



**FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN BANGLADESH:
A CASE STUDY OF MILITARY-BACKED CARETAKER
GOVERNMENT IN 2007-2008**

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Abstract:

Foreign intervention in domestic politics is an old phenomenon. The colonial legacy of various countries is the manifestation of this intervention. In this globalization era, external factors are also important for developing countries' democracy. Bangladesh's post-independence journey was not as smooth as the country went through a long period of turmoil, characterized by assassinations, coups, counter-coups, and military rule. Since the independence army plays an important role in Bangladeshi politics and foreign powers took that opportunity to influence the country's internal affairs especially India, China, the United States of America (USA), and other European countries. Earlier military intervention happened after the liberation war in August and November 1975, later in March 1982, December 1990 and May 1996. At last, the military intervened in politics in 2006 and continued until 2008. This period Bangladesh was ruled by the military indirectly and the power behind the Caretaker Government (CTG) is thought by some to reside with the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI). During this military-backed caretaker government, global actors were involved in Bangladeshi politics both directly and indirectly to serve their purposes. The present research has investigated the nature, causes, and consequences of foreign interference in Bangladeshi politics during the last military-backed interim government. This study applied a qualitative research methodology by collecting data from primary sources, i.e., through content review, which will include newspapers, periodicals, party documents such as constitutions, manifestoes, press statements, etc. From the secondary sources, the historical background of the caretaker government, military interventions in politics, failure of political parties after the independence and characteristics of political cultures in Bangladesh have understood. The paper concludes that the failure of political institutions, undemocratic political culture, and lack of consensus among major political

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parties regarding national issues was one of the main reasons for foreign interference in Bangladeshi politics during 2007-08.

Keywords: Bangladesh, military, caretaker government, foreign interference

1. Introduction

The post-independence journey of Bangladesh could be characterized by assassinations, coups, counter-coups, military rule, and semi-democratic regimes. In 2007, this political instability once again led to military intervention. Eventually, the army seized power and installed a caretaker government that conducted elections on 29 December 2008 after two years of emergency rule. Political parties especially the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were failed to make a consensus for the caretaker government. The technocratic caretaker government was established after months of violence and instability due to the deterioration of the rapport between the leading parties and their incapacity to reach an agreement on the formation of the government. The executive, legislative and the judiciary all came under the commands of the military-backed caretaker government. The absolute powers exercised by it shook the entire governmental structure from state functioning to societal stability. Dissatisfaction among the masses grew with political ambiguity, economic shortcomings and growing human rights abuses. (Mastoor, 2009: 19) During this two years period, foreign powers were involved in Bangladeshi politics both directly and indirectly. Bangladesh is a big market for economic powers. They always try to create a positive political situation so that can dominate the market. Under the CTG, Bangladesh's foreign policy had become more open to foreign direct investment (including from India), promoting access to markets (particularly for labor), supporting the export expansion and foreign aid-all positive steps to boost growth. (DFID, 2008: 14)

Indian interference in Bangladeshi politics started in 1971 when it helped East Pakistan against West Pakistan in the liberation war and since then, Bangladesh is under the Indian umbrella. It is appropriate to recall that the Indian armed forces intervened to carve out Bangladesh from Pakistan. The creation of a pro-Indian country on the eastern flank with no military goal brought about a drastic transformation in the region's power structure with India at its Centre. (Haq, 1993: 112) India's interest in Bangladesh liberation has thus come to be known as the Indian version of the Monroe doctrine. This was reportedly being proclaimed by Nehru in the early fifties. (Kodikara, 1979: 23) Elaborated during his daughter, Indira Gandhi's governments and experimented with the latter's son Rajiv Gandhi.

About India doctrine, a famous Indian scholar writes: *"India has no intention of intervening in internal conflicts of a South Asian country and it strongly opposes any intervention by any country in the internal affairs of any other. India will not tolerate an external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has any implicit or explicit anti-Indian implication. No South Asian government must, therefore, ask for external military*

assistance with an Anti-Indian bias from any country. If a South Asian country genuinely needs to deal with a serious internal conflict situation it should ask help from neighboring countries including India. The exclusion of India from such a contingency will be considered to be an anti-Indian move on the part of the government concerned.” (Gupta, 1993: 23)

