CHAPTER FOUR

THE NATURE OF THE POST-1975 BANGLADESH POLITY

Independent Bangladesh adopted the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy and the armed forces were kept under civilian control. In the immediate post-independence era, the political elites occupied a more influential position vis-à-vis the civil-military bureaucracy. The Awami League leadership tried to ensure civilian supremacy so that the military could not seize power as in Pakistan.

In January 1975, Sheikh Mujib gave up the façade of parliamentary democracy and enforced a presidential form of government. Subsequently in June, he resorted to the device of a one-party system and totalitarian control of government. The civilian rule, however, abruptly ended on August 15, 1975, with the assassination of Sheikh Mujib and toppling of his government in a military coup masterminded by a group of junior army officers.

The Mushtaque Regime

Khondaker Mushtaque Ahmed, the Foreign Trade Minister in the Mujib Cabinet, was sworn in as President. Immediately after the takeover, the new president told the nation that he assumed presidency "in greater interest of the country and in view of historic necessities". He also announced that he had formed a cabinet consisting of 10 ministers and 6 ministers of state. The composition of the new government was not altogether different from the Mujib government. No military officers were included in the Mushtaque Cabinet. Almost all the former ministers switched their allegiance to the new government.

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1 In a radio broadcast he stated that the armed forces had "come forward courageously like a real hero". He denounced the "corruption, nepotism and deception" of the former regime, and said that "the industry of the country, especially the jute industry, was on the brink of disaster". See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, October 13-19, 1975, p. 27381.

2 Ibid.
The Mushtaque government introduced several measures reversing or modifying Mujib's policies. The government imposed martial law and suspended the 1972 Constitution. By a proclamation issued on August 20, President Mushtaque Ahmed assumed the power to issue martial law regulations, which might not be called in question by any court. On August 23, special and summary martial law courts were established. Many of Mujib's political associates were arrested under the martial law regulations on charges of corruption, nepotism and abuse of power. Besides, some pro-Mujib civil servants and other prominent personalities were also arrested. The Mushtaque faction of the Awami League which came to power wanted to purge its rivals from the party and at the same time rally the support of other parties opposed to Mujib's one-party system, behind the regime. A number of politicians who had been imprisoned by the Mujib regime, were released.

The new government repealed a part of the constitution, which was related to the formation and functioning of the single party - BAKSAL. Mushtaque, however, did not restore the multi-party system. Instead, he prohibited the formation of political parties, promulgating the Political Parties (Prohibition) Ordinance, 1975, on August 30, 1975.

The government scrapped the scheme of 61 districts and district governors which had been put in place during the BAKSAL period to replace the then 19 districts administered by Deputy Commissioners. The government also annulled the Presidential Order No.9, which had permitted Mujib to dismiss any civil servant without giving any reason.

The four fundamental principles of the state, i.e. socialism, secularism, nationalism and democracy, were retained. The new regime, however, attempted to bring about a basic change in only one facet of Mujib's ideology. Instead of a continued

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4 On October 3, 1975, President Mushtaque announced that the government had decided on the immediate and unconditional release of about 1000 prisoners detained purely on political grounds. Ibid.
emphasis on secularism, a more demonstrative emphasis was put on Islam. The regime also announced that the country's foreign policy would remain unchanged. But, it was pointed out that the government would strive to establish relations with "those countries which have not yet been our friends."

On September 26, 1975, Mushtaque Ahmed promulgated an Indemnity Ordinance which exonerated the killers of Sheikh Mujib from legal proceedings and punishment for replacing a civilian government by means of violence.

The Mushtaque regime undertook all these steps to redress the grievances of certain groups in the society who were known for their predilections towards the pre-liberation status quo. The new regime exploited the unfavourable political and economic situations that developed during the last days of the Mujib regime.

The August coup brought about far-reaching consequences in Bangladesh. It adversely affected the discipline and cohesiveness of the Bangladesh armed forces and seriously disturbed the delicate balance of power in the state. There was a civilian cabinet for the sake of appearances. A handful of junior army officers who orchestrated the coup were trying to direct the major government policies.

The chain of command under a unified command structure was shattered by the August coup and the lines of communications among the different units of the armed forces was seriously affected. The senior officers were highly resentful of the coup leaders who wanted to continue to be kingmakers behind the scene. On November 3, 1975, several senior officers led by Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf staged a bloodless coup. The Mujib killers were forced to leave the country. On November 6, Mushtaque resigned and handed over the charge of presidency to A.S.M. Sayem, the Chief Justice of Bangladesh Supreme Court.

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5 For instance, the slogan of Joy Bangla (glory of Bengal) was replaced by Bangladesh Zindabad (Long Live Bangladesh).
6 See n.1
7 The text of Indemnity Ordinance is given in Appendix B, pp. 240-41.
Zia's Rise to Power

Khaled's coup was an abortive one and his government was overthrown in a Sepoy Mutiny on November 7. Major General Ziaur Rahman, who was temporarily deposed by Khaled, was reinstalled as the Chief of the Bangladesh Army. In a broadcast, Zia announced that he had to "take over for the time being at the request of the people, Army, Navy, Air Force, Bangladesh Rifles, Police, Ansar and others".\(^9\)

Justice Sayem, considered a 'non-political and non-partisan person', was allowed to continue in the office of the presidency by the leaders of the mutiny. Martial law was declared all over the country. President Sayem became the Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) with Major General Zia, Air Vice Marshal M.G.Tawab and Commodore M.H.Khan as his deputies.

President Sayem gradually elaborated the scheme of 4 Zonal Martial Law Administrators (ZMLAs). The Martial Law Administration was further reorganised. In February 1976, the country was divided into 8 martial law zones, each under the control of an army or navy officer as ZMLAs. The number of zones later increased to 11 in August 1976.\(^10\)

President Sayem also appointed a 7-member Advisory Council consisting of 3 Deputy Martial Law Administrators (DCMLAs) and 4 civilians. The advisers were given the status of ministers and President distributed portfolios among them.\(^11\) Although Sayem was the head of both state and government, Zia became the de facto leader of this military regime. Very soon, the figurehead President was forced to step down. By a proclamation issued on November 29, 1976, President Sayem transferred the office CMLA, which he held since November 1975 to Zia. On April 21, 1977, Sayem resigned

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\(^9\) The Bangladesh Observer, November 8, 1975.
\(^11\) The members of the Advisory Council were as follows: Major General Zia, Air Vice Marshal Tawab, Commodore Khan, Abul Fazal, Kazi Anwarul Huq. Dr. Mohammad Abdul Rashid and Dr. Mirza Nurul Huda. See Keessing's Contemporary Archives, January 16, p. 27522.
the presidency, ostensibly on health grounds and Zia assumed the presidency with full control. He concentrated all authority in himself. He was now the President, CMLA, Chief of Army Staff, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and holder of defence, home and several other cabinet portfolios.

