The Emergence of Bangladesh
Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by Habibul Khondker
Olav Muurlink · Asif Bin Ali
The Emergence of Bangladesh
We remain indebted to a great many individuals for their cooperation, guidance, and encouragement in putting together this volume. We must express our gratitude to Dr Kamal Hossain, Dr Hameeda Hossain, Professor Rehman Sobhan, and Professor Rounaq Jahan, who remain part of the history of Bangladesh, for their support and cooperation with this project. Since one of our aims was to introduce the leading Bangladeshi scholars in the diaspora to the students of Bangladesh studies both at home and abroad, we approached these scholars who, despite their demanding schedules, favorably responded to our call. We want to express our sincere gratitude to all our authors.

We also want to thank Palgrave for their flexibility and support as our task faced some delays in meeting the schedule in part because of the Covid-19 situation.

Finally, for giving us permission to include an extract from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s autobiography, we want to express our sincere gratitude to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.
(Only 7 years after the creation of Pakistan, the election of 1954 was a milestone in the history of the emergence of Bangladesh when the Jukto (United) Front made up of the Awami League and Krishak Sramik Party (KSP) routed the Muslim League in the election of the Provincial assembly. In this election a young Bangabandhu, 34 years old, defeated a veteran Muslim League leader in Gopalganj, Bangabandhu’s birthplace.)

Upon returning to Gopalganj I saw that the Muslim League candidate Wahiduzzaman had joined the electoral fray in full swing. In his own life, he accumulated great wealth. A launch, speedboats, bicycles, microphones—he lacked nothing. As for me, I had a microphone and nothing else. My electoral district is made up of Gopalganj and Kotalipara thana. There was hardly a passable road in the region. For my election campaign, all we had were two bicycles. My party workers used their own personal bicycles. I also did not have much funds to spare. My family had some good-quality river boats that we used. Students and young party workers came forth and started spending their own money as they joined my campaign. After addressing a number of rallies, I came to the realization that Mr Wahiduzzaman would lose miserably. Money would not be enough; public opinion was on my side. In every village I went to, people would not only promise to cast their votes for me, they would welcome me into their houses, treat me to food and drinks and donate money to my election funds. If I declined to take their money, they would be offended and would say this money is for the expenses of your election.
I remember, for example, a poor, old woman waited for me on the roadside to catch a glimpse of me and when she saw me, she insisted that I visit her hut. Holding her hands, I went to her humble hut. There were many people with me. She spread a mat for us to sit down and gave me a cup of milk, betel leaf and four annas. She said, “please have this and take the money, since I have nothing more to give”. My eyes welled with tears. I drank the milk and returned her four annas, supplementing the amount with some more money. She did not take my money. I told her: “Your prayers are enough for me; I will never be able to repay your blessings with money”. The old woman touched my head and face and gave me blessings, saying that “The blessings of the poor will be with you”. When I left her home, silent tears rolled down my cheeks. On that day, I took a vow, “I will never mislead the people.” Many similar events took place. I traveled from union to union by foot. My travels would be interrupted as women in the villages wanted to catch a glimpse of me. Before contesting the election, I had no idea how much people loved me. A major change in my outlook took place during this election campaign.

When Mr Wahiduzzaman and the Muslim League realized that their situation was not favorable, they changed their tactics. They brought in many religious figures, peers, and Maulanas. In Gopalganj there was a famous religious scholar, Maulana Shamsul Haque, who I knew and had respected. He was very knowledgeable about religion. I was convinced that this Maulana would not take a stand against me. But he joined the Muslim League and took active part in the campaign against me. The Muslims in that region had high regard for him. The Maulana began to tour the region by speedboat, moving from union to union addressing campaign rallies against me. In one religious gathering, he issued a fatwa that “If people voted for me, Islam will come to an end, religion will end.” Other peers such as the Peer of Sarsina, Peer of Borguna, Peer of Shibpur, and the Shah of Rahmatpur all joined the fray against me and did not mince words in issuing fatwas against me. With the exception of a couple of Maulanas, the rest of the Maulavis and their followers joined the campaign in full swing. On the one hand, money and on the other hand the peers. Lured by the money, the followers of the peers plunged into the campaign, sacrificing their sleep at night and rest in the day to defeat me.