China is the main competitor in South Asia against India. During the BNP government, China-Bangladesh relation was good rather than India. For China, Bangladesh is the doorway into India’s turbulent north-eastern region, including Arunachal Pradesh, to which China lays territorial claims. Arunachal Pradesh is one of the most strategically placed states because of its common international border with China, Bhutan, and Myanmar. The state is of vital strategic interest for China because if China can gain sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh then in case of any future Sino-Indian war, entry into India’s north-east would become very easy for China. The Chittagong seaport forms significant “pearl” in China’s “String of Pearls”. It is apprehended that at a later stage China could use this commercial port for a strategic purpose. This is mainly the case since China has been involved in developing a deep-sea port off the island of Sonadia at Cox Bazar, a fishing port positioned 150 kilometers south of Chittagong. (Navhind Times, 08 June 2015) New Delhi fears that China will use the strategically significant deep-sea port located at Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, the Sittwe port in Myanmar, the strategically significant deep-sea port of Chittagong in Bangladesh to carry out operations against India. (Ghosal, 2012) On the other hand, the US has gradually increased its presence in the south and south-east Asian region. The conflict between the US and China centering both economically and politically is an open secret in this region. The US has intention over the Chittagong seaport of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a bridge between the south and south-east Asia. So the US always tries to make a political situation in favor of its greater interest.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Foreign Interference

Foreign interference represents any interference in the affairs of others, especially by one state in the affairs of another. Foreign electoral interference means any secret or open attempts by states to influence elections in other states. There are many ways that global powers try to change the regime in other countries and to influence the electoral process is one of those methods. Studies showed that after 2001 the ratio of foreign interference or effect of the foreign electoral intervention has become less. (Shulman & Bloom, 2012) A study listed that from 1946 to 2000 the USA intervened in most 81 foreign elections while Russian Federations (including the former Soviet Union) intervened in 36 an average of once in every nine competitive elections. (Levin, June 2016; Tharoor, 13 October 2016; Levin, 7 September 2016)

2.2 Military Intervention

The aims and objectives of the military are to protect the nation from both external and internal threats. But when the military wants to exercise power, forgets professionalism and seize state power directly or indirectly than it's called military intervention in politics. The military's intervention in politics is another dimension in Bangladesh. There are three views on Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh. (Anisuzzaman, 2000) The first view considers the military as an apolitical and conservative force, which is untrained to involve in the civilian rule as well as political management. However, it added that the military has an inherent institutional desire to serve its corporate interest. For this reason, it is incapable to lead the modernized nations. A second view argues that revolution is the only mechanism. Development and reform can be brought under this initiative. (Ahmed, 2003, cited in Chowdhury, 2019: 25) It argues that regular military is the principal obstacle to this process in developing nations. In this argument scholars compared with Latin America's military interventions. (Ahmed, 1994, cited in Chowdhury, 2019: 25) According to the third view, military values, skills, ideologies are the antithesis of the first. As this opinion stands: military politicians in the developing countries (third world) would make the best as they are the reliable manager to change the society. Khan (1989) and Kochanek (1998) are supporters of military rule in the under-developed countries (third world). Among others, Shils (1962) and Johnson (1964) are in favor of this view. On the contrary, Lifschultz (1979) is not convinced about the military's capability to run the country for a long time. (Chowdhury, 19 January 2014) Bangladesh saw military regimes of Major General Ziaur Rahman (1976-1981) and Lieutenant General H.M. Ershad (1982-1990). (Dyer 2007; U.S. Department of State 2008; US Fed News Service 2007) November 30, 1976, the then Chief of Army Major General Ziaur Rahman assumed the power as the military ruler of the country. (Hossain, 1988; Jahan, 1980) General H.M. Ershad on March 24, 1982, when the then Chief of Army, Ershad declared martial law. (Alam, 1995; Baxter, 1984; Bertocci, 1982; Khan, 1983; Hossain, 1988; Ziring, 1992)

2.3 Caretaker Government

Caretaker government is an administration throughout a period that starts when parliament is dissolved by the president before a general election and lasts for a period after the election until the next ministry is appointed. General H.M. Ershad, an interim caretaker government system was first introduced in Bangladesh under Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in 1990. Bangladesh also experienced nonparty interim caretaker governments under former Chief Justice Habibur Rahman (1995), former Chief Justice Latifur Rahman (2000), Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed (2006) and Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed (2007-2008).ⁱⁱ (Saqif, 11 February 2013) At the end of the tenure of an elected government, power

ⁱⁱ The Caretaker Government Act was passed by the 6th Parliament as the 13th amendment to the Constitution on 25 May 1996. The non-party caretaker government was formed to hold seventh Jatiya Sangsad polls (Parliament Election). Under the fifteenth amendment of the constitution, the provision of the caretaker system was abolished. The fifteenth amendment bill was passed on 30 June 2011.

is handed over to a CTG administered by members of civil society, and headed by the last retired Chief Justice. The CTG is given three months to deliver national elections. This initially strengthened the democratic system. But the system fed politicization of the senior judiciary. Although the concept of the caretaker government is not old recently, we saw few elections were held under such kind of this government across the world. In Pakistan (2013), (Banerji, 25 March 2013) in Greece (2015), (The Guardian, 28 August 2015) in Canada (2015) (The National Post, 28 September 2015) and in Turkey (2015) (The Express Tribune, 25 August 2015) the last general election was held under the caretaker government.

