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Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Mon, 11/11/2013 - 09:58

Paper No. 5600

Dated 11-Nov-2013

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The stand off between the Awami League (AL) led government and the BNP led opposition has reached such an explosive point that unless a compromise is found between the two very soon, the country might go up in flames.

BNP chairperson and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has taken the political battle against AL president and Prime Minister Sk. Hasina to a personal level. It appears that Khaleda Zia has made it a point that Sk. Hasina does not remain prime minister during the period leading up to the general elections which is already due. She wants a return to a caretaker government system to conduct the polls. The provision was deleted from the constitution when the present AL led government came to power in 2009.

The caretaker government (CG) system is not easy to defend either. The CG was supposed to conduct elections within 90 days of the completion of the incumbent government. But in 2006, when the BNP was completing its term, the system fell apart. There was an attempt at a BNP supported military coup. The BNP led alliance in which the other major player was the Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI), initially pushed their people into the CG. Then the army became a player from the background. There was an attempt from outside to neutralize the two ladies politically- the infamous "minus two" formula. **All concerned should realize that this formula is alive and active.**

The hartals (closedowns) led by the BNP are getting increasingly violent. The JEI and its students' front, the Islamic Chaatra Shibir (ICS) have particularly resorted to planned violence using improvised explosives or bombs. Those suffering the most are the common people who have died trying to earn their daily bread. And the country has started to hurt badly economically.

The AL led government made mistakes, some serious ones, in terms of corruption. After 1975, all governments that ruled were corrupt, the worst being the BNP-JEI led government from 2001-2006. The AL led government under Sk. Hasina had many redeeming features. Statistics need not be quoted *ad nauseum*. Bangladesh was beginning to be seen much beyond its borders. News from Bangladesh was no

longer about terrorism but counter terrorism. The roots of the current problem are not the elections and caretaker government issues. They go much deeper. Sk. Hasina had promised to the nation that she would try the 1971 liberation war criminals and bring them to justice. Two International Crime Tribunals (ICT) were set up for the purpose. At least six have been sentenced to death, one to life imprisonment, and more are being tried. The ICTs may be criticized by human rights organizations like the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. But these tribunals had a job to do and are doing it well with all legal facilities open to those being tried.

As these trials proceed, they will unravel many other sinister plots to deny the aims of the liberation war even after liberation.

Neither the Pakistani army (and ISI) nor their Bangladeshi acolytes ever lost the hope of overturning the liberation of Bangladesh. They had ample encouragement and assistance from other countries. Initially, they acted to cleanse the catalysts of the liberation war.

Before surrendering to the Indian army in Dhaka, Pakistani soldiers and their JEI friends massacred renowned nationalists, intellectuals and journalists. On August 15, 1975, the main leader of the liberation movement Sk. Mujibur Rahman and his entire family was killed by a group of army officers. Only two of his daughters, Sk. Hasina, now prime minister, and Sk. Rehana survived because they were abroad. On November 9/10 that year four stalwarts of liberation-Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Mansur Ali and Kamrazzaman-were killed by the same people.

Highly decorated “freedom fighter” Zia-ur-Rehman, unveiled another side of his face. He mounted a coup within the army, killing Brig. Khaled Musharaf, a true freedom fighter, who had arrested Zia after Sk. Mujib’s murder. Another war hero, Col. Abu Taher, a leftist, sprung him out of jail and helped him take power. Taher wanted to raise a ‘people’s army”. Zia had him tried in secrecy inside the Dhaka cantonment, executed him immediately and had him buried there. Zia’s hands were dripping with the blood of many military officers. He met a similar fate visiting Chittagong in 1981.

Before his death, however, Zia severely damaged the nation. As president, he rehabilitated the JEI, banned after the liberation war. He also founded the BNP in 1977/78 which is now being led by his widow, Khaleda Zia.

Zia’s successor General and President H.M. Ershad, was no saint either. He also patronized the JEI and war criminals, then went on to form his political party, the Jatiyo Party.

There is a whole history to be written to make things clear. But the skeletons have to be dug up and the Trojan Horses dealt with decisively if Bangladesh is to survive.

