CHAPTER IX

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS

When power changed hands in Pakistan and Martial Law was reimposed, the situation in East Pakistan, according to some observers, had reached a critical stage. As Rehman Sobhan describes it:

With fundamental issues still unresolved the movement [Anti-Ayub] continued to bring to the surface grievances of a much wider segment of society than the middle class elements demanding parliamentary democracy and autonomy. With the administration virtually immobilized, workers began to take direct action to obtain from their employers a share of the high profits they had accumulated in the Ayub years. The fact that the bigger entrepreneurs in the East wing were West Pakistanis made it all the more difficult for them to resist by invoking protection from local political parties. Even more significantly the traditionally dormant village poor of East Pakistan had towards the end begun to be drawn into the movement. Their frustrations were the end-product of two decades of declining real income at a time when the rich farmer and the Basic Democrat, in particular, had prospered. In the absence of a traditional feudal class which had kept the peasants of West Pakistan in subjugation, the B.D.s and other Government beneficiaries were easy targets for the aroused villagers. East Pakistan's struggle had thus not only realized autonomy but with clear political direction may even have precipitated a social revolution. 1

The "struggle", however, did not lead to a "social revolution" because the objective conditions were not ripe for a "revolution". East Pakistani society at that time lacked a sharply defined class conflict. As Anisur Rahman pointed out:

As part of greater Bengal, East Pakistan already has a long tradition of progressive social thinking. Feudalism has gone from its socio-economic structure, banished by the series of progressive land reforms brought about before and after partition. And due to its slow industrial growth since independence, and its economic stagnation generally, capitalism has been unable to take firm root. The concentration of political and material privilege on which capitalism thrives has not taken place to any significant extent in a province deprived of as a society by development policies geared predominantly to the interests of the oligarchy of West Pakistan... As a result East Pakistan does not have any real upper class, but only a proletariat and a middle class, and mostly lower middle at that. The absence of any pull from a significant upper class, and a sense of shared deprivation of privileges, have resulted in a preservation of emotional and cultural bonds between the middle class and the proletariat to the extent that the former still seeks its roots in the heavily impoverished peasantry. It could not in any case have hoped to attain the sort of privileged life which would have had the effect of alienating it. 2

Class antagonism in East Pakistan was, therefore, blunted. This, when added to a vacuum in revolutionary leadership, rendered the revolutionary potentialities almost

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insignificant. The AL with its widespread organisational network and close linkages with the youth through the students was capable of activising the people. But it was not interested in change through "social revolution". Sheikh Mujib had made it clear that the first and foremost aim of the AL was to achieve autonomy for East Pakistan through constitutional means and that other changes would follow neither precede nor accompany it. He also made it clear that the second set of changes would be introduced gradually and compatibly.

In fact, ideologically, the AL leadership had never subscribed to the doctrine of social change through violent class struggle. Even as a strategy, at that stage, adoption of such a policy would have minimised its leading position. The AL policy was to sustain and widen the popular support it had already received, and to secure considerable electoral support when the occasion arose. The AL, always upholding the principles of liberal democracy could regain the status of a national party only by becoming the first elected majority party of Pakistan and, therefore, its need for an impressive victory in any future elections was more necessary than anything else.

Besides the party's self-interest, the other consideration was that any violent movement might invite such
Repressive measures as to crush all opposition and thus put a seal on the future of the question of autonomy or even mere democratisation of the system. As a result of these constraints the Awami League relied more on holding of and participation in the elections than on initiating a revolution.

On assuming power Yahya Khan, while announcing dissolution of legislatures, abrogation of the 1962 Constitution and imposition of Martial Law with immediate effect had also promised a general election on the basis of adult franchise and transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people.\(^3\) A little later, however, he said that he would hold power only until the politicians reached a consensus as to the future constitutional and political framework of Pakistan.\(^4\) The intention of the regime was quite clear. The past political history of Pakistan, the nature of the popular agitation of 1968-69 and the happenings at the Round Table Conference clearly indicated that the built-in heterogeneity of Pakistani society was so pervading that consensus would always be wanting. In fact, all the major issues that had baffled Pakistanis at the creation of Pakistan still existed. The role of Islam and the nature of the federal polity still remained undecided.

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3 See the text in *Dawn* (Karachi), 27 March 1969.
4 See ibid., 11 April 1969.
The fundamental nature of the polity still remained unclear. Neither Ayub Khan, when he stepped down, nor Yahya Khan, when he assumed power, could be unaware of this total confusion.

Therefore, by putting consensus as the precondition for a change in the power-structure President Yahya Khan only exposed the fact that there had been no change in the ethos of the ruling coterie, that they intended continuation of the prevailing pattern only with some cosmetic changes. They had, however, realised that at least formally the legitimising agent had to be changed, and unless popular representatives were made the formal legitimising agents the regime would lose whatever support base it had at the moment. But a substantial change would also endanger the perpetuation of the existing structure. So Yahya Khan tried to formalise a system where popular representatives would be the symbol of the regime’s legitimacy but would gradually lose their own credibility owing to infighting. The very absence of political consensus at the national level would keep the politicians busy in squabblings and thus strengthen the bureaucratic-military entente. In fact, Yahya Khan on behalf of the ruling coterie was trying to take advantage of (or exploit) an inherent weakness of Pakistani politics. In the absence of a truly national party the working of the party system at the national level would always create a crisis inviting bureaucratic and military
interference. Anyway, President Yahya Khan in his radio broadcast to the nation on 28 July 1969 reiterated his promise to hold general elections.5 But again on 29 September 1969 at a Press Conference in Dacca he indicated that he had his "own ideas" about the future constitution which would be made known at the right time.6 This must have been an ominous reminder to many of President Yahya's predecessor Ayub Khan's submission that the 1962 constitution "represents my political philosophy".

It was quite clear that during the anti-Government movement of 1968-69 the old-guard politicians of West Pakistan had agitated only for wider participation and not for any fundamental restructuring of the balance of power held by the Army, the bureaucracy, big landlords and big business. West Pakistani politicians represented in the Democratic Action Committee (DAC) had expressed satisfaction at Ayub Khan's departure. The subsequent cooling down of political tempers in West Pakistan had assured the ruling coterie that the mere formality of popular participation in the decision-making process through a general election would pacify these conservative political elements of West Pakistan. The more disgruntled elements like Wali Khan or G.M. Sayed could be neutralised by scrapping the One Unit.

5 Ibid., 29 July 1969.
6 Ittefaq (Dacca), 30 September 1969.
The new social forces in West Pakistan, however, had found expression through the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of Z.A. Bhutto. The regime tended to grossly underrate the following that Bhutto and the PPP had built for themselves in Punjab and Sind. This underestimation, in fact, persisted until the election of December 1970. The PPP did not participate either in the DAC or the RNC and thus demonstrated its anti-establishment stance. This, however, did not completely rule out the possibility of an understanding in changed circumstances between Bhutto and a renewed bureaucratic-military ruling clique under Yahya Khan. Presuming convergence of interest between the army establishment and Bhutto, the ruling junta seem to have deliberately overlooked the emergence of PPP under the leadership of Bhutto. Also, the emergence of PPP with a progressive posture and a strong-Centre bias under a West Pakistani leadership provided an inbuilt insurance against chances of the reorganised APAL spreading its influence in the Wing. Had Bhutto and PPP not emerged as forcefully as they did, the APAL might have developed some bases in West Pakistan particularly if other autonomists like Syed in Sind and NAP(U) in Frontier had joined its fold. In Sind certainly Bhutto's emergence as the spokesman for the Sindhi middle class, students etc. preempted attempts by the AL.  

7 It also completely neutralised movements like the Jiye-Sind of Syed which had also been dealt a blow by the scrapping of the One Unit.
with the emergence of Bhutto and PPP, therefore, even the feeble prospects of the emergence of a national party were stalled. In the process Pakistan as a society lost another opportunity to benefit from the process of integrative institutionalisation.

East Pakistan had demanded a complete change in power relations. But since it was expressed through the autonomy demand it could always be crushed in the name of preservation of the integrity of Pakistan and by fostering the available conservative elements who were interested more in the form rather than the contents of democracy and who would be satisfied with the mere revival of the 1956 constitution which did not envisage such extensive regional autonomy as the Awami League was demanding.

The AL stand had been made clear at the RTC. An earlier statement of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to a foreign correspondent saying, "I want a settlement once and for all...if the other leaders agree, well and good. If they don't, my people will achieve it," also indicated that the AL demand represented the popular will and that Sheikh Mujib was only articulating a reality that would be the ultimate deciding factor for the future of Pakistan. The future of the AL in the politics of the country, particularly in the East Wing, also depended on its response to this reality. And in its characteristic democratic-liberal style

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the AL continued to stress the need for an early direct elections as the beginning of the ultimate fulfilment of popular demands. Under the Martial Law Regulations of Yahya Khan, all open political activities were banned. But discussions, speculations and preparations continued.

While most of the political parties in EP were busy in discussions and speculations the EPAL concentrated on preparation for the elections. In this connection Sheikh Mujib, accompanied by other leaders, toured the districts of East Pakistan and addressed party workers at district and subdivisional levels. (Public meetings were still banned according to Martial Law Regulations) The central theme of these speeches was: the party was committed to the fulfilment of its demands contained in the Six-Point Programme and that holding of elections on the basis of universal adult franchise, and a National Assembly with representation on the basis of population to formulate a constitution incorporating full regional autonomy were the most immediate preliminary necessities. It was also made clear that revival of either the 1956 or the 1962 constitution, as demanded by some political forces, would not serve this purpose. AL workers were warned to beware of the forces allegedly representing the cause of Islam and in fact exploiting religion to protect certain vested interests in the same way as they did during the language movement of 1952. Warning was also given against the Left-extremists' attempts to
disrupt democratic constitutional movements. Besides these, the need for immediate flood controlling measures and development of cottage industries to ease the employment problem was also stressed. 9

Some efforts to mobilise public opinion in West Pakistan also were made. Before commencing on a tour of East Pakistan Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Karachi and stated that the AL believed in socialism but not in borrowing or importing ideas from abroad. Socialism as perceived by the AL, he confirmed, had to be indigenous, a product of the immediate environment. He stressed that such socialism did not envisage one-party rule or an atheist state. 10 Sheikh Mujib again toured West Pakistan in mid-1970 and reassured West Pakistanis that the AL programme was meant for the betterment of the common man in both wings. 11

It was generally felt later that if Mujib had toured the rest of West Pakistan during his earlier visit and explained the AL standpoint, considerable West Pakistani support could have been ensured. However, as far as the AL

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9 For details of these speeches see Dawn, 31 August, 1, 2, 3, 11, 13, 19, 24 September and 12 and 13 October 1969. See also, Dainik Pakistan, 21-25 August 1969; Ittefaq, 31 August, 1, 3, 11, 15, 23, and 29 September 1969; Azad, 12 September 1969, and Dainik Purbodosh, 2 September 1969.

10 For details of the speech given at Karachi Press Club see Ittefaq, 12 August 1969.

11 See Ittefaq, 29-30 June and 1-7 July 1970.
programme was concerned the main support in West Pakistan
was around its stand on the abolition of the One Unit. The
autonomy part of the programme also had some support in some
pockets. Its somewhat belatedly publicised stand on the
ultimate inevitability of a socialist economy could have also
drawn some attention. But the emergence of the PPP
neutralised AL chances in this regard. Therefore, in view
of the marginal impact in the West, concentration of East
Pakistan, a surer ground, was natural.