Revival of the Civil-Military Bureaucratic Complex under the Zia Regime

Zia soon undertook the task of restructuring the civilian administration. The bureaucrats who were kept out of the decision making process during the Awami League rule because of their dubious role in the Liberation War, were reinstated while some pro-Mujib officers were either dismissed or demoted. For example, Shafiul Azam, former Chief Secretary of East Pakistan, who was dismissed by Mujib, was recalled to assume the position of Cabinet Secretary under Zia. The other high ranking civil servants reinstated by Zia included Kazi Jalaluddin Ahmed and Tobarak Hussain. Jalaluddin Ahmed, a former member of the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) who was dropped from the rolls by Mujib, served various ministries at the secretariat level under Zia. Tobarak Hussain, a career diplomat, was detained in Pakistan in 1971. Hussain was dismissed from the foreign service when he returned to Bangladesh during the Mujib period, but Zia appointed him Foreign Secretary. On the other hand, A.T.M. Syed Hussain, Mujib's kin and Additional Secretary of the Establishment Division, was removed from office.

The civil-military elite was given the responsibility for the formulation and implementation of development strategy and policies and all the key policy making institutions were dominated by them. In the national state apparatus, the main structures

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12 Justice Sayem later claimed that he was committed to hold general elections on February 28, 1977 to elect a new government which he had promised earlier. But Zia and his military colleagues were determined to postpone the elections indefinitely. According to Sayem, he was virtually forced to relinquish the office of President. For further details see his memoir, *At Bangabhaban: Last Phase* (Dhaka: Hakkani Publishers, 1988).

of decision making were the office of the President and his secretariat. All the subordinate structures of the state were brought under the direct control of the President.

Initially at the core of the new governmental system was a 10-member Council of Advisers. It consisted of 3 service chiefs - Major General Zia, Rear Admiral M.H.Khan and Air Vice Marshal A.G. Mahmud, and 7 civilians who were mostly bureaucrats and technocrats. The civilian members of the council were Prof. Syed Ali Ahsan, Dr. Muzaffar Ahmed, Jamaluddin Ahmed, Ashfaque Hussain Khan, Shamsul Huda Choudhury, Abdul Momen Khan and Shafiul Azam. Zia reshuffled the Council of advisers after the October 2, 1977 abortive coup. The number of advisers were raised to 24, of whom 10 were from the CSP, 3 military officers and rest technocrats. In the overall power structure, the positions of the President, the CMLA, DCMLAs and the advisers to the President were crucial and 80% of them were occupied by the bureaucratic elite. According to a noted political scientist, the council was full of 'non-political' bureaucrats and technocrats who served in the regimes of Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan during the Pakistani colonial rule and who knew the art of running a civil-military bureaucratic regime.

Zia also attempted to strengthen the position of civil bureaucrats at the regional and local level. Former members of the CSP were put in charge of 12 out of 19 districts. In all 4 divisions, Zia appointed ex-CSP officers as Divisional Commissioners.

Moreover, bureaucrats controlled the main policy-making and policy-implementing institutions such as the National Economic Council and the Planning

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15 Air Vice Marshal Tawab was forced to resign on April 30, 1976 for his alleged involvement in the Bogra Mutiny. Air Vice Marshal M.K. Bashar succeeded him as Chief of Staff on May 1. But he was killed in an air crash on September 1. Air Commodore A.G. Mahmud was appointed new Chief of Air Staff on September 5. He was later promoted to the rank of Air Vice Marshal and appointed DCMLA. See n. 10, p. 27989.
19 See Islam, n. 13, p.560
Commission. In 1975, there were 38 public corporations which were also headed by the bureaucratic elites. This was a marked departure from the policies pursued by the Mujib regime, when a majority of the key policy-making positions within administration and state-run corporations were dominated by the political elites.

Along with the civil servants, the military personnel too, wielded enormous power after 1975. The process of militarisation of the administration in Bangladesh was initiated by Zia. During his period, 8 military officers held posts in the Secretariat. Furthermore, 14 of 20 Superintendent of Police, 10 of the 20 heads of the top public corporations were retired military officers.

Following Zia's coming to power, military's higher echelons began to participate actively in the national decision making process. As Chief of Staff and CMLA, Zia used to meet regularly the general officers commanding (GOC) the 5 infantry divisions. In their dual capacity as ZMLAs and GOCs, these generals discussed issues relating to both military and civilian affairs. These 'formation commanders' conferences' provided a forum for senior officers to air their views, and possibly make an influential input into the national decision making mechanism.

After the 1975 political changeover, the civil-military bureaucracy occupied preeminent positions in all basic structures of authority. The civil-military bureaucratic complex -- the old power bastion, was revived under the military regime of Zia. Thus the basic tenets of Pakistani state revisited Bangladesh and drastically altered the nature of the state the Awami League regime tried to erect in the post-independence period.

Some observers of the political development in Bangladesh have compared Zia's regime with that of Suharto's Indonesia where military officers - both serving and retired, both serving and retired,

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were in charge of vital bureaucratic and economic positions in an ostensibly non military regime\(^{23}\). Zia also considered adopting certain clauses of the Turkish Constitution in which the army's role in times of political crisis is clearly defined. In fact, Zia reportedly sent representatives to Turkey and Indonesia to study whether either of their systems could be transplanted to Bangladesh. He was of the opinion that the democratic forms of government that exist in the industrially advanced nations were unsuitable for an agrarian and impoverished society like Bangladesh\(^{24}\).

**The New Political Order**

During the initial phase of his rule, Zia governed as a military man through a rigorous Martial Law Administration. He curtailed certain fundamental rights. Open political activities were banned and the press was silenced or controlled. No criticism of the Martial Law Administration was allowed. A regulation issued on January 8, 1976 made it an offence, punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment, to criticise in any way the imposition, operation or continuance of martial law, to spread reports calculated to cause fear or alarm or to publish or distribute any document containing prejudicial matter\(^{25}\).

Zia introduced several other repressive measures to eliminate opposition to his regime. A martial law regulation promulgated on November 10, 1976, made waging war against Bangladesh or insurrection punishable by death, transportation for life or 14 years' rigorous imprisonment. The same penalties would apply to abetting, conspiring to overawe the government by force, or illegally entering Bangladesh for such a purpose\(^{26}\).

The government also adopted strict measures to maintain law and order and curb various other illegal activities. The police, Bangladesh Rifles and *Ansars* were ordered to take stern action for the seizure of unauthorised arms and checking anti-social and

\(^{23}\) See Franda, n.21; and Kukreja, n.17


\(^{25}\) See n.10

criminal activities. Severe penalties were laid down on January 20, 1976, for the smuggling of goods or currency out of or into the country. The Bangladesh Rifles had been directed to intensify the anti-smuggling drive in the border areas and stop illegal movements along the border. The village defence parties were asked to cooperate with the government machinery in identifying subversive elements in their localities.

The above mentioned measures were primarily directed against some Awami League activists who wanted to salvage Mujibism. The most prominent among them was Kader Siddiqui - a valiant freedom fighter and a staunch Mujibite. He unsuccessfelly tried to dislodge the Zia regime in the early months of 1976.