Some of the civil servants were also actively involved in this campaign. The police chief from Dhaka showed up in Gopalganj and ordered the civil servants in no uncertain terms to support the Muslim League. The district magistrate of Faridpur, Mr Altaf Gowher, was transferred and
replaced by another officer as he declined to do the bidding of the government. The new civil servant started addressing campaign rallies and changed the election centers three days before the elections, to the advantage of Mr Wahiduzzaman. Ordinary people and students were on my side and they started to work selflessly. Just four days before the election, Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy came to address two rallies in my support after hearing all these partisan activities of the civil servants. A day before the election, Maulana Bhasani came to address a rally. Few days before the election, Khondker Shamsul Haque Moktar Shahib, Rahmat Jan, and Shahidul Islam o Imada were arrested under the security law and were transferred to Faridpur Jail. About forty important persons were arrested from one union and arrest warrants were issued against another fifty people three days before the election...

When the election results were announced, it was revealed that Mr Wahiduzzaman had been beaten by 10,000 votes. Not only had people voted for me, they had also raised 5000 taka to meet the expenses of the election. It came to my realization that if you love the people, they will love you in return. If you make small sacrifices, then people will be ready to sacrifice their lives. Realizing his mistakes, Maulana Shamsul Haque retired from politics. In this election, the Muslim League was routed. A few days before the elections, Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy in a statement said: “I will be surprised if Muslim League gets more than 9 seats in the election”. Out of 300 seats, the Muslim League received just nine seats.
CONTENTS

Introduction
Habibul Khondker, Olav Muurlink, and Asif Bin Ali

The Political and Economic Context Underlying the Emergence of Bangladesh
Rehman Sobhan and Habibul Khondker

Wind of Change: Bhola 1970
Olav Muurlink

War Babies of 1971: A Missing Historical Narrative
Mustafa Chowdhury

The Making of the Bangladesh Constitution
Kamal Hossain

Bengali Identity, Secularism and the Language Movement
Tazeen M. Murshid

Religious Radicalization in Bangladesh
Ali Riaz
The Making of Minorities in Bangladesh: Legacies, Policies and Practice
Meghna Guhathakurta 109

The Political Economy of Development: Bangladesh From Its Emergence toward the Future
Haider A. Khan and Shamayeta Rahman 135

Human Development in Bangladesh: A Dynamic Trajectory
Selim Jahan 157

Government—Business Relationships in Bangladesh
Syed Akhtar Mahmood 177

Gender and Development
Shelley Feldman 203

Livelihoods and Food Security of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: Factors of Change and Future Prospects
Shapan Adnan 229

The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh
Amena Mohsin 251

Climate Change and Displacement: Locating the Most Vulnerable Groups
Tasneem Siddiqui 259

Retracing Accountability in the Bangladeshi Public Administration
Quamrul Alam, Shibaab Rahman, and Julian Teicher 273

The Changing Role of the Bangladesh Military: 1971 to 2020—The Evolving Bangladesh Defense Policy
Mahmud Ur Rahman Choudhury 293
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Evolution of Education Policy in Bangladesh: Past and Present</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mak (Chanchal) Khan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success and Its Consequences: Bangladesh’s Health Report Card at 50</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olav Muurlink, Pratima Durga, Nabil Awan, and Andrew Taylor-Robinson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Emerging Diaspora of Bangladesh: Fifty Years of Overseas Movements and Settlements</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazli Kibria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi Mediascape: Political and Corporate Power</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asif Bin Ali and Olav Muurlink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film in Bangladesh: Cultural Transformation of a National Cinema within and beyond the Nation-state</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zakir Hossain Raju</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip-Hop Music Activism: A New Phenomenon in Bangladeshi Popular Culture</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mubashar Hasan and Priyanka Kundu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Bangladesh</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habibul Khondker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Shapan Adnan** (PhD Cambridge) is a professorial research associate with the Department of Development Studies of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He has taught at the National University of Singapore and the Universities of Dhaka and Chittagong. He has been a visiting scholar and visiting research fellow at the University of Oxford. His research and publications are in the fields of political economy, sociology/anthropology, and development.

**Quamrul Alam, PhD** is Professor of International Business & Strategy at the School of Business and Law, Central Queensland University. Formerly at Monash University in Australia, Alam’s research interests include international business strategy, public governance, regulatory governance, corporate social responsibility, and public—private partnerships. He has published over 60 journal articles, 16 book chapters and four books.

**Nabil Awan** is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Statistical Research and Training, University of Dhaka. He is on study leave, as a graduate researcher in biostatistics at the University of Pittsburgh, and formerly worked as Assistant Director (Department of Banking Inspection) at the Central Bank of Bangladesh.