3. Literature Review

Habib M. Zafarullah (1996) argues Military interventions in politics began on the earth before the last century. From the period of ancient Greece up to the twentieth century, the displacement or the threat of displacement of an elected government by overt military action has been a recurrent theme in academic literature. Previously analysts looked at the military institution as *"an alien and demonic,"* after the Second World War political scientists viewed it differently. It was argued that *"a military man cannot be a good man."* The main hypothesis of Baladas Ghosal (2009) is that a new pattern of military involvement in politics is emerging in countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, which will call *"power without responsibility and accountability."* The article referred 2007 coup as saying, *"the military intervention has both long- and short-term implications for political developments in Third World countries and, thus, requires closer scrutiny and analysis."* This study could not assess the causes and conditions of availing in the country before military intervention occurred in 2007. Murat Onder (2010) supports political institutionalization and socio-economic as having the most important impact on the incidence of coups. He gives more importance on military interventions in Latin American and African countries but could not address actual problems of Asian particularly Bangladesh context of indigenous style political crises which contain dynamism of politics of enmity, discord, and mistrust. Some scholars argued that developing nations have been suffering from political problems, which caused *"bad governance"*. The problems contain political turmoil and anarchy; broaden corruption, the lack of rule of law, transparency as well as accountability. D.T. Hagerty (2007) claims that since 1991 Bangladesh is a sign of all indicators. Nicole Ball (1981) analytically assesses the developing countries' armed forces' political role for two causes. First, the military-backed regimes are minimum responsive to the needs and voices of the poor majority. Besides, military-dominated governments use arms far more frequently than civilian-dominated governments to curb civilian demands and unrest. Second, with the increasing role of the army in politics, its control over limited resources of the country increases as well. For this reason, a greater amount of these scarce resources has been channeled into the military sector or activities closely related to the military. Maryam Mastoor (2009) argues since independence Bangladesh has been a victim of continual political turmoil. It got bogged down in the

power struggle between three powerhouses-the army and the two dynastic political parties, BAL and BNP kept the country in the down whirl. In 2007 this political clash once again led to military interference. Eventually, the army seized power and installed a caretaker government that conducted elections on 29 December 2008 after two years of emergency rule.

Emajuddin Ahamed (2007) wrote Bangladesh is one of those new democracies where democratic culture is yet to strike deep roots into the social soil. The institutional framework has been created, but these institutions have not been vibrant with life forces. Scores of political parties exist in the country, but all of these are organized on feudal lines rather than democratically, thus creating ample opportunities for personalized power for the party bosses. Sofia Wickberg & Transparency International (2012), argue the technocratic “*caretaker government*” was established after months of violence and instability due to the deterioration of the rapport between the leading parties and their incapacity to reach an agreement on the formation of the government. During those two years, civil liberties were significantly curtailed in the context of the declared state of emergency. M. Mukhlesur Rahman Chowdhury (2014) argues international relations have a major role in governing different countries, particularly, in this era of globalization. It is more evident in developing countries’ politics. Moreover, an extra-constitutional government needs special support and attention from foreign powers for its legitimacy. Bangladesh witnessed the military-backed government’s parley to gain international support during its tenure of the 2007-08 periods. The military rule contacted relevant international powerful quarters to receive their support. He claims although the United Nations (UN) and the USA i.e. the international community was in favor of democracy, India was supporting Moeen. There was a reason behind it. Acting High Commissioner of India S. Chakrabarti heard unexpected comments from Sheikh Hasina and reported to his government accordingly. European Union (EU) was very vocal about the political situation from October 2006 to January 2007. Canadian High Commissioner Barbara Richardson acted undiplomatically during the period. Australian High Commissioner Douglas Fosket was cooperative and from time to time he along with Butenis appreciated my role. Ali Riaz (2013) argues the military stepped in to take charge on 11 January 2007, compelled the President to declare a state of emergency and appointed a new cabinet with the former head of the central bank as its chief. The caretaker government of Iazuddin Ahmed between 29 October 2006 and 11 January 2007, made a mockery of a system which until then, despite its limitations, had served the country well. On 12 January 2007, the military-backed interim government that assumed power under the state of emergency had both legal and moral legality but had neither a defined tenure nor a clear agenda. Bruce Vaughn (2008) argues many initially welcomed the intervention by the military as it was thought to have prevented anticipated violence. While initially welcomed as a stabilizing influence, the military-backed interim government is increasingly viewed in Bangladesh, and abroad, as a potential threat to democratic government in Dhaka.

