

Civil Society and Democracy in Bangladesh

Edited by

MIZAN R. KHAN

MOHAMMAD HUMAYUN KABIR

The book *Civil Society and Democracy in Bangladesh* is a study on the role of the former in strengthening the latter in the country. Highlighting the role of the growing array of civil society organizations in putting politics on a desired track has indeed been a major objective of the discussion in the book. The book deals with two distinct and yet inextricably linked issues in the context of Bangladesh – 'Civil Society and the Political Process' and 'Civil Society and People's Empowerment'. The title of the book suggests its critical importance to Bangladesh, given the state of politics and the level of people's empowerment. The book is a recommended reading for reflection for scholars, researchers, politicians, civil society leaders, NGOs, and advanced level university students.

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Preface

Among other activities, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), Dhaka, holds a number of national seminars each year on topics of national importance. One such seminar was organized on "Civil Society and Democracy in Bangladesh" on 28 September 1998. The theme of the seminar itself suggests its critical importance to the nation, given the state of politics and its process in the country. The role of the growing array of civil society bodies in putting politics on a desired track was the focus of deliberations in the seminar.

The Hon'ble (former) President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, graced the occasion as Chief Guest and inaugurated the seminar. Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, former Advisor of the Caretaker Government and currently Chairman of Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), presided over the inaugural session. Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman, former Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, gave the valedictory speech at the concluding session. A total of six papers covering various aspects of the theme were presented and discussed in two working sessions. About 75 academics, officials, political leaders, media representatives and NGO leaders from all over Bangladesh participated in the day-long seminar.

This book is a compilation of the research papers presented in the seminar. The draft presentations have been revised and edited. We thank all the learned authors and participants for their insightful deliberations. The summary of the proceedings has been added at the end of the book to

give the readers an opportunity to get an idea of what transpired in the seminar.

We take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the Chief Guest of the seminar. The presence of the Head of State is an eloquent testimony to the importance attached to the seminar. His critical and wise words served as a guide to the deliberations. We are also grateful to Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman and Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed whose addresses enriched the deliberations tremendously. Our sincere thanks are due to the session chairpersons and designated discussants of the working sessions for sharing their scholarship and invaluable time with us.

A seminar of this scale had hardly been possible on the part of BISS but for the constant support, guidance and supervision of Major General Mustafa Kamaluddin, ndu, psc, then Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, and Brigadier Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc, then Director General of BISS. The engaging personality of former Director General, Major General Jamil D. Ahsan, BP, psc, finally inspired us to get the book published. We are grateful to Ambassador Mufleh R. Osmany, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and currently Chairman, Board of Governors of BISS, and Major General Sikder Md. Shahabuddin, psc, G+, Director General of BISS, for their encouragement for the same. We would be remiss were we not to record our debt to our colleague Dr. Abdur Rob Khan, Research Director of BISS, and our other colleagues for their constant support and affection for us.

We extend our thanks to Ms. Shahina Rahman, Managing Director of the Academic Press and Publishers Ltd., for bearing with our broken promises to deliver the manuscript in time. Many other individuals assisted us in different ways.

We are grateful to all of them. Our wives and children deserve special thanks for their constant inspiration to our academic pursuits.

We hope the book would be of immense value to scholars, researchers, political leaders and activists, officials, NGO activists and university students. Again we most sincerely thank the authors for their learned papers. The views expressed in the book are their own, and may not necessarily reflect those of the Editors or of the organizations they work for.

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January, 2002

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