**Asif Bin Ali** is a Lecturer at the History and Philosophy Department, North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He was Erasmus Mundus Fellow (2019–2021) at Swansea University, the UK, Aarhus University, and Danish School of Media and Journalism, Denmark. A former journalist, he is regional editor of *Global Dialogue*, a quarterly magazine of the

Mahmud Ur Rahman Choudhury PSC (Retd), was educated at Faujdarhat Cadet College. He was commissioned into the Bangladesh Army in 1976, as an officer in the Corps of Artillery. He retired in 2000. Since retirement, he has been working a freelance writer and author on the history of Bangladesh, geo-politics and military studies. He is the editor of RAOWA Review.

Mustafa Chowdhury a Canadian of Bangladeshi origin, has graduate degrees in English Literature, Library and Information Science, and Canadian History. He has authored three books: Ekattorer Judhoshishu: Obidito Itihash; Picking Up the Pieces: 1971 War Babies’ Odyssey from Bangladesh to Canada; and Unconditional Love: Story of Adoption of 1971 War Babies.

Pratima Durga is Director of the Research Centre for Learning and Scholarship Skills (CLASS) at Alphacrucis College in Brisbane, Australia. Her PhD studies at Central Queensland University examine how Bangladesh is handling remote area health delivery, and rural health innovation in Bangladesh.

Shelley Feldman is Senior Fellow, Max-Weber-Kolleg für kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Studien, Universität Erfurt, Germany. From 1984 to 2016 she was International Professor, Cornell University, and Director of its Feminist, Gender, and Sexualities Studies Program. She has undertaken research in Bangladesh since 1978 with a focus on the political economy of economic and social restructuring.

Meghna Guhathakurta taught International Relations at Dhaka University from 1984 to 2006. She serves as Executive Director of Research Initiatives Bangladesh, an independent research organization. She graduated from the University of Dhaka and received her PhD from the University of York, UK. She has written extensively on migration trends, partition histories, and peacebuilding and minority rights in South Asia.

Mubashar Hasan, PhD is an adjunct fellow at the Humanitarian and Development Research Initiative, Western Sydney University, Australia.

**Kamal Hossain** educated at University of Michigan and Oxford, is an internationally known jurist. He is former Law Minister and Chairman of the Constitution drafting Committee of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh in 1972 and former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh.

**Selim Jahan** PhD McGill, is a former director and the lead author of the United Nations Human Development Report. Prior to that, he headed the Poverty Division of the organization. He was Professor of Economics at University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and also taught at McGill University, Canada. He is the author of 12 books.

**Haider A. Khan** PhD Cornell University, is a distinguished university professor at Josef Korbel School of International Studies (JKSIS), University of Denver. He is ranked among the top 1 percent of international economists. He has served as the chief international adviser to Arab Trade and Human Development and a senior economic adviser to UNCTAD in Geneva.

**Mak (Chanchal) Khan, PhD** is a consultant and adviser to various multilateral development partners. His areas of work include public policy, education, human capital development, governance, and development effectiveness. A former UNDP official and an academic with the University of Melbourne, Dr Khan has contributed to strategic plans and policies for governments and development partners across 28 countries in the Asia-Pacific region over the last three decades.

**Habibul Khondker** PhD University of Pittsburgh, is Professor of Sociology at Zayed University, Abu Dhabi. He is co-editor of *Covid-19 and Governance* (2021) and *Asia and Europe in Globalization* (2006). With Bryan Turner he co-authored *Globalization East and West* (2010). His research is on global studies.

**Nazli Kibria** is Professor of Sociology at Boston University. She specializes in the sociology of families, immigration, race, and childhood with a focus on South Asia as well as the Asian American experience. Her most recent books include *Race and Immigration* and *Muslims in Motion: Islam and National Identity in the Bangladeshi Diaspora* (2011).
Priyanka Kundu is working with Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). She has worked as a journalist with UNB (United News of Bangladesh).

Syed Akhtar Mahmood is an economist. He was previously Lead Private Sector Specialist in the World Bank Group. He studied, and later taught, economics at Dhaka University in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He obtained a D.Phil. in Economics from the University of Oxford.

Amena Mohsin is a professor in the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. She graduated from the same department and later received her MA and PhD degrees from the University of Hawaii, USA, and Cambridge University, UK. She is the author of *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh* (1997) and *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On The Difficult Road To Peace* (2003).

Tazeen M. Murshid teaches South Asian history and politics, and has held positions at Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium; the School of Oriental and African Studies, London; University of North London; BRAC University; and East-West University, Dhaka. She has been a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin; at St Antony’s College, Oxford; and at Homerton College, Cambridge, and a visiting fellow at Columbia University, New York, as well as directeur des études at EHESS, Paris.

