of exploitation East Pakistan suffered in the hands of the rulers based in West Pakistan, and

to comprehend the level of economic disparities that were generated between East and West Pakistan between 1947 and 1970.

Between 1950 and 1970, Pakistan was a significant recipient of foreign economic assistance that had contributed immensely to the industrialisation and economic growth of the western part of the nation. This was primarily due to the allocation of disproportionately higher resources to West Pakistan. Between 1950 and 1970, West Pakistan’s share of both development and revenue expenditure was 60 percent higher than that of East Pakistan (Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, July 1970, Report of the Advisory Panel for the Fourth Five-Year Plan). As a result, the growth between the two provinces was imbalanced, which contributed to the disparity in per capita income between them.

The differences in other indices such as per capita consumption of essentials, healthcare, education, and housing facilities were even more deplorable. Furthermore, in the 50s and 60s, a sizeable net transfer of resources had taken place from East Pakistan to West Pakistan. Even after providing enough allowance for the undervaluation of foreign exchange in terms of the Pakistani currency, the total transfer from East to West between 1948 and 1969 was estimated to be 31 billion rupees, or USD 2.6 billion (at the scarcity value of 11.90 rupees to the dollar, instead of the official rate of 4.76 rupees to the dollar) (Khan, 1972, “March Movement of Bangladesh: Bengali Struggle for Political Power.” *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Pg 33, 3, 291-322). Highlighting the extent of exploitation, Bangabandhu noted “... although East Pakistan earned the bulk of foreign exchange after independence, 80 percent of the foreign exchange was spent in West Pakistan” (1970, March 2, *The Morning News*).

Since “the growth of inequality in Pakistan was not the unintended or unconscious by-product of Pakistan’s development strategy, Pakistan’s policymakers actively pursued policies which promoted inequality” (Islam, March 1972, “Foreign Assistance and Economic Development: The Case of Pakistan,” *The Economic Journal*, Pg 519), but the consequent economic disparity was not acknowledged either by the policymakers or by the civil society of West Pakistan.

Under these prevailing economic fundamentals, Bangabandhu came up with his Six-Point Programme. He understood that the only way to realise the fair share of economic and political power was by limiting the responsibilities and power of the central government of Pakistan. Therefore, firstly, his Six-Point Programme logically and systematically challenged the political and economic monopoly of West Pakistan. Secondly, if implemented, the export earnings of East Pakistan would no longer be funnelled to fuel the economic growth of West Pakistan. Thirdly, foreign aid would no longer be monopolised. Fourthly, East Pakistan would no longer remain a captive market for the surplus industrial output of West Pakistan.

In other words, through the execution of the Six-Point Programme, Bangabandhu had aimed to transform the “One Country, One Economy” framework of Pakistan to a two-economies-based framework, and to realise the ultimate political goal of nationhood for the Bengali people. With the emergence of the two-economy theory through Bangabandhu’s Six-Point Programme, the world witnessed the potential demise of the two-nation theory.



PHOTO: ARCHIVES

operating within the political structure of Pakistan. Bangabandhu knew very well that one wrong move at such a time would turn a legitimate people’s movement into a separatist move by the ruling class.

That is exactly what happened. Despite providing a detailed explanation of the Six-Point Programme’s importance to the economy of East Pakistan, the ruling class of Pakistan and the political parties of West Pakistan didn’t comprehend the prevailing economic inequalities between East and West Pakistan; they only saw the Six-Point Programme as a separatist agenda. For example, the then Pakistan President Ayub Khan reacted

through a military coup in 1958, General Ayub Khan introduced an electoral system called “Basic Democracy.” Regrettably, it was neither basic nor democratic. The system simply did not follow key principles of democratic rule. It was a top-down model designed by the military and its chief, and founded on a hierarchy of local councils whose work was very closely intertwined with that of the bureaucracy at the local level.

In his second memoir “*The Prison Diaries*,” Bangabandhu warned the ruling class of Pakistan about its stance and declared, “[It] is a demand that is a matter of life or death for East Pakistan. It cannot be suppressed forcibly. Attempting to

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

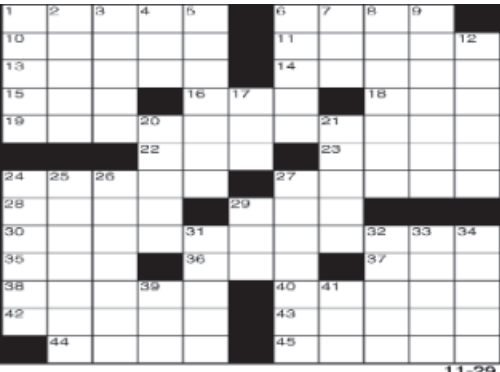
ACROSS

- 1 — nova (1960s dance)
- 6 Boars’ mates
- 10 Accepted truth
- 11 Franc replacers
- 13 “The Lion King” hero
- 14 Warble
- 15 Marrying words
- 16 Letter after sigma
- 18 Even score
- 19 Table decoration
- 22 Wish undone
- 23 Sink problem
- 24 Programming pro
- 27 Work breaks
- 28 Opera solo

DOWN

- 29 Pod veggie
- 30 Bourgeoisie
- 35 Poker prize
- 36 Sense of self
- 37 Mouth part
- 38 “My Fair Lady” lady
- 40 River of France
- 42 Evil spirit
- 43 Tango or trot
- 44 Beholds
- 45 Spirited horse
- 1 Rudimentary
- 2 Rust compound
- 3 “Graceland” singer
- 4 Cry loudly
- 5 No pro
- 6 Party prep

- 7 Owned by us
- 8 Authors
- 9 Ask for
- 12 Sacks out
- 17 “Roses — red”
- 20 Tire feature
- 21 Perfect
- 24 Slept in a tent
- 25 Baltimore team
- 26 Served a sentence
- 27 Files
- 29 Coat rack part
- 31 Inclines
- 32 Without others
- 33 Subsequently
- 34 Velocity
- 39 Tony winner
- Caldwell
- 41 Bowler, for one



TUESDAY’S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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The Daily Star
OPINION



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