4. Background and the Turmoil of 2007-08 in Bangladesh

In 2001, in its second time in power since 1991, the BNP took a step to confirm that it can manipulate the future caretaker government to its advantage. It passed an amendment to the constitution. The fourteenth amendment of the constitution, passed on 16 May 2004, rose the retirement age of Supreme Court Judges by two years with an eye on the next head of the caretaker government. (Islam, 2015) The BNP-led government tried to use state institutions to its benefit ahead of the general elections that were eventually scheduled for 22 January 2007. Its efforts to rig the results included placing party loyalists in key positions throughout the administration and, as early as 2005, altering regulations to ensure that Chief Justice K.M. Hasan, a party supporter, would head the non-partisan interim government the constitution mandated to oversee elections.ⁱⁱⁱ As the BNP's tenure was coming to an end in October 2006, the opposition led by the AL raised their objection to the appointment of the immediate-past Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, K.M. Hasan, as the head of the CTG, because of his previous involvement with BNP politics. (The Daily Star, 21 September 2006) It is ironic to note that an abrupt decision of the BNP to raise the retirement age of judges made K.M. Hassan eligible for the post. The opposition parties did not trust him as he was once the international affairs secretary of the BNP. (Habib, 2006) The Opposition threatened to boycott the elections if Justice Hasan was appointed. (The BBC, 29 September 2006) The ruling party also appointed party loyalists to the Election Commission and civil administration positions crucial to holding the elections.

In October 2006, political violence blowout over the country caused a lot of lives. (Sarker, 2008) When the president, Iajuddin Ahmed, himself assumed the role of chief adviser as the former chief justice K.M. Hassan declined the offer owing to the opposition allegations of being biased, evoking the last option stipulated in Article 58 of the constitution. (Assignment Point) However, in such a situation the constitution of Bangladesh provides for the appointment of another retired chief justice who is next before the last retired chief justice. The AL was skeptical of this decision but later it gave a chance to the president made an 11-points demand for reform in the election commission to ensure free and fair elections. In November 2006 the AL resorted to more violent policies to pressure the interim government. On 12 November, for example, AL along with its coalition parties initiated a traffic blockade to force the removal of chief election commissioner K.M. Aziz.

On 23 November, the chief election commissioner finally stepped down and the blockade was lifted. (Reuters, 21 January 2007) He, however, skipped a provision that requires him to invite other former Chief Justices to head the caretaker government. The

ⁱⁱⁱ The constitution stipulates that the chief adviser to the caretaker government (it is head) be the most recently retired chief justice. In 2005 the government changed the fifteenth amendment to increase the retirement age of Supreme Court justices from 65 to 67, to ensure the job would go to K.M Hasan. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. www.pmo.gov.bd/constitution/index.htm. Accessed 02 January 2019

supposition of the caretaker government chief's office by the President, in addition to his duties, was conflicting to the spirit of the constitution, if not to the letter. President Ahmed, with a few neutral personalities but the majority, seemed to be BNP sympathizers assembled a 10-member cabinet, called an advisory council under the constitution. In early December, the simultaneous resignation of four advisors and their public comments made sure what was suspected-the strings were being pulled by the former PM and her close aides, who were not willing to create a level playing field. It also came to light that the voter roll was filled with "ghost voters". The opposition withdrew all its candidates and called for a boycott of the election. (The Daily Star, 04 January 2007)

Against this background, the military stepped in to take charge on 11 January 2007, compelled the President to declare a state of emergency and appointed a new cabinet with the former head of the central bank as its chief.^{iv} The constitution authorizes the president to declare an emergency if the country faces a grave external threat or internal disturbance.^v