Zia not only restructured the administrative system but also tried to reorganise the political order. The rules of the game were completely changed. Zia used to say, "I will make politics difficult for the politicians". He postponed the general elections slated for February 1977. The official reasons cited for the postponement were - "gradual deterioration of general law and order situation, unabated pressure on the border, subversive activities of some misguided youth under the influence of anti-national and foreign elements". Zia followed the carrot and stick policy. He undertook a systematic purge of the two major opposition parties - the Awami League and the Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), while the pro-Islamic, pro-Chinese and pro-West political forces were coopted to strengthen his power base.

Despite its anti-Awami League rhetoric, the Zia regime retained certain draconian measures such as Special Powers Act, 1974, and Emergency Power Act, 1975, which were introduced during the Mujib period. Under the Special Powers Act, the police could arrest and detain any person for a period of 3 months without giving any reason.

27 See P.B. Sinha's, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh*, Occasional Paper No.1, (New Delhi: The Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, 1979), pp.55-56; and n.10
28 Kader Siddiqui launched a guerrilla movement in Bangladesh's north-eastern parts, particularly in Mymensingh district. For details see n.10; and Sinha, n.27 pp.38 and 52.
30 See Sinha, n.27, p.52.
Moreover, the Act empowered the government to impose a ban on political parties if their activities were considered ‘prejudicial to national interests’. The Emergency Power Act provided for suspension of fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution and curtailment of the powers of the judiciary. Like his predecessor – Sheikh Mujib, Zia frequently resorted to these coercive measures to maintain his power.

Zia also imposed several new restrictions on the political parties. The Political Parties Regulation issued on July 28, 1976, laid down that before commencing its activities a party must submit its constitution, manifesto and programme and a list of affiliated or associated organizations to the government for approval. No party might propagate opinions prejudicial to the country’s independence, sovereignty, integrity or security, accept foreign aid, carry out underground activities or form any armed organization, under penalty of dissolution and confiscation of funds. No party might criticise another party or any candidate in its election propaganda. It was apparent that this provision was designed to protect the Islamic parties which had collaborated with the Pakistan Army in 1971. Another government order issued on August 28, forbade parties to base their policies on a personality cult or to refer to the work of an individual, dead or living, with the aim of gaining political advantage. Political analysts suggested that this order was intended to prevent the formation of parties claiming to be the political heirs of Sheikh Mujib. Even the mention of Mujib’s name was disallowed in political gatherings. The Awami League was permitted to resume its activities only after it dropped from its constitution, the word ‘Bangabandhu’ (Friend of Bengal) – the name given to Sheikh Mujib for his contribution to the cause of Bengali nationhood.

Zia was ruthless against the two uncompromising political opponents of his regime – the Awami League and the JSD. Several leaders and workers of both these parties were arrested, imprisoned, tortured and executed. To purge the country of staunch

31 The text of Political Parties Regulation, 1976 is given in Appendix C, pp. 242-47.
32 See n.10
33 Abu Sayeed, General Ziar Rajatto (Dhaka: Jgyankosh Prakashani, 1994), pp.36-41.
pro-Mujib elements, official circulars were issued down to the village level asking for the whereabouts of prominent Awami League leaders. According to one source, about 62,000 Awami League activists were arrested during 1975-76. Some of the frontline Awami League leaders were arrested, including Begum Sajeda Choudhury, Abdul Malek Ukil, Abdul Momen Talukdar, Rafiquddin Bhuiyan, Salaluddin Yusuf and Mozaffar Hossain Paltu. Furthermore, many pro-Mujib intellectuals and eminent persons were harassed and persecuted on various pretexts. The Awami League accused the martial law regime of unleashing a reign of terror in the country.

The Zia regime also cracked down on the members of the JSD and its armed wing – Biplobi Gono Bahini. On November 24, 1975, several JSD leaders were arrested on the charge of subversive and anti-state activities. They included Major (retd.) M.A. Jalil, A.S.M. Abdur Rab – President and General Secretary of the JSD respectively, and two other prominent leaders – Lt. Colonel (retd.) Abu Taher and Shahjahan Siraj. The anti-JSD campaign continued. Thousands of men, suspected of belonging to the JSD, were arrested in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country.

On June 21, 1976, the detained JSD leaders were put on secret trial before a special martial law tribunal in Dhaka’s Central Jail on charges of “attempting to overthrow the government and subvert the armed forces”. The tribunal, in its judgement pronounced on July 17, convicted 17 accused. Taher was sentenced to death, and Jalil and Taher’s brother Abu Yusuf Khan were sentenced to transportation for life. Abdur Rab, Prof. Anwar Hossain, Hasanul Huq Inu, Serajul Alam Khan, and several others were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment ranging between 10 years and 1 year.

Following the October 2, 1977, abortive coup, the JSD along with the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the Democratic League of the deposed President Mushtaque Ahmed were dissolved. The government accused the three parties of

34 Ibid p.34
35 See n.26
36 See Sinha, n.27, p.49
37 Ibid, p.50
“terrorism, foreign infiltration and conspiracy”. Moni Singh and Mohammad Farhad, President and General Secretary respectively of the CPB, and Shah Moazzam Hossain, a leading member of the Democratic League, were arrested. It was announced on October 15 that the President had amended the Political Parties Regulation of 1976 to provide for the dissolution of any party engaged in activities prejudicial to the independence, sovereignty, integrity or security of Bangladesh, and that the 3 parties had been dissolved under this provision. 38.

Constitutional Changes

Zia brought about some significant constitutional changes on April 23, 1977 by promulgating Proclamations (Amendment) Order No. 1, 1977. The 1972 Constitution was amended basically to cajole the conservative sections of the society, the armed forces, the Islamic countries and the international aid agencies and the donor countries. Zia inserted the Quranic phrase “Bismillah-ur-Rahman-ur-Rahim” (In the name of Allah, the Beneficient, the Merciful) at the beginning of the Preamble to the Constitution and replaced secularism with “absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah” as one of the four principles of the state. The Islamisation of the constitution was designed to exploit the religious sentiments of the country’s overwhelmingly Muslim population. The proclamation also stressed the solidarity of Bangladesh with the Muslim countries. A new clause was added which stipulated that the state would endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relationship between Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity 39.

The Preamble to the Constitution underwent another change. The words, “a historic war for national independence” was substituted for “a historic struggle for national liberation” in the first paragraph of the Preamble 40. This was done primarily to

38 See n.16
40 See Kamal n.39
emphasise the role of the military in the liberation struggle. The armed forces personnel complained that they were not given due recognition by the Mujib regime in spite of their active participation in the Liberation War.

The regime also changed the nationality from ‘Bengali’ to ‘Bangladeshi’. It was an attempt to differentiate the people of Bangladesh from the Bengalees of West Bengal, in neighbouring India, and to highlight the Islamic heritage of the country. The rightists and the reactionary forces readily welcomed this change.