Olav Muurlink has been involved with education development in Bangladesh, principally in Bhola, for close to thirty years, through his roles as Head of Country, Bangladesh, and Chair of the Australian NGO Cooperation in Development (Australia) Incorporated. He is an associate professor of Sustainable Innovation at Central Queensland University in Brisbane.

Shamayeta Rahman is a research assistant at the University of Denver. Her research work is focused on gender, health, and development in Bangladesh. She received her Master’s degree in Economics from the University of Denver.

Shibaab Rahman received his PhD from Monash University. He is an academic and an experienced professional with more than eight years of project management, policy analysis, and qualitative/quantitative research experience within the international development arena.
Zakir Hossain Raju  PhD Latrobe, is a professor and Head of the Department of Media and Communication at Independent University, Bangladesh. He also taught at Monash University in Australia and Malaysia and served as a research fellow at the University of Malaya and the Korean National University of Arts. He has authored many research articles and monographs, including *Bangladesh Cinema and National Identity* (2015).

Ali Riaz is a distinguished professor of Political Science at Illinois State University, USA. His research interests include democratization, violent extremism, South Asian politics, and Bangladeshi politics. His recent publications include *Voting in a Hybrid Regime: Explaining the 2018 Bangladesh Election* (2019), and an edited volume, *Religion and Politics in South Asia* (2021).

Tasneem Siddiqui is Professor of Political Science, University of Dhaka, and Founding Chair of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU). She led the drafting of the National Strategy for Internal Displacement in Bangladesh 2021 and the Overseas Employment Policy 2006. She is on the Global Editorial Board of the *Oxford Journal of Migration Studies* and adviser to the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

Rehman Sobhan is a freedom fighter and a distinguished economist. Educated at Cambridge, he was a professor of Economics at Dhaka University before becoming a member of the Planning Commission of Bangladesh. An author of over 20 books, he was adviser (a cabinet position) to the Caretaker Government and the founder of the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Bangladesh.

Andrew Taylor-Robinson has over 30 years’ research experience in tropical infectious disease immunology and epidemiology, including in Bangladesh, focusing on malaria, dengue, and other mosquito-borne diseases. He holds professorial appointments at VIN University and is international scholar at the Center for Global Health, University of Pennsylvania.

Julian Teicher is the CEO of the Melbourne Institute of Higher Education, and an adjunct professor at Central Queensland University with strong research connections with Bangladesh. He has had a distinguished research and leadership career in various universities, including as Deputy Dean (Research) at Central Queensland University, Head of the Centre of Business at RMIT Vietnam, and professor at and Director of the Graduate School of Business at Monash.
LIST OF FIGURES

The Political Economy of Development: Bangladesh From Its Emergence toward the Future
Fig. 1 Anemia Prevalence Amongst Women of Reproductive Age. (Source: Global Nutrition Report, 2016) 148
Fig. 2 Underweight by Sex. (Source: Global Nutrition Report, 2016) 149

Human Development in Bangladesh: A Dynamic Trajectory
Fig. 1 Human development—the analytical framework. (Source: UNDP, 2016) 159
Fig. 2 Human Development Index (HDI) disaggregated by male and female HDI. (Source: Razzaque, 2020, based on UNDP data) 162
Fig. 3 Poverty incidence in Bangladesh (percentage of population living below the poverty and extreme poverty lines). (Note: Poverty rates in 2017, 2018 and 2019 are based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimates. Source: Based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data) 163
Fig. 4 Under-five mortality by the rural—urban divide. (Source: Akash, 2020, estimation based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of BBS [2019]) 165
Fig. 5 Under-five mortality by wealth quintiles. (Source: Akash, 2020, estimation based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of BBS [2019]) 165
Fig. 6 District-wise incidence of multidimensional poverty in Bangladesh, 2019. (Data source: OPHI, 2020) 167
Government—Business Relationships in Bangladesh

Fig. 1  The dominance of garments in total exports of Bangladesh: 1996–2020. (Source: Government of Bangladesh) 179
Fig. 2  The relative complexity of Bangladesh’s exports: 1995–2016. (Source: Harvard University, Growth Lab, Atlas of Economic Complexity) 180
Fig. 3  Firm-size differences in perceptions of business constraints. (Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey, 2013) 184
Fig. 4  The Many Dimensions of Regulatory Uncertainty Faced by Businesses. (Source: Business survey done by International Finance Corporation) 185
Fig. 5  Business views on discretionary behavior by officials in Bangladesh. (Source: Business survey done by International Finance Corporation) 186
Fig. 6  Business views on causes of discretionary behavior by officials in Bangladesh. (Source: Business survey done by International Finance Corporation) 187
Fig. 7  Market Dominance in Bangladesh Relative to Peers. (Source: World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Indicators) 190
Fig. 8  Effectiveness of Anti-Monopoly Policy in Bangladesh Relative to Peers. (Source: World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Indicators) 191
Fig. 9  Capture, privilege-seeking, and corruption 192
Fig. 10 Undue Influence on Policymaking: Bangladesh vs. Peers: 2007–2016. (Source: World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Indicators) 193
Fig. 11 The attitude of mid-level officials toward business issues 200
List of Tables