On 12 January 2007, President Iajuddin Ahmed declared a state of emergency in Bangladesh amidst violent street protests over feared vote-rigging in the run-up to planned elections. (The Daily Star, 14 January 2007) The military-backed caretaker government that assumed power on 12 January 2007 under the state of emergency had both legal and moral legitimacy but had neither a defined tenure nor a clear plan. (Riaz, 2013: 4) The military's stated rationale for intervening was to forestall increased violence and flawed elections. (The Daily Star, 11 July 2007) Two weeks after the takeover, the government issued the more extensive Emergency Power Rules (EPR) as legal cover for its reforms. (The New Age, 26 January 2007) It forbids any kind of association, procession, demonstration or rally without authorization from the government and imposes severe restrictions on press freedom by prohibiting any criticism of government deemed "provocative".^{vi} An army-backed caretaker government ruled Bangladesh for most of the next two years. The interim administration intended to clean up the country's democratic institutions through an ambitious anti-corruption program. (Sengupta & Manik, 29 December 2008)

^{iv} Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, a former World Bank economist, was appointed the Chief Advisor to the caretaker government.

^v The president may issue a proclamation of emergency if he is "satisfied" that a "grave emergency" exists in which the economic life of Bangladesh or any part thereof is threatened by war, external aggression or internal disturbance. Bangladesh Constitution, op. cit., Article 141.

^{vi} Emergency Power Rules, 25 January 2007, it exempts rallies, processions, and functions relating to religious, social and state affairs. (The Daily Star, 27 January 2007) For a partial discussion of the EPR, see Asian Legal Resource Centre, 06 September 2007.

5. Foreign Interference in Bangladesh during the Military-backed Caretaker Government 2007-08

Foreign Interference in Bangladeshi politics is not new. Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku's special envoy Sir Ninian Stephen mediated Bangladesh political stalemate in 1995. (Chowdhury, 2010) US President Jimmy Carter mediated with the Bangladeshi political parties on the eve of the 2001 parliamentary election. During the volatile situation of 2006, western diplomats were very busy with Bangladeshi political leaders and government actors to overcome the deadlock occurred. Sometimes, the role of external powers affects the internal configuration of politics in Bangladesh or other countries. Relations with external powers affect the policies of the political parties such as BAL, BNP, Jatiya Party (JP), and Bangladesh Jamaat-i-Islami (BJI). Sometimes, these relations influence the outcomes of elections. (Hagerty, 2008: 45-57) Bangladesh saw how foreign powers have influenced the election and politics during the last military-backed caretaker government. The election commission announced the schedule of elections to be held on 22 January 2007. Due to the trust deficit over the chief adviser and the election commission, political parties expressed their reservations on the election process. The AL decided to boycott the elections. Its activists set fire to the office of the election commission and again a three-day traffic blockade was announced by the party. Many people were injured in clashes between the activists of the rival parties. (Reuters, 21 January 2007) Fearing further bloodshed, a group of Dhaka-based diplomats met Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil and his BNP counterpart, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, to negotiate a compromise. (Crisis Group, 28 April 2008) After the talks failed, (Ibid) the European Commission suspended its Election Observation Mission, warning that polling would not meet international standards. (European Commission, 11 January 2007) The UN announced it would suspend all technical support for the election, including closing its International Coordination Office for Election Observers in Dhaka. (UN Department of Public Information, 10 January 2007) The chief UN official in Bangladesh said the army would jeopardize its lucrative role in UN peacekeeping operations if it facilitated an election boycotted by the Awami League and its allies.^{vii} Finally on 12 January 2007, when President Iajuddin Ahmed declared a state of emergency (The Daily Star, 14 January 2007) the diplomatic community welcomed it.

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury said his government broadly welcomed the opportunity for political change. (The Daily Star, 13 January 2007) The USA expressed regret over the political parties' failure to resolve their differences through dialogue. The USA said, Iajuddin Ahmed was compelled to declare the state of emergency but also that early election was the best solution for the political crisis. (Crisis Group, 28 April 2008: 9-10) On 9 March 2007, Geeta Pasi, the embassy's chargé d'affaires, met with Zillur Rahman, the acting president of the Awami League and M. Saifur

^{vii} Press statement by UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Renata Lok Dessallien, Dhaka, 11 January 2007. General Moeen had received similar warnings in the months preceding the 11 January coup. Crisis Group interviews, New York and Dhaka, 2007.

