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[Home](#) > Bangladesh: To Bangla Opposition Leader: Pyromaniachs are eventually consumed by fire:

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## **Bangladesh: To Bangla Opposition Leader: Pyromaniachs are eventually consumed by fire:**

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By Bhaskar Roy

Begum Khaleda Zia, Chairperson of the main opposition party in Bangladesh, is a two-time Prime Minister of Bangladesh. She and her party also took to the streets in 1992 in a joint movement with the Awami League to oust General and President H.M. Ershad's military government. Her husband, Gen, Zia-ur-Rahman, usurped the post of the President of the country, ran a martial law government to start with, lived by the sword, and died by it.

The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family on August 15, 1975 ushered in the politics of Martial Law and military rule like Pakistan. The BNP and its ally the Jamaat tried to sponsor a military coup in 2006, but were pre-empted by some top army leaders. But there was the shadow of the army over the caretaker government when the famous "minus two" theory – exile both Khaleda Zia and Sk. Hasina, was tried. A new party to be led by a particular celebrated person was contemplated.

Then army Chief Gen. Moin U. Ahmed also floated a new political theory of "democracy with Bangladeshi characteristics". Unfortunately, Gen. Moin appears to have been influenced by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's theory of "socialism with Chinese characteristic". There can be no comparison between two in any way. But people do get carried away, and can be pardoned if they did not cause any harm.

With this background, it is astonishing that a political leader like Begum Khaleda Zia who has seen the Bangladesh liberation war in the early stages from the Pakistani army controlled cantonment in Dhaka, to the present stage would again call on the army to intervene in the politics of the country.

This writer remembers what late Maj. Gen. M.A. Mannaf told him in 1983. Gen. Mannaf, who was the GOC and Martial Law Administrator of Chittagong Division said he believed the army belongs to the barracks and on the borders of the country to defend the nation from external aggression

Certainly, many countries call in the army to help in natural disasters, communal riots and disturbances of this kind, because the army is better equipped and better trained. In all circumstances it is the government that controls the country. On March 24, however, Khaleda Zia called upon the army not to be a silent spectator and play its role in the political development in the country. She placed the police firing on the rampaging Jamaat and its student wing Shibir cadres, on the same page as the police firing under the Pakistani regime in 1971!

Khaleda Zia's recent public statements have not only been injudicious but down right dangerous. She called the nation's secular youth movement as "perverted" and anti-Islam. She called the police actions to control the violent protests by the Jamaat-Shibir and some BNP cadres as "genocide".

True more than 170 people have died in these riots. But the dead include a number of policemen, several minorities (Hindus and Buddhists), pro-secular activists and, of course, some Jamaat-Shibir cadres.

Khaleda Zia never termed the killing of more than three million Bengalees and rape of more than two hundred thousand Bengalee women by the Pakistani army and their Bengalee Jamaat partners in 1971, as "Genocide". There were three recorded instances of genocide in the last century. One was the German Nazi extermination of Jews in the "Holocaust", the 1971 killing and raping of Bangladeshis, and the extermination of almost a third of the Cambodian population by the Khmer Rouge. The Nazi war criminals have been brought to justice, and so have the Khmer Rouge killers like Ieng Sary and Khieu Sampan among others.

It is the turn for Bangladesh to bring their killers to book and bring the 1971 genocide to a closure. This happened in Germany and Cambodia.

The closure of 1971 has been prevented by foreign interference including strategic interests and Wahabi infiltration to turn Bangladesh's sufi oriented Islamic culture which can be interpreted as secular Islam, into a radical Islamic country. Between 1998 to 2008, the effort of the Jamaat with support from BNP leaders was to convert Bangladesh into a haven for the Al Qaida and Taliban. While the BNP wanted to create a special relationship with Pakistan, which revealed the so called Bangladeshi nationalists in Pakistani clothing like Gen. Zia-ur-

Rahman and his wife Khaleda Zia, the Jamaat's objective was to reject the liberation war and reunite with Pakistan. The Jamaat ever accepted Bangladesh as a sovereign country.

International empathy for the BNP and Jamaat appears to have dwindled sharply. The Jamaat has been at pains to explain their innocence on the atrocities against minorities to the Human Rights Watch (HRW), but to no avail. The UK Weekly, **the Economist**, a steadfast supporter of the BNP and the Jamaat over the last two years at least, is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their position. The magazine is now attacking the judicial process of the Bangladesh International War Crimes Tribunals (ICT- I & II). This is unlikely to last long. The magazine has compared Nazi War Criminal Adolf Eichman's trial with the ICT trials. But they have stopped short of the Cambodian trial of the Khmer Rouge exterminators.

Begum Khaleda Zia must remember one thing. That in the last ten years the world has changed at a very fast pace. She is opening the proverbial Pandora's Box. What pours out from this Box can destroy her and her two sons.

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[Khalida Zia](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

[Jamaat](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

**Category:**

[Papers](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

**Countries:**

[Bangladesh](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

**Topics:**

[Political](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

[Human Rights](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

[Islamic Affairs](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

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- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/79>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
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- [9] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/islamic-affairs>