Continued ban on public meetings necessitated
intensive work by party workers at different local levels
for propagation of the AL viewpoint. Between August and
October 1969, therefore, Sheikh Mujib continued addressing
workers' meetings where he not only explained the AL
objectives but also provided answers to criticisms levelled
against the AL from various quarters. This was how he sought
to prepare the local units to face such criticisms at local
levels. In his preoccupation with this programme he even
absented himself from the inauguration of the Jatiyo Sramik
League (National Labour League), the labour front of the AL,
on 11 October 1969 in Dacca. However, in his message he
said that for twenty-two years a group of twenty-two families
was controlling eighty per cent of the national wealth on
the plea of national integrity and religion. He called for
a "socialistic economic structure which agrees with our
custom, tradition and willingness" and which would establish
a "new exploitationless society based on nationalist feelings". He demanded that the greater portion of the ownership of mills and factories in the country should be given to the people. In order to overcome the hardship due to draught, flood and excessive rains he suggested:

(1) exemption of rent and other taxes of the cultivators possessing up to twenty-five bighas of land,
(2) distribution of surplus land among the landless cultivators,
(3) control of floods,
(4) introduction of co-operative farming,
(5) establishment of agricultural banks in villages to grant long-term loans, and
(6) fixation of minimum price of jute and nationalisation of the jute industry.  

Thus the AL had begun its election campaign much before the ban on political activities in public was lifted in January 1970 and care was taken to cater to the interests of the largest section of the electorate. This was further evident from certain resolutions adopted by the BPAL WC in November 1969.

After making a general review of the economic situation the BPAL WC urged upon the Government to streamline the rationing system so that villagers and industrial workers

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were benefited, to provide fair price shops all over East Pakistan, to provide doles/jobs to the jobless, to pacify industrial unrest among industrial workers by lifting lock-ups and reinstating retrenched workers, to fix minimum prices favourable to jute and sugarcane growers, to introduce rational minimum wage for all tea-garden workers and count each human head as one unit of worker (replacing the system of counting husband and wife as one unit). The resolutions also included demands for immediate release of all students and workers detained under civil laws and Martial Law Regulations and withdrawal of warrants against students and workers. The meeting also urged the Government to implement the recommendations of the Krug Commission for flood control in EP and finance the projects from outside the Five Year Plan allocations - the way it was done for the Mangla and Tarbela dams and the Indus Basin Project.  

During the time when the AL was indicating specific measures for redressing the material grievances of the people other political forces like the Jamaat-e-Islami or the Pakistan Democratic Party were talking in vague terms of Islam and the integrity of Pakistan being in danger, and demanding restoration of the 1956 Constitution. Maulana Maudoodi, Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami, alleged that the agitation in East Pakistan was being engineered by West Bengal, the

13 For details see Morning News, 17 November 1969.
neighbouring Indian state. Mian Tofail Mohammad, another leading light of the Jamaat, alleged that Sheikh Mujib was a Communist. At a later date, however, the Majlis-e-Shoora of the EP Jamaat through a resolution urged the Government to remove inter-regional disparity through legislative enactments and demanded that "concrete steps in this direction must be visible to the entire nation within a year". In sum total the Jamaat's suggestions were a combination of the Six Points of the AL and the Eight Points of the PDM. The Jamaat-e-Islami wanted allocation of foreign exchange to EP commensurate with the amount earned by it and its proportional contribution towards the Central Government expenditures; modification of fiscal policy to stop flight of capital from EP; participation of both wings in the management of currency, foreign exchange, foreign trade, Central Banking, inter-wing trade and communication; equal inter-wing representation in the Supreme Court and Central Services including the Foreign Service and autonomous bodies; effective equality in "fighting and fire power" of two wings; shifting of Naval Headquarters to EP, establishment of cadet colleges and ordnance factories in EP. The meeting also expressed concern about the Farakka Barrage under construction in the neighbouring Indian state which they believed was a joint conspiratorial move against

14 See Dawn, 1 September 1969.
Pakistan by India, USA, USSR and the World Bank. Abdus Salam Khan, convenor of the East Pakistan PDP, warned that since most of the Six Points of the AL were unacceptable to West Pakistan, any attempt to implement them would lead to armed clashes. He also wanted issues like regional autonomy, breaking-up of One Unit, representation on population basis etc. to be settled before the general elections. Later, however, he tried to appear more rational by suggesting that the autonomy issue could be resolved before election by having the six, eight and eleven points evaluated by a committee of experts. 

PDP, an offshoot of the PDM and DAC adopted its constitution and party manifesto as late as 25 September 1969. Belated counter or competitive campaigning against the AL on these issues was extremely difficult (and futile, as it was proved later). Naturally, ready-made solutions for such intricate problems were being advocated by parties like the PDP or the Jamaat.

The National Progressive League (NPL) convened by Ataur Rahman Khan in July 1969 adopted its party constitution

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15 For details see *Morning News* (Dacca), 28 November 1969.
and manifesto in December 1969. In August 1970 at its first national conference, the Governor, while emphasising the plus points of his party, remarked that the Six Points Programme was no great innovation and that after the abolition of the parity principle it had become absolutely irrelevant because of the prospects of an East Pakistani-dominated national legislature and Central Government. He even doubted whether Sheikh Mujib, once he held a dominant position at the Centre, would continue to plead for a weak Centre.20

It would appear that in his habitual opposition to anything associated with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ataur Rahman Khan had even overlooked bitter experiences of the 1950s when efforts for improving conditions in EP could always be thwarted by certain vested interest groups and that such forces were in fact far more well entrenched now than ever before and that the Six Points sought a constitutional guarantee against recurrence of such developments.

The other political force, the Leftists, were represented by two factions of the NAP. While the AL was widening its base and providing guidelines to its workers for the elections, and the conservative political forces

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were trying to sustain themselves by direct and indirect anti-AL propaganda, Maulana Bhashani was pleading for violent social revolution. In June 1969 he announced that his party was not going to participate in the elections, in October 1969 he suggested that the President should call a Round Table Conference and frame the draft of the future constitution which should be submitted to a popular referendum and the majority opinion be accepted. In December 1969, however, his party was divided on the issue of participation in the forthcoming elections and by the beginning of 1970 although Bhashani himself favoured participation "in order to raise the people's grievances in the Assembly and not to capture power", some of his supporters still opposed participation. As the year advanced he changed his preference from violent social revolution to non-violent Islamic revolution. This also created further rift in his party.

Maulana Bhashani's ambiguity and indecision immensely weakened the radical left forces in East Pakistan. The moderate Left represented by its front party NAP (W), better known in EP as NAP (Kazaffar), which for tactical reasons had supported the AL, continued its efforts for formal entente with it, while continuing with its own programme independently.22

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21 Pakistan Observer (Dacca), 22 June 1969; Ittefaq, 7 October 1969.

22 See Morning News, 7 November 1969 for a report on NAP(H) Demand Week.
The students lay low during the first few months of Yahya Khan's rule but showed their resentment against the proposed education policy of the government in August 1969 when clashes between different groups led to a ban on meetings and processions within educational institutions in Dacca and several student leaders, including Tofail Ahmad (CL), A.J.M. Abdur Rab (CL), Mostafa Jamal Hyder (CU-Menon), Mahbubullah (CU-Menon), Shamsuddoha (CU-Matia) and Ibrahim Khalil (NSF) were accused of violating Martial Law Regulations. They were, however, pardoned by the President during his visit to Dhaka in September 1969. Two students' organizations viz. CL and CU (Matia) continued advocating unity among opposition parties though later CL, following the footsteps of the AL, abandoned such pleadings and concentrated more on fanning out its own organisation in the interior of the province and carried on campaigning for the AL. The CL made it very clear at its Annual Conference in Dacca in March 1970 that unless autonomy on the basis of the Six Points were realised, implementation of other demands of the Eleven Points would be impossible. It was during this conference that Sheikh Mujib asked the people to prepare to become "Ghazis" and not "Shaheeds".

24 Ibid., 22 March 1970.
Hence, as during the autonomy movement in 1966-67, and during the following years, the political forces of East Pakistan continued to work in mainly three different directions. The AL, however, appeared to be the closest to the tangible aspirations of the common man and also to a large chunk of the student community led by the Chhatra League. This was the situation when on 26 November 1969 President Yahya Khan finally announced his outline programme for the transfer of power to the people. He pointed out the absence of consensus among the politicians and repeated his earlier statement that the grievances of East Pakistanis were legitimate, and that the solution lay in the installation of a federal structure where the provinces would have powers, both legislative and financial. He announced the scrapping of the One Unit in West Pakistan and holding of elections on the principle of one-man-one-vote. Regarding the extent of provincial autonomy, however, the President chose to remain vague. The actual task of defining it was left to the future constitution-making body. The guidelines he provided were that autonomy of the federating units should not impair national integrity and solidarity of the country. He said: "People of the two regions of Pakistan should have control over their economic resources and development as long as it does not adversely affect the working of a National Government at the Centre. The President mentioned that since there was no disagreement on constitutional issues like parliamentary
form of government, direct adult franchise, fundamental rights of citizens and their justiceability, independence of Judiciary and the Islamic character of the constitution, these should be considered as settled for the purpose of the constitution to be framed (and hence for the purpose of the elections also). The time-table for the transfer of power was: resumption of political activities on 1 January 1970; preparation of a provisional legal framework for holding elections by 31 March 1970; preparation of electoral rolls by June 1970; holding of National Assembly elections on 5 October 1970; holding of Provincial Assemblies elections thereafter and framing of the constitution within 120 days of the first meeting of the National Assembly. The President called on all to "eschew parochial interests and cast aside personal and local considerations".26

In East Pakistani political circles the Presidential announcement evoked reactions ranging from the critical through lukewarm acknowledgment to warm welcome.

Of all the immediate responses the first elaborate and critical response came from Ataur Rahman Khan, ex-Awami Leaguer and ex Chief Minister of East Pakistan and convenor of the recently constituted National Progressive League. He pointed out that there was "nothing positive about regional autonomy though the demand for it was as forceful as that for the break-up of One Unit". He further said that suggestion

26 See the text in Dawn, 29 November 1969.
for maximum autonomy to the extent it did not impair national integrity and solidarity was vague and undefined since the demand of East Pakistan had been very clear, i.e. a Centre with three subjects only. Ataur Rahman was also reported to have said that the Presidential declaration "offered a controlled assembly while our demand was for a sovereign constitutional assembly".27

The immediate appreciative gesture came from Khwaja Khairuddin, President of the EP branch, the Council Muslim League. He welcomed the "bold and courageous" announcement. A.J.M. Shafiqul Islam, General Secretary of the EPL (Council), went a step ahead and said that the President had "just voiced the sentiments of the people" and that "he has done the best of what he could do".28

Maulana Nuruzzaman, Chairman of the EP branch of PPP "wholeheartedly supported the constitutional formula", rated it as "the only solution".29 It is worthwhile to mention that though Shafiqul Islam and Maulana Nuruzzaman both welcomed the declaration the former thought that the ball was now in the court of the "politicians" while the latter believed it to be in the court of the "people".

Professor Golam Azam, Amir of the EP Jamaat-e-Islami was satisfied that the President had taken decisions

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid. Nuruzzaman later broke away from the PPP and formed the Independent Peoples' Party which was almost still-born.
about certain issues. The unresolved question of the extent of autonomy, he appreciated, was at the moment beyond solution because different political parties were yet to reach accord on it.  It should be noted here that barely two days before the announcement was made the FP JI had clearly delineated the extent of provincial autonomy as perceived by the party leadership and had urged the Government to concretise the steps tangibly within a year.  