Another basic principle of the state policy – ‘socialism’, was redefined as “economic and social justice” and the pledge to establish “a socialist economic system” was deleted altogether to satisfy the rightists. The proclamation also stated that compensation would be paid for all nationalised or requisitioned property\(^{41}\). By effecting these changes, the Zia regime tried to win back the confidence of the domestic business community, the international donor agencies and the multinational corporations. The previous regime alienated these dominant economic forces by pursuing an extensive nationalisation programme and frequently resorting to socialist rhetoric.

**Rehabilitation of the Anti-Liberation Forces**

In its bid to broaden its support base, the Zia regime began to appease various pro-Islamic and pro-Chinese political parties such as Jamaat-i-Islami, Nizami Islami, Muslim League, National Awami Party or NAP (Bhasani), United People’s Party (UPP) and Samajbadi Dal, which had opposed Bangladesh’s independence from Pakistan in 1971. The government lifted ban on 45 daily and weekly newspapers in 1976. The beneficiary of this order were the newspapers of the rightist and ultra-leftist leanings, banned previously by the Awami League regime\(^{42}\).

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\(^{41}\) See M.Nurul Amin and M. Rafiqul Islam’s, "Twenty Years of Bangladesh Politics: An Overview", *Regional Studies*, vol.X, no.2, Spring 1992, p.114; and *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, n.39

\(^{42}\) See Sinha, n.27, p.51
To obtain the support of the rightists, the regime discontinued trials against the collaborators of 1971. By an ordinance issued on December 31, 1975, the 1972 Collaborators Act was repealed. It was reported that the government, by August 1977, released over 8,100 undertrial prisoners and 4,111 political detenus who might have been thought not to be dangerous to the new regime.

The pro-Islamic political parties had been banned by the Mujib regime from participating in the country's political affairs. Some of their leaders such as Prof. Golam Azam, Abbas Ali Khan, Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami, Mohammad Kamaruzzaman, Abdul Alim, Maulana Delwar Hossain Syeedi, Maulana Abdul Mannan and many others were widely condemned for their anti-people role in the Liberation War. They formed a number of para-militias like Razakars, Al-Badrs and Al-Shams in cooperation with the Pakistan Army. The principal aim behind the formation of these forces was to provide battlefield support to the Pakistan Army, gather intelligence about local resistance groups and identify and eliminate nationalist elements. Besides, they also committed several heinous crimes against the innocent and unarmed civilians. It was estimated that about 3 million people died in their campaign of genocide.

The Zia regime took several steps to rehabilitate these anti-liberation forces in the polity. By a Presidential Proclamation of May 3, 1976, Zia removed the constitutionally imposed ban on the collaborators. The Article 38 of the Constitution which restricted individuals from forming or belonging to any religious organisations and societies with political aims and purpose, was dropped. Under the Political Parties Regulation of 1976, 22 political parties were allowed to resume their activities. Among them, 6 were religion-based parties. The Mujib regime had initiated trials against the war criminals and many of them including Prof. Golam Azam were deprived of their citizenship.

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43 Ibid.
44 For details see Report on the Findings of the People's Inquiry on the Activities of the War Criminals and the Collaborators (Dhaka: National Coordinating Committee for the Realisation of Bangladesh Liberation War Ideals and Trials of Bangladesh War Criminals of 1971, 1994).
46 See Sayeed, n.33, p.141.
Although the professor was not given back his citizenship but the Zia regime allowed him to return to the country in 1978\(^{47}\). The rightists and the reactionary forces, now rehabilitated and rewarded became Zia's civilian support base.

**Restoration of Private Sector Development**

The Zia regime tried to win over the business community by rejecting Awami League's socialism, reducing the number of public sector enterprises, and expanding opportunities for private sector growth and development. To encourage investment in the private sector, a new investment policy was announced on December 7, 1975. The policy raised the investment ceiling from TK 30 million to TK 100 million. It also expanded the list of industries open to the private sector and reduced the sphere of public sector activity. The government also relaxed restrictions on foreign investment by raising ceiling on foreign equity participation in selected areas.

The Zia regime undertook a number of measures for the promotion of the private sector. The regime set up various development financing institutions such as *Bangladesh Shilpa Bank* and *Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha*, and instructed them to assist the private entrepreneurs. To mobilise savings and channel them into industrial investment, the Dhaka Stock Exchange, closed during the Mujib period, was reactivated in July 1976. The Investment Corporation of Bangladesh was established to provide institutional support to the stock market. Moreover, the regime decided to return a number of industrial units, including textile and jute mills to their former owners. A compensation plan was also drawn up for the benefit of the shareholders of private firms which had been earlier nationalised without compensation.\(^{48}\) Thus the business elite was coopted by Zia's denationalisation measures and liberal investment policies.

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Zia’s Search for Legitimacy: Holding of Local Councils Elections

Since November 7, 1975, Zia had been ruling over Bangladesh with the help of Martial law Regulations and bureaucrats and the advice of some political leaders having no grass-root support. He was under considerable pressure from the domestic political forces as well as the international community to democratize his regime. Zia, however, decided to move cautiously towards democratization. He concentrated his efforts on revamping the local councils before holding elections at the national level.

The government issued a New Local Government Ordinance in 1976, retaining the Union Parishad with some modifications in its composition and function. The Union Parishad was to consist of 12 members including two women and a chairman. The government could exercise supervision and control over the Parishad to ensure that its activities conformed to the objectives stated in the Ordinance. It also provided the sub-divisional officer (SDO) with the authority to direct, suspend, or otherwise control Union Parishad. Such provisions were aimed at consolidating the position of Zia at the local level.

Elections to the 4,335 Union Parishads were held in January 1977. It was a ‘partyless’ election but the political affiliations of the candidates were known to the electorate. A study indicated that about 47% of the elected members of the Parishads had “at least some form of association with the Awami League”, and 23% of “the elected village leaders claimed to be supporters of the Muslim League and other right-wing parties”.

Elections in 78 municipal councils were also held in August-September, 1977. A total of 421 candidates for chairmanship and 3339 candidates for the post of commissioners were contesting 78 and 867 positions respectively. Although the candidates for municipal council chairmanship did not stand under party symbols, 27 of

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51 Ibid. p.128
those elected were reported to be Awami League members and 24 Muslim League members, the remainder being members of 6 other parties and independents.\(^{52}\)

The Awami League's success in these elections demonstrated its organisational strength at the grass-roots level. In Bangladesh, the Awami League was the only party which had an extensive organisational network. However, the most significant aspect of the election was the resurgence of those rightist elements who were identified as supporters of the Muslim League and Ayub Khan's 'Basic Democracies' in the 1960s. These political forces were allowed to participate in the election for the first time after independence. The rehabilitation of the anti-liberation forces was designed to counter the growing influence of the Awami League in the local councils.