Rahman, the acting chairperson of the BNP's Saifur faction, to discuss political and electoral issues related to the roadmap. (The New Age, 10 March 2007) On 14 May 2007, 15 US Senators, from both parties, including presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, sent a letter to Fakhruddin Ahmed urging him to "*promptly lift the state of emergency and restore full civil and political rights to Bangladeshi citizens.*"^{viii} In early March 2008, the US State Department critically assessed human rights under the CTG, saying the record had "*worsened, in part due to the state of emergency and postponement of elections.*" (Crisis Group, 28 April 2008) The European Parliament passed an Urgency Resolution demanding an end to the creeping militarization of the country on 6 September 2007. (European Parliament, 06 September 2007) However, a report after a European Parliament delegation visit in November 2007 backtracked; saying "*creeping militarization*" may have been "*somewhat exaggerated and not entirely appropriate to describe the situation.*" (Crisis Group, 28 April 2008)

The diplomatic community in Dhaka has been largely uncritical of the CTG. Public statements by Western diplomats consistently urge the CTG to stick to the election roadmap but stop short of voicing concern about human rights violations committed during the state of emergency. A Bangladeshi human rights activist said, "*the diplomats here don't care how we get from 11 January 2007 to December 2008; they just want us there as quickly as possible. As long as an election is held by next December, they'll close their eyes to everything that happens in the middle.*" (Ibid: 28) Several reform-minded Awami League and BNP politicians have also expressed frustration with the international community's uncritical support of the CTG. A former Awami League minister said, "*we have lost some trust in the diplomats. They have supported the CTG's political party reforms but not the reformers in the party. They think we are all criminals. I am afraid it will be an uneasy relationship between embassies and the next party government.*" (Ibid) But a Western diplomat in Dhaka explained, "*Our collective silence might indicate a certain level of support for the government, but given the government we had to work with before, we have the rare appetite to stomach the army in power.*" (Ibid)

India is the so-called "*biggest democracy*" in the world but unfortunately, it supported the military-backed caretaker government in Bangladesh during 2007-08. India supported authoritarianism in Bangladesh since then General Moeen visited India and was given red carpet reception by the Indian government. Major General Syed Fatemi Ahmed Rumi, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Rangpur area of Bangladesh Army, was Director General (DG) of Special Security Force (SSF), was the only general who accompanied army chief during the visit. (Outlook India, 21 February 2008) New Delhi gave General Moeen the protocol of head of the government and six horses as a gift. On his visit to India, General Moeen met General Deepak Kapoor, Indian army chief, and Air Marshal Homi Major, Indian Air Force chief, and promised to usher a new era of close defense cooperation with India. He also had a meeting with the vice-

^{viii} Letter to Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed signed by Senators Joseph Biden, John Kerry, Barbara Boxer, Chuck Schumer, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Richard Lugar, Norm Coleman, John E. Sununu, Russ Feingold, Johnny Isakson, Edward M. Kennedy, and Frank R. Lautenberg, 14 May 2007.

chief of the Indian Navy, held extensive military talks with his Indian counterparts. Press Trust of India (PTI) reported that General Moeen also met Indian political leaders including External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and State Minister for Defence MM Pallam Raju. (The Daily Star, 26 February 2008) India accorded General Moeen's visit the weight it deserves.

The Indian media especially all mainstream newspapers (The Statesman, The Hindu, Assam Tribune, and Ananda Bazar Patrika) gave importance to his visit and published news of his day-to-day program. According to Harun ur Rashid, *"the six-day visit of the Bangladesh Army Chief, Gen. Moeen U Ahmed to India from 25th February is significant in many ways, given the importance of bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India. The visit assumes added connotation at a time when a non-party caretaker government, headed by Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed, has been running the country since 12 January 2007. The caretaker government has no political ideology of its own and therefore, wants a trustworthy relationship with India, for mutual benefit."* (Rashid, 08 March 2008)

The role of China in South Asia is very significant for regional peace and stability. Apart from rising as a global power, China's influence as a regional power is also notable. It attaches great significance to its relations with regional neighbors as well as Bangladesh. Besides the Indian influence, China's relations with Bangladesh have grown stronger in recent years, centered on trade, cultural activities and a warm military relationship. Today, most of the current inventory of fighter aircraft, coastal patrol boats, and tanks in Bangladesh was supplied by China. (Global Security, 18 May 2012) China, however, is yet to play a significant part in the developmental progress of Bangladesh. China's role in Bangladesh always opposite of India's interest and the competition between two big Asian powers started in 1971 when India supported Bangladesh against Pakistan and China supported Pakistan. After independence, China even did not recognize Bangladesh as an independent nation until October 1975 it even blocked the new country's entry into the UN. After 1975 the bilateral relations between the two nations become stronger day by day. China's influence or type of interference in Bangladesh is passive and more economical rather than political. China has helped Bangladesh economically and at present operating various mega projects what India observing cautiously.

