"God Willing": The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh

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"God willing, we shall form the next government," declared Khaleda Zia, former prime minister and then leader of the opposition at a rally in the port city of Chittagong on April 4, 2000 almost eighteen months ahead of the general elections in Bangladesh. Pointing her finger to the leaders of her four-party alliance sitting on the dais, Khaleda Zia declared firmly that "we have united to protect the nation, our hard earned independence and Islam." Present on the dais were Golam Azam, the Ameer (chief) of the largest Islamist party, Jaamat-i-Islami; Azizul Haq, who claims himself a Shaikhul Hadit (meaning an interpreter of Prophet Muhammad's words) and a leader of a militant Islamist organization called Islami Oikya Jote; and former military dictator General H. M Ershad, who was previously convicted on graft charges and indicted on a number of other corruption related matters. "Representatives of 66 percent of the people are here," Zia told the meeting.

About a year and half later, on 21 September 2001, during a three-day northern region campaign tour, Zia told her applauding supporters in Naogaon, "Insha Allah, the alliance will be voted into power riding on popular support." A few kilometers away, in another rally in Joypurhat, she confidently declared that the alliance would bag a two-thirds majority in the parliament. The last campaign meeting held in Dhaka on September 28, three days ahead of the elections, was a replay of the Chittagong meeting of April 2000; flanked by the leaders of the Jaamat and the Oikya Jote, Khaleda proclaimed, "God willing, the alliance will get two-thirds majority and will form the next government." "We stand united," she said, referring to the alliance, "for the sake of Islam."[1]

On October 1, Khaleda Zia got what she wished for—a two-third majority for her alliance, and within a week a new cabinet was installed with two members from the Jaamat-i-Islami. For the first time in the history of the nation, a center-right coalition had come into power. It was an ironic moment for a nation that had emerged in 1971 on the basis of secular-socialistic principles, and whose first constitution—framed in November 1972—imposed an embargo on the use of religion in politics. Thirty years later an election had brought a coalition to power with two Islamist parties as partners. The more prominent of the two is the Jaamat-i-Islami (JI), a party which openly professes "Islamic revolution" and calls for the establishment of an "Islamic state" in Bangladesh.[2] The other, smaller, partner of the alliance, the Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ), is even more radical having previously expressed solidarity with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.[3] The leading partner of the alliance, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), views Islam as an integral part of the socio-cultural life of Bangladesh.[4]

The obvious question that comes to mind is: what made it possible for the Islamists, especially the Jaamat-i-Islami, to rise to power? Can this be seen as a sympathetic gesture of a large number of Muslims toward the Taliban and Al-Quaida? Since the tragic events of 11 September 2001, media and political analysts have paid enormous attention to a de-territorialized, supranational, uprooted activism conducted in the name of Islam.[5] Undoubtedly this transnational movement has become a serious threat to international security, however it is yet to become the principal mode of domestic politics in Muslim societies. Impacts of international events notwithstanding, the growing strengths of Islamists are shaped by the national particularities and they are largely products of the political culture and society of a given country. This phenomenon can be described as "nationalization of Islamism."[6] The rise of the Islamist forces as prominent legitimate political actors in Bangladesh follows this trend rather than as a sympathetic gesture to any extraneous organization or ideology. It is the specific dynamics of domestic politics that allowed the preeminence of Islamic forces in the polity, and their successes in the electoral process.

My contention is that the rise of the Islamists in general and particularly the Jaamat-i-Islami should be viewed as part of a conservative Islamization process which Bangladesh has been undergoing over the last quarter of a century. The process included the deletion of "secularism" as a state principle from the constitution in 1977, the declaration of Islam as the state religion in 1988, the growing use of Islamic idioms in politi-

cal discourse, and the close liaisons between secularist and Islamist political parties. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that the rise of Islamic political forces in Bangladesh is the reassertion of the dormant Muslim identity of the Bangladeshi population, I will argue that two factors have played key roles in the rise of Islam as a political ideology and contributed to the growing strengths of the Islamist parties in Bangladesh. These are: (a) the crises of hegemony of the ruling bloc; and (b) politics of expediency by the "secularist" parties. These factors created an environment conducive to the rise of religious rhetoric in political discourse and subsequently allowed the Islamist parties to become a significant force in the Bangladesh polity.

This paper begins with an examination of existing explanations, and outlines their shortcomings. This is followed by a presentation of an analytical framework which identifies the fundamental factor responsible for such phenomenal changes. Concrete historical facts pertaining to the crisis of hegemony and politics of expediency are then analyzed in light of the proposed framework.

Conventional Wisdom

There is no paucity of literature on the interplay of Islam and politics in Bangladesh, and political analysts have offered interpretations of various kinds.[7] The growing importance of Islamist forces in the Bangladesh polity has been described by some as the rise of fundamentalism, while others prefer to call it either an upsurge or a resurgence of Islam. Also available is literature, mostly of a polemical nature, characterizing this phenomenon as a frenzy of communalism. One can, however, identify three distinctly different strands in analyzing the causes of and conditions for the rise of Islamists in Bangladesh. The first strand emphasizes the question of the identity of the Bangladeshi population; the second insists upon the incompatibility between the concept of secularism and the ethos of the newly formed nation; and the third posits that certain internal variables are responsible, including failed secularist experimentation and certain external inputs such as remittances from West Asian Islamic countries. Despite such significant differences, these analysts seem to agree in putting the blame squarely on the secularists. Those who see the Islamization as an inescapable product of history, as well as those who see it as an unfortunate and engineered germination, do not hesitate to concur that the rise of these forces is a reaction to the secularization processes of the early days of independence. Their judgment, at times given as assumptions without evidence, is that what had been seen as solutions are rather the causes.

Scholars belonging to the first strand of analysis argue that this question is rooted in the duality of heritage (i.e., religion and language/ethnicity) of the majority population. This line of argument insists that it is intrinsically linked to Bangladesh's painful quest for a clearly defined "national identity" that can intertwine these two aspects. Implicit in this argument is the inevitability of a change from a language-based identity to a religion-based identity, and hence relieving the progenitors of any wrongdoing. The "national identity" argument, as we will see later, raises questions that even its sympathizers call "ugly." The central point of this argument is that since the thirteenth century, Islam has always been a significant factor in determining the identity of the Bengali Muslims. Zillur Rahman Khan argues that in the sixteenth century "when the number of Muslim conquerors and Sufis thinned…in response to the challenge posed by plebeian appeal by Hindu revivalists" Bengali Muslims cultivated an identity that incorporates both "socio-economic egalitarianism of Islam" and "Bengali culture and literature."[8] This continued for centuries, with ebb and flow, and helped Bengali Muslims to identify with the Pakistan movement that culminated in the establishment of Pakistan in 1947 based on a "two-nations" theory. But Khan insists that two factors transformed the Muslim nationalism into Bengali nationalism in the late twentieth century. These are: (a) "Jinnah's decision to adopt Urdu as the only national language, which led to a massive conflict in which a number of Bengali students lost their lives"; and (b) "decisions by the central government of Pakistan to set aside the 1954 elections (in which Muslim League party was routed) and to put Fazlul Huq (who was elected the Chief Minister of East Bengal after the termination of the League government) to house arrest."[9]

Proponents of this argument go on to say that in subsequent decades Bengali Muslims swung their allegiance to an identity that emphasizes their ethnic/language heritage more than their religious heritage. This resulted in the civil war of 1971, which brought Bangladesh into being. The civil war succeeded in establishing an independent country, but "failed to diminish the strength of Islam as a strong ideology."[10] , however, remained dormant as the ruling Awami League drafted the first constitution of Bangladesh, which made no reference to Islam and placed emphasis on secularism—along with nationalism, socialism, and democracy—as the founding principles of the Bangladesh polity. Khan argues that soon "this line of thinking was solidly rejected by the vast majority of the people of Bangladesh," and "in response to intense domestic pressures and without changing the constitutional emphasis on secularism, Mujib eventually reversed himself and made Bangladesh more Islamic than before.... Ultimately, of course, the secularist politics of Mujib caused a Muslim backlash in Bangladesh."[11]

Sheikh Mujibar Rahman, the founder-president of

Bangladesh, then was assassinated in a pre-dawn coup d'etat on August 15, 1975 and the brief secular interlude ended unceremoniously. This was followed by eighty-four days of chaos and confusion, coups and counter-coups, killings and counter-killings, conspiracy and up-rising that paved the way for the rise of General Ziaur Rahman to power. In 1977, when he took over the post of President, he amended the constitution. Secularism was replaced with "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah" and the identity of the citizens of Bangladesh was changed from "Bangalee" to Bangladeshi. Zia's brand of nationalism intertwined the ethnic and religious identities with a clear emphasis on the latter. Thus, the pendulum returned to its original position. Since then, with the help of the state, religion assumed pre-eminence in the Bangladeshi polity. Having arrived at this point, the proponents of the identity crisis theory contend, it is the painful quest for a definite national identity that brought religion back into politics. Although they claim that the changes are irreversible, they acknowledge that the process is not yet over.

This line of argument, like the narration of history it accompanies, raises question that even supporters of new nationalism cannot escape. Syed Mahmud Ali, for example, insists that the rise of Bangladeshi nationalism with a confessional element as its core is a result of the failure of the Bengali nationalism to explain or rational-ize the continued division of Bengal into independent Bangladesh and state of West Bengal in India.[12] Ali went on to say that "a lack of consensus as to the founding principle, the *raison d'être*, had fragmented the elite and activists in internecine conflict" and Zia's formulation of new nationalism reflected "the configuration on the ground …combining Bengali cultural underpinnings with the religious faith of the majority." But Ali ac-knowledges that the "restoration of the confessional element to the politico-ideological realm raised an ugly question—if Islam was indeed so important to Bangla-deshi nation-statehood, how to rationalize the rejection of Pakistan's two-nation *raison d'être* manifest in the war of independence? No answers to this were forthcom-ing."[13] Although it is true that the relationship between the Bengalis of Bangladesh and of the Indian state of West Bengal was a blind spot of Bengali nationalism, it is neither a unique case nor does it justify evoking relig-ion as a major component of national identity. In Europe, Norway and Sweden have developed two dif-ferent nationalities despite their shared ethnic back-ground. In neither country did religion play a role in such development. In reconstructing the past history and providing historic-political analysis of the present, authors who belong to this camp are selective, to say the least.