The Political and Economic Context Underlying the Emergence of Bangladesh

Table 1  Disparities in per Capita Income between East and West Pakistan 14

Religious Radicalization in Bangladesh

Table 1  Factors of Radicalization 92
Table 2  Factors of Radicalization in Bangladesh 96

The Political Economy of Development: Bangladesh From Its Emergence toward the Future

Table 1  Key Macroeconomic Data for Bangladesh in the 1971–1980 period 143
Table 2  Key Macroeconomic Data for Bangladesh in the 1980–1990 period 144
Table 3  Key Macroeconomic Data for Bangladesh in the 1990–2019 period 145
Table 4  General Labor Force Data between 1990 and 2019 146
Table 5  Poverty and Inequality Data for Bangladesh in the 1988–2010 period 147
Table 6  Literacy Rates in Bangladesh between 1974 and 2016 149
Table 7  Education enrollment data by sex 150
Table 8  Overview of General Health Outcomes between 1971 and 2015 150
Table 1  Comparison of Bangladesh’s performance under HDI components with comparator countries (2019)  161
Introduction

Habibul Khondker, Olav Muurlink, and Asif Bin Ali

Bangladesh, against all odds, has come of age. International pessimism surrounding the future of Bangladesh in 1971 was clearly misplaced. This book attempts to assess the development of Bangladesh historically, starting with a rationale for the independence of this South Asian country. In order to achieve these objectives we gathered a number of well-known scholars on Bangladesh, as well as scholars who are perhaps better known in their scholarly communities than they are in their original homeland. Some of them played a direct role in shaping the history of the country; others are eminent scholars of international repute. We owe a great debt to them for sharing their thoughts and ideas with the students of Bangladesh studies both at home and abroad. For the students of

H. Khondker (✉)
Department of Social Sciences, Zayed University, Khalifa City, UAE

O. Muurlink
School of Business and Law, Central Queensland University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

A. Bin Ali
Department of History and Philosophy, North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Bangladesh studies it is very important to hear from the makers and shapers of Bangladesh’s history. One of the aims of the book was to introduce Bangladeshi students to the preeminent scholars of Bangladeshis in the diaspora. We have gathered scholars from both home and abroad who have distinguished themselves as specialists in the fields of politics, economics, and society.

For general readers who want to understand the paradoxical development of Bangladesh in a comprehensive way, we trust this volume will be particularly useful. The contributors of this book have provided evidence, cogent arguments and a coherent narrative in a lucid way to present the story of Bangladesh.

**Paradox of Development**

At 50, Bangladesh is a middle-income country, according to the classification of the World Bank. In social indicators, too, Bangladesh has gained remarkable success. A former chief economist of the World Bank states:

Bangladesh’s GDP per capita now closely rivals India’s and significantly exceeds that of Pakistan. Average life expectancy, at 74, is higher than in India (70) and Pakistan (68). The country is a leading global exporter of ready-made garments, and other sectors are taking off, too. Bangladesh’s pharmaceutical industry, for example, is thriving. With 300 companies (several of which conduct research) the country now meets 97 percent of domestic demand [in this sector], and is beginning to export globally. (Basu, 2021)

Yet there are clear challenges ahead for Bangladesh which the nation has to tackle, including poverty and inequality, if it is to avoid the traps that beset middle-income countries. It does so against a background of vulnerability to climate change, which in turn puts in peril the nation’s plans to address its critical energy shortfall in a manner compatible with fighting that threat.

Bangladesh’s quantitative growth in education needs to be supplemented by qualitative development. Literacy rates have improved dramatically, but the country’s success as an ‘exporter’ of labour is tempered by the kinds of jobs its human exports are able to attract. Technical, professional and management positions are underrepresented by Bengalis in the ‘export markets’ of Asia and the Middle East, and this is partly a measure
of the room for improvement in the education sector. Capacity building in research and fields of technology is also a clear requirement for the next stage of development.

