



The Pre- and Post - 1/11 Circumstances in Bangladesh: Some Thoughts

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After the overthrow of the H.M. Ershad regime and the subsequent return of BNP to power in 1991, the nation expected that the newly elected democratic government would usher a new era of reconstructing and nurturing democratic institutions--suitable for the practice and promotion of parliamentary democracy in the country. People also hoped that the government would accomplish comprehensive political and social reforms throughout the nation, and establish good governance, rule of law, transparency, and accountability in all spheres of public life. Unfortunately, nothing of that sort happened. Rather institutions were polluted with partisan appointments; crime, extortion, and corruption were committed with the patronage of the government. This continued with a moderate speed and intensity during the entire tenure of

Khaleda Zia's first government between 1991 and 1996. Here an important point needs to be underlined, that rampant corruption, for the first time in Bangladesh, got institutionalized in the corrupt hands of H.M. Ershad during his nine year rule preceding 1991. Khaleda Zia did not even try to reverse the Ershad legacy. She continued the same process and added another vice i.e. partisanship in making appointments to all state institutions.

People got disenchanted, replaced Khaleda Zia with Sheikh Hasina in 1996 general election with a hope of some better future. Sorry to say, Hasina could not deliver what she promised. She only accelerated the pace of corruption, partisanship, extortion, etc. all over Bangladesh. Again people became very frustrated. They have had tried both the major political parties with no positive outcomes. The leadership of the two major political parties i.e. BNP and Awami League began to think, that people do not have any option but themselves. Thus, no matter what they do, BNP and Awami League would come to power in turn. In reality it did happen. In the general election of 2001, Khaleda Zia came to power again with the support of Jamaat winning a two-third majority in the parliament. That made herself, her son, and above all her political henchmen corrupt, dishonest, and arrogant. They reminded the people of Bangladesh and proved to them that "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." During the whole term, the BNP-Jamaat coalition government did every thing possible to put their own people in all major state institutions such as, president, the Supreme Court, election commission,

anti corruption commission, public service commission, and civil bureaucracy. With the tacit support of all these partisan institutions, BNP and its leadership started looting public property, amassing wealth at home and abroad in an historically unprecedented rate. Toward the end of their tenure, they began to realize that they had done too much and that they were losing ground fast. People were uniting against them, all of their partners quit them except Jamaat. Jamaat stayed with BNP, NOT because it liked BNP but because it did not have any other option. Had Awami League given Jamaat a green light, Jamaat would seriously consider abandoning BNP and joining Awami League alliance. BNP-Jamaat coalition also realized that due to the killings of Ahsan Ullah Master and SAMS Kibria, Grenade attack on Hasina's meeting, and above all, the JMB bombings in 63 districts in a single day, they will not be spared this time if Awami League and the left alliance come to power in 2007 election. They also came to know that it would be extremely difficult for them to protect and enjoy the looted public properties and to save themselves from facing criminal prosecutions. That made them desperate NOT to lose the general election of 2007.

On the other hand Awami League-led the left coalition rightfully understood that BNP-Jamaat had established almost absolute control over the critical state institutions and civil bureaucracy in such a way, that if they return to power again in 2007, the existence of Awami League and left politics in Bangladesh will be at stake. Thus they became desperate too to come to power by any

means. Accordingly, they went all the way to make so-called great coalition with Ershad and militant so-called Islamic groups to guarantee victory before committing to take part in the election. Their demand for a free and fair election was only a part of their grand strategy to win the election, nothing else. Their objective was to go to power and do more extensively what their predecessors did. At least, this was the overwhelming perception of the people about them.

While these two coalitions became desperate and senseless in greed of power, the people of the country being caught in the middle became very frustrated and nervous. They were helplessly awaiting some divine intervention to get rid of these two oppressive and unscrupulous groups of leaderships. Allah was kind enough to the people of Bangladesh. The timely and bold intervention of the patriotic armed forces of the country saved Bangladesh from a catastrophe. In the short term, it averted a near civil war situation. In the long term, a great window of opportunity has opened for Bangladesh to reconstitute and reform all state institutions, get rid of corrupt political leadership, and reestablish the rule of law in the country once and for all.

Here, one point needs to be emphasized that, had the two coalitions become flexible and reached a negotiated settlement to participate in the election, the nation would have remained shackled within the old vicious circle of corruption, partisanship, mutual hatred, revenge, and massive looting of public properties for years to come.

As a nation, Allah has given Bangladesh an opportunity and now people should make full use of this opportunity. No matter how long it takes, the present regime should complete all the reform processes, reconstitute all state institutions, reestablish good governance, rule of law, and make sure that the political process never gets derailed any time in the future. Once this mission is complete, the people of Bangladesh want both local and national election immediately, not a day earlier not a day later.

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(BAN Annual Picnic 2007)

My Noble Parents

Tasneem Zeenat Ahmed (Shipu)

My parents are Dr. and Mrs. ATM Mohyuddin. Abboo came to the US in 1974 and Ammoo and the rest of us joined him in 1975. Abboo is a Physician and Ammoo has a Master's degree in Bengali. They are the most decent individuals who have influence the lives of all of us. We always knew how wonderful they were when we were children, but as we became adults, we are in awe of their grandeur as human beings. They have experienced life with all its intricacies with dignity and patience. During this fascinating journey they have shown us how to tackle the ropes of life and never let go of it. AlHamdulillah! I would like to share a slice of life experience of my parents with our esteem community members.

Abboo and Ammoo lived in Quetta Pakistan since their marriage in 1956. Abboo practiced in Civil Hospital as a Pathologist and Ammoo stayed home to take care of us. Life was wonderful there. They put us in the best private schools to instill in us the value of a good solid education. Abboo would always drive us to and from school, even though many public transportation were available. He would leave from work to bring us home, and then return back to work. Abboo and Ammoo were very careful about our religious education. They hired the best Maulvi Sahib to teach us the Quran after school. We learned to pray salat early and we were already praying and fasting long before our peers joined us.