

to utilize the money.

Privatization of the economy and selling off the public sector units, which Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has claimed as her government's independent decision, had long been the goal of the donor agencies. By 1989, one report says, as many as 640 enterprises have been denationalized under the allegation that state sector units are ill-managed causing low productivity. Although the argument has never been proven, in the sense that the private sector in Bangladesh performs any better, the uncritical acceptance of this viewpoint indicates the power and influence exerted by the donor agencies. The resident representative of the World Bank at Dhaka has noted that the "opportunity for aid-givers to impose their views on Bangladesh was made all too clear, when it became the accepted view that Bangladesh simply could not manage her economy without the assurance that large amounts of aid would be forthcoming."

The growing crisis

Bangladesh's aid addiction does not end with only the domination of the donor agencies at economic policy making. Bangladesh has entered into a structural adjustment program in 1987 with the IMF and World Bank for a period of three years ending July 1990. The result: worsening performance of Bangladesh's physical infrastructure. Bangladesh's growth rate fell to 2.8%. The IMF diktat to enhance foreign investments into Bangladesh drew no response from foreign investors. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Moudud Ahmed, under President Ershad, took a much-publicized tour through the West urging investors to come to Bangladesh while assuring them that "Bangladesh would wipe the smile off the Asian tigers." His efforts drew a blank.

However, opposition to such aid addiction and kow-towing to the donors is gathering force. Dr. Iftekhharuzzaman of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, at a seminar in February 1992, attacked the government's aid-dependent development strategy and called for a self-imposed moratorium in its external resource inflow for a decade or two. He pointed out that the present strategy is "expanding and strengthening the network of an aid-sustained elite, which flourishes in its exclusive position by trading poverty while the poor continue to be poorer."

Short of such a drastic measure, Bangladesh's elite will be driven to sell the nation's labor power as a slave pool. The government has set up an export-processing zone in the port-city of Chittagong in southern Bangladesh which caters exclusively to export-oriented industry. Plans are afoot to set up similar export-processing zones in Dhaka and the coastal city of Khulna. Already, textile factories are churning out textiles for the world market, sold under all different national labels. Bangladeshi labor is, evidently, among the cheapest in the world—one to two cents an hour.

The assassination of Sheikh Mujib

by Ramtanu Maitra

Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's action in September against the cadre-based Freedom Party, led by two professed killers of the country's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, could have a resounding impact on Bangladesh's body politic. Coming alongside memories of the vicious killing which wiped out all of Sheikh Mujib's family except two daughters who were abroad on that fateful day, leaving none to bury the dead, the action against the Freedom Party may open a political Pandora's box.

The arrested leaders of the Freedom Party were two of the four important members of a team of 15 that killed Sheikh Mujib in 1975. Both were given free passage by Ziaur Rahman, Begum Khaleda's husband who became President, only to be assassinated in 1982. The Freedom Party was formed in 1986 during former President H.M. Ershad's reign, and the two assassins were allowed to come back home to open a political office in Dhaka. Subsequently, Farooq Rahman, one of the two Freedom Party leaders, ran unsuccessfully against General Ershad in a presidential contest. The recent police raid gathered evidence showing that the assassins of Sheikh Mujib were involved in arms smuggling in collusion with the right-wing Islamic party, Jamaat-e-Islami. Jamaat is hated by the majority of Bangladeshis for lending support to the Pakistani Army during the liberation war of 1971. It is also widely known that Begum Khaleda's Bangladesh Nationalist Party had made political arrangements with the Jamaat during last year's general elections which had brought her to power.

To know the real story behind the assassination of Sheikh Mujib on Aug. 15, 1975, is important not only for the citizens of Bangladesh, but also for the people of the entire region. Once the veil is finally lifted from Sheikh Mujib's assassination, a number of events in the region that followed the assassination become clear.

The 1971 liberation war in which India, and Mrs. Indira Gandhi in particular, had played a key role, led to the formation of Bangladesh and the humiliation of the much-vaunted Pakistani Army. This result did not please Washington, and President Nixon made that known when he ordered the Seventh Fleet to enter the Bay of Bengal, ostensibly to help rescue the Americans stationed in Bangladesh. At the time, Washington's South Asia policy was firmly in the hands of Henry Kissinger. Under Kissinger's prompting, Pakistan

was working on behalf of the United States to help develop a channel to China so that Kissinger and Nixon could meet with the aging and fading Mao Zedong. The objective was to achieve a "balance of power" against the Soviet Union and India with the help of Pakistan and China. The freeing of Bangladesh showed that Pakistan was less invincible than what Washington would have liked Beijing to believe, and that India had surely gained by clipping Pakistan's eastern wing.

