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Keynote Paper

“The Challenging Interface of Democracy and Security”

By

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Bismillaher-Rahmaner-Rahim. Hon'ble President Prof. Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed, Chairman of the session, Hon'ble Advisor, Excellencies, Distinguished Participants from home and abroad, Representatives of the Press and Media, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamu- Alaikum and a very good Morning

I am indeed very delighted to speak on this occasion on a very crucial topic. I am grateful to Bangladesh Political Science Association for inviting me at this regional conference of Political Scientists from home and abroad.

Distinguished Participants:

The 21st Century began with new hopes of international peace, security and democracy particularly for countries aspiring to meet Millennium Development Goals. But the path to freedom and development is not an easy one as the nations strive to overcome the burdens of history, conflicts of interests, economic inequalities, entrenched social divisions, and cultural differences. The new era of globalization marked by technological revolution and economic interdependence and democracy has brought people closer across the globe. On the other hand, it has also led to assertion of diversity and recognition of identities of nations and groups. This changing political landscape in the new millennium leads us to rethink the paradigm of human interactions and governance in the national as well as global contexts. A new wind is, therefore, blowing now, a wind that is changing the leadership climate around the world to achieve the desired goals of security and democracy.

On a regional plane, if we look at our South Asian region, countries by and large represent similar system of values, regulative principles of life and a common heritage of struggle for emancipation. We share with each other, similar concept and convictions, similar tradition and experience. But we have also differences in terms of language, religion, race and ethnic identities. We have axis of conflict as well as avenues of cooperation, we have unity as well as diversity with renewed sense of history and destiny. But we all aspire freedom and development in a peaceful and stable regional framework. In fact, such a complex of shared goals and diversified strategies inspire our united efforts as well as sense of national dignity.

Now, focusing precisely on Bangladesh, I must say we are a new nation with a long history. We can trace our history back to 12th century where Bengal came under the Muslim rule. In 1947, this part of British India became the eastern wing of Pakistan as a

Muslim majority area. After two and half decades, this part of Pakistan became an independent state after a bloody war of independence. In fact, the independence of Bangladesh was a great historical episode that drew its inspirations from the high ideals of participatory, democratic and an exploitation-free society. But it is ironic that in the past thirty-six years, we could not realize those objectives and the full potential of Bangladesh. I believe the aspiring democratic process of Bangladesh and the current transition period allow us an opportunity to develop a new concept and find a new sense of direction to the future politics of Bangladesh. By its own merit, the country has a principle to live by and a purpose to strive for, and this needs rethinking so that we can reinvent a system of governance with new leadership at all levels.

The development of this concept is a challenge for political scientists particularly in the post - 9/11 global order. Today, we must build up our vision of freedom, peace, dignity and justice for the people of Bangladesh. While the governance through a 'Care-Taker' system is a very apolitical idea, yet we have to accept the reality in view of the poor governance and corrosive corruption that almost destroyed the fabric of our society. We must examine the pitfalls of our political democracy in the context of the report of Transparency International. On the other hand, we have to read the resolute character of Bangladeshi people that enabled us to overcome the perpetuation of dynastic rule for a transparent and accountable Bangladesh. I must express, Bangladesh has chosen its freedom by its own choice and its history of 36 years reflects that it has been successful in dealing with any unholy alliance against its citizens.

The World Bank fact sheet 2005-2006, suggests Bangladesh to be the 10th most rapidly growing economy among 31 large developing countries. The income poverty has declined by 1% point per year since 1990 – faster than almost all other developing countries. Primary school enrollment is almost 100% - one of the highest rates in the developing world. The ratio of girls to boys in primary school is higher than most developing countries. Bangladesh is also the only country to have eradicated polio in South Asia. Other sources indicate that Bangladesh is rapidly becoming a good home for global investment with proposals from foreign investors in the telecommunications, infrastructure, energy, garments, banking, gas and coal sectors. Goldman Sachs economic researchers have placed Bangladesh among the "Next 11" countries after Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC), which have the potential to be substantial economies in the coming decades. In my own analysis I would add the following points towards Bangladesh's democratic and economic potential:

- Continuous GDP growth at a yearly rate of 6.7% with every possibility of breaking the 10% threshold and advancing even further in the coming decade.
- Success in Micro credit programs recently given recognition to by the Nobel Committee.

- Overall increase in the literacy rate.
- Empowerment of women who are now the bedrock of our garments industry and the main breadwinner in many families in Bangladesh.
- Democratic aspirations amongst the people.
- Internationally recognized as a moderate Muslim country with communal harmony.
- Continuous reduction of poverty and a continuous augmenting in our position in Human and Social Development Indexes.
- Success in birth control.
- International peace support operations under the auspices of the United Nations

The idea underlying the development politics and democracy must take into account the need and requirement of a particular country. We cannot copy, we must deliberate and reinvent our own style in the light of our social dynamics and economic potential. We do not want to go back to an 'elective democracy' where corruption in society becomes all pervasive, governance suffers in terms of insecurity and violation of rights, and where political 'criminalization' threatens the very survival and integrity of the State.