The second strand in explaining the causes of and conditions for this phenomenal change touches the no-tion of "secularism." Evoking Indian philosopher M. N. Roy's comment that "secularism is not a political insti-tution; it is a cultural atmosphere, which cannot be cre-ated by the proclamation of individuals, however, highly placed and intensely sincere,"[14] some analysts, Talukdar Maniruzzaman for example, argue that such a cultural atmosphere is absent in subcontinental society in gen-eral and Bangladesh in particular. According to Mani-ruzzaman, "secularism in Bangladesh did not reflect Bangladesh's societal spirit and history. It arose as an utilitarian expediency in the political field."[15] One can identify, in this interpretation as well as in the first one, a predisposition towards essentializing culture. To them, culture is devoid of any material basis. The "spirit" of any society that is being referred to here is an abstrac-tion, but that abstraction emerges from and resides on the material basis of the society. One of the major weaknesses of this culturalist interpretation is that it fails to appreciate the fact that the secularism pro-pounded for the Indian subcontinent in general and Bangladesh in particular is markedly different from the western notion of secularism and hence cannot be la-beled as an alien and imported phenomenon that failed to take root. An examination of the Indian and the Bangladeshi constitution in its original form reveals that they adopted a definition of secularism different from that of a western secularism.[16] While the western notion of secularism insists upon a complete separation be-tween the state and religion, the subcontinental concept implies a role of the state in religious affairs. In the In-dian subcontinent, Tazeen Murshid notes, "'Secular' came to be defined as the binary opposite of 'commu-nal' implying a tolerance of other religious communi-ties." Analyzing the constitutions of India and Bangla-desh, she emphasized that the idea of religious tolerance was enshrined in the constitution of India as *sarbadhar-masamabhaba,* meaning the equality of all religions before the state, and in the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh as *dharmanirapekshata,* meaning religious neutrality. "In neither case does the state dissociate itself from matters pertaining to religion. Instead, it seeks to act as an im-partial broker between the various religious communi-ties."[17] Obviously, in the case of Bangladesh, religious neutrality meant the equal opportunity for all religions for state patronage and participation in public affairs. "In the context of (the Indian) Constitution, secularism means that all religions practiced in India are entitled to equal freedom and protection."[18]

These examples show that the notion of secularism as propagated in India and Bangladesh has been an en-dogenous construct.[19] The necessity of such a con-struction, of course, lies with the interests of the domi-nant- and/or prominent-classes and their quest for power. It is also true that this variety of secularism be-came an important part of the ruling ideology because

the progenitors at one point or other established their moral and constitutional leadership over the larger section of the population and instituted their brand of secularism as a state principle after capturing the state power. Thus, it is acceptable to say that at a certain point in time the appeal of the ruling ideology waned or even faced challenges, but to say that it does not reflect the societal spirit of the country is a serious mistake. Alienation between a certain component of the ruling ideology and the masses can emerge if and when the ideology fails to appeal to the people whom it once won. In such circumstances, one must analyze why the ideology lost its relevance to the masses. The other weakness, both of this and the first strand, is the implicit assumption that religion in general, and Islam in particular, is either inescapably central to, or even constitutive of, Bangladeshi society, past and present. But religion, especially the popular religion, in any society is an "institutionalized bargain," a power contract. The emergence and perpetuation of the syncretist tradition of Islam in Bengal,[20] and its emphasis on inter-faith understanding and tolerance, is a testament to this statement.

A third trend in explaining the causes of Islamic resurgence insists that certain internal variables and external inputs are "responsible for reviving Islam as a force in Bangladesh politics."[21] The internal variables, according to Syed Anwar Hussain, are: (a) the failure of secularist experiments; (b) leadership legitimization; and (c) uneven socio-economic development. Prominent among the external inputs are what he called "Petro-Dollar aid," massive export of labor in oil-rich Middle Eastern countries and proliferation of non-formal organizations supported by the Islamic countries. This framework of analysis has its intellectual debt to Richard Hrair Dekmejian's "catalysts theory," which maintains that the rise of an Islamic alternative can be attributed to, among other factors, a crisis of legitimacy of political elites and social systems. [22] Other factors mentioned by Dekmejian are ineffective rule; excessive reliance on coercion for political control by the elites; class conflict in the midst of corruption; military weakness; and the disruptive impact of modernization with its non-Islamic ideologies, values and institutions. However, in analyzing Bangladesh's situation, Hussain defined legitimacy within the narrow confines of constitutionality and hence failed to appreciate that the legitimacy of the ruling elite can face serious erosion even when they have the constitutional right to govern. Despite this weakness, the framework introduces us to an important element, the crisis of legitimacy of the ruling elite, which is significant in understanding the phenomenal changes Bangladesh has experienced over the last thirty years with regard to its secularist policies, and which serves as the point from which I will develop the central argument of this paper.

I will argue that the "crisis of legitimacy" should be seen beyond constitutional *modus operandi* of a regime. This may, and in the case of Bangladesh did, originate from the crisis of hegemony of the ruling class. This has played a key role in creating an environment conducive to the rise of religion-based political parties in Bangladesh. The other factor that played a significant role is the politics of expediency. We must, however, begin by identifying the key element of the analytical framework to be used in building my arguments.

Crisis of Legitimacy and Hegemony

The question of legitimacy is usually attached with constitution and constitutionality. It is widely argued that a group/party/class is legitimate ruler so long as the constitution allows them to be. But the legitimacy of a ruling class cannot be determined solely by its constitutional right to govern; rather its success in providing leadership to the masses must be taken into account. Gramsci noted that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership." A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to "liquidate" or subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise "leadership" before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to "lead" as well.[23] Such leadership can be described as, what Gramsci called, "hegemony." Hegemony is understood as "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by a dominant fundamental group.[24]

From this point of view a ruling class becomes hegemonic when it establishes both material dominance and intellectual and moral leadership over the society, and succeeds in pursuing subordinate classes, that positions of subordination and superordination are just, proper, and legitimate. The intellectual and moral leadership, an important component of hegemony, can be and usually is, elicited by presenting an ideology that on the one hand universalizes the corporate interests of the dominant/prominent class, while on the other hand, apparently representing the interests of the subordinate groups/classes. Absence or decline of either material dominance or moral leadership definitely means that the hegemony of the ruling class is in jeopardy and creates a situation wherein the legitimacy of the ruling class/elite comes under fire. Thus there exists an intrinsic relationship between hegemony and legitimacy. Lack of hegemony undermines legitimacy. Having arrived at this point the question that must be raised and resolved is why, if,

and when, ruling class(es)/elites face a crisis of hegemony? Gramsci provides the answer:

> ...the crisis of the ruling class' hegemony...occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broader masses (war, for example) or because huge masses (especially of peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit organically formulated, add up to revolution.[25]

What is of further significance is the role of ideology. Without evolving an ideology that appears superior to other ideology and appeals beyond the class boundaries, no class can establish its hegemony. On the contrary, rupture of the hegemony of a certain class is reflected in rejection of ideology that once was accepted by the masses as "common sense" and served as the *raison d'être* for the supremacy of certain class.

Most important of all, perhaps, is the consequences of the crisis of hegemony. Consequences are of two types: immediate and long-term. "When such crisis occurs," Gramsci explains, "the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous, because the field is open for violent solutions, for the activities of unknown forces, represented by charismatic 'men of destiny.'"[26] The long-term consequences are of greater importance. Because "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and new cannot be born; in this interregnum a greater variety of morbid symptoms appear."[27]

This framework of analysis will acquire visibly and didactically its full significance if it is applied to the examination of concrete historical facts. This might usefully be done for the events that took place in Bangladesh from 1972 to 2002. A closer reading of Bangladesh's history reveals that it is this crisis of hegemony of the ruling class that undermined the legitimacy of the first post-independence regime of Bangladesh and paved the way for the rise of a "man of destiny."[28] Consequently, a variety of morbid symptoms, including preeminence of religion in politics, have appeared.

The first post-independence regime that came to power in 1972 was deposed by a military *coup d'etat* in August 1975. Despite the violent change at that time, the crisis continued, and perhaps accentuated. because, for the new ruling bloc (i.e., military-bureaucratic oligarchy), constitutional and ideological legitimacy remained the basic problem. Central to the political project of the new regime, which came to power after a series of coups and counter-coups, was gaining legitimacy. It involved, besides evolving a constitutional procedure, the construction of a new ideology that would undermine the ideology of the former regime and justify a takeover.

This was also to serve as the new regime's guiding principal. The important question, however, remains: in what forms, and by what means, did the previous regime (i.e., Awami League) succeed in establishing its intellectual, moral and political hegemony? What contributed to the rupture of that hegemony?

Nationalism as a Hegemonic Tool

From the mid-1960s, the idioms, icons, and symbols of nationalist ideology began to occupy relatively more space in the political discourse in Bangladesh. The concept of "two-economies" (i.e., East Pakistan's economy should be considered as separate from West Pakistan's or the federal economy of Pakistan) propounded by Bengali economists translated into the political discourse as a theory of "two nations," Bengali and Pakistani. The underlying theme of the newly articulated concept of nation emphasized that the Bengali people for a long time maintained a separate identity through their distinctive culture, language, and lifestyle. And it was held that the Pakistani ruling power bloc is up against these distinctive characteristics. The Bengali language and its place within the federal structure, as well as the language movement of 1952, had been portrayed as the prime example of the antagonistic attitudes of the ruling power. The attempt to introduce the Arabic script in Bengali and to ban Tagore's songs in the state-controlled media were other examples that reflected the deliberate attempt of the state power to crush the cultural heritage of the Bengali people and thus made them subordinate to the alien culture patronized by the state apparatuses. The examples cited were in no way exaggerations. Rather, they were quite reflective of the colonial attitudes of the ruling power bloc of Pakistan. However, the point to note is that the highlighted symbols and idioms of Bengali nationalism were precisely the ones that fit into the middle class culture of the Bengali population.

Neither the distinctive identity of the Bengali population was new, nor the nationalist ideology. In the early nineteenth century, the middle class, educated, urban population of Calcutta embarked on such an ideological position in order to seek their "legitimate share" from the colonial state. The political objective of the so-called "Bengal Renaissance" of the nineteenth century, led and eulogized by the *bhadrolok* (gentlemen) community of middle classes, was to achieve greater participation in the colonial administration. While this strand of nationalism sought to collaborate with the colonial state, yet create a sub-hegemonic structure to subsume other subordinate classes, the subordinate classes created their own brand of nationalist ideology which altogether rejected the colonial domination and resisted the colonial state and its functionaries on many occasions. The *bhadrolok* strand of nationalism, considered to be the

only nationalist movement by the elite historians, had a number of limitations in terms of the social origin and the space within which it operated. First, it could not go beyond the educated middle classes. Secondly, it willfully excluded the Muslim middle classes, for the Muslim middle classes were yet to be incorporated into the power bloc that performed the role of functionaries of the colonial state. Thirdly, the entire movement was limited spatially within urban Calcutta. The subordinate class strand of nationalism, reflected in the peasants' uprisings of Bengal, was militant and deeply rooted in the class struggle of the subordinate classes. Additionally, given the social structure of the Eastern Bengal, the latter one was relatively more powerful then the former. After the partition of 1947 the elite nationalist ideology for obvious reasons lost its ground, while the subaltern class ideology prevailed in a dormant form. Given the setback of the Communist Party in East Pakistan, the militant nationalist movement of the subaltern classes could not be transformed into a radical resistance against the newly emergent Pakistani state. But sporadic resistance in different parts of East Pakistan continued in the early phase of the Pakistan-era. A severe food crisis in early-1950s and reduction in jute prices, matched with the exploitation of *jotedars,* gave impetus to the subaltern classes to confront the state. It was in this context that the language movement of 1952 erupted. Although the question of language bears no significance for the illiterate subaltern classes, they joined the urban middle classes to pressure the colonial state. This was again possible because the ruling political party (i.e. Muslim League) emerged from within the landed class in Bangladesh. As such, the resistance against the Muslim League rule and the alien colonial rule had no difference to the poor peasants of East Bengal.

