

# **Bangladesh : Identity Politics and Economic Deprivation**



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# Introduction

- ◎ Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state embracing the principles of secularism and nationalism in 1971.
- ◎ But the secular character of nationalism changed along with the political regime in mid 1970s.
- ◎ In Bangladesh, the national identity has been politicized and problematized by a confluence of forces.
- ◎ The religious turn in the political and cultural landscapes has impacted the discourse of national identity in Bangladesh.



# Identity Politics in Bangladesh



- ◎ Both language and secularism became justifications for a separate identity for the inhabitants of Bangladesh from its very inception.
- ◎ Since 1975, the country has clearly drifted towards Islam.
- ◎ Islamic revivalism in Bangladesh was also supported by the funds received from the Gulf states that began to establish links with various religiously affiliated political parties in Bangladesh.



# Chittagong Hill Tracts conflict

- Chittagong Hill Tracts problem is a national integration problem from the inception of Bangladesh.
- The CHT (consisting of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari districts) has been home to eleven ethnic indigenous communities, namely, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Lushai, Khumi, Chak, Khiyang, Bawn, and Pangkhua.
- They are also known as Jumma-s, a designation deriving from their practice of hill-agriculture, and each community has a distinct dialect, culture , tradition and religion.

- ◉ With the influx of Bengali Muslim settlers in the region backed by the government and thousands of acres of land submerged by the Kaptai Dam, the indigenous communities continued to face extinction from the region.
- ◉ In 1997, the PCJSS (Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti) and the then government , led by PM Sheikh Hasina (also the current PM), signed the CHT Peace Accord.
- ◉ The government committed for withdrawing the army and other state military camps and resolve the land crisis, including withdrawing the Bengali Muslims settlers who were settled illegally by the government.



- Even after more than twenty years signing the accord, the government has failed to withdraw the army and other state military camps from the region, which are still actively curbing the rights of indigenous people.
- The persecution of the indigenous communities in CHT and the Rohingyas in Rakhine state, although unrelated, portray a similar picture, where the military plays a big role.
- While Bangladesh condemns the persecution of the Rohingyas, it is also persecuting its own minority communities.

# Nationalism and the 'Politics of National Identity'



- Even though secularism, socialism, democracy and nationalism were included as the state principles in the country's first constitution in 1972, the role of religion became palpable in politics.
- Islamist political parties emerged as kingmakers after the restoration of democracy in 1990s.
- While the Islamisation of politics was underway, the 'pro-secular' Bangladesh Awami League(BAL) and the centre-right Bangladesh National Party (BNP) were engaged in political squabbles.

- ◎ The acrimonious relationship between these two parties had left the political and ideological spectrum vacant and provided Islamist groups with significant opportunity to mobilise and influence.
- ◎ The political use of Islam led to the construction of two identities : the 'Bengali' and the 'Bangladeshi'.
- ◎ The 'Bengali' and the 'Bangladeshi' nationalism adhere to selective histories that serve each political party's unique version of the 1971 and subsequent history.



# Bengali vs Bangladeshi

- ◎ The 'Bengali' identity highlights the secularist traditions that were an integral part of the early history of Bengal as well as the Language Movement that arose in the early 1950s which eventually led to the creation of Bangladesh.
- ◎ On the other hand, the 'Bangladeshi' emphasizes Islam as the core element of its identity and territorial nationalism, as an effort to differentiate the Bengalis of Bangladesh and Bengalis of West Bengal of India.
- ◎ The identity struggle turned from a political issue to a social crisis in 2013 when the Shahbagh movement and Hefazat shed light on the unresolved and politicized issue of national identity.

# Bangladeshi Economy : Challenges and Impacts



Despite various steps towards progress, there is still a plethora of challenges that lie ahead.

- ⦿ Rising inequality of income
- ⦿ Sustaining the momentum of agricultural growth through diversification
- ⦿ Prudent use of biotechnology
- ⦿ Managing the incentive structure for industrial growth in a globalized world where comparative advantage keeps shifting
- ⦿ Confronting the energy crisis that threatens to undermine the momentum of economic growth

- ① Unleashing the potential of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the information and communication technology (ICT) to propel economic growth on the one hand and contribute to poverty reduction on the other.
- ② Finding the right speed and sequence of further trade liberalization
- ③ Dealing with the issue of large bilateral trade imbalances
- ④ Managing the growth of manpower export with a view to ensure the welfare of migrant workers and enhancing the flow of remittances.



- ① Conducting monetary and financial policies in an efficient way
- ② Reforming the labour market and the educational system to develop the full potential of human resources especially the youth
- ③ Removing the impediments to discrimination against women in the labour market and engender empowerment of women
- ④ Addressing the existing inefficiencies and inequities of healthcare delivery systems
- ⑤ Ensuring economic growth in an environmentally sustainable manner

# Attracting Foreign Investments

The quest for foreign investment explains why successive governments denied the rise of violent Islamism, which began to emerge in the 1990s.

The deterrents that discourage foreign investors include :

- Time-consuming bureaucracy
- Poor socio-economic and physical infrastructure
- Unreliable energy supply
- Low labour productivity
- Underdeveloped money and capital markets
- High cost of doing business
- Complicated tax system
- Delays in decision making



# Way Forward

- Ensuring inclusive growth has turned out to be a major challenge for Bangladesh.
- The government needs to take immediate action to resolve socio-economic issues creating hindrance in the pace of development.
- Diversification of the export basket and tapping new markets is sorely needed.
- There is a need to invest much more in education, health and infrastructure, and create a favourable environment for local and foreign investment, in order to increase production and consequent employment opportunities for the future workforce.

# Conclusion

- ◎ The ongoing political polarization and political crisis in Bangladesh since its independence reflect the fundamental weaknesses of the pillars of Bangladeshi society and national identity.
- ◎ Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in reducing poverty, supported by sustained economic growth.
- ◎ Inclusive growth and good governance must be taken into consideration to ensure the national integration and to accelerate the pace of development of Bangladesh.



Thank You...!!!