6. The Causes of Foreign Interference in Bangladeshi Politics

6.1 Failure of Democratic Institutions

The political institutions of Bangladesh are not strong and developed enough to secure democracy. Parliament does not work effectively due to continuous boycott by the opposition and unfair role of the ruling party. Most of the political parties are the safe shelter of vested interests. So, politics collapsed several times with undemocratic regimes and foreign interference. Talbot (1998: 45-47) claim after independence, democracy was buried by politicians and one-party rule began. It was followed by a military take over. The main leader's enormous charisma was matched with an unsound vision of

Bangladeshi people in the post-liberation era. (Thelen, 2004) BAL and BNP, two largest parties, have virtually divided the country's electorate and its institutions between themselves since 1990. The BNP, considered right-of-Centre, middle class, urban, anti-Indian, pro-Pakistani and of an Islamic bent, has led two governments in the past 28 years; the BAL, left-of-Centre, secular, pro-Indian and rural, has led three.^{ix} The organizational characteristic of Bangladesh's political parties and their insight into India's role in the 1971 liberation war are undoubtedly reflected in the policies towards India. (Ghosh, 1989: 64) Most of the political party takes a decision undemocratic process. Party head holds the supreme power. Until 2006 political power was increasingly centralized and controlled. The Prime Minister's Office became the focal point of decision making, with increasing control over Parliament (legislature) and constitutional bodies such as the Bureau of Anti-Corruption, Election Commission and Public Service Commission. (DFID, 2008: 28) Political identity was synonymous with the party leader. The debate was limited, and decision-making kept in the hands of a small core of advisers. Consequently, the checks and balances of a vibrant political process were slowly undermined. Political dysfunction, the politicization of the bureaucracy and political violence increasing became the norm. These were, however, manifestations of the political system. (Khan, 2005) Not only political party bureaucracy and judiciary are handled by the government of the day. Due to this, the government becomes weaker and non-participatory.

Bureaucracy's neutrality and the faceless position have been questioned. Politics divided the Bangladesh bureaucracy. Promotion is based on political loyalty. Opponent officers are made Officer on Special Duty (OSD) for political reasons. (Murshid, 2008: 67-73) Quality of bureaucracy and accountability has been affected by these malpractices. For example, a section of civil servants joined the "Public Platform" (Janatar Mancha) on the street under the banner of political party BAL in 1996 in order to topple the BNP government on the eve of an abortive military coup. Bangladesh has also lacked strong political leadership essential for leading the nation toward progress and stability. As a result, Bangladesh saw undemocratic rules several times since independence. Both BAL and BNP compromised for the parliamentary system in 1991. (Rahman, 2007) Contrarily, since then the boycott culture became a threat to parliamentary democracy. In the parliamentary sessions, the ruling party does not allow the opposition to criticize them or participate in any issue which embarrasses them. On the other side, opposition parties used to attend parliament sessions before their membership expires on the 90th consecutive day to retain their seats. This practice has been continuing since 1991. (Rashiduzzaman, 2001) Centering an issue of rigging in a by-election of a parliamentary seat the mainstream opposition parties resigned from the parliament in 1994 and since then streets have become the Centre-point of politics instead of parliament in Bangladesh. (Hasanuzzaman, 1998) Speaker is appointed from the ruling party (Bangladesh Constitution) and he does not act neutrally. (Riaz, 2005: 112-118) As a result foreign

^{ix} The BNP led two governments, from 1991 to 1996 and from 2001 to 2006 and the BAL led government from 1996 to 2001, 2009 to 2013 and 2014 to 2018.

powers like India, the USA and China always try to influence the political affairs of Bangladesh. In the name of aid or “good democracy” or dialogue within the parties, they forced to make policy in favor of them.

6.2 Undemocratic Political Culture

Bangladesh has a lack of democratic political culture. Democratic orientations and practices are not seen in polity and society. People’s competence to cope with democratic norms and values is not adequate. Thus, democratic norms and values could not strike root in society and polity. Since the return to democracy in 1991, democratic practices have been largely limited to the holding of regular elections. Politics became increasingly violent, polarized and punctuated by protest and boycott. (DFID, 2008: 10) Politics in Bangladesh is confrontational in nature where there is no cooperation, trust, and solidarity among political parties and groups. There is no consensus among political parties on issues of national interest. They compete against each other only for the sake of hostility. The former British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Stephan Evans stated, the politics of confrontation is the biggest threat to Bangladesh. (The Daily Star, 2011) In Bangladesh, there is a lack of tolerance, mutual respect, trust and reciprocity among politicians and political parties. Compromise and consensus are absent from polity, which inflames enmity among politicians and endangers the growth of democracy in the country. Former US Ambassador Patricia Butenis stated that “*Bangladeshis have suffered because the political parties ... could not agree on the basic rules of the game ... the hard part is actually creating political parties that are genuinely democratic in practice and outlook, parties that focus on issues and the national interest instead of personalities...*” (Butenis, 17 December 2006)