Maulana Bhashani’s immediate response revealed his mixed feelings. He was reported (by APP’s special correspondent, who had interviewed him immediately after the announcement) to have welcomed certain measures like abolition of One Unit, while calling some others like the one on autonomy as ambiguous. He was also not sure whether the broadcast had clearly defined representation on the basis of population. In his opinion the Centre-province relationship should have been clarified in the light of the 1940 Lahore Resolution. He also pointed out that the President’s reference to the Islamic character of the constitution required further clarification in view of the fact that there was a “lot of confusion about the nature of Islamic constitution in the country”. From the report it seems that the Maulana, after his last discussions with the President, was under the impression that the latter had agreed to Islamic


31  Referred earlier in this chapter.
Socialism and was hurt that this was not mentioned in the
announcement.

Besides pointing out the shortcomings, Maulana
Bhashani made certain suggestions also. According to him,
"any legal framework for general elections or such other
things" were to be framed at "a convention of representatives
of political parties and intellectuals, labourers and
peasants" and the framework thus evolved "should then be put
to referendum...particularly because neither certain political
leaders alone represented the opinion of the people nor the
discussions which they had with the President had been made
public. Moreover the President also did not talk to the
people publicly".32

Bhashani's basic resentment about the provisional
legal framework that "like the previous two constitutions it
is also imposed on the people"33 was more categorically
expressed by Mohammad Toeha, General Secretary of his party,
when he said: "The Presidential pronouncement of having a
constitution through the proposed National Assembly could not
fulfil the necessity of our time." He was reported to have
said that he -

failed to understand how such a venture on
constitution-making could be workable without

32 For further details see Morning News, 29 November 1969.
33 Ibid.
taking into cognisance the existence of the working class and the peasantry...any effort for having a workable constitution must have the participation of the working class, peasantry, students, political parties, patriotic intelligentsia and patriotic section of the national bourgeoisie...the future constitution of the country must have the character of a people's constitution.

What is interesting to note here is that both Bhaskari and Toaha denied political parties any representative character whatsoever since, in addition to political parties, they wanted representation from all segments of society for the constitution-making. Whom did the political parties — including their own NAP(B) — then represent? If they did not represent any interest, on what basis were they entitled to participate in the constitution-making process? In this instance there seems to have been some lack of clear perception on the part of leaders like Bhaskari and Toaha or they were incapable of communicating their ideas. Either of these is a serious constraint in the way of party-building. And quite possibly, the radical left in East Pakistan suffered immensely from such short-comings of the leadership and contributed towards the retarded growth of the Left.

Khan A. Sabur, senior Vice-President of the Convention ML, appeared quite indecisive. He initially declined

34 Mohammad Toaha's statement, ibid., 1 December 1969.
any comment and was very cautious when he did give his views. He praised the President for proving his good intentions of transferring power peacefully. But he mentioned, "there are, however, some unspoken procedure of voting, distribution of power between the Centre and the provinces, ground rules for election campaign, etc." And "unless all these issues are elucidated more clearly, it is not possible to convey my further reactions to the announcement". Aware of the complications involved in constitution-making in Pakistan he asked: "Is not four months time rather too short a period for drafting and adoption of the whole constitution?" These, however, he said were not his final comments.

Quite unenthusiastic was the reaction of the EPANAP(M). The working Committee of EPANAP(M) "noted that some of the popular demands, for example, date of elections, framing of constitution by elected representatives, dissolution of One Unit, replacement of the undemocratic principle of parity - have been accepted by the President". But it sought certain clarifications: Whether the authentication was a mere formality, on the relationship between the President and the proposed National Assembly. It differed from others in that it did not ask for clarification about the extent of autonomy but reiterated its own stand on it.

36 See statement to AFP, Ibid., 1 December 1969.
namely, that only foreign affairs (political), defence and
currency were to remain with the Centre.37

The Awami League declined any comment immediately.38

After discussions in the party, however, it issued a long
but dispassionate statement making it very clear that
irrespective of the nature of the legal framework imposed
by Yahya Khan, the party would remain unperturbed and follow
its own programme. In sharp contrast with most other reac­
tions, the AL did not seek any further clarification of any
issue from the President though it noted that certain vital
issues were left undecided. The AL took it for granted
that these (and also others for which the President had
given suggestions) would be decided by popular will expressed
through popular mandate in the elections. Nevertheless it
appreciated the Presidential gesture for transferring power
to the people through democratic means, and hoped that the
President would ensure congenial conditions by restraining
the administration from taking "overzealous action" on
"touchy matters" and "controversial issues". Sure of the
AL victory the statement said:

we are confident that the people will give
their verdict in clear terms in favour of
their demand for autonomy on the basis of the
Six-Points' Programme which alone can be the
basis for solidarity and integrity of Pakistan
by removing once for all the chronic mis­
understanding, on account of power imbalance,

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 30 November 1969.
economic disparity, disparity in services
including the defence services between the
Centre and the federating units, particularly
East Bengal. 39

On the whole the AL appeared to be unperturbed. It would be
wrong to assume that the feeling of concern expressed, say
for example, by Ataur Rahman Khan were baseless or that,
contrarily, the AL was blind to the possible implications.
In fact, the AL was more than aware of it. But to express
concern at that stage would have only betrayed weakness on
its part, which would certainly have been bad strategy. So
the AL decided to project a feeling of unconcern about what
the President said as well as about what he ought to have
said but did not say. And this, rather brushing off of the
President as something inconsequential, continued throughout
the election campaign. What strengthened the AL leadership's
nonchalance was a faith that they were moving in the right
direction. This was made clear on various occasions, for
example, at a Chhatra League discussion meeting Sheikh
Jahangir Rahman said that all the demands made by his party
were decided upon after "thorough analysis" and "made with
confidence" and therefore those demands were not negotiable. 40

The student community reacted sharply to the
Presidential broadcast. In a pamphlet signed by Presidents
and Secretaries of MUCU (Matia), AUL and MJU they demanded
certain clarifications, speedy announcement of the proposed structural framework, lifting of Martial Law and release of political prisoners. They wanted that the framework should clearly ensure adoption of the constitution by simple majority votes, President's authentication of the Constitution as a formality, and sovereignty of the national legislature in all decision-making, including provincial autonomy. It is to be noted that the students also did not ask for a Presidential decree on the autonomy issue. They were certain of its impotence, even if there was one. They were rather more concerned about what they described as "conspiracies being hatched by the right reactionaries and left-adventurists for stalling the elections" and therefore alerted the people to shed complacency and be aware of these forces. The students affirmed that freedom as perceived by them could not be realised only by elections and parliamentary democracy. Their fight would continue till imperialism, feudalism and monopoly capital were routed out, till self-rule by all races (in Pakistan), including the Bangalees, was fully established, till all the problems of the common man were solved.

Fundamental rights and individual freedom asserted by elections and parliamentary democracy, according to them, were only a means to the end. Anyway, by accepting parliamentary democracy as the first step towards fundamental

41 See Esaro Dafar Sangram Cholbei - Yahya Khaner Basarona Samparke Shibatra Samajer Abhimat (A Pamphlet in Bengali).
structural changes the signatories openly approved the AL strategy. It should be noted here that PACU (Mono) was not among the signatories which indicated that the students were no longer unanimous in their decision to support the AL strategy.

As time progressed it became abundantly clear that the AL was determined to contest the elections on the basis of its Six-Points Programme without entering into any alliance with other parties, and also without bothering about the LFO. This was the Awami League's first opportunity to secure the people's formal verdict on its programme, and sure of the outcome, it was not prepared to share political glory with any other political group. Sheikh Mujib believed that "No real good to the people can be secured through United Front". He emphasised: "...we do not want unity of parties or leaders - we want unity of people", and added that if members of other parties believed in the ideas of the AL, they should change their "sign boards" and join the AL.

Referring to the politics of the United Front in 1954 he said that he was not willing to go through it again. The comment about the like-minded parties obviously referred to BPIAP(M) because it was BPIAP(M) that was repeatedly urging for a united front for the elections, and it was BPIAP(M)

42 See Mujib's Address to CL meeting. Ittefaq, 5 January 1970.
43 Ibid., 12 January 1970.
44 See Prof. Muzaffar Ahmad address to party workers, Morning News, 14 December 1969.
only that happened to be nearest to the AL regarding solution of most of the basic problems. Evidently BHAP(H) still had not given up the hope of a joint front with the AL for the P-CU(Mutia) was still aligned with the PPCJ. 45

Avani League's disinclination towards any alliance had been a well thought of policy. In the General Secretary's report submitted during the Council session of the EP-LAL in June 1970 he said that in the forthcoming elections the AL would not enter into any electoral alliance with other parties because that would only create confusion. He pointed out: "The people have now got an opportunity to choose clearly their own representatives and party." There could not have been a clearer exposition of the party's determination to go it alone. The Avani League, however, wanted to leave its options open. And so the report continued:

That does not mean that we do not want to maintain any contact with other democratic forces in the country. It has already been stated that if the future course of politics does not proceed along the democratic path and we are forced to organise mass movements and launch a struggle, we shall welcome the co-operation of other democratic parties in the country. 46

This report also reassured other parties that the AL would "seek their co-operation and advice in framing the constitution and establishing democracy in the country". Tajuddin reminded them that "competition in election do not

45 See joint statements of P-CU (Mutia) and PPCJ, ibid., 13 and 28 December 1969.

46 Ittefaq, 5 June 1970.
presuppose non-cooperation in all other matters". 47

The abovementioned report indicated two very important facts. One was that the AL, in spite of the opposing forces, was confident of its predominance in East Pakistan. The second is, it was well aware of its limited bargaining power vis-a-vis the Pakistani ruling coterie, in spite of its predominance in East Pakistan. The first fact was clear even at the nomination stage. 48 The second fact surfaced only after the elections.

The Awami League decided to conduct its election propaganda on the basis of the Six Points Programme alone but maintained its previously held stand about the Eleven Points of the SAC. Syed Nazrul Islam, Vice-President of the EPAL, had once explained that as the elections were to be held in order to frame the future constitution of the country the AL would adhere to the Six Points which in fact formed the core of the Eleven Points also. As for the other provisions in the Eleven Points Programme, since these "were not relevant to the constitution-making task" they could not be incorporated in the programme for election". 49 The "other provisions" of

47 Ibid.

48 In the National Assembly elections EPAL contested all seats while the Convention ML followed with only half of the seats, others trailing much behind. This will be dealt with in details later.

49 Sanchad, 12 January 1970.
the Eleven Points related to nationalisation of banks and insurance, an independent and neutral foreign policy, demands for improvement in the conditions of peasants and workers, and overhauling of the education system to make it more socially relevant. It should be noted here that in his address to AL workers during his tours in 1969 Sheikh Mujib had himself pleaded for urgent solution of the related problems and the EPAL had adopted elaborate resolutions regarding the same in its meeting in November 1969. Besides, in order to make the Constitution an effective instrument for social change the constitution-makers were expected to take into account social needs. Hence Syed Nazrul Islam's explanation was not satisfactory. Was he trying to extend the AL policy of non-alliance a bit too far? His words, however, became irrelevant when these "other provisions" found their way into the Awami League Election Manifesto and the Awami League repeatedly expressed its commitment to the comprehensive programme of the students and lauded the principle underlying it. Kamruzzaman, General Secretary of the All Pakistan Awami League, addressing the Punjab Students' League at Lahore in April 1970, said that every country had its peculiar problems which must be solved in its own way. According to him, the main idea of socialism was a planned economy with a view to secure fair distribution of national wealth. He said that the movement of the AL was a socialist movement in the sense that it was directed
against the prevailing social system of Pakistan which had led to the concentration of national wealth in the hands of a few families. This too simplistic a definition of socialism and undefined commitment of the AL to socialism however, was made a little clearer by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during his 1970 tour of West Pakistan. He mentioned that phased establishment of an exploitation-free society in Pakistan was the ultimate aim of his party. But, he also clarified, in defense, that would not entail importation of ideologies from abroad which by implication meant that AL would not work for the establishment of a classically defined communist society though it would work for an exploitationless society.