I must argue that the democratic ideal established by the ancient Athenians and successively modified by Cleisthenes and Pericles of direct democracy could be achieved in a small city state but such a system is not remotely achievable today. While Pericles' reforms to the democratic system which introduced the criteria of merit and efficiency and not wealth for public office was highly commendable – very few democracies today have successfully emulated this ideal and further innovation and modifications have had to be made in order to suit the requirements of the particular society.

My contention is that had corruption not been a persistent factor, the full economic potential of Bangladesh could have been realized at a much faster rate and the benefits dispersed widely and more evenly throughout the population rather than to a corrupt and favoured few. This could not, happen in an oligarchic and plutocratic governmental system in the guise of a democracy. This analysis corroborates country's informal economy that rose by 4.5% points on an average annually in the last decade and reached 34.9% of the official Gross Domestic Production (GDP) in 2000-01. The idea of an informal or shadow economy represents unreported income and unregistered economic activity. One can only imagine the extent of the shadow economy in the years subsequent to 2000-01. Had poor governance not been a conspicuous phenomenon in our democratic politics, the per capita income would not have stagnated to its current level of \$482 but reached a more respectable \$920 with every possibility of breaking the \$1000 barrier in the coming years – a goal that is still attainable once democratic norms are institutionalized through the reforms being initiated by the interim government.

I reckon, Bangladesh will have to construct its own brand of democracy recognizing its social, historical and cultural conditions with religion being one of several components of its national identity. Unfortunately, in light of the 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis and the advent of a unipolar world the debate on democracy has introduced new conflicting categorizations with the most recent being an 'Axis of Democracies' in Asia. Bangladesh will try to promote a democratic system tolerant of other governing systems prevailing in the region with no hostile intent or purpose. In this respect, Bangladesh is a model of a progressive and tolerant South Asian State.

Looking into the economic advances made by Bangladesh over the last two decades, the despondency reflected through corruption and the new form of micro terrorism visible in this millennium - my ideas of new order will revolve around ground realities. These are deliberated in the promising strides you see in economic development in Asia and South East Asia in particular – a case in point that is not too distant future for Bangladesh. This resilience is seen with Bangladesh and can be directly attributed to the perseverance and determination of our common mass, bureaucrats, business community, judiciary, expatriate populace, law enforcing agency, women folks, conscious citizens, remittance earners and civil society, who have laboured under considerable stress and hardship. The road map to democracy lies; I presume, with objectives as envisioned by the government through anti corruption drive and reform packages, within affordable time frame that will steer the country away from escapism and build strong foundation of validity on democracy.

The substance of discussion has corresponded to and grappled on the proclamation of emergency as inconsistent with a democratic development. I want to profess with certainty and without any reservation, since the Armed Forces stood as silent partner to the people, the intention of the introduction of this device is to safeguard our democracy, ensure economic stability and also to provide a security environment where the political and administrative reforms can be implemented without the fear of intimidation or threat. Bangladesh is well on its way to accomplishing its democratic and economic mission that will emphasize:

- Transparency, responsiveness and accountability in government.
- Appropriate development strategies for sustained economic growth.
- Promoting the Rule of Law.
- Fostering friendly relations with global and regional partners.
- Support global and regional activities in security matters and counter-terrorism.

This neatly brings me on to the wider issues of security in the South Asia region. While the security threat to western industrialised societies can be easily defined, the situation in

South Asia is far more complex. Terrorist organizations spread throughout the subcontinent have widely differing objectives and agendas. The causes behind the rise in terrorist movements in South Asia appear to be related to sectarian violence, ethnic tensions, religious, communal and ideological motivations. The sophistication of terrorist groups has also changed with the 1990s witnessing indiscriminate killing and high mass casualty counts as a defining feature of international terrorism in this period. Another advance over previous decades was in the technological sophistication of terrorist groups and their utilization of modern communication systems to disseminate their ideologies and programs as well as in managing complex financial and logistical networks at 'micro level'. The innovative tactics and methods employed by such groups now also include asymmetric warfare and the use of ' sleeper cells ' that are crucial features for the present day government under non-lethal environment.

Bangladesh stands at the crossroads of a cultural and societal wave, more practically, as a bridge between South West Asia and South East Asia. As a moderate Muslim country and aspiring democracy, I emphatically express this to be a fortress country against any wave of terrorism on the southern hemisphere. The interconnectivity of migration across the borders into the West, in search of a better livelihood, where large expatriate communities work and nourish in the developed countries, the country can only serve to remind its significance of respect for others' culture, religious rights, respect and pluralist society. Here Bangladesh will pursue peaceful means to international and regional disputes. True to its commitment, Bangladesh will continue to engage constructively with Asian countries and contribute to peace efforts throughout the world.

Bangladesh is aware and prepared for the challenges posed by security concerns facing the region. In my opinion, the issue of security and democracy are inextricably linked. In the same way that democratic reforms are dependant on sustained economic growth, security is similarly dependant on the reform agenda. Democracy itself requires a secure environment for it to thrive and spread its roots. I perceive that both democracy and security are complimentary features of the system now being put in place by the current initiatives. There is a tide of new aspiration in our people; both on the political expectation and socio-economic arena, and the new order will be visible on the upsurge of new social forces and emergence of a new Bangladesh that can contribute to development of world community with hope, sense of accomplishment and pride.