There is a continuity of pro-Pakistan sentiment and the attempt to inject Wahabi Islam from 1971 exists even today. The war cry of the Pakistani collaborator in 1971 was “save Pakistan, save Islam”. It directly translated into “oppose liberation, oppose Bengalee culture and

secularism, uphold Ala Moududi, the founder of JEI". This included not only eliminating Bengalee nationalists, but also minorities (read Hindus). This phenomenon surfaced periodically since then, but became prominent after the BNP-JEI election victory in 2001.

The recent attacks on Hindus including their idols and places of worship by JEI and BNP in Pabna, Faridpur, Lalmonirhat and Khagrachari districts have been condemned by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), the US and the European Union (EU). The minority attack aspect represents the Wahabi/Moududi script of non-tolerance of any other religion. The increased volatility in Bangladesh politics suggests that religious extremism is likely to grow.

It needs to be asked specifically why the BNP-JEI leadership remained in denial of the new religious terrorist organization Jamatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) and its leader Banglabhai till the countrywide bomb explosions by this organization occurred in August, 2005. Even Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at that time had said the JMB and Banglabhai were the imaginary creation of the media. This organization, which comprised some who fought along side the Taliban in Afghanistan, ran a reign of terror. Finally the leaders of the JMB were arrested after a warning from US president George W. Bush. Six of the seven leaders were executed during the caretaker government regime. The seventh is still absconding.

The period 2001-2006 witnessed unprecedented rise in terrorist organizations in Bangladesh, patronized by the ruling political leaders and funded from Wahabi sources in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Pakistan. Then came the political killings including the attempt on Sk. Hasina's life using terrorist organization like the HUJI, linked with Pakistan's HUJI.

India obviously became a prime target for the Pakistani ISI and Bangladesh government and intelligence organizations. The old Pakistani operation of funding Indian separatists and terrorists resumed. The strategy and plans from the days of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) till now remain unusually similar if not the same. And this is not going away soon. An Al Qaida cooperation was just emerging but had to be discarded because of the elections.

The cancellation of the JEI's registration with the Election Commission (EC) as per a High Court order is not necessarily a setback for the party. Several clauses of the JEI contradicts the constitution, especially on secularism, religion, democracy and women's issues. In 2008 the EC gave JEI a provisional registration to contest the elections, though it did not have the powers to do so. Since then the EC has called upon the party several times to rectify its charter in line with the constitution but to no avail.

It was a deliberate act of the JEI to have itself deregistered, preventing its party from participation in the elections. It has taken the position that it will not abide by the existing constitution. This is a very serious development. The people of a nation are expected to abide by its constitution. The JEI has, therefore, decided to create a reality that a group or a social organization exists in the country which does not respect the constitution. They have plunged into street agitation including violent actions to defy liberation and independence.

The new hard line religious organization Hifazat-e-Islam (HEI) comprising Mullahs of Quami madrassas has been funded by both the JEI and the BNP principally to confront the AL and other secular and pro-liberation parties.

It is unfortunately turning into a serious conflict between anti-liberation and pro-liberation sections of the society. The HEI has put up a 13-point demand supplementing the JEI agenda which also denigrates women. There is a direct attack on the Bengalee national aspirations and culture.

Foreign countries involved which have influence are not playing a helpful role either. The US leads this force, but it does not seem to be following its advertised policy of democracy and secularism. There is an old cold war hangover supporting Pakistan and its acolytes in Bangladesh. It wants to build a constituency of US friendly Muslim or Islamic parties, entities and countries to erase its anti-Muslim reputation in the Gulf, the Middle East and North Africa. **If Washington thinks it can control a hard-line Islamic country in Bangladesh it should review its past experience in Afghanistan and elsewhere.**

It is difficult to speculate if the BNP has really thought over this position if and when the JEI comes to share government with their constitutional and legal frame work.

In case of such a drastic and explosive change India will be the first country to be affected. The same nightmare of terrorism, support to separatists and Pakistan's agenda will return.

India will work with or will be forced to work with any government that rules Dhaka. New Delhi would remember the distraught bilateral relations with Bangladesh between 2001-2006. Did New Delhi do enough? Yes and no. Certain critical assistance was given. But the two most visible ones, the Teesta Water Agreement and the Land Border Agreement fell victim to internal political pressures in India.

New Delhi must be ready with new diplomatic calculations before the Bangladesh elections take place by the due date of January 24, 2014. Unfortunately however, a cloud seems to gathering over the elections.

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