

Bucks County
Courier Times

Opinion

and

Background

MONDAY, MAY 1, 1972 PAGE 7

Political party, not the government, runs Bangladesh — and you'd better join

By Martin Stuart-Fox

DACCA (UPI) — The Awami League, the political party of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has so consolidated its power in newly independent Bangladesh that it now functions as a parallel administration throughout the country.

Both the civil service and the police have seen their authority eroded away since Bangladesh achieved independence four months ago. The result has been that on the one hand the administration can only make decisions with the consent of the party, and on the other the police have been unable to reestablish effective law and order.

Civil servants from the deputy commissioner in charge of a district down to the village constable must now defer in all matters to local Awami League officials. All new appointments within the civil service now go as a matter of course to friends and relatives of Awami League big-wigs.

The 450-odd members of the Bangladesh Constituent Assembly, all elected on the Awami League ticket, have become a power unto themselves. Any aspirant to a government position makes sure he was written recommendations from as many assemblymen as possible.

So intense has the maneuvering for jobs become, and so great the pressure, applicants without a recommendation from an assemblyman are automatically disqualified.

Some Awami League assemblymen have armed bodyguards and take actions irrespective of the government or the administration. The assemblyman for the Dacca suburbs of Mohammedpur and Mirpur has had thousands of non-Bengalis ejected from their homes so that the houses can be given to Awami League supporters.

Law and order continues to be a serious problem in Bangladesh and this is in large part attributable to the failure of the Awami League to discipline and control its younger members.

Bands of armed students, many of them sons or relatives of high party officials, still terrorize Dacca. Now that the Bihari (non-Bengali) community has been looted of all it had, they have turned their attention to the Ismaeli followers of the Aga Khan and to Bengalis who are not party members.

When approached, the police merely shrug. They know who the culprits are but they cannot touch them. Groups of these arrogant, posturing youths may be seen any night spending freely in the bar of the Dacca Intercontinental Hotel.

The two principal student organizations in Bangladesh are the Awami League Student League and the Marxist Student Union. Union members have reported their meetings broken up, premises damaged, threats and beatings.

An elite group of Awami League students was specially trained and indoctrinated by the Indians during the Bengali liberation struggle. They were well armed but never fought. Known as the Mujib Bahini, they existed for reasons more political than military.

They were sworn to fight for the principles of "Mujibism," the political philosophy of Sheikh Mujib consisting of nationalism, democracy, secularism and socialism.

The Mujib Bahini have since surrendered their arms but their militancy remains. Some have joined the paramilitary national security force, which is also under Awami League control but most are back at college forming the backbone of the Student League.

In addition to the students, the Awami League can call upon its volunteer force, made up of party supporters of all ages who parade with long staves and are sworn to loyalty to the principles of the Sheikh. Any time the party wishes to clamp down upon opposition organizations the volunteers are there.

On the labor front, the party has created the National Workers League, a new series of trade unions in all industries to attract membership away from the old socialist unions. Infighting between the old and new unions has added considerably to labor unrest since independence.

The Awami League gives shelter to people of widely differing political beliefs. It is only nominally socialist and opposition to the league comes from within itself. No love is lost between the league and the more extreme Marxist group, which claims that in the countryside Awami League cadres have assassinated left-wing organizers.

Both the Awami League and the government react immediately to what little press criticism there is. One English-language editorial suggested that since the present government was elected when Bangladesh was East Pakistan, it is not a legal and constitutional government. The editor was fired the same day.

In the first months of independence the Awami League has become a state within a state and the actions of its members are largely outside the discipline of the law.

The power of the Awami League is complete, a distressing fact for those Bengalis who believe that a free democracy is the best form of government for Bangladesh.