The militant nationalist movement of the subaltern classes was defeated militarily by the Pakistani state in its very early days, and given the fact that no attempt was made by the ruling power bloc or the state apparatuses to incorporate them, the subaltern classes remained antagonistic to the state. It was in this background that the Awami League advanced its six-point demand in 1966. The demands were purely a petty-bourgeois political program. Yet, its posture to confront the state and the subjective conditions for discontent against the state brought the poorer segments of the society closer to the Awami League.

In the specific historical circumstances of the mid-1960s, the intermediate classes in general and the Awami League in particular began to use the the Bengali nationalism to rally people from all walks of life. Their goal was to create tightly-controlled and well-orchestrated extra-legal pressure on the Pakistani state in order to open the avenue of negotiations. Since until then intermediate classes were kept by the colonial rulers on the periphery of power, directly under the domination of the colonial state the primary political objective of the intermediate classes was to create space for negotiation, and in order to pressure the state to do so, the intermediate classes very much needed to counter the colonial state on an ideological plane. With this end in mind, the intermediate classes, led by the petty-bourgeoisie, set out to develope a sub-hegemonic structure. The intermediate classes posed the question of Bengali nationalism at that historical conjuncture in opposition to the dominant ideology of the Pakistani state. Here, the category of the nation was attractive to the intermediate classes because of its "predilection to suppress the class question," and its supra-class appearance.[29] Despite the existence of a militant nationalist consciousness (in a dormant form), the one that was articulated and propagated by the intermediate classes was a hegemonic project of the intermediate classes led by petty-bourgeoisie.

It is necessary to note that the Bengali nationalism in question pointed towards "Sonar Bangla," a golden-age Bengal representing a retreat to a pre-colonial classlessness. Furthermore, they used the term "people of Bengal" as frequently as possible, as if the people of Bangladesh were an undifferentiated mass and all of them would equally benefit from the negation of the colonial state. Thus, another important aspect of the underdevelopment, the exploitation of the subaltern classes by the petty-bourgeoisie, was completely subsumed within the discourse of Bengali nationalism. Under the rubric of Bengali nationalism, the proponents, in the words of Kamal Hossain, an ideologue of the nationalist movement, "sought to forge an unity between the alienated urban elite groups and rural masses."[30] They transposed the class conflict onto the inter-nation level, identifying the whole of Bangladesh as "oppressed" and West Pakistan as "oppressor" and "capitalist," and hence the prime task was to eliminate colonial presence that causes the oppression and underdevelopment.[31] Bengali language and culture had been portrayed as the unifying point of the entire nation. The conflict between the Bengali political leadership and Pakistani rulers since the inception of Pakistan was explained in terms of a conspiracy against the Bengali nation as a whole. Aspirations of different classes—subaltern, intermediate, and nascent bourgeoisie—were articulated in their own idiom and thus brought together on a common platform under the ideological hegemony of the petty-bourgeoisie against the colonial domination. The uprising of 1969 that ousted the Ayub regime was the zenith of the ideological hegemony of the petty-bourgeoisie. The militant nationalist consciousness of the masses, especially of the rural subaltern classes, was incorporated within the politics of intermediate classes on its

own terms.

With the ideological hegemony of the petty-bourgeoisie firmly established through the mass upsurge of 1969, the Awami League sought constitutional legitimacy of its leadership. The landslide victory in the 1970 general elections provided that constitutional legitimacy. Bengali nationalism, as propagated by its proponents, called for the cancellation of the colonial state. This led to a conflict between the colonial state and the Bengali intermediate classes' legitimate constitutional representative, the Awami League. The conflict eventually culminated in 1971 in an armed struggle from which a new state of Bangladesh emerged.

Post-colonial Rupture

In post-colonial Bangladesh, the ruling alliance faced multiple crises. The feuds and cleavages within the ruling party, the political opposition from contending political forces, and the failings of economic policies to generate surpluses necessary to maintain the dominant mode of production were among them. But the most important crisis was the rupture of the ideological hegemony they established during the anti-colonial struggle.

As noted before, the intermediate classes' principal tool for establishing ideological hegemony over the other social classes during the colonial era was Bengali nationalism, a shared identity as Bengalis opposed to a Pakistani identity. The development of this "oneness," cutting across barriers of interests and social backgrounds, or in other words, the growth of a common sense of identity, was not automatic. The rise of nationalism, as it happens in all other cases, was accomplished through a process of selection, standardization and transmission of specific symbols from a vast pool.[32] The objective conditions prevalent in the society made it possible for a given class to manipulate these symbols to their advantage. The success was not entirely dependent upon the capabilities of the given class to manipulate the symbols and the objective conditions but also upon the failure of contending social classes to do so. Nevertheless, the willingness of the subjects of this hegemonic order to identify with the particular symbols and share a common identity was contingent upon whether or not doing so held out hopes for their own well-being. Thus the hegemony of the intermediate classes during the colonial period was a fractured compromise among the social classes opposed to colonial exploitation. The discourse of Bengali nationalism subsumed all other discourses, including that of class exploitation, and a "unity" among the social classes was achieved through consensus. The unity, identity, and consensus were based on the objective conditions of colonial rule and were mapped out against the Pakistani colonial rulers.

But the passing of colonial rule, especially the war of liberation, changed the objective conditions altogether. The "enemy," against whom nationalism pitted, disappeared. The post-colonial society required fashioning a new social order. The emergent arrangements threatened the very basis of the social hierarchy created during the colonial rule. This created a tension. Such tension definitely undermined the so-called national cohesion. Unity was replaced with class conflict. Thus, the relevance of nationalism as the hegemonic ideology was lost and the hegemony of the intermediate classes was ruptured. The rising popularity of an alternative ideology bears out this fact.

The Awami League declared that one of the objectives of the regime was to establish an exploitation-free, just society and hence socialism was included in the constitution as one of the ideals of the state. But their concept of socialism was soon challenged by the radical elements of the party as well as by small leftist parties. At independence the radical fraction of the AL, mostly comprised of students and youth, contended that the liberation struggle was an unfinished revolution and called for the establishment of "scientific socialism" under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.[33]

But after being disenchanted with Sheikh Mujib and the party, the radical faction left the AL in April 1972. The student leaders who had played significant roles in the liberation struggle initiated the split and their move was followed by the peasants' wing (May, 1972) and the workers' wing (June, 1972). Finally the radical faction launched their own party, the Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD, National Socialist Party) in October 1972 under the leadership of two prominent freedom fighters. Within a brief period of time, the JSD not only drew the attention of the public but also became popular to such an extent that its leaders were compared with Sheikh Mujib, who was still called "Bangabandhu" (the friend of Bengal). What is significant here is that these leaders not only broke away from the ruling party but also took a position that was ideologically opposed to the ruling class. They insisted that the socialist transformation of the society could be achieved only through a revolution of the proletariat class. Furthermore, they maintained that the (nascent) bourgeoisie of Bangladesh had captured state power and was perpetuating an exploitative social structure; therefore, they claimed, a revolutionary uprising of the proletariat was the only way to make independence meaningful to the oppressed classes. In spite of incoherence and inconsistencies in their ideological positions, they made the point quite clear that the principal contradiction in independent Bangladesh was between social classes, and that one's identity stems from one's class affiliation.

Around the same time, another underground radical left political group, the Sorbohara Party (SP, Proletariat

Party) under the leadership of Siraj Sikdar, a brilliant engineer, gained considerable support in rural areas. They considered the AL regime "a puppet of Soviet social imperialist and Indian expansionists." The Sorbohara Party engaged itself in armed conflict with the police and other para-military forces and began to annihilate "enemies of the revolution"—the rich farmers. On most matters, these two parties were pursuing different paths. But their rise clearly indicated that the ruling classes' hegemony over the subaltern classes was ruptured. The ruling classes did not fully dictate the political discourses. As opposed to the "consensual politics" of the ruling classes, the politics of "class conflict" gradually occupied the center stage.[34]

In agreement with Gramsci, we can assume that consent and coercion co-exist in all societies. The coercive elements inherent in a hegemonic system are laid bare, if and when the ability of the ruling classes to organize consent weakens. Under normal circumstances, the elements of coercion are kept latent, concealed. The ruling classes seek, and of course, prefer active and voluntary consent of the subordinate masses. But when the masses "do not 'consent' actively or passively," or the consent is not sufficient to reproduce capitalist relations, the apparatus of state coercive power "legally enforces discipline on those ... who do not consent."[35] That is why the ruling classes attempt to impose a general direction on social life through their ideology and ensure social conformity to it. In response to crises, the ruling classes of Bangladesh made that attempt through devising a new ideology.

In order to counter the growing popularity of the radical left and their ideology of "scientific socialism," the ruling party evolved a new ideology of its own, *Mujibbad* (Mujibism). Named after Sheikh Mujib, the ideology lacked any philosophical thesis, and as a matter of fact, the promoters of the "Mujibbad" at first did not know what it stood for. The ideology was essentially an admixture of populism and a personal cult advocating "consensus" among the subjects as opposed to "class conflict." The promoters insisted on the supra-class nature of this ideology, and integration and accommodation of the various elements of the social formations within a dominant party structure as its primary goal. The new "ism," its advocates claimed, sought to correct the deficiencies of capitalism and socialism. In their view, it was the nationalist reaction against "foreign isms" and deeply embedded in the social, political and cultural traits of the country.

The principal components of the new ideology were nationalism, democracy, socialism, and secularism. These were enshrined in the constitution as the principles of the Bangladesh state. But interpretation of these ideals remained open as no specifics were ever provided by the ruling party. Mujib's own description only enhanced the scope of multiple interpretations. Sheikh Mujib said on one occasion:

> If "Mujibism" is to be considered an ideology, then it ought to be explained by philosophers. I can give my own understanding of what has come to be known as "Mujibism." In the first place, I believe in democracy—in the triumph of the will of the people, in freedom of thought, of speech and in other freedoms which ennoble mankind. Together with faith in democracy, I am convinced that the development of democracy is possible only in conditions of a society, which is free of exploitation. That is why in addition to democracy I speak of socialism. I also believe that all the religions that exist in Bangladesh should have equal rights. By this I mean secularism, the right to profess one's faith. And last, but not least, is the necessity for people to derive inspiration from Bengali culture, language and folklore and from the entire Bengali environment. This inspiration will rouse the Bengalis to work better for the sake of Golden Bengal. This is how I understand nationalism.[36]

In spite of divergent interpretations, the state-controlled media began to propagate the ideology of Mujibism and gradually became the sole medium for the propagation of this ideology. But interestingly, these equivocations did not look into the substance of Mujibism.

Nonetheless, one could deduce the meaning of this ideology from the actions of the ruling party and the regime. For example, the economic policies of the regime demonstrated what the ruling party meant by socialism. The socialism of the ruling party was only beneficial to the intermediate classes through the extension of state property. State enterprises were used by a small segment of the society to accumulate wealth at the expense of the larger section.