**Towards Industrialization and Urbanization**

For a country built almost solely on agriculture, and which depended heavily in its early years on a single farm export, jute, Bangladesh is becoming remarkably urban in its orientation. The disproportionate growth of Dhaka is one of the nation’s most striking features and influences everything from the country’s problems to their solutions. Bangladesh is in fact ranked one of the fastest-urbanizing countries in the world, with an average annual rate of urbanization of 5.34% since its establishment (Roy et al., 2019). Amongst the world’s megacities (those defined as hosting over 10 million people) Dhaka has the distinction of being the fastest-growing, but the story is not the speed of growth but its cause. The driver of Dhaka’s growth is not its exceptional fecundity, but a function of what Chowdhury et al. (2013) in their landmark *Lancet* study have called the “Bangladesh paradox”: “steep and sustained reductions in birth rate and mortality”, wrought by its extraordinary success in public health measures and its improvement in agricultural efficiency, *despite* persistent poverty and structural disadvantages. Dhaka’s population explosion is also perhaps the globe’s clearest illustration of climate-driven migratory shift.

The shift to the city is of course not the only extraordinary transmogrification under way. Key drivers that determine the demographic composition and scale of the population of Bangladesh have undergone extreme change over just 50 years. Fertility levels have dropped so precipitously that Bangladesh has approached replacement-level fertility, from a high of around 7 children per family: this translates to a fall to around one child per family size per decade. In part this has come about due to the country’s revolution in education (always linked to reduced family size), and partly, again, the success can be laid at the feet of public health measures, where the nation is rightly considered a world leader.

As a result, the age profile of Bangladesh will be dramatically restructured in coming years as Bangladesh achieves what is called by demographers ‘stationarity’ in population. The population is growing steadily and remarkably older. Despite family size decreasing, the population numbers have momentum, and will continue to grow long after family sizes have
fallen to two children per unit or below. The tax base of the nation will have to cope, as in the developed world, with a much larger proportion of those over 50, driving a need for policy reform that the country has not really begun to embrace.

**CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY**

Against this background of achievement, despite significant headwinds, Bangladesh has also faced challenges that are essentially of its own making. Following an export-oriented neoliberal growth model, Bangladesh has veered away from its early promise of democracy, secularism and civil liberties, and its initial dalliance with socialism is also largely in the rear-view mirror. The rule of law and administration show weaknesses that need attention to consolidate and sustain the country’s economic growth. Power has tended to be concentrated in the executive branch of the state, while its democratic reputation has been tainted internationally because of controversial elections (Feldman, 2015). Bangladesh is now a fair distance from having a competitive and tolerant political system, and is trending towards an intolerant political culture. This has economic implications, emerging from the damage done to good governance. Relative to the region, the nation is at peace, and has ‘peaceful’ elections, but while it has democratic architecture, in reality its highly centralized bureaucratic system with effective control over Parliament and the justice department has gradually turned Bangladesh into an authoritarian system, albeit one that is far more tolerant than some of the world’s dictatorships. For a nation of over 160 million, many still living in poverty, the Bangladesh ‘experiment’ is a triumph, with increases in wealth being eked out despite the great challenges, in an environment of relative peace.

**FOREIGN POLICY IMPERATIVES**

Where the nation sees itself is perhaps surprising when seen from the perspective of 1971, focused more on India than Pakistan. Even despite the Islamization of Bangladesh and the nationalist politics in India morphing into anti-Muslim sentiment, there is an Indo-centrism to how Bangladesh sees itself (Bhardwaj, 2003), and India remains the nation’s largest regional trade partner. As noted in this volume, the new nation has focused a fair share of energy that might have been devoted to an outward effort and building bridges with the world on repairing bridges within its
borders—and in some cases, as with the Chittagong Hill Tracts (see Chap. 10), engaging in behaviour that is hard to characterize as repair. The way in which the nation has handled its own discord, in particular how successive governments have handled political opposition, has failed to win it allies (D’Costa, 2012). Its internal squabbling, D’Costa argues, has tainted its international stance. China continues to play a significant role, both in the nation’s psyche and, increasingly, in the practical machinery of its economy, using its Silk Road plan to embed its influence in Dhaka. The various components of the nation are not in lockstep with one another: while Bangladesh pleads on the world stage for action on climate change, another arm of the nation is reaching out to China for support in building coal-fired power stations without carbon-capture technology to support its intense thirst for electricity (Gallagher et al., 2021). Soft power and electrical power overlap on the borders with India as well, with the nation importing electricity through its western border.

In summary, Bangladesh is a nation that has come a remarkable distance in a short time. The Bhola cyclone of 1970, the war of liberation, the floods and the famine that marked its birth in blood and suffering, put the nation at an extreme disadvantage, but those who look at the next 50 years with optimism now have 50 years of evidence accumulated in favour of hope.

