

# BANGLADESH SOCIETY POLITY ECONOMY

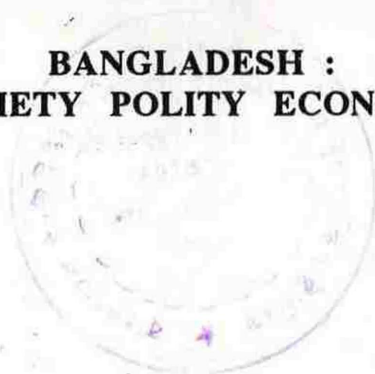
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## INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the decade of nineties was marked by high expectations in Bangladesh. Politically, the country witnessed towards the end of 1990 a massive popular upsurge which culminated in the collapse of the autocratic regime paving the way for democratic transition in the country. The election that was subsequently held under a caretaker government was acclaimed home and abroad as genuinely free and fair. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party as the largest party in a multi-party parliament formed the new government. Expectations about the establishment of democracy have been heightened further when positive moves were subsequently taken towards resolving one of the most critical long-standing issues in the nation's political life, viz., form of government. The ruling party as well as nearly all the opposition parties including Awami League reached a consensus on re-establishing parliamentary form of government, one of the main popular demands during the anti-autocracy movement.

Notwithstanding these notable advances, a number of pressing problems remains to be addressed. Various manifestations of violence and anarchy undermining the prospect of strengthening the rule of law appear to be increasingly taking deeper roots as a part of the political and social culture. There are also pernicious indications of lack of tolerance and political accommodation as politics tends to be viewed in terms of a zero-sum game. The role of religion in politics continues to be intensely debated. Despite notable progress in recent time, the state has remained uncomfortable with the country's small but geo-politically significant ethnic minority community involved in an armed struggle in the name of establishing greater autonomy.

On the economic front, in keeping with the global trend, the government began to introduce sweeping reforms including liberalization and structural adjustments aimed at establishing and strengthening institutional frameworks for the free market system. The reforms were intended also to respond to the mounting challenges facing the country after long years of economic mismanagement, corruption and inefficiency. Besides mounting problems of overpopulation and widespread poverty, Bangladesh has been maligned by major structural impediments since the



early years of its independent existence. Over-dependence on external resource inflow and vulnerability to recurrent natural disasters are highlights of the challenges facing the country. Bangladesh is also exposed to nearly all forms of problems related with environmental degradation at the national, regional and international levels.

The transition in the domestic politico-economic scenario in Bangladesh has, notably enough, coincided with the massive transformations in the international order that accompanied the end of the Cold war. In the continuing fluid situation, Bangladesh like most other countries around the globe has been on the look-out for appropriate responses to the unprecedented international changes which proffered new opportunities as well as challenges.

In this backdrop, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organized a national seminar on "Bangladesh in the Nineties: Society, polity and Economy" on September 17-19, 1991. This volume presents the collection of papers presented in that seminar. The contribution, support and patience of the authors of the papers are appreciated with sincere gratitude. We are thankful to our colleagues in the Institute who shared with us the burdens of organizing the seminar and publication of this book. We are particularly thankful to Barrister A. K. H. Morshed, Chairman of the Board of Governors of BISS for his inspiration and support which made this publication possible.

**Iftekharuzzaman**

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