The AL continued to give such assurance throughout the campaigning particularly in major campaign speeches obviously to avoid apprehensions aroused in certain sections about a classless or an atheist society, very likely leading to some resentment against the AL and thus create a situation which could be exploited by the anti-AL religious and conservative parties to their advantage.

But this was not the only fear. As has been pointed out earlier, the AL leadership was also apprehensive about the

50 Ibid., 12 April 1970.

51 In the mid-fifties, when both Jubbawardy and the AL was under attack from the IL, he was frequently accused of having a Western-secular outlook and consequently branded incapable of looking after the interests of Pakistan. And that was how the IL could stage a comeback on the East Pakistani political scene. This has already been discussed in a previous chapter.
post-election course of politics in Pakistan. This element of uncertainty was the outcome of the experience of 1958 - when the prospect of a general election was stalled by the imposition of Martial Law; certain utterances of President Yahya Khan, like the one made in September 1969 that he had his own ideas about a constitution and his answers to press-men at Dacca airport in December 1969 when he said that the autonomy issue was not connected with holding of elections and at the same time saying "something will have to be left to be election issue" adding to it, "our people are sensible". His stand on the authentication of the Constitution was also not indicative of an easy legalisation of the constitution for he had said on the same occasion that the President was not a "signing machine" and that as a non-political and non-partisan man, the head of the State was responsible for safeguarding the interests of the people and the nation. Doubts and misgivings aroused by such comments were accentuated by certain provisions of the Legal Framework Order (LFO) of President Yahya Khan made public on 1 April 1970. The LFO empowered the President to nullify any change that the elected representatives of the people might try to introduce in the existing structure. Two clauses of the LFO were particularly criticised by East Pakistani politicians. The first of these, clause 25, specified: "The Constitution Bill, as passed by the National Assembly, shall be presented to the

52 For details see Morning News, 24 December 1969.
President for authentication. The National Assembly shall stand dissolved in the event that authentication is refused."

The second was clause 27 which declared:

(1) Any question or doubt as to the interpretation of any provision of this order shall be resolved by a decision of the President, and such decision shall be final and not liable to be questioned by any Court.

(2) The President and not the Assembly shall have the power to make any amendment in this order. 53

Immediately after the LFO was announced the EPAL WC met for two days and passed a resolution asking for a revision of the LFO in accordance with democratic principles. Publicly also the AL asked for amendment of the LFO to ensure sovereignty of the Assembly. 54 But the Chhatra League was quite vocal in its criticism. What it said amounted to accusing the President of misusing his terms of reference. The CL leaders said that the nation had not asked for a constitutional framework from the President. All that the President was required to do was to provide a framework for the elections. The post-election developments were entirely the business of the popularly elected representatives. By keeping the veto power regarding authentication of the Constitution and also the power to dissolve the National Assembly at his pleasure the President had only revealed his lack of

53 See text of the LFO, Pakistan Observer, 30 March 1970.
54 Ittefaq, 2 April 1970 and Pakistan Observer, 4 April 1970.
confidence in democratic principles and in the people of Pakistan. They declared that Bangalees would not accept a constitution given by an individual. The then PCCCL President Nur-e-Alam Siddiqui forewarned the National Assembly members of the province:

You will have to make all-out efforts to make a constitution based on the Six and the Eleven Points. If you fail in that, we will still honour you. But if anyone of you betray Bangla by compromising the Six and Eleven Points in favour of ministership or permits and help in the making of an undemocratic pocket constitution - you shall not be forgiven.

It was declared that the student and youth of Bangla would accept nothing but autonomy on the basis of the Six and Eleven points. Chhatra League workers were told to reach this message to every household and prepare for a movement. A new slogan, Jago Jago Bangali Jago (wake up Bengalis, wake up) was heard in the PPCL procession on 7 April 1970 in Dacca. The PPCL at that point of time was the strongest student organisation of the province, having 114 out of 124 College Unions under its control. Later, out of 142 elections held in various colleges, universities and Residential Halls the CL won in 132 and thus created a record in the students' bodies elections. It is to be noted that though the PPCL

55 For details see Ittefaq, 8 April 1970.
56 Ittefaq, 9 April and 18 May 1970.
criticized the LFO and its author President Yahya Khan and talked about a movement it did not declare revision of the LFO as a precondition for participation in the elections. Neither did the AL make any such public announcement. Rather, in its Council Meeting in June, while adopting a resolution requesting withdrawal of the clauses 25 and 27 of the LFO it also passed a resolution in favour of participating in the elections. The meeting also reiterated the party objective as constituting a sovereign legislature through direct elections and entrust it with the task of constitution making and thus ensure the realization of the Six Points through democratic struggle. It called on the Government to make up for the deficit in the Third Five Year Plan allocations and also to postpone the revision of the Fourth Five-Year Plan till the elections to entrust the job to the people's representatives. By other resolution Government's attention was drawn to chronic food shortage in rural areas, non-completion of Ruppur Project, and tapping of private telephones and censoring private mail. Demand was also made for release

57 The EPAL Council was constituted of elected representatives of primary members at the rate of one member per 50,000 population per district and one member per 15,000 population per city. These elections were to be conducted by the District and City Awami Leagues once in two years at their council meetings. The composition of the District AL Councils was: 25 x no. of subdivisions (elected) + 5 x no. of subdivisions (nominated). Composition of City AL Councils: 10 x no. of wards (elected) + 15 coopted. Source: Tajuddin Ahmed, Sadharan Sampadak, Purba Pakistan Awami League, Purba Pakistan Awami League, Cathantantra O Nivanabich (Dacca, 1969). This incorporates amendments up to September 1969.
of political prisoners, withdrawal of cases and warrants against student leaders, labour leaders and political leaders and workers and compensation for the families of martyrs during the last (1968-69) movement. Sheikh Mujib, clarifying the AL stand, said that the AL wanted repeal of clauses 25 and 27 of the LF0. But even if the President refused to repeal these clauses, the AL would contest the elections. He added that the AL recognized the people as the only source of authority and there was no higher authority in the country to override the decision of the people's representatives. If the people gave a favourable verdict on the Six-Point Programme, the AL would implement it, whatever might be written in the LF0. Earlier Sheikh Mujib had said (while referring to Maulana Bhashani's insistence that the President should decide the autonomy issue before the elections): "We are not beggars. We know how to establish the right of the people." Thus the Awami League's attitude towards the Central authority had been that of near-defiance. Still no action was taken against it.

The Awami League's policy of non-alliance and its attitude of unconcern about the implications of the LF0 appeared intriguing to many. Speculations were afloat about some secret understanding with some faction of the Muslim League or near-understanding with the PPP and so on. Doubts

58 See reports in Dainik FORBODCH (Dacca) and Ittefaq, 7 and 8 June 1970.
59 Ittefaq, 7 February 1970.
were expressed about the sincerity of Sheikh Mujib. Later, non-amendment of the LFQ, and non-acceptance of the demand about the Fourth Five Year Plan and postponement of elections to December were described as the Sheikh's defeat, causing loss of face within the party. Some critics felt that the AL was being illogically overconfident. It was argued that in order to incorporate the Six-Point Programme in the Constitution the AL would require alliance with other pro-autonomy forces in the Assembly. If the issue was to be decided outside the Assembly through a popular movement then also the Awami League would require co-operation from other pro-autonomy forces and, therefore, there was no logic behind the anti-alliance attitude of the AL. It was also said:

After the tremendous build-up of mass feelings through his campaigning for Six Points and chanting Joi Bangla any search on his behalf for a workable compromise with his West Pakistani associates will be looked upon by the average man, including his party youngsters, as a crude attempt to barter away some of the province's unfulfilled rights. He will also be very vulnerable from the flank due to his policy of exclusion of other pro-autonomy forces in the province. He may well discover in near future that his current popularity was merely ephemeral.

This, however, was a typical expression of concern coming from those who did not doubt the Sheikh's sincerity

60 See Dainik Purbadeesh, January to September 1970, particularly a regular column "Tritya Pat" written by Abdul Gaffar Chaudhury.

but were aware of his limitations imposed by the situation which he seemed to have been overlooking. They were afraid that "in his eagerness" he might be "assuming a tremendous responsibility upon himself of carrying his demand to its logical conclusion without compromising its contents" as they were almost certain that "he cannot get a constitution of his choice on the basis of his strength in one province alone" because "from the ARJ experience it is abundantly clear that formidable opposition to Six Points exist not just among rival parties but also in competing echelons of power". They feared: "This hostility is likely to surface prior to the authentication of the Constitution by the President who has already kept his options open by declaring that he is not going to perform the role of mere signing machine."62

If apprehensions were so deeply felt and so clearly expressed even before the LFU was announced it would be wrong to assume (as some critics did) that Sheikh Mujib or the AL leadership were unaware of the danger once the LFU was made known.

The attitude of the ruling coterie can be summed up from what Professor G... Chaudhury, the then Communication Minister of Pakistan (and reported to be unofficial constitutional advisor of President Yahya Khan) declared in a speech before the Pakistan Society of London in September 1970 and

62 Ibid. See also Talukdar Maniruzzaman, Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh (Dacca, 1975), pp. 38-39.
what he said in reply to some questions in the meeting. What Chaudhury said amounted to an admission that under no circumstances would the West Pakistanis accept the inevitable outcome of representation on the basis of population and it also indicated that the ruling junta was sure that in East Pakistan no party would win with an overwhelming majority.63 Thus, Pakistan stood exactly where it was when the democratisation process was thwarted in the fifties and signs were too glaring to ignore the danger of a repeat performance by those who controlled the reins. But signs were also distinct that such manoeuvres would not go unchallenged this time. East Pakistan had abandoned the policy of conciliation. Undoubtedly, the AL was the architect of this sea-change in the political outlook of East Pakistan.

Even before the LFO was announced Sheikh Mujib, while addressing a 6,000 strong gathering of Chhatra League workers, had made a reference about preparing to become *ghazis* and *shaheeds* any more which in the context could have only meant that victory was around the corner. Therefore, they should prepare themselves to play the role of victors (*ghazis*) rather than martyrs (*shaheeds*). After the promulgation of the LFO, a smooth passage for the constitution could hardly be expected. The abovementioned report by Tajuddin Ahmad and various statements by Sheikh Mujib were pointers to the AL line of thinking. In fact, what Sheikh

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63 For details see A. Mascarenhas, *The Race of Bangladesh* (Delhi, 1971), pp. 56-57.
Mujib had been saying from 1969 onwards amounted to declaring that the AL would see to it that its Six-Point Programme was implemented, whatever the means. It would, however, prefer a peaceful and democratic method. But if the task could not be accomplished within the Assembly by the people's representatives, it would have to be done by the people themselves outside the Assembly. Apparently, the critics (both the friendly and the unfriendly ones) firstly underestimated the Awami League's chances of electoral victory and secondly, they forgot that if the issue was to be solved in the streets the movement would take a much bigger dimension than the organisational ability of any particular party could cope with. It would turn into a full-scale national movement. Hence by non-alliance the Awami League would lose little. But, after an electoral victory, by whichever process the autonomy demands were fulfilled, it would be done in the name of the AL. The Awami League knew this and hence was indifferent to overtures for alliance.