The ideology of Bengali nationalism as envisaged and practiced by the ruling party was to marginalize the non-Bengali minority in general and tribal nationalities in particular. The debate in Constituent Assembly on October 25 and October 31, 1972, especially the reactions of members of the ruling party, were indicative of this attitude. On October 25, while discussing Article 14 of the proposed constitution, the question of ethnic minorities came to the fore. Article 14 provided that one of the fundamental responsibilities of the state would free the working population—peasants and laborers—and the "backward sections" of the population from all kinds of exploitation. The article did not specify these "sections." Manabendra Narayan Larma, an independent member from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the home of several ethnic groups, moved an amendment to the above article proposing that "a) the lawful rights of the minority and backward nations (nationalities) should be preserved; b) in order to improve their educational,

cultural and economic standards they should be given special rights; and c) full opportunities should be given to them by the state to enable them to be at par with the advanced nations (nationalities)." Larma also proposed that since Chittagong Hill Tracts are a tribal area, in order to ensure that its political, economic, and religious rights are not infringed upon it should be an autonomous tribal region. Larma was dismayed by the attitude of the ruling regime and expressed his discontent: "The framers of the constitution have forgotten my land, my people…. We have been deprived of our rights, the country has become independent, but we continue to have a cursed life."[37] Larma's amendments were rejected on procedural grounds but his comments infuriated the ruling party members. They portrayed these comments as a challenge to Bengali nationalism the *raison d'etre* of the new nation state. Some even described these comments as a conspiracy against the sovereignty of Bangladesh. A similar situation arose on October 31. Abdur Razzaque Bhuiyan, a member of the ruling party, proposed an amendment to Article 6 of the proposed constitution. He proposed that the clause regarding citizenship should include that "the citizens of Bangladesh will be known as Bangalee." Manabendra Narayan Larma objected to this amendment saying that inhabitants of Chittagong Hill Tracts have been living there for centuries and have never been asked to be Bangalee. "I don't know why this constitution wants to make us Bangalee," he said. Larma continued, "you cannot impose your national identities on others. I am a Chakma, not a Bengali. I am a citizen of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi. You are also Bangladeshi but your national identity is Bengali.…[the hill people] can never become Bengali."[38] Despite such pleas the amendment was passed, and Larma walked out in protest. Following Larma's walkout, the Deputy Leader of the House Syed Nazrul Islam requested him to return to the session, saying "I hope that he will accept this opportunity to identify himself and his people as Bengalis."[39]

The fourth component of the ideology of Mujibism was secularism. The exploitation of Islam by the Pakistani colonial rulers to legitimize the perpetuation of the colonial rule and the excesses committed by the Pakistani Army and collaborating Islamic parties "to save the integrity of Islamic Pakistan" created bitter resentment among the people against the use of religion in politics. It was against this backdrop that the ideals of secularism gained support in Bangladesh. Article 12 of the Bangladesh constitution reflected these secular aspirations when it stated that,

   in order to achieve the ideals of secularism,

   a) all kinds of communalism

   b) patronization by the state of any particular religion

   c) exploitation (misuse) of religion for political pur-

poses

   d) discrimination against, and persecution of, anyone following a particular religion will be ended.

In line with this principle, all religious political parties were disbanded after independence.[40] On the one hand the regime took such bold and commendable steps, while on the other hand Sheikh Mujib categorically declared that he was proud to be Muslim and that his nation was the second largest Muslim state in the world.[41] He not only frequently made use of Islamic expressions in his speeches but repeatedly insisted that his vision of "secularism does not mean the absence of religion."[42] Mujib also led the Munajaat (Islamic prayer) on November 4, 1972 during the session after the passage of the Constitution Bill.[43]

The state-controlled media, especially radio and television, began to undercut the spirit of secularism when they adopted a policy of equal opportunity for all religions. Instructed by the government, they read extracts from the holy books of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Their policy of distributive justice in terms of allocating time to the different religions, according to one newspaper, slowly poisoned the concept of secularism and injected religious fanaticism into the minds of the people.[44] The government not only extended indulgence to all religions but also subjected itself to religious pressure. It was under this kind of pressure that the government increased funding for religious education in 1973. The annual budgetary allocation for Madrassa (Islamic educational institutions) was increased to Taka 7.2 million in 1973 from Taka. 2.5 million in 1971. Furthermore, in March 1975 the government revived the Islamic Academy which they had banned in 1972, and then elevated it to a foundation to help propagate the ideals of Islam. The inherent self-contradiction of the ruling party in terms of its policy of secularism became more evident when Mujib joined the Islamic Summit held in Lahore in February, 1974. Two months later Bangladesh took the lead at the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference held in Jeddah in establishing the Islamic Development Bank.

Thus the ideology that was invented and propagated by the ruling party to counter the growing popularity of the radical left and the ideology of "scientific socialism" proved itself inherently self-contradictory and essentially barren. These drawbacks hindered the ideology of Mujibism from making any appeal to the general masses, let alone becoming hegemonic. Hence emerged the possibility of a dangerous and violent solution. The regime itself took the first steps towards that end. Two steps, taken within a span of a month, demonstrated that the crisis of the ruling regime had reached its zenith. These were: the promulgation of a state of emergency in December, 1974 and the introduction of the one-party

system in January, 1975. These steps gave authoritarianism—as a mode of governance—a constitutional facade.

A spiral of coup d'etet ensued on August 15, 1975 with the brutal killings of Sheikh Mujib and his family members by a small group of army officers. The "coup de main" was followed by eighty-four days of chaos and confusion, coups and counter-coups.[45] These led to the advent of General Ziaur Rahman as the strong man and established what one can call, borrowing Marx's words, "rule of military sabre and clerical cowl."[46] When a semblance of stability returned in late-November 1975, the very first problem the new regime faced was the question of legitimacy.

Legitimization of Military-Bureaucratic Rule and Islam

The legitimization process of the new regime involved constitutional measures as well as an ideological shift. In terms of constitutionality the regime was illegitimate. But one favorable point was that Zia neither engineered nor participated in the process of violating the constitution. He could easily claim that the coups and counter coups, killings and counter killings, paved the way for his emergence but were not carried out with an intention to bring him to power.[47]

Ziaur Rahman essentially derived his legitimacy from the uprising of November 7, 1975, though he did not identify himself with the spirit of the uprising. The spirit of the coup, if we go by the pronouncements of the organizers, was to bring social changes, bring an end to the social injustices and to build an army that would protect the interests of the poor.[48] There was clearly ambivalence: Ziaur Rahman had to separate the act from the spirit of the act. In order to do so he attached a new meaning to the uprising befitting to his seizure of power. Thus, he interpreted the uprising in terms of its nationalist content: nationalist, yet different from the nationalism of the Mujib regime. He thus interpreted the uprising as a nationalist one, an uprising to safeguard the national sovereignty against foreign conspiracy (i.e. Indian hegemony), to assert the independent identity of the people of Bangladesh.

There were three elements in this interpretation of the uprising: first, it marked a break with the radicals' claim of class uprising and hence attempted to reach all classes, shifting the political discourse from class contradiction to consensus and nation- building; second, because the uprising to safeguard national sovereignty was primarily led by the military, the military appeared as the defender of national independence at a critical juncture and thus should play a paramount role in future in ensuring the security of the Bangladesh state; and third, the enemy against whom the nationalism should be pitted was different from the earlier regime's interpretation; now it was India.

In accordance with this interpretation, Ziaur Rahman began to talk about a new nationalism, Bangladeshi nationalism. In April 1977, soon after the assumption of the office of President,[49] Zia made some constitutional amendments through a proclamation (Second Proclamation Order no. 1, April 23, 1977). The amendment brought changes to Article 6 of the original constitution, which stipulated that the identity of the citizens of Bangladesh would be known as "Bangalee." Instead, the amendment proclaimed, the citizens would be known as "Bangladeshi." Thus the identity of the nation was linked with the territorial limit in order to isolate it from the so-called "Bangalee sub-culture" of India. The amendment also brought changes in the preamble of the constitution. The words, "historic struggle for national liberation" were replaced by "historic war for national independence." The change, though it appears to be only semantic, reflected the regime's attitude towards the historical background of Bangladesh and the role of the civilian population. Ostensibly it highlighted the war of 1971, in which the military played a role, rather than the political movements of the civilian population in the 1950s and 1960s that contributed to the growth of Bengali nationalism. Minimizing the role of the civilian population in "achieving the independence" also minimized their role in "safeguarding the independence."

The word "secularism," appearing in the preamble and Article 8 as one of the four fundamental principles, was substituted with "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah," and a new clause (1A) was inserted to emphasize that "absolute trust and faith in almighty Allah" should be "the basis of all actions." Article 12, which defined "secularism," was omitted and above the preamble the words "Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim" (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) were inserted to give the constitution an Islamic color. The principle of socialism was given a new meaning— "economic and social justice"(Preamble and Article 8). Taken together, a new ideological terrain was created by the regime to legitimize their rule. Religion, territoriality of identity, and national security constituted the core of this new ideology.

Although these changes were made in 1977, the indications became obvious as early as March 1976. Then Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator (DCMLA)— second in command of the military junta and chief of the Air Force—Air Vice Marshal M. G. Tawab attended and addressed a religious gathering organized by Jaamat-i-Islami at which slogans were raised calling for the conversion of Bangladesh into an Islamic state. Several points should be noted about that gathering. Using the pretext of *Waz Mahfil* (meeting for religious preaching) this gathering brought out Islamist activists into the political arena. This was the first large-scale gathering of the Islamists since independence. While all political ac-

tivities were banned under military regulations, Islamists have had the open field and they made use of it to the fullest. The close liaison between the regime and the Islamists was made public in order to send a clear message to the nation at large. The presence of Air Vice Marshal Tawab in that meeting was significant on another count. It is alleged that in the following month, Tawab conspired to take over power with the help of a discontented and organized faction of the army.[50] The attempt, in hindsight, can be described as an abortive bid by the Islamists to take over power. The failure cost Tawab his job, and he was soon thrown out of the country.

Although the hardcore Islamists failed to take power, their influence within the regime continue to increase. The regime took several steps beginning in 1978, evidently to show their insistence on making Islam the focal point of their ideology. Some of these steps may appear to be more symbolic than substantial, but closer examination reveals that their impacts are long-lasting. Two of them involved education. In 1977, the government appointed a "syllabi committee" which declared that "Islam is a code of life, not just the sum of rituals. A Muslim has to live his personal, social, economic and international (sic) life in accordance with Islam from childhood to death. So the acquiring of knowledge of Islam is compulsory for all Muslims—men and women."[51] In 1978, the government established a separate directorate within the education ministry and set up the "Madrassah Education Board" to oversee the madrassah education (traditional Islamic religious education provided by clerics). The board's responsibilities include standardization of the madrassah curricula and tests. The board was entrusted with the task of making the madrassah education equivalent to secular education. Although this was not the first time the state took interest in madrassah education, it was the first time the government created opportunities for madrassah-educated students to enter university. The second change was the introduction of "Islamiat" —a course on Islamic studies—at the primary and secondary levels (i.e. grade 1 through grade 8). This course was made mandatory for all Muslim students. The government established a new ministry called "Ministry of Religious Affairs" to coordinate religious activities on behalf of the government. Soon *'id-i-milad-i-nabi'*, Prophet Muhammed's birthday, was declared a national holiday. State-controlled electronic media began broadcasting *Azan* (the call to prayers) five times a day and programs on Islam's role in daily lives. At one level all these measures were tokenism at best, while on another level, taken together, they represent a clear shift with long-term implications. The cabinet and the newly established ruling party were composed of defectors from various political parties and people who collaborated with the Pakistani regime

in 1971. But more importantly, those who had close ties with religious organizations became more visible within the cabinet. Maulana Abdul Mannan, leader of the *Jama'at-i Mudarrisin* (Association of Madrassa Teachers), for example, became a close confidant of Ziaur Rahman.