REFERENCES


The Political and Economic Context Underlying the Emergence of Bangladesh

Rehman Sobhan and Habibul Khondker

INTRODUCTION

Looking from afar one might not easily understand why Pakistan, a nation-state carved out of undivided India in August 1947 following a period of struggle and marked by the bloodbath of partition, did not even last for 25 years, a short lifespan for a contemporary nation. Many readers today—separated by a distance of fifty years)—may have the same question in mind. What happened? Why did Pakistan fail to survive as a nation-state? If it had to meet such a sudden end, what was the rationale for forming Pakistan in the first place?

Political history has never been unilinear, nor have its paths been predictable. There is no inevitable path, no teleology, to history. Historiographers and philosophers of history often caution us about disruptions, discontinuities, contingencies, surprises, and uncertainties,
which are the marks of history. In this chapter we outline the political and economic circumstances that led to the emergence of Bangladesh. We cover the period from 1947 to 1971 as the historical setting when Bangladesh was incubated in the womb of Pakistan.

The standard, mainstream narrative of Pakistani history offers a narrow religio-culturalist account of the birth of Pakistan. In that narrative, Pakistan was supposed to be an abode for the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. However, this religious justification was a myth because a large number of Muslims in India remained in India. In 1947, Muslims in India were one third of the total number of Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. Yet the myth of Pakistan’s experiment with a religion-based nationalism became the standard textbook version of its history. The fact that the founding father of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was not exactly a symbol of piety and that the leader of Jamaat-i-Islam, Maulana Mawdudi, had reservations about the viability of Pakistan under Jinnah (Nasr, 1994) are inconvenient truths that were swept under the carpet. Be that as it may, here we ask: What was behind the façade of the religion-centered narrative? What about the role of class? What about the class interests of the nascent Muslim bourgeoisie in India? Religion as an ideology was not altogether irrelevant but class interests and uneven class formation in the region were no less relevant.

Pakistan was born as a geographical oddity. The two provinces were separated by the 1500 kilometers of landmass of the state of India. It was expected that the physical separation would be overcome, and a nation would be forged by faith in a shared religion. Islam was supposed to unify the two parts and all the Muslims of Pakistan. Pakistan provided a test case for Islam-based nationalism. But religion by itself failed to give any durable sense of unity. The regional disparity became more and more visible with the uneven and dependent development of Pakistan. Religion was of course a unifying factor and played a role but was unable to counteract economic disparities and cultural diversity. Apart from the constraint of distance, which made mobility an expensive and difficult proposition, cultural differences must also be considered. Differences in language, diet, and general customs made social integration difficult.

As noted, the division of historical India was ideologically justified by the founding fathers of Pakistan in the name of Islam. However, the political economy of the division of India lay not just in religious difference but in the needs of the nascent Muslim bourgeoisie who wanted a space of their own, unencumbered by competition from more established Hindu
and other non-Muslim bourgeoisie in India. With the independence of Pakistan, the Muslim bourgeoisie, either from areas located in West Pakistan or who migrated to West Pakistan from various parts of India, looked to the Pakistani state to set them on the path of economic accumulation. State policy and public expenditure prioritization initiated a process of infrastructural development in the West Wing, which, in turn, encouraged the rise of new industries. A large proportion of the national budget also went to the military establishment, largely composed of recruits from West Pakistan and the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP). The military establishment was dominated by officers from Punjab whose elite classes played a central role in Pakistani politics.

The cultural rights of the Bengalis were given scant recognition almost from the earliest days of Pakistan, culminating in the language movement of 1952. On February 25, 1948, at the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan when a Bengali member, Dhirendra Nath Dutta, proposed that Bengali should also be included as a language of the Constituent Assembly since it is the language of the majority of people, he was rebuked by the Prime Minister, Liaqat Ali Khan, who insisted that Urdu should be the only official language of Pakistan (Waheeduzaman Manik, 2014). In March 1948, Mr Jinnah on his first and only visit to Dhaka declared that Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan, which invoked spontaneous protests from the audience.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was actively involved in the protests against Jinnah’s ex-cathedra declaration. Four years later, in 1952, when the then PM, Khawaja Nazimuddin, once again publicly asserted that Urdu would be the national language of Pakistan, angry demonstration initiated by the students of Dhaka University culminated in police shootings on February 21 and, tragically, the creation of the first martyrs in the Bengali struggle for the assertion of their cultural and democratic rights.

