

Vol 1 Issue 12 Sept. 2012

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

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The Clinton Administration and Democracy Promotion in Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Given the growing trend of Islamic fundamentalism, President Clinton regarded democracy as the core of his country's foreign policy towards Bangladesh. His Administration not only praised Bangladesh for growth of democratic institutions and culture but assured Dhaka that it would continue to provide assistance and support for strengthening democracy and democratic process in Bangladesh.

KEYWORDS:

Clinton Administration and Democracy Promotion , Islamic fundamentalism.

1.INTRODUCTION

President Clinton believed that citizens of US and Bangladesh shared many democratic ideals and goals like freedom and equality. To make democracy work on ground, the US always tried to end the deadlock between government and opposition party in Bangladesh. Many a times it advised opposition leaders not to boycott parliament and go for legal remedy to address the problem of rigging in election. It described the 1991 election as free and fair and did not agree with opposition parties of Bangladesh that election was rigged or unfair. The US condemned violence in Bangladesh and urged both ruling and opposition parties to avoid clashes before general election.

US congress was equally concerned vis-a-vis democracy in Bangladesh. Congressmen, expressed concern at pre election violence in Bangladesh. He urged all political parties in Bangladesh to support democracy. Congressman Bill Richardson, a close friend of President Clinton made efforts to strengthen Democracy in Bangladesh. In June 1996, Mr. Richardson visited Bangladesh just before general election. This time he came as head of two member delegation of the Washington based National Democratic Institute (NDI). The delegation exchanged views with the Chief election commission on forthcoming election. He urged commission to hold election in free and fair manner.

While congratulating newly elected Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina in June 1996, President Clinton said: "Let me congratulate you on your hard fought electoral victory and on the commitment to democracy demonstrated by the people of Bangladesh. The overall transparency and peacefulness of the election, the high turnout, the orderly transfer of power and the advent of robust new parliament all testify to the strength and vitality of Bangladesh's democratic institutions."¹

US supported 1996 general election in Bangladesh in three ways. First, US groups such as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs provided training to Bangladeshis in election

monitoring techniques. Many US based non – governmental organizations worked as observers. Second, the USAID’s democratization funds were used to support voter education programmes and training of election observes. It also provided technical assistance to parliament and other democratic institutions. Third, the USAID helped local bodies of Bangladesh to become more responsive to the needs of their people.

President Clinton during talks with PM Sheikh Hasina in February 1997 at Oval Office praised his government’s efforts in strengthening democracy there. The US not only appreciated Bangladesh’s commitment to democracy and rule of law but described it as “model of democracy for developing countries”² During his Dhaka visit in March 2000, President Clinton admired Bangladesh as a nation proud of its islamic heritage, culture and its commitment to tolerance and democracy. He believed that Bangladesh was a nation committed to democracy with vigorous level of political debate. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright admitted that his government had offered support to Bangladesh because it had set the example of a moderate Muslim country.³

The US government always urged Bangladesh government and opposition parties to avoid any direct standoff. It advised government and opposition parties of Bangladesh to make parliament the forum alternative to hartal and resolve differences through reasoned debate.⁴ US Assistant Secretary of State Karl F. Inderfurth requested Bangladeshi leaders to resolve their differences peacefully. He said that accommodation not confrontation was essential for economic growth and prosperity.⁵ US expressed concern at the confrontational politics between the government and the opposition parties and sought Bangladesh President’s intervention to restore political stability which was necessary for the economic development of the country.

In brief it can be said that Clinton Administration seriously pursued its goal of democracy promotion in Bangladesh. Here Washington’s main objective was to prepare Bangladesh as the model of democracy for Muslim countries running after Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

END NOTES

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