The new ideology proved as divisive as the previous regime's Mujibism because the religion itself has the potential to create a line that can divide the nation into at least two communities. However, it succeeded in gaining support for the regime. Zia's move gave a new lease on life to once-banned Islamist political parties. They were given the opportunity to partcipate in political activities under the Political Parties Regulations (PPR) Act promulgated in July 1976. The act required all political parties to register with the government, and they were allowed to function on a limited scale (e.g., organize small-scale indoor meetings). Beside reemergence of already established parties like the Awami League and the Muslim League, scores of new parties emerged.[52] The Islamists, especially those who were members of parties like the Jaamat-i-Islami prior to independence, rallied under the banner of a newly formed party, the Islamic Democratic League (IDL). The IDL became the fountainhead of a new Islamist movement in Bangladesh. In subsequent years, the military regime organized a referendum and a presidential election, both won by Ziaur Rahman through massive manipulation. Zia launched his own party in September 1978 and organized parliamentary elections in February 1979. The IDL forged an alliance with the Muslim League and contested 265 seats of the parliament. The alliance won 20 seats with eight percent of popular votes.[53] The IDL-Muslim League combine was highly favorable to the newly formed party. The Muslim League by then was a spent force, lacking activists to organize and resources to mobilize, their name nevertheless gave the combine credibility as a political force and helped distinguish it among 20-plus new parties. The election and the passage of the fifth amendment of the constitution in the parliament provided the constitutional legitimacy to the military regime. The fifth amendment incorporated all the resolutions, decrees, proclamations, and orders issued under the authority of martial law into laws and parts of the constitution, where necessary. Thus the actions taken after August 15, 1975 were legitimized, including the changes of state principles and indemnification of the Mujib's assassins. The changes also enabled the Islamists to become constitutionally legitimate poltical actors in Bangladesh. This indebted them to the Zia regime, and the Islamists extended their unequivocal support to Zia until he died in an abortive *coup d'etat* in May 1980.

Within nine months of Zia's death, then Chief of Army General Hussain Mohammed Ershad seized

power. It was *deja vue* for the citizens of Bangladesh—1975 all over again. The regime was faced with a crisis of constitutional legitimacy, and simmering discontent among students. Like his predecessor, General Ershad turned to Islamization to legitimize his rule. In late 1982, he declared in a religious gathering that Islam would be the basis of the new social system and it would be given its due place in the constitution. On January 15, 1983 Ershad declared that making Bangladesh an Islamic country was the goal of his struggle.[54] He also stated his intention to introduce "Islamic principles" into the "cultural life" of Bangladeshi Muslims.[55] The announcement was made at a gathering of Madrassah teachers organized by Maulana Abdul Mannan, head of the Madrassah Teachers Association and a former minister in the Zia cabinet. This failed to contain the growing political crisis. Despite the ban on political activities, opposition parties were mounting resistance to Ershad's rule and various parties were coming closer in their efforts in forming alliances to face the new regime. Ershad, on the other hand, secured support from a number of *pirs,[56]* religious preachers with large followings. He often visited them and addressed their *urs* (annual congregations). Between 1983 and 1987, on several occasions the Ershad regime came close to being overthrown through popular uprisings. His success in creating rifts among opposition parties in 1986 saved him from being toppled. Despite his Islamic rhetoric and steps towards further Islamization of society, Ershad failed to win the support of Islamic political organizations. The Jaamat-i-Islami, for example, maintained close links with two opposition alliances led by the BNP and the Awami League respectively, and participated in street agitations. Embroiled in political crises that began in early 1983 and intensified in late 1987, Ershad attempted to woo away Jaamat from agitators and to bring them in line with the government. To placate the Islamist forces, as well as to prove his Islamic credentials, Ershad went for a constitutional amendment in June 1988, which declared Islam the state religion.[57] The enactment of this bill generated reactions from both secularists and Islamists. Secularists saw this as a regressive step and insisted that this would make non-Muslims second-class citizens,[58] while the Islamists described this as a "hypocritical move" to resist a "genuine" Islamic movement. The leader of the Jaamat-i-Islami, for example, insisted that people wanted an Islamic state, not a declaration of Islam as the state religion.[59] Jaamat's reaction, however, was ambivalent. While three opposition alliances—led by the AL, the BNP and the left—called for a general strike on June 12 to protest the enactment of the law, Jaamat didn't support the program. Their separate program was less confrontational in nature and emphasized other issues. Ershad's attempt to use Islam to solve a legitimacy crisis, worked for a while but in the long run proved futile: the regime had to succumb to popular pressure. In December 1991, the Ershad regime was toppled through a popular urban uprising.

Civilian Regimes & Continuity

With the downfall of the Ershad regime, the Bangladesh polity saw a real possibility of democratization after almost 15 years of military or military-dominated civilian rules. But over this period various moves by successive regimes had accorded religion a definite space in the political discourse of Bangladesh. From the mid-1980s the so-called secularist political parties had been using idioms and icons of religion. Circumstances had changed so much that the Awami League, which once took pride in its secular identity, made a remarkable change in its approach towards religion and religion-based political parties. Now it clearly prefers to be portrayed as a party that values Islam as an integral part of the culture of Bangladesh. Beginning in 1991, statements of party leaders and party publicity materials show the Awami League's eagerness to present itself as a good custodian of Islam in Bangladesh. Symbolic expressions of this change by AL chief Sheikh Hasina included carrying of prayer beads and wearing scarves to cover hair. In addition to making pilgrimages to Mecca, Hasina began using Islamic phrases such as "Bismillahir Rahmer Rahim," "Khoda Hafez," and "Insallah" in her public speeches. Party political posters also carried these phrases to assuage the devout electorate. Prior to the elections of 1991, BNP leader Khaleda Zia alleged that if the Awami League is elected to office, it would remove "Bismillahir Rahmir Rahim" from the constitution. Sheikh Hasina dismissed this as a smear campaign against the Awami League and declared that she had "no quarrel with Bismillah."[60] Posters and slogans of three political parties, BNP, AL, and Jaamat, during the 1991 general elections reflect the extent of influence of Islamist idioms on political discourse. Slogans by the political parties attempted to demonstrate their indomitable faith in Islam. For example, BNP supporters chanted, "*La ilaha illallah, Dhaner shishe Bismillah*" (There is no God but Allah, vote for paddy-sheaf saying God the merciful;[61]) Awami League supporters came up with the slogan: "*La ilaha illallah, Naukar malik tui Allah*" (There is no God but Allah, the boat[62] belongs to Allah); and Jaamat supporters' slogan was: *Vote diley pallay, khusi hobe Allah* (Allah will be pleased with you if you vote for the scale[63]). Usage of Islamic jargon and religious verbiage by the Jaamat, the BNP and like-minded parties[64] was understandable, but the Awami League's shift in this direction was somewhat interesting. At the beginning, especially in the early 1990s, this was described as a tactical move, but soon it graduated to a strategy, and now ostensibly it has become the ideological position of the party.

Awami League's shift reflects, if not represents, a trend within secularist politics and cultural activism in Bangladesh. As the politics of Islamism became a legitimate discourse and the religio-political force, with the patronage of the state, became considerably stronger, secularists were faced with one immediate question: how to confront them, both in short- and long- term? The search for an answer (or answers) to this question should have been part of a larger debate involving modernity and secularism, the role and place of Islam in modernity and so forth. Despite a rich tradition of such discourse in Bengali literature and culture, contemporary Bangladeshi intellectuals shied away from the debate.[65] The answer or answers to this question also called for a definition of religion and an assessment of what religion is and does. Here we have seen the emergence of two groups of people whom we can describe, borrowing from Vanaik,[66] as "assassins" and "immortalizers." The assassins provide negative definitions of religion which lend themselves to abusive ideological usage and assign conclusions in an excessively deterministic manner. In the Bangladesh context, the orthodox Marxists' claim that religion should be defined as "false consciousness" is the best example available. Immortalizers, on the other hand, are those who see religion as an anthropological condition, meaning "in our essence we are inescapably religious animals."[67] The entire school of intellectuals who argue that the "overarching values" of Bangladeshi society are based on or influenced by religion in general and Islam in particular, belongs to this category. Beginning in the 1980s, the immortalizers of religion have gained ground among the secularists and they have glorified religion in many ways. They follow a standard bifurcation of religion into good and bad, i.e. religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology, true religion and mere religiosity. In this binary division, the immortalizers present themselves as the representatives of the former while claiming that the Islamists represent the latter. An oft-pronounced assertion, "citizens of Bangladesh are God-fearing, but not fundamentalists," is rooted in this strategy. They essentially emphasize an authentic indigenism which opposes the recent Islamization process but also distances it from the secularist experimentation of the past; an experiment they perceive to be borrowed from the outside. Their objective is to endorse and utilize the resources within the religious traditions of Bangladesh. By situating the debate in this terrain they attempt to reclaim the land already occupied by the Islamists. This forces them to argue in a language and a structure that is inherently favorable to those whom they want to defeat. This strategy has had a damaging political effect by implicitly legitimizing the existence and arguments of the Islamists. The Awami League's decision to get on the bandwagon either reveals their lack of sincerity to ad-dress the issue or an inclination to return to power at any cost.

As a centrist political party, the Awami League was faced with another set of challenges and another level of dilemma. By the early 1990s, changes in both global and domestic situations were making it necessary to adjust their positions on various issues. Globally the demise of the Soviet Union, disarray in the left movement, and increased strengths of the right all around the globe have had their impact on the Awami League. Changes in global economic circumstances and Bangladesh's relationship with international agencies (e.g. The World Bank, IMF, WTO) necessitated that the party shed its socialist postures to make it acceptable to the donor community. Domestically, the country saw a rapid process of segmentation and polarization, both in society and politics. For the Awami League, the question was whether it should move towards the right, vacating its centrist position, or alternatively, should it strengthen its centrist conviction which may be seen as "a liberal left standing" compared to others. Given the party's avowed commitment to and complete reliance on electoral politics, it had to seek answers to these questions keeping the electorates in mind. For them, the question was, can a centrist party hope to win, or even fare well electorally? The unexpected results of the 1991 election, the first election in Bangladesh considered to be free and fair, convinced them otherwise. The global and domestic situations that I have described above had further weakened the left forces in Bangladesh as they took a more orthodox stance. On the other hand, these have had very little impact on the BNP because, firstly, the party initiated these domestic changes in the late 1970s during their first rule under Ziaur Rahman, the changes were in some respects their achievements; secondly, the party, since its inception, leaned towards the right. A further move in that direction was not painful at all.