The problem of national integration was compounded by the growing disparity in the distribution of public resources favoring West over East Pakistan. This contributed to imbalanced development between the regions, leading to the widening of disparity in living standards and per capita incomes in favor of West over East Pakistan. The main source of foreign exchange earnings for Pakistan, however, in addition to foreign aid receipts, was jute exported from what was then East Pakistan. Much of the foreign exchange earned from these exports from the east was deployed in the west to finance the region’s rising import demands, a cycle which further aggravated the sense of deprivation and injustice of the Bengalis. A
small number of economists, mostly based at Dhaka University, highlighted the issue of regional disparity and drew attention to its exploitative implications. The work and arguments by these economists gained traction among Bengali politicians who were interested in defending the rights of their constituents in East Pakistan.

The growing sense of injustice originating from the unfair access to economic opportunities was directly traced to erosion of the political rights of the Bengalis. It was observed that the politics of Pakistan deviated from the path of democracy and was captured by a narrow military, feudal, and bureaucratic elite who were subsequently joined by an emergent business elite, all drawn from or settled in West Pakistan and largely non-Bengali. Pakistan turned out to be a bureaucratic—authoritarian regime before O’Donnell developed this formulation, later widely used in Latin America. Hamza Alavi (1972) termed it a military-bureaucratic oligarchy.

The real beneficiary of the state of Pakistan were the bourgeoisie and landed interests of Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan remained excluded from these elite classes. The promise of prosperity for the people of East Pakistan turned out to be elusive. As hopes of economic prosperity were frustrated and career mobility for the aspiring salaried classes stalled, grievances began to mount. As income inequality grew and economic polarization overlapped with geographical isolation, the 22 families who shared the bulk of the wealth and exerted enormous control over the polity of Pakistan were also targeted by the Bengali politicians but eventually invoked the hostility of a large segment of West Pakistan. This anger was eventually harnessed by the newly formed Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to propel him to electoral victory in Punjab and Sind in the 1970 elections.

Despite the absence of the embourgeoisement processes in East Pakistan, a growing progressive intellectual class centered around Dhaka University came to play a dominant role, and some of its members actively joined hands with the Awami League leadership in advancing their common cause of seeking redress from regional justice. Against all odds, a Bengali middle class was slowly emerging, most of whom were professionals such as doctors, lawyers, academicians, and small traders. They remained marginalized in civil and military bureaucracies. The aspirations for autonomy and right to self-determination, culminating in the call for independence, began gradually. In order to examine this process, it is important to recount the political forces driving economic development in Pakistan.
The demand for regional and provincial autonomy grew stronger, while the call for social justice also became more vocal. The political climate also influenced the one-sided treatment of the quest for regional justice. Federalism was not given a chance and democracy was stifled first under political conspiracies hatched by the West Pakistani rulers. Democracy was eventually banished and replaced by military-dominated governance. Pakistani writer Hasan Zaheer (1994) later lamented that had Pakistan been a democracy, some of the problems and conflicts between the two regions could have been resolved through negotiations. It is hard to resolve issues of counterfactuals. But the military domination of politics not only led to an imbalanced development process, but made the political domination explicit and visceral.

The veneer of religion used by the ruling elite as cover for the undemocratic and exploitative character of the state had, over the years, lost its credibility, particularly in East Pakistan. The faux religiosity practiced by Pakistani presidents and political parties with conspicuously secular appetites further undermined the use of religion as a political instrument. In consequence, religion-based parties, whether in what is now Pakistan or today in Bangladesh, have invariably performed poorly in electoral contests.

The exclusionary politics of Pakistan did not give Bengali politicians a fair chance to participate in the democratic process. In March 1954 the Awami League and its coalition partners under the banner of the United Front (Jukto Front) won a landslide election routing the Muslim League government in the East Bengal Provincial assembly, and elected A.K. Fazlul Haque of Krishak Sramik Party (KSP), as Chief Minister Sheikh Mujib, then 34, held his first ministerial portfolio in that elected administration. The Jukto Front was given no time to implement its 21-point agenda. Within a year, invoking somewhat spurious justifications, the central government through a presidential decree dismissed the elected government, and presidential rule was imposed and enforced through a handpicked governor, Iskander Mirza, the then Secretary of the Interior, who eventually played an instrumental role in introducing martial rule to Pakistan.

The dismissal of the democratically elected government left little room for ambiguity in the minds of most Bengalis that within the Pakistani state they would be left with little democratic space to rule themselves as was promised under the Lahore resolution. The imposition of military rule on October 27, 1958 was partly motivated to frustrate the impending national elections scheduled for January 1959, where the Awami League was