**The 19-Point Programme**

The Zia regime also tried to garner the support of the rural population by addressing their needs. On April 30, 1977, Zia introduced a 19-point programme which included, among others, the following objectives: to make Bangladesh a self-reliant nation; to ensure people's participation at all levels of the administration and in developmental activities; to strengthen the economy by according top priority to agriculture; to make the country self-sufficient in food; to rid the country of illiteracy; to check the population growth; to decentralise the administration; and to establish a social order based on justice and free from corruption.\(^{53}\)

Zia pumped resources to the local bodies and the elected leaders were called upon to implement his 19-Point Programme. The government launched a massive programme to train the newly elected members and chairmen in the management of local administration. Attempts were made to bring the local leaders closer to the government through seminars and conferences and several members of the local councils were sent abroad as part of their training.\(^{54}\) Thus the local councillors were won over to the regime.

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\(^{52}\) See n.16

\(^{53}\) For details see Appendix D, p. 248.

\(^{54}\) See Rashiduzzaman, n.51, p.128.
The 1977 Referendum

After consolidating his base of support at the local level, Zia in his quest for legitimacy, wanted to secure a vote of confidence through referendum. On May 30, 1977, a national referendum was held on the question: "Do you have confidence in President Major General Ziaur Rahman and the policies and programmes enunciated by him?". The voters were asked to say either 'yes' or 'no'. The government claimed that the voter turnout was 85% and that 98.89% voted 'yes'. The opposition parties, however, questioned the validity of such a high percentage of votes cast. Foreign observers also suggested that the number of voters and the percentage of votes had been exaggerated by the government officials.55

The referendum was organised after Zia’s assumption of presidency and he made full use of the government machinery. The factors which contributed to Zia’s resounding victory were: participation of the bureaucracies in mobilising public support; unqualified support of a majority of the newly elected Union Parishad leaders; active help from the moderate and right-wing forces; influence of the government controlled media; and absence of any other candidate.56

Civilisation of Military Rule

On the political front, Zia was successful in coopting some sections of the political elites into his system. But as a military leader, he faced numerous abortive coups and soldiers’ uprisings and was unable to discipline the various factional groups despite severe reprisals. He, therefore, decided to reduce his dependence on the factionalised military. Zia hastened the process of civilisation particularly after the October 2, 1977 abortive coup which almost shook his regime. During this period, the Zia regime tried to

55 See Mahfuzul H. Choudhury, Muhammad A. Hakim and Habib Zafarullah’s, “Politics and Government: The Search for Legitimacy”, in Zafarullah, n.50, p.29; and Keesing’s Contemporary Archives n.39
56 See Rashiduzzaman, n. 51, p. 126-127.
stabilise itself and establish close relationship with other dominant socio-economic groups such as civil bureaucracy, political parties, business groups and intelligentsia.

The regime allowed some relaxation in the rigours of martial law. In November 1977, the Martial Law (25th Amendment) Regulations was promulgated which liberalised the procedure of review of cases tried under martial law. The martial law zones and sub-zones and the offices of the DCMLAs were abolished. Zia also inducted more civilians into his Council of Advisers.

Launching of JAGODAL

To obtain support at the national level, a new party called *Jatiyotabadi Ganotantrik Dal* (JAGODAL) was formed by Justice Abdus Sattar, then Vice President, on February 23, 1978, with President Zia’s blessings. Zia abstained from taking JAGODAL's membership, but most of the members of his Council of Advisers joined it. The party soon became the spokesman of the regime and flourished under official patronage. JAGODAL, however, failed to recruit frontline political figures and its members were either second ranking leaders or politicians with little credibility.

Jatiyotabadi Front

Realising the inherent weakness of the JAGODAL, Zia mobilised a new broad-based anti-Awami League coalition composed of pro-Islamic and pro-Chinese political forces. The Awami League had already been discredited for its authoritarianism and economic mismanagement during the Mujib era and Zia took full advantage of the prevailing anti-Awami League environment in the country. He formed an alliance with

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57 See Sinha, n.27, p.54
some political parties named the Jatiyotabadi Front (JF). The JF consisted of JAGODAL, NAP (Bhasani), UPP, Muslim League, Bangladesh Labour Party and Scheduled Caste Federation. He became the chairman of the JF.\textsuperscript{59}

The 1978 Presidential Election

Zia sought to enhance his legitimacy. On April 21, 1978, the government announced that a presidential election would be held on June 3. New rules and regulations were laid down for the election and restrictions on political activities were withdrawn on May 1. He also amended the Army Act on April 28 to legitimise his presidential candidature. According to the Bangladesh Army regulations, an active army officer or Chief of Staff cannot indulge in politics, capture power, proclaim martial law and accept a political party's chairmanship\textsuperscript{60}.

The most notable aspect of this election was that a president was to be directly elected by the people for the first time in Bangladesh. The JF nominated Zia as its presidential candidate. The main issues raised by the JF during the election campaign were Zia's 19-Point Programme, his achievements in office and the amendment of the constitution providing for a presidential model under the multi-party system. The opposition parties such as Awami League, NAP (Muzaffar), Jatiyo Janata Party, Krishak Sramik Party, Bangladesh Jatiyo League joined together in a common platform called Ganotantrik Oikkyo Jote and supported General (retd.) M.A.G.Osmani, the Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Liberation Forces in 1971, against Zia\textsuperscript{61}.

Zia won the election by a large margin. He received 76.63% of the more than 53% voter turnout. Osmani, on the other hand, secured only 21.70% of the votes cast. But, there were allegations by opposition parties of widespread rigging in the election.


\textsuperscript{60} Hasanuzzaman, Search for a New Dimension: Politico-Constitutional and Military Tangle in Bangladesh (Dhaka: Pallab Publishers, 1992), pp. 21-22.

\textsuperscript{61} See Hossain, n.59.
As the virtual military dictator, Zia was in an advantageous position to manipulate the electoral process. The opposition parties complained that only one month was allowed for campaigning. According to Osmani, the election was "grossly unfree and unfair".

Nevertheless, Zia was able to acquire a formal legitimacy for his regime after the 1978 presidential election. The Council of Advisers was replaced by a new cabinet which contained 28 representatives of the parties who had supported him in the election. Among them, 19 were from JAGODAL, 3 from NAP (Bhasani), 2 each from Muslim League and UPP, and 1 from the Scheduled Caste Federation.

**Formation of BNP**

Zia attempted to build a civilian support base by forming his own political party. The JF which supported him in the presidential election was a political platform of diverse elements organised hurriedly. He was not comfortable with it because of internal cleavages and felt the need for a more broad-based political organisation. He soon dissolved the JF and floated a new political party called Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on September 1, 1978. The JAGODAL, NAP (Bhasani), Muslim League (Shah Aziz) and UPP joined the BNP. Zia became its founder chairman.

The political leaders of different ideological backgrounds ranging from radical socialism to Islamic fundamentalism joined the BNP. For instance, the party included: Mashiur Rahman and Kazi Zafar Ahmed - both with leftist orientations; Obaidur Rahman - a liberal democrat; and Shah Azizur Rahman - an alleged collaborator of the Pakistan Army in 1971. Moreover, some Awami League leaders such as Mohammad Ullah, Nurul Islam and Sujat Ali joined the BNP.