India was doubly aggravating to Kissinger and company. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was also signed in 1971, and it seemed that Sheikh Mujib would join Washington's much-dreaded "Indo-Soviet Axis." That did not happen, because neither India nor the Soviet Union could or would come up with what was considered to be generous aid to Bangladesh.

On May 18, 1974, India detonated its first nuclear explosive, and immediately drew the wrath of the international community. Although others criticized India for its nuclear ambitions, no one attacked India as viciously as did the United States and China. Pakistani Foreign Secretary Agha Shahi journeyed to Beijing in June, and China announced "full and absolute support to Pakistan against foreign aggression and interference, including nuclear blackmail."

Kissinger, who had described India's role in Bangladesh in 1971 as similar to "Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland," came to India in October 1974, ostensibly to talk it over with Mrs. Gandhi. The two-day trip came to nothing. Mrs. Gandhi, showing her contempt, chose to stay away from New Delhi the day Kissinger arrived.

By then, India had drawn further ire in Washington, London, and Beijing. In the summer of 1974, the mountain kingdom of Sikkim, bordering Chinese Tibet, joined the Indian nation through a bill passed in the Sikkim Parliament. Sikkim figured as a linchpin in the British dream of forming the "Great Himalayan Kingdom" as a geopolitical counter to India. The British operation was put into force when an American, Hope Cooke, was married off to the Sikkim monarch. While Washington has since accepted Sikkim's union with India, China so far has not, and its printed maps of the region prove the point.

However, by the end of 1974, a different wind began to blow across India. General economic problems, intense pressure from the International Monetary Fund to "stabilize" the Indian economy, and general price rises put Mrs. Gandhi on the defensive. Civil disobedience and anarchy broke out all over the country, particularly along the Gangetic plain, as a western-backed J.P. Narayan decided to bring the government down through organized anarchy. While opposition leaders were planning to overthrow Prime Minister Gandhi, she herself was quietly working toward imposing an internal emergency. On June 25, 1975, the state of emergency was imposed, and a large number of opposition leaders were imprisoned within the first few days.

Failures to the fore

Developments within Bangladesh were no less ominous. "Bangabandhu" (Friend of Bengal) Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's rule had soured almost as soon as it had begun with Bangladesh's 1971 liberation. After proclaiming a socialist form of government, Sheikh Mujib had little means to give it that shape, and quickly became dependent on foreign aid and grants. On March 26, 1972, Sheikh Mujib took over ownership of all assets belonging to the Pakistani nationals who had left Bangladesh in the wake of the liberation war. But it was a hollow victory: Pakistani entrepreneurs had already stripped the facilities, leaving behind only a huge amount of liabilities.

Through his proclamation of establishing a socialist state, Sheikh Mujib wanted to give peasants, students, and workers, who had fought the liberation war, an equal share. But rampant corruption within the nationalized units and addiction to foreign aid left Sheikh Mujib politically weak and isolated. His three closest economists, Nirul Islam, Rehman Sobhan, and Anisur Rahman, had all joined the Planning Commission, but soon left. Anisur Rahman went on record saying that the government must go without aid, and that this was the only way to change the institutions as well as the "very social landscape of the nation."

Attacks against Sheikh Mujib began to show up from different quarters. The Bangladeshi middle class, along with the military, were also feeling the pinch of a weakening economy. Talk surfaced that Sheikh Mujib's relatives were amassing wealth. Sheikh Mujib saw it all, but did not respond in any useful way, and when he did, such as when he made Bangladesh into a one-party nation, the effect was disastrous.

In February 1974, Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to Bangladesh, ostensibly in order to "heal wounds." While the anti-Mujib and pro-western crowd gave Bhutto a rousing welcome, the peasants, students, and workers shouted: "Butcher, go back home!" Pakistan claimed that Sheikh Mujib had organized the counter-demonstration, but there was little doubt that the polarization between pro-liberation war and anti-liberation war was complete.

The drumbeat for the kill

Those in Bangladesh who kept their ears close to the ground claim that the assassination plot had been in the works for quite some time before it was carried out. In 1972, Lieutenant Ziauddin, a Maoist military officer, demanded Sheikh Mujib's removal in an article in *Holiday*, a magazine owned by a Maoist elite. Sheikh Mujib called in Ziauddin and took him to task for what he had said, but did not fire him. That came later, and Ziauddin went underground to organize. Ziauddin's comrade-in-arms, Col. Abu Taher, who had enjoyed a brief spell of glory in November 1975 when he had organized a coup, and who was later hanged by Ziaur Rahman, was also fired for radical activities.

There were other ominous signals as well. The explosion

of the Soviet-built urea plant at Ghorasal, 30 miles northeast of Dhaka, on Sept. 30, 1974, was the result of an act of sabotage. The temporary closing down of the Ghorasal urea plant seriously hurt Bangladesh's agriculture. Besides, Bangladesh got into a desperate bind to generate foreign exchange to import more urea. The money could not be gotten, leading to an almost 30% drop in fertilizer consumption in 1974-75.