The alliance-seekers also knew this, and hence wanted to align themselves with the most dominant party. The Awami League's autonomy demands covered so wide a spectrum that there was no question of the other pro-autonomists adding to it. The Awami League's adherence to the programme through many adversities was so complete that there was no question of those demands being toned down by others though some critics had failed to fathom it - some deliberately and some out of ignorance about the past developments. The
Awami League’s readiness to decide the issue by extra-constitutional means was so clearly expressed that there was no doubt about it, though some critics again either deliberately or because of lack of understanding overlooked or even ignored it. These positive traits along with the party’s support to the Eleven Points – had placed the AL in a formidable position in the politics of East Pakistan. The only viable alternative to what the AL had indicated as its line of action would have been a call for a total restructuring of society through a violent upsurge. Under the existing circumstances such a movement to be initiated by East Pakistanis for the whole of Pakistan was inconceivable. And no amount of revolutionary consciousness among East Pakistanis could have carried out any violent upsurge that could change the East Pakistani situation unless the Centre-Province relationship was completely overhauled. Therefore, an autonomous, if not independent, East Pakistan was a preliminary necessity for creating the objective conditions for any radical change. Hence also, the struggle for autonomy was not only unavoidable but was indispensable. The logical attitude of the social-changers, therefore, should have been to accelerate that process. Over the years since the early 1950s this had been debated upon by various factions of the social changers which in the process got highly fragmented but a section represented by the NAP(W) almost always officially or unofficially remained close to the AL. In 1970 some Bhuiyani followers also were believed
to have opted to work "through" the Awami League when he failed to indicate any concrete line of action.\(^{64}\) These so-called extremists, however, did not immediately affect the ideological moorings of the Awami League leadership to any great extent. But they attracted attention of the rank and file with far-reaching effect.

The character and development of leftist politics in most of the Muslim countries would perhaps suggest that in 1970 in East Pakistan with its existing low rates of literacy, industrialisation and urbanisation and absence of any well-entrenched class-consciousness - a united front of the AL with the Leftist parties like the NAP (even the moderate NAP(W)) - could have been counter-productive. For example, the Awami League's appeal certainly would have been minimised among a large section of the population if the anti-Awami League forces had succeeded in attacking it for an alliance with the NAP(W) which was believed to be the front organization of the ECP and in strict ideological terms would be committed to work for an anti-religious society. The Awami League's secular bias - strongly opposed by a section initially - was being accepted by different sections in later years partly because of infusion of younger blood in the population but also because of its

public and official commitment to protect the basic tenets of Islam. (Sheikh Mujib's repeated assertions about evolving an indigenous socialism during the election campaign is significant in this context.) After all, a leader like Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmad - a devout Muslim coming from a well-known family of religious preachers, had high status in the party since its inception. At local levels also there were similar instances. And these were dependable insurances against the Awami League going atheist/agnostic. But the NAP(W) was by implication working for the international Communist movement, and therefore an alliance with NAP(W) at that stage might have been used by the Islam Pasanda to vilify both the alliance and its constituents with greater vigour. That would have helped neither autonomy nor social change.

It was quite clear from the AL election manifesto\(^\text{65}\) that the Awami League was well aware of the fact that

\(^{65}\) See A.H.M. Kamruzzaman, General Secretary, All Pakistan Awami League, Manifesto of All Pakistan Awami League (Dacca, 1970). Kamruzzaman wrote in the Preface: "In a meeting of the Organising Committee of the All Pakistan Awami League held on 9 August 1969 at Karachi, a Manifesto Subcommittee was formed. The Subcommittee invited suggestions from all the provincial units of the Awami League and, considering the suggestions from the different units, a draft Manifesto was prepared which was placed before the Organising Committee on 3rd June 1970. The Organising Committee finalised the draft on 5th June 1970, and placed it before the Council Session of the All Pakistan Awami League. The Council session of the ALL Pakistan Awami League unanimously accepted the Manifesto on 6 June 1970."
secularism was tolerated only in so far as the religion practised by the vast majority of the people was not violated. The manifesto, therefore, made a very cautious if not dubious promise when it stated that no law repugnant to Islamic principles would be enacted. 66 This was in conformity with the party manifesto of the EIA, which had stated that no law opposed to the basic principles of the Quran and Sunnah could be enacted while making a constitution for Pakistan through democratic means. 67

The NAP (W) election manifesto, on the other hand, made no reference to Islam, the Quran, Shariat or Sunnah or any other religious matter except that it stated that in the realm of general education religious teaching would be made optional and that suitable separate arrangements would be made for religious education. 68 This only guaranteed by implication that religion as a personal faith would not be touched. But the NAP(W) commitment to abolition of private ownership of land and mills and factories 69 was in itself

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66 See ibid.


68 National Awami Party: Purba Pakistan Shokhor Birbachani, Istahar, October 1970, p. 24. This manifesto was based on the central party manifesto with special reference to points affecting East Pakistan.

69 Ibid., p. 12.
anti-Islam in the sense that Islam not only puts no restriction on private property it does not even limit the extent of private property of any individual—though it does prescribe mechanisms for sharing one's wealth with others through the system of Zakaah, etc.

These undoubtedly prove that any AL-IAP(W) alliance proposal could not have fructified unless either of the parties gave up their professed ideology and/or objectives and thus compromise on principles. It would appear that both the parties, knowing their limitations fully well, were hurling criticisms against each other on the alliance issue only to gloss over the fact that it would be risky to start an open dialogue involving questions of the status of religions. As it was, the Awami League's commitment to preserve Islamic principles could have been questioned any time. By accepting the ultimate inevitability of the Eleven Points—which was absolutely silent about the status of religion in society—the AL had placed itself in a vulnerable position. The operative part of its promise about Islam also was liable to different interpretations. Logically, law "not repugnant" to Islamic principles need not necessarily "uphold" them. The AL's stand about Islam had been made further vague by Sheikh Mujib who in his radio/televison speech stated that the Six Points and other economic measures of the AL were intended to do justice to all and, therefore, these could never be anti-Islam. The Islam-passand opponents of the AL
either missed these nuances or else, their Islamism also was
a watered-down version like the socialism of the AL.

The Awami League's election manifesto reiterated
the party's stand that the people were to "vindicate their
rights through democratic struggle". It stated:

Radical institutional and structural changes
have to be made in our society in order to
make it possible for the people actively and
collectively to involve themselves in the
common venture of rebuilding of our society
on the foundation of justice. What is required,
therefore, is a social revolution to be brought
through the democratic process. To bring it
about we need a new constitutional, political,
economic and social structure....

...It is, therefore, to bring about a revo-
lation through the democratic process and
thereby to replace the present structure of
injustice by a new constitutional, political,
economic and social order in which justice
between region and region, and between man
and man, shall prevail, that the manifesto
of the party has been drawn up. The mani-
festo presents in outline a comprehensive
strategy for securing justice for each of the
regions of Pakistan and for every citizen of
the country. 70

The Basic Feature of the Constitution as outlined
in the manifesto promised "a real living democracy", and a
 guarantee to the effect that "no law repugnant to the injunc-
tions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah shall
be enacted or enforced in Pakistan". Besides incorporating
the demands in the Six-Point Programme, it mentioned various
economic, social, defence and foreign policy measures that
the party proposed to take up. These were: a system of extensive

70 Manifesto, n. 65.
co-operative farming, implementation of comprehensive flood control measures, fair and stable price to the growers of foodgrains, enforcement of law of Shari'ah in Bata'ah and lease system, abolition of jagirdari, zamindari and sardari systems in West Pakistan, distribution of Government khas land and land above the ceiling to landless peasants and small peasants; growth of small-scale and cottage industries on co-operative basis, nationalisation of all basic and key industries and of all banks and insurances, complete ban on monopolies and cartels; introduction of a progressive system of income-tax and the realisation of substantial taxes on capital gains, profits, wealth, gifts and inheritance, comprehensive review of the system of deduction, exemption and tax-holidays, nationalisation of jute and cotton trade; right to form trade unions, right of strike to workers, fair wages to workers, proper housing, medical and educational facilities to the labour and their families; better transport and communication facilities by construction of bridges, roads, sea and inland ports, eradication of illiteracy, provision for extending religious education at all levels, free and compulsory education up to primary standards, establishment of new medical and technical universities, facilities for higher education to meritorious students, promotion of Urdu and Bengali languages, proservation of regional and provincial languages, equal status for women, service corps manned by college and university students, provision for rural medical centres at every union and
hospital at every thana headquarters, introduction of national service in rural areas for medical graduates, training of para-medical personnel to staff the rural medical centres; equal rights and privileges to all citizens of Pakistan, equal rights and opportunities to mohajirs, priority to low-cost urban housing schemes, an independent and non-aligned foreign policy, withdrawal from SEATO and CENTO pacts, support to the oppressed peoples in their struggle against imperialist and neo-colonialist powers, settlement of Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN Resolution, settlement of Farakka dispute, peaceful co-existence with all states, particularly with neighbours.

It was mentioned at the end of the manifesto that specific programmes relating to each federating unit would be incorporated in the AL manifesto of the federating units within the framework of the above.

The Awami League manifesto of 1970 in a way resembled the twenty-one point United Front manifesto of 1954. Both were meant to have wide appeal to all segments of East Pakistani population. This manifesto also clearly indicated the pragmatic character of the Awami League. However, it did accommodate demands made by the APSAC. Implemented fully, the promises made could have brought significant changes in the economic condition of the people, if not in economic structure.

Commencing officially on 7 June 1970, the AL election campaign speeches, however, dealt mainly with the
issues involved in the Six-Point Programme accompanied by mention of local problems. In his speech on 7 June 1970 at Dacca Sheikh Mujib stressed the indestructibility of Islam and Pakistan and the Awami League's commitment to the establishment of workers' and peasants' rule. Here he perhaps went beyond what the AL manifesto had promised in the country and urged the President to amend clauses 25 and 27 of the LFO admitting the supremacy of the national legislature. These were interpreted by some as his conversion to non-secularism, political stunt, and half-hearted and futile attempt. On 14 June 1970 at Narasingdi Sheikh Mujib said that the Awami League wanted the East Pakistanis to be brothers of West Pakistanis and not their slaves and East Pakistan the bazaar of West Pakistan. He also declared that the people of Bangladesh would establish their legitimate rights at all costs once they had learnt to shed blood. At this meeting he pointed out that the next election was not for capturing power, it was a referendum on the Six-Point Programme. He also said that this election would decide whether the people of East Pakistan would get their real rights as citizens of Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib also promised partial ownership of the factories to the labourers. In the latter phase of the

campaign, Sheikh Mujib reiterated his determination to realise the demands of the people either through the ballot or through a popular movement and said that the coming election offered an opportunity for thwarting exploitation. He added that posterity would "legitimately blame us if we fail to rise to the occasion". He assured that "those who had bartered away the people's interest should this time be defeated, because the country's constitution ensuring Bangalees' share in the national affairs would be framed". The East Pakistanis were frequently reminded that the exploiters from West Pakistan were responsible for the decay of the East, and that the coming "ballot battle" would be his last fight to achieve the rights of Bangla through peaceful means. He also mentioned in some of his speeches that conspiracies were being hatched to defer the transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people. In all his election speeches, Sheikh Mujib mentioned his imprisonment and the anti-people role of Nurul Amin. On 28 October 1970 Sheikh Mujib in his radio/television speech again emphasized the importance of implementing the Six-Point Programme in the context of the past, present and future state of affairs in the country. He said:

The Awami League's Six-Point Programme, which is embodied in the Eleven-Point Programme, presents a rational solution to this problem of regional injustice....The only feasible solution is the reordering of the constitutional structure by giving full regional autonomy to the federating units on the basis of our Six-Point Formula. Such
autonomy in order to be effective must include the power of managing the economy. This is why we insist upon federating units having control over monetary and fiscal policy and foreign exchange earnings and other powers to negotiate foreign trade and aid. 74

It was apparent that the AL's mainstay was the Six-Point Programme. From 1966 onwards it had constantly publicised the implementation of this programme as its foremost, if not the only, objective and by 1970 this programme had become the symbol for East Pakistan people's future existence. So, on the eve of the elections of 1970, the AL was in a much more advantageous position than any other political group in East Pakistan. Hence it was naivete or sheer discomfort that prompted commentators like the author of the "Tritiya Mat" to make adverse comments upon the growing crowd of nomination-seekers at the AL headquarters. It was also alleged that many deserving candidates were being turned down in favour of non-deserving ones and newcomers.75

The number of nomination seekers was large indeed. While announcing the list of AL-nominated candidates from East Pakistan on 24 September 1970 Tajuddin Ahmed, General Secretary of the EPAL who was also Secretary of the AL Parliamentary Board, mentioned that there were 359 and 1556 applications for nominations for 162 and 300 seats in the

74 For details of these speeches see The People (Dacca), and Dainik Pakistan, 5–30 October 1970.
75 See Dainik Purbadeesh, 20 August 1970.
National and the EP Provincial assemblies respectively.\textsuperscript{76} That only showed the expected electoral prospects of the party. The 'non-genuine' applicants would have certainly gathered around other parties if these were believed to have better prospects (unless driven by some ulterior motives the applicants were trying to make the AL leadership feel overconfident). The comparative weakness of other parties becomes very clear from percentage of seats contested in East Pakistan by various parties for the National Assembly and East Pakistan Provincial Assembly seats.\textsuperscript{77} It is evident that the Awami League was far ahead of other parties in the first lap of the electoral race. While the AL fielded candidates for all the constituencies both for the National Assembly and the Provincial Assembly elections only one party could field more than 50 per cent candidates for the NA and two for the PA elections.

The wide margin between the AL and other parties is significant because none of the political forces represented by the latter was new on the East Pakistani political scene. Their inability to contest from a large number of constituencies only showed their very localised areas of influence.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 25 September 1970.

\textsuperscript{77} See percentage of party-wise candidature in Tables & Charts IX.1.

\textsuperscript{78} See party-wise percentage of distribution of seats contested in various districts in Tables and Charts IX.2.
Hence it was only natural for the other parties to seek a postponement of the elections schedule on the plea of natural calamities having jeopardized normal life of the province. Their request was granted and the elections were rescheduled for 7 and 17 December 1970 for the National and Provincial Assemblies respectively. Further postponement was sought after the devastating cyclone of November 1970. This was not granted. And ironically, the devastating cyclone of November 1970 that ravaged East Pakistan added further to their unpopularity. The Awami League’s autonomy platform assumed greater appeal. The indifference\footnote{It was in fact more than indifference. Even “the information media were given categorical instructions at the outset of the disaster to play down the details of the havoc”. See \textit{Forum}, vol. 2, no. 2, 28 November 1970, p. 3.} shown by the ruling junta in West Pakistan nullified whatever goodwill it might have created among certain sections of the people by raising the number of East Pakistanis in various government departments, in the Armed Forces, and by promoting a few East Pakistani bureaucrats to higher ranks, or by allotting a greater share of national resources to East Pakistan. In the process those who had not accepted the Centre-Province relations as defined by the Awami League in its Six-Point Programme lost even the remnants of credibility that they had.
Sheikh Mujib, in a statement issued on 26 November 1970 after a tour of the cyclone-affected areas, blamed the Government at the Centre for delay in the rescue and relief operations causing further loss of life and property. He also criticised the West Pakistani politicians for their indifference. What he said in the concluding part of his speech was an electrifying war-cry, which could well be interpreted as a declaration of independence. He said:

...Bangladesh is now awake. It will give its verdict at the polls, if polls are not frustrated. If the polls are frustrated, the people of Bangladesh will owe it to the million who have died to make the supreme sacrifice of another million lives, if need be, so that Bangladesh can be the master of its own destiny. 80

If the 1965 war had finally exposed the colonial type of relationships between two wings of Pakistan and prompted the Awami League to adopt a confrontational posture and launch the autonomy movement to oppose the continuation of the existing relationship the Government's apathy towards the cyclone-affected 3P people proved that no dent had so far been made in that structure and prompted the AL leader to take a clearly offensive position. The popular feeling was aptly expressed by Forum:

A people's government would have had its chief executive with his cabinet sitting in Dhola [the worst affected part]...personally directing relief operations...The demand for popular government is thus no casual whim of

ambitious politicians. It is an imperative for the survival of 70 million people. We have no illusions that elections are the end to our problems. They will merely record before our people and before the world the basic urge of the people of East Pakistan to rule themselves. It is a demand which no longer needs elaboration or justification. It now only has to be registered loud and clear. If this demand once made is ignored by our ruling classes, the next stage in the struggle for democracy will unveil itself. There is still time for statesmanship which preserves this nation in peace and sanity. But this can only be demonstrated if the people of East Pakistan speak with a clear voice. Our dead have voted with their lives: Let the living speak with their votes.

It is quite obvious that under the circumstances the Awami League would not favour further postponement of the elections. In order to carry out the promise to make East Pakistan "the master of its own destiny" either by parliamentary or extra-parliamentary methods the AL needed to fight from a vantage point. As its strength did not lie in the barrels of guns, it had to decisively win over the human element that was to constitute its support base. And this was the most opportune moment for making such an effort.

Secondly, before plunging into the final confrontation the Awami League needed to ascertain for itself, and prove to its opponents, too, the exact extent of its support base. Only an immediate election could clarify this point. That the elections were of crucial importance to the party had in

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fact been pointed out much earlier when Sheikh Mujib told the Chittagong Bar Association: "I have no moral right to call myself a leader until and unless I am elected by the people."\(^{82}\)

The Awami League was criticised for its stand on the postponement of the elections by some politicians. A protest day was observed by Bhashani and others on 4 December 1970 which demanded a three months' delay in the elections. An eminent West Pakistani journalist called them "the orphans of the storm" and clarified that it was "not the cyclonic deluge behind whose wreckage they are trying to take shelter, but the political storm that has swept East Pakistan over the last year or two, and which seems to have found these gentlemen unawares and completely unready".\(^{83}\) But by and large the people of East Pakistan seemed to have shared the Awami League's view of "now or never". East Pakistan had always expressed its grievances through anti-Centre agitations. But this time no large-scale anti-Centre agitations were reported. With the impending elections they seemed to have preferred to express themselves through their franchise first and then adopt other measures if necessary. This attitude of restraint was

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82 *Dawn*, 11 September 1969. Apparently President Yahya Khan also held the same view. He had told Dacca pressmen that he did not consider anyone to be a representative of the people unless he was elected by the people. See *Morning News*, 24 December 1969.

partly spontaneous and partly due to conscious efforts of the AL workers, including the Chhatra Leaguers, for its stake in the holding of elections. The AL leaders with their previous experiences of sudden twists in Pakistani politics apprehended that any outbreak of large-scale violence (a natural corollary of any anti-Centre agitation at the time) in East Pakistan would invite a repeat performance of the 1968-69 repressions and an indefinite postponement of the elections. This would have not only stalled further progress of the autonomy movement, but it would have neutralised the advance made so far. Thirdly, by its long-term campaigning since 1969, the AL had brought the popular mood to boiling point and a pause would have harmed the organisation immensely, particularly in view of the growing restlessness among the students including the Chhatra Leaguers. It was a fact that the intensity of the students' agitations that raged in East Pakistan during the first quarter of 1969 had visibly lost its edge. It was to some extent due to the reimposition of Martial Law, but more due to a policy of restraint preferred by the strongest component of the Students Action Committee, viz. the Chhatra League. The then CL leadership, though temperamentally aggressive and ideologically progressive, were pragmatic, too. They were prepared to give a chance to the politicians to solve the problems through constitutional means but not indefinitely. There were occasions when they almost defied even Sheikh Mujib's advice.84 The SAC

84 Interview with some student activists of the time. Also see Mazharul Islam, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib (Bengali) (Dacca, 1974).
programme of launching a mass movement, in fact, had been postponed, not withdrawn. As a result, of course, it became structurally weak. The Menon Group of CU left the alliance. But even the unquestioned loyalty of the Chittara Leaguers to the Awami League could not be taken for granted for an indefinite period. They also faced a similar problem: if matters were to be ultimately decided by extra-constitutional means, the sooner it was known the better. For the students' movement also had gained a certain momentum and a long time-gap would require a fresh beginning. And with the adventurist postures of some groups in a very fluid situation it was only natural for the others to feel alarmed about the course of any movement in the future.

Hence, the Awami League's decision favouring holding of elections as per schedule speaks of political farsightedness of its leadership. The tacit popular approval of the AL stand at this juncture indicated that the uppermost thought in the people's mind was the implementation of the Awami League's programme for autonomy. It is quite conceivable that in details "autonomy" might have meant different things to different sets of people - but there was a common denominator that affected the majority - better and satisfactory living conditions created by economic, political and

85 PPCU (Menon) itself was bifurcated like its parent party NAP(B), the more radical faction being led by Mahbubullah at a public meeting in March 1970 talked of an independent republic of Bangladesh. Many of them were arrested and some went underground. Information gathered from conversation with Mahbubullah and some others in Bangladesh in 1976.
cultural non-subjugation. For the older generation, these were what they expected to get when Pakistan was created but did not get. For the younger generation these were fundamental human rights that they were being deprived of.

As a political commentator put it:

It is unlikely that the basic factors at play in these elections will have varied appreciably from place to place. The issue throughout the province remains self-government for East Pakistan and Mujib remains the Messiah. Whether his message will continue to override the influence of local patriarchs or overcome the shortcomings of his candidates to give him total victory is to be seen. But that he will dominate the polls to the exclusion of all party and personal rivals is certain. We will then move into the next phase of the struggle which will depend on the reaction of the rulers to the results. If the results are challenged there seems little doubt that the mood in East Pakistan is ripe for the politics of movement. 86

The popular eagerness for autonomy also proved that President Yahya's decision to keep the autonomy issue alive was based on wrong assumptions. President Yahya with all his dictatorial powers could have easily decided the extent of autonomy before the elections. In fact, by incorporating his veto power on the authentication of the Constitution Bill in the Legal Framework Order, he had kept his options open in this regard. But he knew that his ruling on the autonomy issue was likely to be unacceptable to the

people concerned. A deadlock before the elections was obviously unwanted for that would put off the regime's efforts to legitimise its position through the holding of elections. So, instead of trying to minimise the Awami League's appeal by deciding the autonomy issue beforehand, President Yahya depended more on the lack of consensus among the political forces in East Pakistan and hoped that that would restrict the Awami League votes. Secondly, since the regime did not expect the Awami League to be the only representative party from East Pakistan in the National Assembly, (a critical analysis of the candidature pattern, however, should have put it on guard) it expected that local dissensions would be carried over to the National Assembly and would create a deadlock over the making of the Constitution. Once the elected representatives failed to frame the Constitution within the stipulated time period the President could "legally" impose (according to the LFU this would have been perfectly legal) his own solution on the people and put the entire blame on the East Pakistani politicians, particularly the Awami League, for lack of co-operation and unconcern for national interests etc. In this way preservation of the existing system with a facade of democracy would be realised without completely exposing the interest of the ruling coterie and at the expense of the politicians, particularly the East Pakistanis.