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63 See Rizvi, n.58, p.231.

64 See Choudhury, Hakim and Zafarullah, n.55, p.28.

65 Ibid, pp. 28-29
Zia's new party also tried to recruit the support of urban professional groups, civil-military bureaucracy and the rising businessmen. The BNP's Central Executive Committee was dominated by the moneyed sections of the middle classes. Businessmen constituted the largest group with 33.5% of the committee's membership, followed by professionals with 31.2%; bureaucrats had only 6.5% \(^{66}\). The occupational background of some of the prominent BNP leaders were as follows: Moudud Ahmed, a barrister; Saifur Rahman, a chartered accountant; Badrudozza Choudhury, a physician; Jamaluddin Ahmed and L.K. Siddiqui, both businessmen; A. Momen Talukdar, a retired civil servant. In addition, a few former army officers enrolled themselves in the BNP. They included Major General Majedul Huq, Major General Nurul Islam Sishu, Colonel Oli Ahmed, Lt. Colonel A.S.M. Mustafizur Rahman, Lt. Colonel Akbar Hossain and Nurul Huq. \(^{67}\)

Zia intended to build a mass political party through which he could propagate his ideology and programme to the nation. He once said, "Our party's structure is so organised as to involve the various cross-sections of the society. We have given all of them a platform in our party and through the party platform we want to mobilise and organise them" \(^{68}\).

The BNP stood for a presidential form of government. The party manifesto outlined 17 goals and objectives, including establishment of "people's democracy", "greater concentration on the private sector", "production-oriented politics", "multiple political parties", and "Bangladeshi nationalism" \(^{69}\).

However, it should be noted that the BNP was basically a government-sponsored party. It was designed to civilianise the military regime of Zia. The party was imposed from above and had no real grass-roots base. Besides, the BNP was also not a homogenous political organisation. Some political forces and dominant socio-economic

\(^{66}\) See Islam, n.13, p.564.

\(^{67}\) See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, August 10, 1979; p.29770; Choudhury, Hakim and Zafarullah, n.55, p.28; and Baxter and Rahman, n.13, p.47.

\(^{68}\) Far Eastern Economic Review, October 12, 1979, p.30.

\(^{69}\) See Islam, n.13, pp.563-64.
groups who otherwise belonged to dissimilar and mutually antagonistic ideological persuasions, united under a common platform with the sole objective of sharing and holding positions of power in government. Rounaq Jahan has remarked that a government party like the BNP "generally attracts members who are not at all concerned about the party ideology or programmes, rather they are there simply to share government patronage and power... The strength of such parties lies in their access to state machinery and not in people's support".\(^{70}\)

The BNP also lacked internal democracy. Most of the members of the party's two policy-making and policy-implementing bodies -- the Central Executive Committee and the Standing Committee, were nominated by Zia. The party functionaries at the district and local levels were chosen by these committees. Zia used to run the party affairs in a dictatorial manner. The BNP was, in fact, a one man party'.

**The 1979 Parliamentary Elections**

Encouraged by his success in the presidential election and the formation of a political party, Zia continued his civilianisation process. In November 1978, he announced that a parliamentary election would be held on February 18, 1979. Prior to the elections, the government introduced several measures which included suspension of martial law provisions pertaining to political activities, liberal policy on the release of political prisoners and restoration of certain fundamental rights. Zia also promised to withdraw martial law after the elections and make the new parliament sovereign. The civilian political forces demanded the withdrawal of martial law before elections and threatened to boycott the polls under the military rule. However, they were finally persuaded to participate in the parliamentary elections.\(^{71}\)

A total of 2,125 candidates, including 416 independents, contested for the 300 seats of the *Jatiyo Sangsad*, the nation's parliament. About 31 political parties, many

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\(^{70}\) See Jahan, n.18, pp.219-20.

\(^{71}\) See Choudhury, Hakim and Zafarullah, n. 55, p. 31; and Sinha n. 27, p. 56.
without having any considerable following at the grass-roots level, participated in the elections. The BNP fielded the maximum number of candidates, closely followed by the Awami League (Malek Ukil). Two parties - the Democratic League of Mushtaque Ahmed and the Jatiyo Janata Party of Osmani did not join the election. According to one source, nearly 250 candidates nominated by the BNP belonged to the anti-liberation forces. Among them, at least 84 were noted Razakars.

During the election campaign, the BNP focussed on Zia's reform programmes; the presidential system with a sovereign parliament and the concept of 'Bangladeshi nationalism'. The Awami League, on the other hand, called for the restoration of parliamentary democracy and the implementation of the social, economic and administrative changes envisaged by the 'second revolution'.

The BNP won a two-thirds majority in the parliament with 207 seats. The Awami League (Malek Ukil) emerged as the second largest party with 40 seats. The Muslim League secured only 20 seats.

The 1979 parliamentary elections, however, did not evoke much enthusiasm among the common people. Only 50% of the voters turned out - the lowest turn out in any election held since 1970 but of this, 44% went to the BNP and 25% to the Awami League.

Nevertheless, the holding of parliamentary elections helped Zia to complete his civilianisation process. Following the election, he resigned as Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh Army but remained as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces in his

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73 Cited in Sayeed, n.33, p.87.
74 On June 25, 1975, Sheikh Mujib brought about a series of far reaching changes in the country’s socio-economic and politico-administrative structures though the Fourth Constitutional Amendment. The Awami League regime termed the constitutional changes as 'second revolution' aimed to bring about “the economic freedom of the masses in an exploitation free society and to establish socialism and democracy of the exploited”. For details see Moudud Ahmed’s, *Bangladesh : Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1983), pp. 24-44; and Choudhury, Hakim and Zafarullah, n. 55, p. 33.
75 See *Keesing’s Contemporary Archives*, no. 67, p.29769.
76 See Rizvi, n.58, p.232; and Zaman, n.58, p.110
capacity as President. He lifted martial law on April 6, 1979, and a 42-member new Cabinet was formed on April 15. Shah Azizur Rahman was appointed Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{77}

**Authoritarian Structure of the Zia Regime**

Although Zia claimed that the new parliament would be a sovereign body, in practice, it was subordinate and subservient to the President who was a military ruler in civilian garb. The parliament's existence, under Zia, depended totally on the pleasure of the President. It could be summoned, prorogued and dissolved by the president according to his wishes.

After the presidential election, Zia decreed a fifth amendment to the constitution in December 1978, providing the basis for a new authoritarian political system in which the President had enough power to handle the affairs of the state, bypassing the parliament. The amendment empowered the President to (i) appoint a Prime Minister from the parliament who would hold office at the pleasure of the President; (ii) appoint one-fifth of the members of the Council of Ministers from among the people who did not need to be members of the parliament; (iii) withhold assent from any bill passed by the parliament which could be overridden only in a national referendum; and (iv) enter into any treaty with other country in the 'national interest' without even informing the parliament.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, it can be said that Zia made use of the parliament to realise his own ends.