Internally, those who hated Sheikh Mujib and wanted his rule to end, did not lack outside support. Kevin Rafferty, writing in the *Financial Times* of London on June 6, 1974, had already called for halting aid to Bangladesh. Rafferty said of the party Sheikh Mujib led: "Aid merely allows the Awami League to live off the fat of the land. It would be far better to let the country fend for itself, let the people suffer, and kick the rulers out."

Kissinger was in Dhaka on Oct. 30, 1974, and met with Sheikh Mujib. What happened between them is a matter of conjecture, but at a press conference in Dhaka, Kissinger told newsmen that the talks had produced "some progress towards straightening out some of the difficulties." Kissinger evaded their queries about what these "difficulties" were, but dropped hints that he, and the United States government, believed that U.S. aid was being squandered—a U.S. green light to Mujib's opponents.

The final act: the assassination plots

According to sources in Dhaka, there were four assassination plots to eliminate Sheikh Mujib. The plot that got the green light involved 15 Army men, four of whom were major actors. Two of them were related through marriage, and the other two were dismissed from the Army, and hence disgruntled. According to Moudud Ahmed, who later became prime minister during General Ershad's presidency and is now languishing in jail for amassing a disproportionate amount of wealth, "In the course of time it became clear that the Army officers who took the lead in the operation had no plan of their own. The question remains why did they do it, then, and for whom?"

All 15 members of the plot were duly protected by Ziaur Rahman when he became President following a series of coups by military men in November 1975.

Two other stores were making the rounds those days in Dhaka. One involves Ziaur Rahman, who was then a major general and aspiring to become the chief of Army staff. Ziaur Rahman wanted to impose martial law in Bangladesh, and had received enthusiastic support from then U.S. Ambassador David Boster. Sheikh Mujib had, however, preempted the plan by making Maj. Gen. Safiullah chief of staff, superseding Ziaur Rahman.

The second story was reported by American journalist Marcus Franda. Franda, a shadowy figure—and the Indian government will confirm that—had managed to be in Dhaka a few days before the Aug. 15 assassination. Franda says that according

to a senior Awami League member, Tajuddin Ahmed was approached by "some Americans" in 1975. Tajuddin duly cautioned Sheikh Mujib of the impending danger.

No matter what the plotters might have believed about their motives, the event of the assassination and what follows makes clear the strategic result: The assassination occurred on the morning of Aug. 15, the day India celebrates its independence. This was done most likely because the plotters wanted to convey a message to Mrs. Gandhi, given that Sheikh Mujib had remained Mrs. Gandhi's best friend among the heads of state. Franda, a staff member of the American Universities Field Staff, headquartered in Hanover, New Hampshire, wrote cryptically that the date was "one of the many ironies . . . of the case."

Those "ironies" include:

- Beijing recognized Bangladesh on Aug. 31, 1975, sixteen days after Sheikh Mujib's murder. When Ziaur Rahman became President, Bangladesh began its military relationship with Beijing, ostensibly in order to protect itself from the "threats of Indian invasion."

- Saudi Arabia, which had opposed the liberation war of 1971 and the formation of Bangladesh, also opened diplomatic relations soon after Sheikh Mujib was killed.

- Pakistan Radio on Aug. 15, in announcing Sheikh Mujib's assassination, said that "the People's Republic of Bangladesh" had been changed to "Islamic Republic of Bangladesh." Challenged by India, this was denied by the new Bangladesh government. Hearing about the coup, Mrs. Gandhi had put the paramilitary forces stationed along the Bangladesh borders on alert.

- In the interim cabinet of Sheikh Mujib during the liberation war, there was one person, Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmed, who was regarded as pro-West and pro-Islamic state. Khondkar Mushtaque became President upon Sheikh Mujib's assassination.

- Following the November coup which had brought the Maoist Army officer Col. Abu Taher to power for a brief period before Ziaur Rahman took over and hanged Taher, the remaining four interim cabinet members were slaughtered in their prison cells in the Dhaka Central Jail.

- Moudud Ahmed, in his monograph for the U.S. Heritage Foundation on the Mujib era, celebrated the removal of Sheikh Mujib. He said: "Anyhow, that was the end of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the beginning of a new era for Bangladesh. The death of Mujib changed the entire perspective of Bangladesh politics. The new journey began with a general sense of relief in the mind of the people."

The assassination moved Bangladesh out of India's orbit and placed it firmly in the U.S.-China-Saudi Arabia nexus which ensured more cash for the elites and more arms for the military. The "new journey," not completely different from Sheikh Mujib's as far as the economy is concerned, formalized the current system of foreign debt, foreign grants, and foreign diktats.