The Politics of Expediency

If the crisis of hegemony paved the way for the rise of Islamist political parties, the politics of expediency has helped them to survive over the last three decades. The process began as early as 1974. Faced with opposition from two forces—extreme left and extreme right—Sheikh Mujib decided to allure one faction. Between the two "evils" Mujib went for the latter. Granting clemency to those who collaborated with the Pakistani administration in the name of Islam was a clear indication in this regard. Although Mujib failed to win their heart, it shows that expediency can dictate key political decisions. Ziaur Rahman took it further. At the early stage of his presidency he brought together the left and the Islamists to form an alliance that helped him to cling to power and gave some semblance of legitimacy to his regime. He also founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party

(BNP), a party of centrist political orientation with a belief in confessional nationalism. As mentioned before, Ershad treaded the same path when he faced intense opposition from major political parties. In early 1983, he made his first attempt, to no avail, to bring the Islamists to his support when he declared that his goal was to establish an Islamic Bangladesh.[68] By late 1987, with his popularity at its lowest ebb and the agitation against him reaching the zenith, Ershad looked for means to get a fresh lease on political life. He relied on force of religion and passed the Eighth Amendment in mid-1988. When the opposition called a general strike against the bill, Ershad commented, "they have called the hartal against Allah, his Prophet, and religion."[69] When Ershad was trying to allure the Islamists to his side, his opponents brought them closer to their heart and formed an alliance to topple the government.

After the downfall of Ershad's regime and the general election of 1991, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) sought the support of the Jaamat-i-Islami to form the government. The understanding between these two political forces was largely "a marriage of convenience." The BNP, with 140 seats in parliament was short of 11 seats to claim a stake in power.[70] They relied on the Jaamat for backing. The marriage was over within two and half years. By late 1993, the Jaamat had become a vocal critic of the regime and some of their comments were harsher than the regime's arch-rival, the Awami League. Then party chief AbbasAli Khan commented that Islam, national sovereignty, and democracy were in danger under Khaleda Zia's regime.[71] The secretary general Matiur Rahman Nizami alleged that Khaleda Zia's regime had failed to maintain the dignity of Islam, though they used the name of Islam to be elected to office.[72]

The election results of 1991, however, showed that the Islamists had a vote-bank of six percent.[73] What became noticeable was the steady growth in the number of votes of Jaamat. In 1979, the Jaamat won 750 thousand votes; in 1986 the number rose to 1.3 million; and in 1991 the number stood at 4.1 million. It was evident that the Jaamat had become a force to be reckoned with. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina, took this into cognizance and befriended the Jaamat when they launched a campaign against Khaleda Zia's government in late 1994. Street agitations led to the general elections in 1996, in which AL secured the largest number of seats but was short of an absolute majority to form the government.[74] The post-election drama of 1991 was staged again, with AL in the role of the BNP. The Awami League went for a coalition government with the Jatiya Party. The Jatiya Party, which had enacted the bill making Islam the state religion, and the Awami League, which had condemned the bill saying that it undermined the spirit of the liberation struggle, formed a coalition

and ruled the country for five years between 1996 and 2001. Jaamat extended their support to the coalition and was greeted with enthusiasm. Within two years, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) wooed the Jaamat back to its camp and formed an alliance along with two other parties—a small but radical Islamist party called the Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ), and a faction of the Jatiya Party led by General Ershad.[75] The center-right alliance bagged more than two-thirds of the seats[76] and formed the cabinet in October 2001 with two members from the Jaamat-I-Islami.

Pursuing the politics of expediency is not the sole preserve of the two major political parties; the political flip flop of the Jatiya Party during 1997-2001 demonstrates that others are equally apt in this exercise. But what is significant for our purpose is the end product; that these shifts ultimately benefit the Islamist parties. This is more visible in the case of the Jatiya Party than in others. A detailed description presented below shows how the ruling party at that time used the legal system to achieve its goals, and how these manipulations helped a radical Islamist organization.

Following his downfall in late 1990, President General Ershad was arrested by the interim government, and prosecuted by the Khaleda Zia regime in 1991. At least 15 cases of graft and corruption were brought against Ershad. Some other members of his cabinet were also tried. After a protracted court battle, Ershad was sentenced to 13 years of imprisonment in one case. Other cases against him remain pending. While he was in jail, his party took part in elections in 1991 and 1996 and secured 35 and 32 seats respectively. Ershad himself was elected on both occasions. During Khaleda Zia's regime, Ershad remained in jail and his party played a low-key role in opposition. As mentioned before, following the 1996 elections the Jatiya Party joined the AL-led coalition government. Party Secretary General Anwar Hossain Manju became a cabinet minister. In January 1997 General Ershad was released from jail on bail halfway through his 13-year sentence. Ershad's political opponents, the BNP in particular, accused the AL government of releasing him as a political pay-off for his crucial support after the June 1996 elections.[77] This was followed by infighting within the party. A number of leaders alleged that Ershad had "turned the party into his own property and indulged in activities that not only tarnished his personal image but disturbed the party's rank and file."[78] Key among his alleged transgressions were turning the JP into an "extension of [the] Awami League" and his personal indiscretions. The split became official on June 30, 1997 when the rebel faction, claiming it was supported by a large number of party delegates, declared itself the "real" Jatiya Party.[79] JP (Zafar-Mizan) co-chairman Kazi Zafar Ahmed was soon urging all nationalist and Islamic forces to "wage a

united movement against [the government's] anti-people and anti-nation activities,"[80] and in mid-August he joined the opposition alliance with the BNP, the Jamaat, and other parties.[81] The Jatiya Party's problems did not end with the expulsion of the rebel faction. On March 2, 1998, in a bid to return the JP to the political limelight with a more independent, anti-government role, Ershad asked Anwar Hossain Manju, the party's secretary-general and communications minister in the AL government, to resign from the cabinet.[82] When Manju did not resign his cabinet position, he was removed as JP secretary-general. Soon afterwards, Ershad announced tha the JP was withdrawing from the government.[83]

But Ershad's actions, and obvious indications that he had reached some sort of an understanding with the BNP, divided the party once more; on March 6, 1998, 14 of the JPs and 33 MPs issued a joint statement opposing the decision to sack Manju.[84] By late April it became clear that the JP, under the leadership of Ershad, had shifted gears and joined the opposition rank. When the four-party alliance was formalized in December 1998, the JP became a partner and vowed to fight the Hasina regime. The ruling party became annoyed by Ershad's *volte face*, but with imminent elections in mind the Awami League initiated efforts in early 2000 to lure him back. Behind the scenes negotiations involving relatives of Prime Minister Hasina and deposed President Ershad went on for quite sometime,[85] The Awami League, in order to ensure that Ershad would not have any other choice, put him under extreme pressure with threats to revive the pending cases against him. On August 25, the high court sentenced Ershad to five years of imprisonment and a fine of Taka 55 million in a corruption case. Although the four-party alliance extended support to Ershad[86] it was rumored that the government would continue to put pressure until he joined the ranks. Ershad was sent to jail in November.[87] With Ershad in prison, the party faced a serious dilemma, whether to quit the alliance now or face the possibility of long term incarceration if AL returned to power. The JP finally chose to quit the alliance, resulting in a split. One small faction of the party, under the leadership of Naziur Rahman Manzur, remained in the alliance, while the larger faction decided to fight the election from a separate platform. In April 2001, soon after the JP left the alliance, Ershad was released on bail.

There was no doubt that the Awami League thought the best strategy was to weaken the opposition four-party alliance. Ershad was fighting for his political life, the JP was under the impression that none of the two major parties would get the absolute majority, and the JP would reappear as the kingmaker. Soon after leaving the alliance, Ershad resumed shopping for an Islamist alliance with the hope that this would reduce the votes of the BNP-led alliance. He was joined by a radical Islamist party called the Islamic Shashontontro Andolon (Islamic Constitution Movement). With three other small parties they formed the Islami Jatiya Oikya Front (IJOF, Islamic National United Front). Pir of Charmonai Syed Fazlul Karim, the leader of the Islamic Constitution Movement (ICM), declared that they would establish an Islamic government in the country if voted to power. The extent of orthodoxy of the party can be understood from the party's position on women in leadership. The pir is not only against leadership by women, but also dictated that Ershad's wife, Raushan Ershad, a former member of parliament and a senior leader of the Jatiya Party, must wear a veil if she comes to attend any of the alliance's meetings.[88] The Jatiya Party's election manifesto, especially on issues pertaining to religion, also reflected that the ICM was dictating the terms. The JP election manifesto stated that if JP were voted to power, "existing laws would be brought in line with the principles of the Quran and Sunnah"; "laws contrary to the Quran and Sunnah shall be amended"; "Shariah laws would be followed as far as possible"; "special laws would be made for punishing those making derogatory remarks against the Prophet (sm) and the Shariah"; "religious education would be made compulsory at all levels."

The events described above amply demonstrate that the politics of expediency was the driving force in the formation of these political understandings and alliances. Should ideological inclinations have had any role to play, none of these alliances would have been formed, let alone survived. From the Islamists' point of view, these alliances had accorded them recognition as legitimate political actors and helped absolve their role during the liberation struggle. As for the political landscape of Bangladesh, these have brought a sea change making religio-political forces important components of the Bangladesh polity.

Islamists Beyond the Jaamat

Discussions of Islamist politics in Bangladesh usually center on the Jaamat-i-Islami for a good reason. The party has weathered bad times and good, and has emerged as the largest platform of the Islamists. But it would be erroneous to assume that the Jaamat-I-Islami was the only religio-political force that grew during this period; various small factions have also emerged. During the general election of 2001, more than 15 Islamist parties filed candidates for parliamentary seats.[89] Indeed, a large number of these parties exist only as letterheads, but some of them have gained significant power and influence, not to mention mobilizational capacity. Although they haven't succeeded in garnering large support from the electorate, they have built up enough manpower to organize street agitations. On occasions, they have flexed their muscles as well. The Islami Oikya

Jote (IOJ), a coalition partner, is one such organization. The frightful events in early 2001 demonstrated their strength. Following a high court verdict that issuing "fatwa" (religious edict) is illegal and unconstitutional, and anyone engaged in such act should be tried in the court of law,[90] IOJ declared the judges who gave the verdict "murtad" (apostate) and pronounced death sentences on them.[91] During the course of a general strike called by this group, a police constable was killed inside a mosque in Dhaka. The chairman and the secretary-general of the IOJ were arrested in connection with the killing.[92] This led to a call for another strike in the eastern town of Brahmanbaria, the stronghold of the group, in which a number of persons were killed in police firing.[93] The BNP, partly out of compulsion to support its ally and partly with a view to gain a portion of the popular vote in the forthcoming election, decided to fully back the IOJ. For more than a month, street agitation gripped the country and scores of people died in the confrontations. The tension gradually died down when the Supreme Court stayed the verdict for an indefinite period. But it was clear to the public at large that the IOJ had the means to create havoc, if they wanted to.