The parliament constituted after the February 18, 1979 general election passed the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, ratifying and confirming all Proclamation Orders, Martial Law Regulations, Martial Law Orders and all other orders issued between August 15, 1975 and the withdrawal of martial law on April 6, 1979 and making the same immune from judicial review.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{77} See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, no. 67, p.29769-70.
\textsuperscript{79} See Mohammad A. Hakim and Ahmed Shafiqul Huque's, "Constitutional Amendments in Bangladesh", Regional Studies, vol.XII no.3, Summer 19943, pp. 81-82; and Kamal n. 39, p.59
The amendment retained some authoritarian measures which were introduced during the martial law period. Zia, for example, incorporated the Indemnity Ordinance into the constitution through the Fifth Constitution Amendment Act. He justified the amendment by saying "During the martial law period, we had to take certain measures which had to have the support of the martial law regulations. It is always done all over the world when martial law makes way for a civilian government, to give validity to those measures these are legalised by passing them into law democratically in the parliament. The fifth amendment has been discussed in the parliament and passed by the parliament. So this is legal." 80

However, it needs to be mentioned that the changes embodied in the fifth amendment were made arbitrarily by a single person, and they were subsequently ratified by an 'impotent' parliament. Some political analysts have argued that this act "initiated a trend of assuming power through unconstitutional means and amending the constitution through order." 81

During the Zia period, the power of the judiciary was severely curtailed. The civil courts had no real power to enforce fundamental rights. Since the country was under martial law from 1975 to 1979, martial law courts continued to exercise enormous judicial powers. The appointment of the Chief Justice and other judges was made an exclusive prerogative of the President. He also had the power to dismiss a judge with the help of a newly created body called Supreme Judicial Council. It consisted of the Chief Justice of Bangladesh Supreme Court and next two senior judges. Its functions included: prescribing a code of conduct to be observed by the judges, and enquiring into the capacity or conduct of a judge. 82

All these provisions were contrary to the democratic principle of the separation of the judiciary from the executive and had adversely affected the independence of the judiciary.

80 See n. 68
81 See Hakim and Huque, n.79, p.82
82 See Choudhury, n.24, pp.166-69.
Rural Institution-Building During the Zia Period

After consolidating his position in the national state apparatus, Zia concentrated his efforts on building a rural power base. Zia was quite aware of the fact that in order to sustain himself in power, he needed a strong support base at the grass-roots level. He tried to restructure the rural society in Bangladesh through the creation of a number of new village-level institutions. The Zia regime introduced 3 important institutions:

(i) **Swanirvar Gram Sarkar** (Self-Sufficient Village Government)

(ii) **Gram Pratirakkhi Bahini** (Village Defence Force)

(iii) **Jubo Complex** (Youth Complex)

**The Swanirvar Gram Sarkar**

In 1976, Zia announced the formation of **Gram Parishad**, which was later renamed **Swanirvar Gram Sarkar** in 1980. A **Gram Sarkar** consisted of a **Gram Pradhan** (Chairman) and 11 members representing various sections of the rural population, who were chosen through a consensus among all adult residents of the village present at a **Gram Sabha** (Village Assembly) called by the **Thana Circle Officer** (a bureaucrat)\(^{83}\). Like Ayub Khan's 'Basic Democracies', **Gram Sarkars** were designed to mobilise support for the regime and also give the rural people a sense of participation. However, they were more of the creation of the bureaucracy than the results of genuine political participation. In the selection process of many villages, the local member of parliament of the ruling BNP and district officers played a vital role in nominating candidates.

The main functions of the **Gram Sarkar** were: to take care of village problems; to promote family planning; to double food production; and to initiate local developmental projects\(^{84}\). By the end of 1980, village governments had been established in approximately two-thirds of Bangladesh's estimated 91,000 villages\(^{85}\).

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\(^{83}\) See Islam, n. 13, p.566.

\(^{84}\) See Zaman, n.61, p.113.

\(^{85}\) See Franda, n.21, p.358.
**Gram Sarkars** were meant to encourage developmental activities at the grass-roots and decentralise administration to the lowest level. The government, however, did not have enough confidence in the **Gram Sarkars** to allow them adequate autonomy which was necessary to perform satisfactorily. It exercised strict control over the **Gram Sarkar** to ensure that its activities conformed to the rules. The financial sources of Gram Sarkar were: (a) contributions from individuals, **Gram Samabay Samiti** (Village Cooperative Societies) or any institution or local authority; (b) any other income from any legitimate source.86 But the **Gram Sarkars** failed to mobilise local resources and had to depend on the government for fund. On the whole, they could contribute little to the process of development and improvement of the living conditions in the rural areas.

The Zia regime attempted to build a rural power base without disturbing the existing power structure. A report on the leadership pattern of **Gram Sarkar** in 6 villages revealed that this rural institution was controlled and managed by a handful of persons belonging to the relatively affluent households in the villages.87

**The Village Defence Force**

The Village Defence Force (VDF), officially a voluntary and non-partisan semi-police force, was organised directly by the Home Ministry in each village with about 150 people manned by almost all BNP supporters. The primary activities of the VDF included: (i) maintaining law and order in the village; (ii) supervising adult education and family planning programmes; and (iii) raising volunteers for various developmental activities.88

The VDF members were given training in village defence techniques and developmental strategies, with particular emphasis on government programmes. It was assumed that a strong village force could play a key role in defence against external aggression. By August 1979, about 60,294 VDFs had been formed throughout the

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86 See Huque, n.49, pp. 118-23.
87 See Zaman, n.58, p.113.
88 Franda, n.21, pp 358-59; and Zaman, n. 58, p. 113.
country consisting of approximately 904,410 members. The VDFs were, in fact, modelled after the 'Peace Committees' organised by the Pakistan Army during the Liberation War. The creation of VDFs was aimed at strengthening the BNP in the countryside.

The Jubo Complex

The Jubo Complex scheme was launched to involve thousands of unemployed youths in the nation-building activities under the guidance of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. It was entrusted with the task of combating corruption, black marketing and nepotism, collecting tolls and taxes and settling local disputes. However, this organisation was criticised by the opposition parties as a source of corruption. According to them, the local BNP workers used the complexes for personal aggrandisement.

Rural Development Programmes

One of the striking features of the Zia regime was the mobilisation of the rural masses to participate in self-help development projects. The regime initiated some programmes such as canal digging, building embankments and constructing or repairing roads to build the infrastructure in the rural areas. In order to mobilise the rural people, Zia took extensive tours of the rural areas and joined thousands of villagers in canal digging schemes. This was dubbed by the government as the first phase of 'peaceful revolution'.