The attitude of the political parties regarding solution of the autonomy issue is clearly understandable.
All parties except the Awami League/nd-loaded for a Presidential solution in specific terms before the elections for they thought that would take away much of the Awami League's electoral appeal. The Awami League was not keen on it. It was fighting the elections precisely on the autonomy issue. It would be wrong to assume that AL wanted the autonomy issue kept alive merely for a comfortable electoral victory. As the initiator and standard bearer of the autonomy movement which had its embryonic formation in the early fifties the Awami League was certain that autonomy as defined by the Six-Point Formula was beyond the comprehension of the West Pakistani-dominated ruling coterie of Pakistan and therefore, a Presidential solution would bring no salvation. The only hope was an overwhelming AL majority in the National Assembly. And that was what the AL had been working for since 1969 through extensive and intensive campaigning and mass contact programme. But the quantitative majority also had to be qualitatively adequate for the purpose for which the numerical majority was to be used. Hence, a lot of deliberation was exercised for nomination of AL candidates, particularly for the National Assembly. Consequently, the aggregate of AL nominees was a goal-oriented, close-knit, educated and politicised team of village-born, comparatively young men mostly of independent professions.

Profession-wise out of the 162 nominees for the general seats in the National Assembly the largest component
was made up of lawyers (47.53%) followed by businessmen (19.13%), college and university teachers (6.17%), and landholders (7%). Education-wise 31.48 per cent were at least university graduates (including quite a few with postgraduate degrees). Age-wise 47.53 per cent belonged to the age-group between 40-50, the majority of the rest (32%) were below 40 years of age and only 20 per cent were above 50 years of age. The professional and educational backgrounds of the nominees were typical of post-colonial liberal democratic societies. Besides, taking into consideration the significance of the legislative proceedings that they would be called upon to participate in, the preponderance of people with high educational background and legal training was but natural. Predominence of comparatively younger people is also understandable taking into consideration the age-group distribution of the population. Besides, complete party loyalty could be ensured by nominating candidates with a clear record of sustained active linkage with the party. This presupposed inclusion of older-age group members who had joined the party in its formative phase and/or those younger ones whose political socialisation began with their direct or indirect association with the party.

87 For details see Jalukdar Maniruzzaman, Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh (Dacca, 1975), pp. 39-41.

88 On the basis of the 1961 census data of Pakistan, in 1970-71, 40-50 per cent of East Pakistanis presumably belonged to 15-35 years age group.
Some background information collected about 100 of the 162 AL nominees demonstrate this.\(^{39}\)

A background study of these 100 AL nominees shows that 84 of them were born in villages and six in towns within the districts from which they were contesting, one was born in a city (Calcutta). However, since 61 of them had postgraduate education,\(^{90}\) most of them must have spent a few years of their academic career in urban areas of Dacca and a few in Rajshahi and Chittagong.\(^{91}\)

\(^{39}\) Source of the details of these 100 AL nominees: Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad, Banglar Banj, November-December 1970 and interviews in Bangladesh in 1976.

District-wise distribution of these hundred is:

- 8 from Rangpur out of 12 total nominees
- 2 from Dinajpur out of 6 total nominees
- 2 from Bogra out of 5 total nominees
- 3 from Pabna out of 6 total nominees
- 5 from Rajshahi out of 9 total nominees
- 3 from Kuhtia out of 4 total nominees
- 3 from Jessore out of 7 total nominees
- 5 from Khulna out of 8 total nominees
- 6 from Bakerganj-cum-Patnakhali out of 13 total nominees
- 5 from Tangail out of 5 total nominees
- 16 from Mymensingh out of 18 total nominees
- 8 from Faridpur out of 10 total nominees
- 10 from Dacca out of 16 total nominees
- 3 from Sylhet out of 11 total nominees
- 12 from Comilla out of 14 total nominees
- 6 from Noakhali out of 8 total nominees
- 3 from Chittagong out of 9 total nominees.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has not been included in this list of 100.

\(^{90}\) Not necessarily Master's degree. For the purpose of this study, Bachelor of Law degree also has been counted as post-graduate degree because this was a course taught at the university level only.

\(^{91}\) It should be made clear here that none of these places except perhaps Dacca can be termed "urban" in the Western sense of the term. Even now they are urban only nominally. Even in 1976 Ziaur Rahman, the then DCMA of Bangladesh, once remarked that, after all, Dacca was a district town suddenly attaining the status of a national capital.
Out of the 100 cases studied, thirty-five (35) had belonged to some student or youth organisations during their student life and before joining the AL.

Age-wise eighteen (18) of these thirty-five were less than forty years of age, twelve (12) of whom had joined the AL after 1960 (in fact after the revival of the party in 1964) and three (3) had joined the AL in 1950s. (Information about two was not available.) A majority of thirteen (13) of the seventeen (17) who were above forty years of age (but less than fifty-five) had joined the AL in the 1950s, and three (3) in the 1960s. (Information about one was not available.)

Occupation-wise, seventeen were legal practitioners either within the district or in Dacca. Two were agriculturist-cum-traders, two were university teachers and two college teachers. Five were yet to start on any career, being either freshly out of the university or being still there. Profession of eight could not be clearly ascertained.

Out of the above mentioned thirty-five, twenty-four were ex-Chhatra Leaguers (that is, as students they

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92 They were either devoting full time to politics depending on income from agriculture or just agriculturists. It should be noted here that whatever might be the profession, the major source of subsistence of an educated urbanite in East Pakistan had always been agriculture - it is still so, in Bangladesh now - and that largely contributed to the close urban-rural linkage.
had been in the Chhatra League only).\footnote{Purba Pakistan Chhatra League (PPCL) was the successor organisation of the East Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League founded in 1948. Though PPCL had no official linkage with the EPAL it had been the unofficial student wing of the EPAL, its main recruitment centre and at times its guide also.} Two had been in the Muslim Chhatra League (the predecessor of the CL), one each in the Muslim Chhatra Federation (MCF), Yuba League (YL) and All India Students Federation (AISF). One had been in both the MCL and CL, two in both MCL and YL, one in MCF and YL, one in Chhatra Union (CU) and YL, and one came to AL via MCL, CL and CU.

All the twenty-four (24) recruits from the CL had been functionaries at various levels of the CL organisation and sixteen (16) of them had moved from one level to another at least. As the details show, fifteen (15) had been functionaries at the provincial level, the highest level since there was no national-level body. Two of those fifteen (15) had moved from college through district level, three (3) from university through subdivisional and district levels, seven (7) directly from the university level, two (2) had risen from subdivisional through district level directly. There were four (4) who had graduated from the subdivisional to the district and one from the university to the district and two, one and one had functioned at only district, university and college levels respectively.

Thirteen (13) of the twenty-four (24) ex-Chhatra Leaguers in the AL had also been functionaries at various levels of the party.\footnote{See Tables and Charts IX.3.}
four of these thirteen held positions at the national level, one having risen from subdivision to district to provincial and three from district to provincial. There were two who had graduated from Thana level to subdivisional level and one from subdivisional level to district level and there were one, four and one who held positions at city, district and provincial levels respectively.

Most of the eleven recruits who were not ex-Chhatra Leaguers only also held position in the AL. One each were at city, district and provincial levels, one had been at district level having risen from the subdivisional level. Three of them were at national level, having graduated from district through provincial level. Most of them had also held positions in their respective student/youth organisations.

Moving over to the sixty-five AL nominees directly recruited to the AL it is found that many of them had been in the student wing of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League before Pakistan came into being and had taken part in the Pakistan movement. There were three who had earlier belonged to the RSP, the NAP(W) and the NAP(B) respectively. Age-wise it is seen that fifty-one (51) of them were above forty of whom twenty (20) had joined the AL before 1950, eight (8) in early 1950s, ten (10) in late 1950s, six (6) in 1960s, one (1) in 1970. (Information about six (6) could not be ascertained.) Of the fourteen (14) who were below forty
years of age — two (2) had joined AL in 1950s, 5 in 1960s, two (2) in 1970 (information about seven could not be ascertained).

That they were not sleeping members of the party is quite evident from the record of their mobility within the party organisation. In 1970 seven (7) of them were functionaries at the national level, four (4) having earlier been at district and provincial levels, two (2) having been at the provincial level and one (1) at the district level. There were three (3) at the provincial level, two (2) having been at the district and one (1) at the subdivisional level. There were nine (9) at the district level, eight (8) of them having been at the subdivisional level and one (1) who had risen from thana level via the subdivisional level. There was one (1) who was still at the subdivisional level, having earlier been at the thana level. Besides these twenty (20), there were six (6) at the provincial, six (6) at the district, four (4) at the subdivisional, five (5) at the thana level functionaries. Exact party position (in 1970 or earlier) of twenty-four (24) of the hundred (100) nominees discussed here could not be ascertained. But these include about a dozen nominees who apparently did not have long association with the AL and their nominations could not have been appreciated by other aspirants for the particular

94 See ibid. for structure of the party organisation.
constituencies. A look at the particulars of these "new elements," however, explains their nominations without having to be rationalised by other explanations. One was at first the leader of the Independent Group and later the leader of the opposition in the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly since 1965. There were two eminent young barristers who had been leading members of the team which had been pleading for the accused in the Agartala Conspiracy Case and both of them were also part of the AL contingent to the ADC. There was one elderly lawyer, an eminent member of both the Dacca High Court and the Supreme Court of Pakistan. One young nominee was the Chief Reporter of Ittefaq since 1969 till his nomination. There were two well-known trade unionists, one of them the Secretary of the Jatiya Jramik League. There were a couple of college principals known for their constructive social work in their areas. There were two other journalists: one was the editor of Azadi, a progressive newspaper published from Chittagong and the other an ex-member of the NAP(B) and ex-editor of the NAP(B) weekly Janata.

The allegation, made from certain quarters that AL nominations were irrational, therefore, appear to have been based on the fact that a couple of AL nominees apparently did not belong to any of the abovementioned categories. There were specific allegations also, as reported in the pro-Hamidul Haq Chaudhury Dainik Purbodosh, that several of
Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmad's nominees were rejected. Khondkar Mushtaque himself, however, while talking in 1976 about the nominations of 1970 did not mention this. He rather said that the principles of nominations viz. party loyalty, seniority, honesty, service records, candidates' personal qualities were generally adhered to though in certain cases exceptions were made, like in the case of Dr. Kamal Hossain.

Anyway, whether or not absolute objectivity was maintained while approving AL nominations in most of the cases - an objective assessment of those who were nominated reveals that a majority of them were legitimate aspirants by the standard set by the party and formed a well-knit group to carry on with the mission, i.e. to make an all-out effort to frame a constitution based on the Six Points in the face of heated opposition. At least that was the expectation aroused in the popular mind through the intensive campaigning.

A glance at the AL nominees for the provincial Assembly presents more or less the same pattern. However, for obvious reasons, the contingent, apparently, lacked lustre. But still it had well known provincial and local leaders like Mansoor Ali, Dr. Ashabul Haq, Shamsul Haq, Moyezuddin, Phani Majumdar, Mohammad Habibur Rahman, Commandant Manik Chaudhury, Nurul Haq, etc., ex-CL leaders.

95 Dr. Kamal Hossain joined the AL in May 1970. He contested a by-election held when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman resigned from one of the two seats he had won in Dacca.
like Sardar Amjad Hossein, Abdur Rauf Chaudhury, Mohammad Shafiullah, Nashed Nosheraf, Shah Hoazzan Hossein, Abdur Razzak, one of the leading lights of the 1969 movement etc. and victims of Ayubian repressions like Sgt. Fazlul Haq - an accused in the Agartala conspiracy case who was shot at along with Sgt. Zahurul Haq while in detention in the Dacca Cantonment during the Agartala conspiracy case.