6.3 Military Intervention in Politics

Since Independence, Bangladesh has marked by political turmoil with five military coups, assassination of national leaders, conflicting and low political cultures, weak democratic institutions and foreign dependence of political parties. Bangladesh’s army is a Pakistani legacy. It followed its predecessor’s path in overthrowing elected governments. Militarization, deputation, and civilization have been continuing in various regimes. (Jahan, 2008: 15-16) The military is called “*third force*” in Bangladesh as it intervenes in politics. The Military intervened in politics directly five times but the picture of indirect intervention is more awful. After the independence military was first intervened in politics in early 1975. Prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family member was assassinated by some military personnel.^x In the consequence of a series of coups and counter-coups General Ziaur Rahman took power in 1976. He established multi-party politics and founded the BNP. General Zia also assassinated in

^x Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, daughters of Mujibur Rahman were outside of the country. They stayed in the United Kingdom.

1981 by a few army persons.^{xi} After one year General Hossain Mohammad Ershad took power in a bloodless coup in 1982. (Ziring, 1992) Ershad ruled Bangladesh until 1990 when AL and BNP led demonstrations forced him to step down. (Alam, 1995: 1-2) A group of the military-led by its chief General Nasim staged a coup in 1996, which was failed. In 2007, another coup led by Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed overthrown a constitutional Caretaker Government and ruled the country for two years. However, the army chief did not succeed to become the President. Thus, the aim of the coup failed. (Chowdhury, 19 January 2014) The reason for the failure of that coup was development partners and the international world including the USA, UN, Commonwealth, and EU did not support martial law and army chief's intention to be the head of the state. Bangladeshi military has been engaged in the United Nations (UN) Peace Keeping Force since the late '80s that helped the continuation of democracy in the country. (Hagerty, 2007: 34-36) Despite these achievements, Bangladesh could not consolidate democratic institutions. Although the military is not in power, the autocratic system remains in civil leadership.

7. Conclusion

Foreign interference in Bangladeshi politics was started by participating of the Indian army in the war against Pakistan in 1971. (Ghosal, 2012: 4-5) Not only India; China, Russia and the United States of America also involved both indirectly and diplomatically against and favor of Bangladesh. (Shrivastava, 30 October 2011) Since then the involvement of foreign influence in politics is a common phenomenon in the politics of Bangladesh, which is continuing. The foreign powers influence in various ways both directly and indirectly. The most common approach is they support the military to capture the civilian power. For example, the donor countries stopped the control, as the necessary element of the policy achievement was improved by the army rulers. Geo-strategically, Bangladesh is situated in a crucial point of south Asia. For its geo-strategic importance, Bangladesh became the Centre of the game of both regional and international powers. On the other hand, Bangladesh is facing the challenges of a dysfunctional parliamentary government, a weak judiciary, rampant corruption, poor human rights, communal conflict, poverty, and periodic environmental disasters. (ICG, 23 October 2006) Foreign powers always got this opportunity and used it to serve their interests. They influenced the army to intervene in politics so that they can dominate Bangladesh and use this opportunity to control the south and South East Asia as we saw during the last military-backed caretaker government in 2007-08. During this time the UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan's special emissary Craig Gennes, US Assistant Secretary-General Richard A. Boucher and Under Secretary of State in the US State Department were active in Bangladesh politics as foreign actors. (Datta, 2019) The role of British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury, Canadian High Commissioner Barbara Richardson, and UN Resident

^{xi} General Zia was assassinated by a group of army officers ending his five-year rule. (Bertocci, 1982; Hossain, 1988; Khan, 1983)

Representative Renata Lok Dessalian was “*controversial*,” which was well-publicized in the home and abroad. Foreign powers saw the military as “*a last resort and a necessary evil*” (Crisis Group, 28 April 2008: 9) to tackle the corruption of the political parties and the bureaucracy. A senior diplomat stated that some colleagues saw the army’s intervention as “*the only way to protect our development investments. We were getting robbed by both the Awami League and BNP/Jamaat governments.*” (Ibid)

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