The government formally launched the canal digging programme with much fanfare on December 1, 1979. It aimed at irrigating 550,000 acres of land which could

90 See Islam, n.13, p.567.
91 See *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, May 28, 1982, p.31502; Sayeed, n.33, pp.152-53; and Hossain, n.89, pp.139-40.
produce 350,000 tons of additional food grains. The Zia regime pledged to make Bangladesh a self-reliant nation. The most publicised of such projects was the Ulashi-Jadunathpur Project which was organised and executed under the direct supervision of the local bureaucracy. The District bureaucracy mobilised the rural masses through the leadership of local *Union Parishads*.

**Zia's Governing Style**

The strategies adopted by the Zia regime in Bangladesh in order to perpetuate its rule were more or less similar to those adopted by the military rulers in Afro-Asian and Latin American states. Zia tried to consolidate his political base by breaking the opposition parties into different factions and offering their leaders key positions in his government. As Rounaq Jahan has observed, "Zia's strategy was two-fold: to split the faction prone political parties into various groups and to pick up the support of some of the break away factions".

Following the divide and rule policy, he secretly assured some JSD leaders of economic and political opportunities if they remained quiet. A group of JSD workers under the leadership of M.A. Awal responded positively to Zia's offer, and the result was a split in the JSD and the emergence of a new party, *Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal*. Similarly, many Awami League leaders including Abdul Malek Ukil were imprisoned, while some others were inducted into the BNP. The Awami League broke into three factions under Ukil, Mizannur Rahman Choudhury and M.R. Siddiqui. The Ukil faction split further to form two groups: one led by Abdur Razzak, and the other by Tofael Ahmed. Thus, the opposition parties were rendered ineffective and they failed to launch an unified movement against the Zia regime.

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93 See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, n.92.
94 See Zaman, n.58, p. 111.
95 See Jahan, n. 18, p.218.
96 See Kukreja, n.17, p.160; and Islam n.13, pp. 568-69.
Role of the Intelligence Organisations

During the Zia period, the intelligence agencies such as the Defence Forces Intelligence (DFI) and the National Security Intelligence (NSI) played key roles in the negotiations for coopting leaders of opposition parties. Two trusted officers - Air Vice Marshall K.M.A. Islam and A.B.S. Safdar were appointed directors general of DFI and NSI respectively. Both had long training and experience in the Pakistan Intelligence Services. The tasks of the DFI and the NSI ranged from the recruitment of political allies to the surveillance of opponents of the regime. According to a former Bangladesh Army personnel, "Both organisations, with their covert capabilities and financial freedom, were used for setting up new political organisations, hitting the opposition, forging surreptitious alliances, undermining opposition unity, buying support and buying off opponents, as well as for maintaining dossiers on potential trouble makers".

Ideological Mobilisation

In his bid to garner the support of the country's predominantly Muslim population, Zia undertook several populist measures. He established a Ministry of Religion, made religious studies compulsory in all schools, introduced modern education into the madrassas and maintained good relations with the Arab countries.

Zia advocated a linguistic-territorial-Islamic nationalism, which he called Bangladesh nationalism, in place of the linguistic-territorial-secular nationalism, the Bengali nationalism propounded by Mujib. He also tried to manipulate the nationalist sentiments of the people by raising the bogey of 'Indian hegemony'. His regime perceived India as a major threat to Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty. The regime initiated the process of rewriting the history of country's freedom movement. Zia and his...
people were the heroes and the role of India and its armed forces was simply erased from official records.

The Awami League blamed the Zia regime for distorting the history of the liberation movement. The party also criticised the regime when it renamed "Independence Day" - March 26, 1971 - "National Day". The new Bangladesh history did not recognise Mujib's pioneering role in the liberation struggle and a massive propaganda campaign was launched to tarnish his image. Sheikh Mujib's official titles - Bangabandhu and Father of the Nation were annulled. A retired army officer has commented: "A portion of our history - the independence war, is missing. In every country, there is a continuity of history. Even in Indonesia, Sukarno's personal image has been tarnished, but they did not disown the period he ruled. His role in the liberation of Indonesia has been recognised. But here, it is totally obliterated from the history of the country".

Corruption Under Zia

Although Zia personally was not accused of misappropriation of public funds, he did play a major role in "institutionalising political corruption through doling out favours and even direct bribes to buy supporters and to mute critics." It can be seen that, in a way Zia patronised corruption both inside as well as outside the government, so that its beneficiaries would rely more on him and therefore susceptible to manipulation.

It was reported that the BNP ministers made huge fortunes in deals from export of manpower to Gulf countries and various other sources. The Zia regime was blamed for organised corruption and theft of public wealth, particularly bank money. The regime sanctioned loans to private individuals for building industries. However, on most occasions, the bank money was spent for unproductive ventures and never repaid. According to one report, the total debt stood at TK 4000 crores. Besides, the regime also

101 Personal interview with Brigadier (retd.) M.A. Hafiz on April 18, 1995
103 See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, n. 91.
sold about 322 abandoned industries to the BNP supporters at nominal price\textsuperscript{104}.

Bangladesh witnessed a phenomenal growth in corruption during the Zia period. An army officer has described the \textit{modus operandi} of corruption in the following words:

"... a stage came when no door would open without pre-arrangement of a cut, no file would move without bribery, no payment would be made without earlier transfer of manila envelopes"\textsuperscript{105}.

\textbf{The Fall of the Zia Regime}

Despite the so-called 'civilianisation' and 'democratisation' of the Zia regime, in essence, it was characterised by a total concentration of authoritarian power in the executive. A Bangladeshi political analyst observes, "Zia presided over a personalist bureaucratic regime that was highly centralised in structure and strictly regimented in relationships. He ruled with almost unlimited powers and was overbearing in some of his actions"\textsuperscript{106}.

Zia's regime was composed of three different types of political forces: (i) his loyalists within the civil-military bureaucracy; (ii) the pro-Islamic forces and (iii) some pro-Chinese Communist parties. He tried to satisfy all these groups by distributing state's largesse and they in return offered much needed support to his regime. Zia intended to build a power base independent of the armed forces. In the last two years of his rule, he began to distance himself from the armed forces and made concerted efforts to become a civilian leader. This, however, antagonised the highly politicised Bangladesh Army which was not prepared to accept a subordinate position vis-a-vis the political elites in the national decision making process.

The Zia era was one of the most turbulent phase in the country's political history. During 1975-81, army's various factional groups made repeated attempts to capture state

\textsuperscript{104} See Sayed n. 33, p. 220.
\textsuperscript{106} See Habib Zafarullah's, "The Legacy of Zia", in Zafarullah, n. 49, p.178
power. Zia ruthlessly suppressed the dissidents within the army. In the process of consolidating his power, he executed hundreds of military personnel for their alleged involvement in the abortive coups. Despite all his attempts, he could not restore discipline in the army. Zia was killed in an abortive coup on May 30, 1981, believed to be engineered by some disgruntled army officers under the leadership of the Chittagong garrison commander, Major General M.A. Manzoor. Zia's assassination brought an abrupt end to his rule and Bangladesh entered a new phase of instability.