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# INTELLIGENCE NOTE

BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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## BANGLADESH: THE EUPHORIA FADES

During Bangladesh's struggle for independence, Sheikh Mujib's Awami League (AL) enjoyed the overwhelming support of the Bengali people, especially the students who played so prominent a role in the early agitation for autonomy and the subsequent civil war. Only four months after an AL government was established in Dacca, however, those same students have rejected the AL-affiliated student organization in elections at Dacca University, and have elected critics of the present government. This AL reverse demonstrates clearly that public dissatisfaction with the Bangladesh Government (BDG) is rising; it is also finding expression in labor disputes, food riots, and, recently, in a call by student and labor leaders for Sheikh Mujib to disband the present government and institute a "revolutionary" rule. The euphoria of victory in Bangladesh has faded, and the BDG must now contend with criticism in its exceedingly difficult task of reconstruction.

The students, especially in Dacca University, have long been influential in East Bengal politics, and were particularly prominent in the movement for provincial autonomy which led to civil war and eventual independence. A significant number were freedom fighters during the

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civil war and returned to the universities only at Mujib's bidding. They feel they deserve some of the credit for the creation of Bangladesh and have a right to affect the way it develops. Because they are articulate, well-organized, and respected, they have the potential for becoming a potent opposition force. Most of the students probably still support Sheikh Mujib himself, but are no longer willing to accept uncritically the blunders of the inexperienced BDG or the venality of some government and AL officials.

The elections at Dacca University were won by the Bangladesh Students Union (BSU), an affiliate of the pro-Soviet leftist National Awami Party, in opposition to the AL-sponsored Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL). The BCL had split into two warring factions, moderate and left-radical, and the AL itself was divided in its support for the two factions. The BSU also reportedly enjoyed the advantage of significant financial support for its campaign from the Soviet Mission in Dacca. Nonetheless, the performance of the BDG to date was a major issue in the campaign, and the vote was to some extent an indication of no confidence on the part of the students in the present government.

The students are not the only groups who are dissatisfied. Labor unions are fighting among themselves for scarce jobs for their members, and blame the government for failing to reopen factories closed since the war. Farmers complain that the government has not made necessary

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agricultural inputs available to them. Slow and inefficient distribution of food relief has provoked riots in which government granaries have been destroyed. The commission of well-publicized crimes by armed ex-guerrillas has prompted charges of police and governmental incompetence, while attempts to use AL volunteers as vigilantes against the "miscreants" have brought accusation of official lawlessness and political vengeance. Anomalies in the handling of foreign relief goods have given rise to stories of officials' enriching themselves by diverting aid.

The charges of maladministration are not without foundation. The BDG lacks direction. The National Constituent Assembly met on April 10, supposedly to approve a constitution and then function as a legislative body, but adjourned on the second day after having done no more than appoint a constituent drafting committee. New governmental policies are being drawn up, but at the moment all questions must be decided by Sheikh Mujib himself. Even cabinet ministers are unsure of their positions and are unable to give directives to their subordinates. Since Sheikh Mujib cannot handle every problem and subordinates do not have enough authority, important decisions are being deferred, and problems are accumulating. Beyond Dacca, there are two structures. The old Government of East Pakistan officials remain at their posts, but often are afraid to act without direction from Dacca. The local AL political structure is apparently intact, but local party officials are either paralyzed or, reportedly, venal. So far, the administration has

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continued on its own momentum, but unless new directives come down, the government machinery will become progressively more enfeebled.

Through this defective apparatus, the BDG is trying to rebuild a shattered economy -- i.e., create a new financial system, restore the transportation system, and return land and industry to production. It must do all this with inadequate resources, while simultaneously supporting and finding jobs for ten million refugees who have returned from India to abandoned farms, burned-out shops, and closed factories. It has been offered substantial foreign relief, but, given the BDG's limited competence, this has been marred by port congestion, inequitable distribution, and inefficient utilization. The BDG has been unable to keep pace, and has aroused the ire of much of the populace by its poor performance.

So far, Sheikh Mujib himself has been exempted from major criticism. The dissatisfaction has centered on subordinates, and the Sheikh has only been accused of failing to control his followers. The students, however, in their call for a "revolutionary" government accused the Sheikh of failing to live up to his promises of instituting a socialist system. They demonstrated by the Dacca University election that they were not satisfied with the mildly socialistic actions taken by the BDG; they are likely to continue to exert pressure on the Sheikh to take a more radical stand.

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Sheikh Mujib is aware of the growing danger to his government. Despite the urgency of his work in Dacca, he recently undertook a tour of Bangladesh during which he spoke of "conspirators" and a "crisis of confidence," and appealed to the people to give him at least three years to rebuild the country before they criticized the BDG. He has publicly threatened to dismiss and severely punish any AL figure or government official found corrupt. He has already dismissed several, and jailed a few.

Mujib's tour seemed to reduce the intensity of the criticism. He managed to persuade the students and labor leaders to withdraw their call for a new "revolutionary" government, but only through promises of faster reform and punishment of corrupt officials. The student elections were a clear reminder of the limits within which he must work. Increasingly, the BDG and the Sheikh himself will be liable to criticism. Public opinion will become a significant factor in BDG policy decisions, and because the leftists, who are very strong among the students and many of the ex-freedom fighters, are the most vocal and effective of pressure groups, it is likely that the BDG will tend to tilt toward the left. The honeymoon is over for the BDG.

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