Conclusion

This paper set out on a journey to analyze the national particularities of Bangladesh that have paved the way for the rise of the Islamists over the last two decades. The review of Bangladesh history shows that in post-independence Bangladesh, the ruling bloc faced a crisis of hegemony as nationalism lost its significance as the hegemonic ideology. Faced with feuds and cleavages within the party, intense political opposition, and economic crisis, the ruling party responded with an attempt to construct a new ideology—an admixture of populism and personal cult. The newly constructed ideology was fraught with contradictions, including its position with respect to religion. On the one hand it propagated secularism, while on the other hand, the Prime Minister joined the Islamic conference and assuaged the Islamist forces with patronage. The ruling bloc attempted to resolve the crisis through an authoritarian transformation of the polity. The failure of the ruling bloc to provide moral leadership and establish moral superiority resulted in a crisis and a violent solution to the crisis emerged through the coup d'etat of August 1975. For the regime that came to power through a series of coups in 1975 the task was two-fold: to seek constitutional legitimacy, and to provide an alternative ideology. The military bureaucratic oligarchy created a new ideological terrain: religion, territoriality of national identity, and national security constituted the core of this new ideology. The regime also sought the support of the previously disbanded religious forces in their endeavor

to gain constitutional legitimacy. Hence, Bangladesh saw the rehabilitation of religio-political forces in the polity and re-emergence of religious idioms in political discourse. In the fifteen years following 1975, as Bangladesh was ruled by military and military-dominated civilian regimes, religion and religio-political forces gradually occupied a definite space in the Bangladesh polity. The secularist political forces as well as right-of-center political parties began using religious idioms and icons to regain some religious legitimacy and to garner the support of the small but influential religio-political forces in their efforts to seize power. Two major political parties, BNP and AL, pursued a policy of expediency and lined up for the support of the Islamists at every turn of events. Over the last ten years, as Bangladesh returned to civilian rule and electoral politics, the Islamists have emerged as the kingmaker, both in the electoral equation and on ideological terrain. This is due to the fact that these two parties have yet to establish their moral leadership through consent, and to construct a hegemonic ideology. In electoral politics the Islamists have succeeded in fortifying a small but loyal base and drawing the attention of the larger population. They have had this success because the two major claimants to power lack clear and convincing ideological perspectives and largely rely on issue-based differentiation. Past performances of these two parties as ruling regimes, especially blatant manipulation of electoral processes during their reigns prior to 1991, have made them suspect in the eyes of the electorate. Absolute majorities in parliament had been used to further party and individual interests at the expense of the interests of the nation, and the inherent authoritarian tendencies have been laid bare. These have created a space that the Islamists have been trying to capture.

The contour of the crisis of hegemony of the ruling bloc that brought the Islamists to the political arena of Bangladesh has changed but the crisis is yet to be resolved. So long as the crisis remains, the position of the Islamists in the polity will remain influential and Islamic idioms will dominate the political discourse of Bangladesh. The Islamists in Bangladesh, at least for now, don't have a supranational agenda and as such are not an immediate threat to international security, but what is alarming is their growing influence on political discourse, their control over a small but highly influential vote bank, and their position within the government.

NOTES
[1]This narrative is based on press reports and on material gathered due the author's personal contacts with a number of reporters in Bangladesh. The meeting in Chittagong was reported by a wire agency, UNB, on April 4, 2000 (see: "We shall form the next government, Khaleda," http://www.bangla2000.com/news/Archive/National/4-5-2000/ news_detail4.html). The information on the northern

region campaign tour has been gleaned from the *Daily New Nation*, September 22, 2001 (see: "Use vote to root out AL terrorism: Khaleda,," The *Daily New Nation*, September 22, http://nation-online.com/200109/22/n1092201.htm). The Dhaka meeting was reported by the BBC Bengali Service in its evening broadcast of September 28, 2001.

[2]The head of the JI and a minister in the present government, Matiur Rahman Nizami, in a speech to party workers insisted that having one or two party members in the cabinet is not sufficient for an Islamic revolution. This, he said, is only a tactic. (*Daily Janakantha*, 27 October 2001).

[3]OIJ leaders and supporters carried banners and chanted slogans in a public meeting in Dhaka on March 8, 1999 saying that "*Amra Sobia Taliban, Bangla Hobe Afghan*" (We are all Taliban, Bangladesh will be Afghanistan).

[4]The party manifesto written in 1978, unchanged to date, says, "religious belief and love for religion are great and imperishable characteristics of the Bangladesh nation. The long mass struggle against the cruel and unscrupulous foreign rule and domination has given the most sublime and tolerant character to and stabilized our religion." *Ghosonopatra*, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, August 1978, 3.

[5]Al-Quaida, headed by Osama bin-Laden, is the most prominent example of this movement. Recent studies on this organization include Rohan Gunaratna. *Inside Al-Quaida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Jane Corbin, *Al Quaeda: In Search of the Terror Network that Threatens the World* (New York: Nation Books, 2002). Major international media since September 11, 2001 have spent hours on various aspects of this terror network.

[6]Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994); and also "Neo-Fundamentalism," http://www.ssrc.org.sept11/essay/roy.htm.

[7]Some of the books and articles are referred to in this paper later. See also: David Abecassis, *Identity, Islam, and Human Development in Rural Bangladesh* (Dhaka, Bangladesh : University Press, 1990); U. A. B. Razia Akter Banu*, Islam in Bangladesh* (Leiden ; New York: Brill, 1992); Jeremy Seabrook, *Freedom Unfinished: Fundamentalism and Popular Resistance in Bangladesh* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Tajul I Hashmi, "Islam in Bangladesh politics," in *Islam, Muslims and Modern State: Case Studies of Muslims in Thirteen Countries*, Hussain Muttalib and Tajul I Hashmi, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press); Dr. Syed Anwar Hossain, "Bangladesh Politics: From Secular to Islamic Trend," in *State, Development and Political Culture: Bangladesh and India,* Barun De and Ranabir Samaddar, ed. (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd, 1997); Syed Serajul Islam, "Islam in Bangladesh: A Dichotomy of Bengali and Muslim Identities," *Islamic Quarterly*, 41, 3 (1997) and "The Politics of Islam in Bangladesh," in *Religious Fundamentalism in Developing Countries*, Santosh C. Saha and Thomas K. Carr, ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001) ; M. Rashiduzzaman, "Islam, Muslim Identity, and Nationalism in Bangladesh," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 28, (Fall 1994); S.M. Shamsul Alam, "Islam, Ideology, and the State in Bangladesh," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 28, 1-2 (Jan-April, 1993); Naila Kabeer, "The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh," *Feminist Review,* 37 (Spring 1991); Emajuddin Ahamed and D.R.J.A Nazneen, "Islam in Bangladesh: Revivalism or Power Politics?" *Asian Survey,* 30, 8

(August 1990); Dennis Wright, "Islam and Bangladesh Polity," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 10, 2 (1987); Gulam Kabir, "Religion, Language and Nationalism in Bangladesh," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 17, 4 (1987).

[8]Zillur Rahman Khan, "Islam and Bengali Nationalism," *Asian Survey*, 25, 8 (1985): 837.

[9]Khan, "Islam and Bengali Nationalism," 843.

[10]Khan, "Islam and Bengali Nationalism," 844.

[11]Khan, "Islam and Bengali Nationalism," 845-6.

[12]Syed Mahmud Ali. "The Demise of Zia: From Bloody Mutinies to Abortive Coups," in *The Zia Episode in Bangladesh Politics*, Habib Zafarullah, ed. (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers,1996), 165, fn. 11.

[13]Ali, "The Demise of Zia," 165, fn. 11.

[14]M.N. Roy, "Secularism, Indeed," in *Secularism in India,* V.K. Sinha, ed. *(*Bombay: Lalvani Publishing House, 1968), 55.

[15]Talukdar Maniruzzman, "Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends," in *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh,* Rafiuddin Ahmed, ed. (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers. 1990), 69.

[16]It is necessary here to note that secularism was not defined in the Indian constitution and no official explanation of the term was provided until 1978. The definition that came out of the lower house of the parliament in 1978 was "equal respect for all religion." This, however, was rejected by the upper house.

[17]Tazeen Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

[18]P.B Gajendragadkar, "The Concept of Secularism in Secular Democracy," *New Delhi Weekly*, Annual Number (1970), 71.

[19]Whether this notion of secularism helps the secularization process of a society is an open question. Both Indian and Bangladeshi experience show that "fair" involvement of the state in multi-religious terrain as opposed to abstinence from religious affairs has been detrimental to the secularization process of the society and polity. The rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and their "Hindutva" thesis in India, and the religious-idiom-dominated political discourse in Bangladesh point to the weaknesses of this notion. Secularism, on the contrary, should be intrinsically linked to the secularisation process, i.e., "relative decline in religious influence and in the importance of religious identity," Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (London: Verso, 1997), 5.

[20]Asim Roy, *Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[21]Syed Anwar Hussain, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh: Internal Variables and External Inputs," in *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh,* Rafiuddin Ahmed, ed. (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1990), 141.

[22]Richard Hrair Dekmejian, "The Anatomy of Islamic Revivalism: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives," *The Middle East Journal*, 34:1 (1980), and also "Islamic Revival in the Middle East and North Africa," *Current History*, April 1980.

[23]Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International

Publishers, 1971), 57-8.

[24]Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 12.

[25]Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 57-8.

[26]Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 210.

[27]Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 276.

[28]For details see, Ali Riaz, *State, Class and Military Rule: Political Economy of Martial Law in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Nadi New Press, 1994).

[29]Aijaz Ahmad, "Class, Nation and State: Intermediate Classes in Peripheral Societies," in *Middle Classes in Dependent Countries,* Dale Johnson, ed. (London: Sage, 1985), 62.

[30]Kamal Hossain, "Political Development in Bangladesh: Promise and Realities," *Contributions to Asian Studies*, 14 (1979), 103.

[31]B. K. Jahangir, *Problematics of Nationalism in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Center for Social Studies, 1986).

[32]Bernard Cohn, "Regions, Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History," in *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study,* Robert I Crane, ed. (Purdue: Duke University, 1967).

[33]Kamal Hossain, a prominent AL leader and then-minister of law and parliamentary affairs, described the situation as follows: "The radicals had urged that the freedom fighters, instead of being disbanded, should have formed the nucleus of the 'part of the revolution' headed by Sheikh Mujib. The party could then have led a 'class struggle' within the framework of a one-party system, and thus taken society forward towards the goal of social revolution" (Hossain, Poltical Development, 107).

[34]The ruling party envisaged that it could either pursue a politics of consensus or a politics of class conflict. As Hossain explains: "the alternative that had presented itself to the politics of 'class struggle' was the politics of 'consensus.' This policy would seek to accommodate all contending groups within the framework of the system. It was envisaged that the Awami League could continue to be the de-facto one party, a coalition of contending factions, representing different tendencies, ranging from militant social revolutionaries on the left to conservative 'status quoists'' on the right' (Hossain, Political Development, 107).

[35]Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 12.

[36]Mujib, as quoted in Mohammed M Khan and Habib M Zafarullah, eds., *Politics and Bureaucracy in a New Nation: Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Centre for Public Administration, 1980), 86-7.

[37]Parliamentary Debates, 2, 13, 1972, 292-295.

[38]Parliamentary Debates, 2, 13, 1972, 452.

[39]Parliamentary Debates, 2, 13, 1972, 461.

[40]The constitution further stipulated in Article 38, para 2: "No persons shall have the right to form or be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of, any communal or other association or union which in the name of or on the basis of any religion has for its object, or pursues a political purpose" (Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972, 5).

[41]*The Bangladesh Observer,*11 January 1972, 1.

[42]*The Bangladesh Observer*, 29 January 1974.