AL campaigning for the 1970 elections, in fact, as has been admitted in all quarters, was a one-man show. In 1945-46 the Muslims of India were asked to vote even for a lamp-post if nominated by the AIML. In 1970 East Pakistanis were told to cast their votes for the Nauka (boat), the AL symbol. In the former case the dictum came from the Quaid-e-Azam. In the latter it came from the Bangabandhu.96 Sheikh Mujib's personal appeal apart, the most effective campaign-media was a poster titled, "Jonar Bangla Shamasan hallo keno?" (why has the golden Bengal turned into a cremation ground?)97 In certain quarters, however, the AL's effectiveness was not taken seriously. For example, a "rich" and "influential" Convention Muslim League candidate in Rajshahi thought he would certainly win against division of opposition votes among the AL, PDP, NAP(W) and NAP(B) if the rightists parties,

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96 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was awarded this title by the JAC at a public reception organised by the JAC after his release at the Dacca Race Course Maidan on 23 February 1969.

97 See Appendix for a Xeroxed copy of the poster in Bengali along with an English translation of the text.
vz. three Muslim Leagues and Jamaat-e-Islam jointly lent support to him. In the same district, during the campaigning some even felt that Sheikh Mujib's popularity was already on the wane because of his lack of farsightedness in not uniting the democratic forces. It was also felt that the 'Joi Bangla' slogan had not become very popular. Begum Matia Chaudhury, a popular NAP(W) leader, was reported to have said that it would not be possible to realise the right of lakhs of suffering people through the 'Joi Bangla' slogan. Rajshahi was believed to be a comparatively strong base of NAP(W) and it contested 6 out of 9 National Assembly seats, from the district - the highest district percentage (67) of NAP(W) contestants in the province. But as it turned out, in Rajshahi district, nine AL contestants constituting 18 per cent of total candidates (50) from the district polled 74.59 per cent of total valid votes polled in the district for the National Assembly elections and deposits of 37 candidates, i.e. 74 per cent, were forfeited.

98 See report in Rajshahi Barta (Bengali, Weekly), 10 July 1970.

99 Ibid., 21 August 1970.

100 Ibid., 13 November 1970.

101 It was in Rajshahi that Kamruzzaman, hailing from the same district, announced at a public meeting in January 1971 that if the West Pakistani leaders tried to set aside the Six and Eleven Points an independent Bangladesh would be declared. See ibid., 22 January 1971.
However, not all speculations were so off the mark. For example, impressions conveyed by a team doing a pre-poll survey of the districts of Rangpur and Noakhali was confirmed by the election results. This team thought that though Rangpur - the district with highest number of electors in the northern part of the province, and a district with the maximum of unequal distribution of land ownership and so far taking more interest in local issues dominated by local influentials like Jotedars - "was not immune from the pull of Bangla nationalism and Sheikh Mujib attracted unprecedented and hysterical crowds...." 102 Some details given by the survey-team shows that the twelve Awami Leaguers constituting 24 per cent of the total candidates were facing, besides well known, affluent lawyers representing various ML groups, PDP and Jel, and a couple of founder-members of the NAP, a big zamindar who was also ex-Vice Chairman of a District Board and an MPA during the Ayub regime; a wealthy (Hindu) businessman expelled from the AL for defying party ruling denying him candidature; a wealthy textile mill and jute-baling press owner; a local pir; a wealthy leader of strong-arm elements. The Awami League contingent consisted of a school teacher, an agriculturist-cum-small trader, an affluent lawyer plus other lawyers, a doctor, a school teacher turned trader, a wealthy businessman, a well-known

student leader in his twenties and a local Mukhtear.¹⁰³ The score was: The AL secured 70.37 per cent of total valid votes polled in the district.

In Noakhali district, the pre-poll survey team thought the "tide seems to be running strongly for AL" in spite of a "popular myth" that Noakhali was a "Jamaat country". This, they thought was a misconstrued idea and had "no basis in current reality". As they rightly pointed out: "Noakhaliotes had a tradition of mobility and that made them "more conscious of the world around and hence more politicised". It was also pointed out that "the bulk of the handful of BDs who voted against Ayub's confirmation as President in 1960 were from Noakhali" and that "their BDs voted solidly for Miss Jinnah in 1965 and the largest number of Opposition MNAs and IPA during the Ayub raj came from this district". The surveyors thought "it is therefore hardly surprising that the district should today be highly receptive to the political appeal of Six Points". They found that Sheikh Mujib's "charisma" was at "high tide" in the district. To the surprise of the team it was noticed that during the Ramzan month it was the Awami League workers who dominated the taravih and not the Jamaatis. The AL campaign starting with taravih ended with Sehri.¹⁰⁴ Another interesting aspect

¹⁰³ Ibid.

of campaigning in Noakhali was families having relations in West Pakistan or abroad were flooded with letters to vote for the AL and in village society, as the team pointed out, "letters from abroad are treated as a social document for communal reading". With such plus points favouring the AL, Noakhali fielded 7 veteran Awami League members and one in the below thirty-year age-group - a leading light of the JAC.

The obvious happened. AL won with a direct total of 80.29 per cent. Twenty out of its 26 opponents lost their deposits. The Jamaat-e-Islami contesting 5 out of 8 seats from the district secured 8.53 per cent of votes while losing deposits of three contestants. 105

The above may be considered as case studies of two completely different types of districts - where the AL support was visible to objective viewers before the polls and the polls proved their assessment of the prevailing situation to be correct. Hence the confidence of the AL seems to have been well founded and it won 160 out of 162 National Assembly seats.

In multi-party contests often a party may be returned with a majority of seats but without a clear majority of votes cast. But in the 1970 National Assembly elections the Awami League's phenomenal success in capturing seats was reinforced by the percentage of votes it secured. 162 of its National Assembly candidates amounting to 20.74

per cent of total candidature of the Province polled 75.11
per cent of total valid votes polled in the Province. 106
There was no close contest. The dissensions within the
professedly anti-Awami League camp were very acute for
82 per cent of the seats were contested by more than three
candidates and 55 per cent of seats were contested by more
than four candidates. It was, however, roved beyond doubt
that even a combined opposition to the AL would not have
appreciably affected AL's electoral prospects.

By voting for the AL, almost (choice of the two
per cent rejected votes not being known) three-fourths of
those who voted expressed outright rejection of the staunch
religionists and revivalists and also the Leftists. However,
it would be interesting to note how the non-AL votes were
distributed among the various political forces in the
province. The distribution pattern shows that within East
Pakistan the AL appeal had cut across all possible regional
and societal barriers except in a couple of cases and no
significant non-AL pocket even could be charted out in the
province. 108 The extent/magnitude of forfeiture of deposits

106 See details of partywise percentage of votes in
Tables and Charts IX.4.

107 Computed from details in Election Commission, Pakistan,
Report on General Election, 1970-71 (Islamabad, 1972),
vol. 1.

108 See Tables and Charts IX.5 for details.
made the weakness of and infighting in the non-AL forces more glaring. About sixty-six per cent of total candidates lost their deposits, the highest loser being the PML(Q) closely followed by PML (Convention) and PML. Among the deposit-losers the Jamat-e-Islami was the least affected.\textsuperscript{109} This is more significant because this percentage was much higher in the heartland of West Pakistan, Punjab. In Punjab it lost deposits in 79.45 per cent of seats. In Sind, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province this percentage was 52.63, 100 and 80 respectively.\textsuperscript{110} But the distribution of percent votes polled by the Jamat-i-Islami candidates in East Pakistan makes it clear that though in pockets it must have had some hard core supporters who could withstand the AL onslaught unlike the unsure support-base of other rightist or conservative parties its overall strength in the Province was insignificant, as revealed by the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{109} For details of partywise percentage of forfeiture of deposits see Tables and Charts IX.6.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Computed from Report, n. 107, p. 171.
\end{itemize}
total per cent votes secured (7.07%) by the party.\textsuperscript{111}

Taking into consideration the relatively better position of the Jamaat-e-Islami in comparison to other anti-AL parties in AP, a look into the distribution pattern of its candidates in various districts of East Pakistan reveals that the western districts extending from north to south had relatively more Jamaatis than the districts in the East.\textsuperscript{112} The districts from which the Jamaat could contest more than 70 per cent of seats were Dinajpur, Bogra, Pabna and Kushtia.\textsuperscript{113} The districts from where twenty Jamaat candidates could poll more than 20 per cent of votes were Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, Rajshahi, Jessore and Khulna.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{111} See Tables and Charts IX.7 for details of per cent votes polled by the JI.

\textsuperscript{112} See Tables and Charts IX.8 for an outline map of districts of East Pakistan indicating the placement of these districts.

\textsuperscript{113} See Table mentioned in n. 78. Also see map mentioned in n. 112.

\textsuperscript{114} Computed from mimeographed details, n. 105. Incidentally, these were the districts along with Barisal and Chittagong that gave less than 45 per cent of votes to Miss Jinnah in 1969 while other districts gave her between 45 and 63 per cent of votes.
The results of the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly elections followed the pattern of the National Assembly elections, thereby ratifying Awami League's standing with the people of East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{115}

With its absolute majority in the National Assembly Elections\textsuperscript{116} the Awami League acquired the right to form government at the Centre under normal democratic procedure. However, this absolute majority in the National Assembly was strictly regional since it was unable to capture even a single seat from West Pakistan, although it contested eight seats. This, once again, highlighted the exclusively regional character of the Awami League. The fact that no prominent Awami League from the East even as a gesture contested also from West Pakistan not only showed total lack of the Awami League's credibility in West Pakistan, but also demonstrated the Awami League's awareness of the futility of such an exercise. These, added to total absence of the PPP in EP, reflected the non-existence of integrative political forces in Pakistani society, making Pakistan's political system a victim of its own contradictions.

\textsuperscript{115} See tables and charts IX.9 for details of partywise percentage of votes polled.

\textsuperscript{116} See Tables and Charts IX.10 for partywise distribution of the 300 National Assembly seats.
As has been already stated, an absolute Awami League majority in the National Assembly was not anticipated by the ruling junta and, therefore, a deadlock was inevitable.

The Awami League had used the election as a referendum on the Six-Point Programme. It had repeatedly declared that if, in spite of a favourable verdict of the people the implementation of the programme through constitutional means was stalled, the people would resolve the conflict by extra-constitutional means. And after the election there could be no going back. As Mohammed Ayoob has aptly remarked: "The massive mandate the Awami League received converted its Six Points Programme into the minimum non-negotiable demands of East Bengal." 117

The Awami League stand had been similar to Jinnah's well-known pronouncement that if the Muslims of (undivided) India thought they were a 'nation' and not a 'minority' they should be ready to undergo any sacrifice to carve out a homeland for themselves. In fact, the AIML fought the 1946 elections on the issue of Pakistan, 118 and


118 The guideline of the 1945-46 election campaign of the Muslim League in Bengal was provided by a booklet Let us Go to War written by Abul Hashim. See Abul Hashim, in Retrospection (Dacca, n.d.), p. 95. Text of the pamphlet in the form of a press statement is given in Appendix of the book, pp. 170-78.
having won the elections, it not only silenced all opposition but tuned itself to the popular (Indian) Muslim mood by adopting the Direct Action Resolution. Similarly, the Awami League, having won the 1970 elections the way it did, had to abide by the popular East Pakistani verdict. Any deviation now would have led to the withdrawal of the trust reposed in it by the masses of East Bengal.