[43]*The Bangladesh Observer*, 5 November 1972. 1.

[44]*Weekly Wave*, 3 December 1972.

[45]Despite the successful putsch, the small, young, and conservative faction of the army failed to establish total control over the situation. The radical elements and the status quoists

within the army began to vie for power. On November 3, a section of so-called Mujibists and status quoists engineered another coup. The coup was ill-planned, hastily organized, and limited in its objective. Its success was limited and hardly anyone was in a position of power. This led to the third coup, engineered by the radicals on November 7. This coup, described by its organizers as a revolution, was largely by the privates and is commonly referred to as the "Sepoy Mutiny." Ziaur Rahman was used as their front-man. The original planners, however, lost control within hours of the coup and were finally defeated by another segment within seven days.

[46]Karl Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile, Political Writings*, D. Fernbach, ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 2: 149.

[47]One can easily compare the rise of Ziaur Rahman in Bangladesh in 1975 with the rise of Louis Bonaparte in France after the series of events between 1848 and 1851. The situation in Bangladesh was almost identical to the French situation described by Marx: "all fell on their knees, equally mute and equally impotent, before the rifle butt" and all that seemed to be achievements, "vanished like a series of optical illusions before the spell of a man whom even his enemies do not claim to be a magician." (Karl Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 2: 151).

[48]Biplobi Sainik Sangstha, "Call for Uprising," Revolutionary Soldiers' Organization, November 6, 1975, leaflet.

[49]Between November 1975 and April 1977, although Zia held the real power, A.S.M. Sayem held the post of President. Sayem was asked to resign from the position in April 1977.

[50]On April 30, 1976 a group belonging to the army's tank regiment rebelled in Bogra, a city in Western Bangladesh. The rebellion was led by one of the original architects of the August 1975 coup, Colonel Farook Rahman. After the coup d'etat of November 3, 1975, Farook Rahman and at least six other junior officers were given safe passage outside the country as part of a secret deal. These junior officers, commonly referred to as "six majors," were allegedly involved in killing four national leaders inside the Dhaka jail during the chaotic political changes of early November. Since then they remained outside Bangladesh and were barred from re-entering Bangladesh. In mid-April 1976, some of these officers returned to the country secretly. Obviously some members of the regime helped in their return. It is alleged that Tawab was instrumental in this effort. Colonel Farook managed to reach his loyalists and began the assault. The government threatened to annihilate the entire unit if they did not surrender. Farook was coaxed by his parents and sister to give in on condition that he would never be tried and would be sent outside the country. The regime lived up to their end of the bargain. More significantly, he was later given a diplomatic position by the Zia regime. Farook returned to the country in 1986 and formed a rightist political party named "Freedom Party." He was elected to the parliament in 1986 in an election boycotted by major political parties, and conducted under another military ruler, General Ershad.

[51]Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Education, *Bangladesh National Syllabi and Curriculum Committee Report,* II, April 1997, 149.

[52]Muslim League, which led the Pakistan movement in the 1940s, lost its support in then-East Pakistan by the early

1960s. The Bengali nationalist movement practically annihilated the party. Some veteran party leaders have had personal appeal to the older generation, but in post-independence Bangladesh, especially in the context of electoral politics, their appeal was not enough to make any marks.

[53]Zia's newly founded Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secured two-thirds majority (207 seats, 44 percent of votes); the Awami League secured 39 seats with 25 percent votes; a splinter group of AL got two seats with two percent of popular votes; JSD secured eight seats with six percent of votes. Sixteen independent candidates also won the elections. Eight seats went to smaller parties. The results of the elections should be viewed with serious caution. The election results were largely manipulated by the regime to their advantage. The regime required a two-thirds majority in the parliament to legitimize the actions taken after August 15, 1975. The state machinery was used blatantly to deliver the results.

[54]*The Daily Ittefaq*, 15 January 1983, 1.

[55]*The Daily Ittefaq*, 15 1983, p. 1.

[56]*Pirs*, literally translated saints, are very common figures in Bangladesh. The tradition grew out of a specific mode of preaching Islam in the subcontinent. Some of these early preachers drew the attention of the local people irrespective of their religious beliefs through their spiritual power, morality and principles of tolerance. These *pirs*, ideally, represent mystic Islam and represent one or more mystic orders. Following their deaths, their graves are turned into *mazars* (shrines) and are visited by their *muridan* (disciples). But over the years, the practice has degenerated to a great extent and has created cult-like organizations, especially by those who lack high morals. These *pirs* often exert inappropriate influence on their disciples, and their residential-cum-worship compounds have become headquarters of complex social networks and places where patronages are exchanged between high-ranking people.

[57]The State Religion Amendment Bill, commonly referred to as "Eighth Amendment of the Constitution"' was introduced in the parliament on May 11 and was passed on June 7, 1988.

[58]*Naripokhyo*, a women's organization, filed a writ of petition at the Supreme Court on July 18, saying that this amendment is contrary to the spirit of the constitution and a violation of the rights of women.

[59]*The Daily Sangbad*, 12 May 1988.

[60]*The Daily Sangbad*, 16 February 1991, 1.

[61]BNP"'s election symbol.

[62]Awami League's election symbol.

[63]Jaamat's election symbol.

[64]One such party was the Freedom Party headed by Farook Rahman, one of the coup-makers of August 1975. In 1991, their slogan was *Vote Dile Kurale, Khushi Hobe Rasule* (The prophet will be pleased if you vote for axe).

[65]The "Budhi Mukti Andolon" (movement for the emancipation of intellect), a secular intellectual movement that spanned over ten years of time beginning in 1926, is an example of a radical critique of religion in Bengali Muslim society. The movement began in Dhaka in 1926 with the establishment of a new literary organization, the "Dhaka Muslim Shahitya Samaj" with its Bengali mouthpiece, Shikha. All seven members of the movement subjected Islam to a radical rationalist critique in their writings. For instance, Kazi Abdul Wadud flatly refused to accept Prophet Muhammad as "*khatemooneebigin*" or the "messenger of Allah." Abul Hossain opposed the religious dictum that Prophet Muhammad is the greatest human sent to this world. Hossain wrote, "this kind of faith reflects the human intellect's greatest ignorance, weakness and fear" and brings "human society to the age of barbarism." Furthermore, Hossain wrote that social restrictions of purdah create conditions leading to "prostitution," "mental perversions," "narrowness," and "hypocrisy." The veil (*burkha*) is a "disgrace and shame to women." Understandably, this movement faced stiff resistance from the clerics, yet survived for about ten years and made an indelible impression on the Bengali intellectual pursuit.

[66]Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (London: Verso, 1997), 70-71.

[67]Achin Vanaik, 71.

[68]*The Daily Ittefaq*, 21 January 1983, 1.

[69]*The Daily Ittefaq*, 12 June 1988, 1.

[70]Out of 300 seats, BNP won 140, Awami League 88, Allies of Awami League 11, Jatiya Party of General Ershad 35, and Jaamat-I-Islami 18. A total of 151 seats were necessary to claim a stake in power (http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_polls_91.html).

[71]*The Daily Millat*, 29 October 1994, 12.

[72]*The Daily Ittefaq*, 12 December 1995, 16.

[73]The share of popular votes in the election was as follows: BNP: 31 percent, Awami League 28 percent, Jatiya Party 12 percent, and Jaamat-I-Islami 6 percent (http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_polls_91.html).

[74]Awami League secured 146 seats (37 percent of popular votes), BNP secured 116 seats (33 percent of popular votes), Jatiya party secured 32 seats (16 percent of popular votes), Jaamat secured 3 seats (8 percent of popular votes), http://www.bangladeshelections.org/bd/elections/1996.htm.

[75]The party, however, faced a split less than two months before the election. A breakaway faction remained in the alliance, while the majority, under the leadership of General Ershad, left the alliance. Interestingly, soon afterwards they formed another alliance with Islamic groups and fought the election under the banner of the newly formed alliance, the Islamic Jatiyo Oikyo Front (Islamic National United Front).

[76]The alliance secured a total of 216 seats (BNP 193, Jaamat 17, Jatiya Party 4, and Islami Oikya Jote 2), AL won 62 seats and Jatiya Party of General Ershad won 14 seats). (http://www.bdec.org/stat/Parliament%20Election%202001%20Results%20and%20Statistics/share_of_votes_by_party.pdf).

[77]"Bangladesh, Ershad's Out," *The Economist,* 25 January 1997.

[78]Anis Ahmed, "Bangladesh's Ershad Drops Lover to Save Party," Reuters, 11 April 1997.

[79]Shamim Ahmad, "JP's Peripheral Crack," *The Dhaka Courier*, 4 July 1997, 18; Press Trust of India (PTI), [New Delhi], 30 June 1997; and "Jatiya Party Splits as Rebels Expel Founder Ershad," BBC Summary, 2 July 1997.

[80]Shamim Ahmad, "JP's Peripheral Crack," *The Dhaka Courier*, 4 July 1997, 18.

[81]*The Dhaka Courier*, "The Week That Was: JP (Z-M) Calls for United Movement Against Govt," 15 August 1997, 48.

[82]Rashed Chowdhury, "JP on the Brink," *The Dhaka Courier*, 6 March 1998, 17.

[83]"JP No More Part of Government, Says Ershad," *The Bangladesh Observer*, 15 March 1998, 12.

[84]"Split in JP Surfaces," *The Bangladesh Observer*, 7 March 1998.

[85]Sayed Kamaluddin, "Opposition closes ranks after verdict against Ershad," *The Dawn*, 1 September 2000, http://www.dawn.com/2000/09/01/int9.htm.

[86]Among those who criticized the sentencing was former PM Khaleda Zia, but it was her government that had filed all the cases against Ershad.

[87]Moazzem Hossain, "Bangladesh General Back in Jail," BBC News, 20 November 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1032550.stm.

[88]Haroon Habib, "On neutral ground," Frontline, 18, 16, August 4, 2001, http://www.flonnet.com/fl1816/ 18160570.htm.

[89]These parties include Bangladesh Islami Biplobi Parishod; Bangladesh Islami Front; Bangladesh Islami Party; Bangladesh Muslim League; Bangladesh Nejam-e-Islam Party; Islami Al Jihad Dal; Islami Dal Bangladesh; Jaker Party; Jamiyate Ulamaye Islam Bangaldesh; Quran Drashan Sanghstha Bangaldesh; Quran Sunna Bastabayan Parishd; Bangladesh Tanjimul Muslimin; Taherikey Olama-e-Bangladesh. These parties are in addition to well-known parties such as Jaamat-i-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote; Islami Shasantantra Andolon; Bangladesh Kelafat Andolon, and Freedom Party.

[90]"Fatwa declared illegal in Bangladesh," UNB report, 2 January 2001, http://www.bangla2000.com/News/Archive/National/2001-01-02/news_detail1.shtm.

[91]"Islamic Groups Attacks Fatwa Ruling," BBC News, 3 January 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/ 1099421.stm.

[92]"Bangladesh Cracks Down on Islamists," BBC News, 5 February 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/ 1154375.stm.

[93]"Six die in violence on Bangladesh Fatwa issue," *Dawn*, 7 February 2001, http://www.dawn.com/2001/02/07/top16. htm.