

## NATIONAL ELECTIONS UNDER ERSHAD REGIME: THE QUEST FOR LEGITIMIZATION

Dr. M. Aminur Rahman\*

### Abstract

Election is an essential and inseparable part of democracy. But election under military rule is simply used as a means to legitimize and formalize the activities of the military government. Since his taking over power General Ershad constantly made his endless search for legitimizing the regime. For that purpose, he held several national elections. These elections did not help Ershad earn even a veneer of legitimacy. Moreover, the national elections held during Ershad regime destroyed the democratic electoral process of the country. In the present study the national elections under Ershad regime as a measure for legitimization have been analyzed and evaluated.

### Introduction

In a democratic system, election is recognized as a means to have verdict of the people for going or remaining in power. Without election the will of the people cannot be determined. The periodic election provides opportunities for the expression of the electorate's judgement on the performance of the government.<sup>1</sup> Election may help to confer or to establish, or to maintain or re-affirm or to refute or weaken or destroy the legitimacy of a regime or even of a political system.<sup>2</sup> But election under 'Ruler type military governments', which come to power with some clear goals to strengthen the state, bring different experience. Here, election is Bangladesh began its journey as an independent state with a democratic spirit, and a parliamentary system of government was introduced at the initial stages. But hardly after three years of independent, the founder of the nation was assassinated. The shock was followed by tragic after-

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh

<sup>1</sup> Norman D. Palmer (ed.), *Elections and Political Development, The South Asian Experience*, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, Pvt. Ltd., p.11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199

simply used as a means to legalize and formalize the activities of the military government.<sup>3</sup>

Soon the nation plunged into the vicious circle of military rule and the rule by politicians with direct or indirect blessings from the barracks. Elections were there, but they could hardly be called elections of any merit, because most of them were organized and staged in manners only suited to the purpose of those in power. Thus elapsed three decades of independence with no positive stride towards having democracy institutionalized.<sup>4</sup>

After assassination of President Zia, Vice-president Justice Abdus Sattar succeeded the office of the Presidency, who was elected President on November 15, 1981. The Army Chief General H.M. Ershad seized the state power and declared Martial Law in the country on 24 March 1982.<sup>5</sup> At the time of his take over Ershad said that army took over the power, to save the country from economic disaster, pervasive corruption and ruination—the result of wrong policies pursued by the former regime.<sup>6</sup> He stressed the role of the armed forces in the developmental activities of the country.<sup>7</sup> He rationalized the role for the military in the national decision making process. He said, "Our military is an efficient, well-disciplined and most honest body of truly dedicated and organized national force. Potentials of such an excellent force can be effectively utilized for productive and nation-building purposes in addition to its role of national defense.<sup>8</sup> General Ershad promised that the army would eventually return state power to civilian authority after implementing a host of socio-economic reforms in the country including 'elimination of corruption, decentralization of administration, disinvestments of

---

<sup>3</sup> B.M. Monoar Kabir, "Movement and Elections: Legitimization of the Military Rule in Bangladesh", *The Journal of Political Science Association*, Dhaka: Political Science Association, 1988, p.171.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Sahid Ullah, "Electronic Media Coverage of Two Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh: An Overview." in *Chittagong University Studies* (Faculty of Arts), Vol.XII, June 1996, p.232.

<sup>5</sup> Zaglul Haider "Role of Military in the Politics of Bangladesh: Mujib, Zia and Ershad Regimes (1972-1990)", in *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. XXII, No.3, Spring 1999, p.75.

<sup>6</sup> Ataur, Rahman, "Bangladesh in 1982: Beginning of the Second Decade", *Asian Survey*, Vol.23, No.2, 1983, p.156.

<sup>7</sup> *The Bangladesh Observer*, 25 March 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Emajuddin Ahmed, *Military Rule and The Myth of Democracy*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1988, p.134.

industries and educational changes.<sup>9</sup> He declared that he had no political ambition. He was soldier and not a politician and he wanted to serve the people as a soldier.<sup>10</sup>

But General Ershad continuously followed the path of civilianization like other military rulers in the Third world countries. He ruled the country for a long period of time and he was able to maintain unity and discipline within the armed forces. No coup attempt was reported during the Ershad regime. He systematically eliminated his opponents from important positions in the army, and pacified the rank and file by enhancing various facilities.<sup>11</sup> He ruled the country first as a military man and in subsequent part as an elected president. He built his own political party in order to rule the country in civilian form and held certain national elections in order to seek popular consent. He took the various measures to legitimize his rule. But the nine years of Ershad's autocratic rule witnessed an unrelenting struggle for restoration of democracy.<sup>12</sup>

### Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to present brief idea about the national elections under Ershad regime. The objectives of the study are:

- (i) To examine the national elections under Ershad regime.
- (ii) To evaluate the national elections as a measure for legitimization.

### Methodology of the Study

This paper is based on empirical and analytical approach. In order to collect necessary information this study has depended on secondary published materials. The required secondary data and information have been collected from books of reputed political scientists, concerned journals, periodicals, newspapers and dissertations.

<sup>9</sup> Al. Masud Hasanuzzaman, *Role of Opposition in Bangladesh Politics: An Assessment*, (Ph.D. Thesis), Dhaka University, Dhaka, 1995, p.142-43; Rahman, Ataur, *op.cit.*, p.152.

<sup>10</sup> Moudud, Ahmed, *Democracy and the Challenge of Development: A Study of Politics and Military Interventions in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1995, p.251.

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Solaiman, "The Military in Politics, Changing Phases in Bangladesh", *The Jahangirnagar Review*, Part 11, Social Science, Vols. XIII& XIV, 1989-90 Printed in 1992, p.87-88.

<sup>12</sup> Kamal Siddiqui, *Towards Good Governance in Bangladesh, Fifty Unpleasant Essays*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1996, p.2.

### The Party Building

Since his taking over power Ershad constantly made his endless search for legitimizing his regime. In this effort he followed the footsteps of his predecessor late President Ziaur Rahman. As a part of Ershad's civilianization process, a new dimension was added in politics by forming a government sponsored political party called Janadal on 27 November 1983; later Ershad renamed it as Jatiya Party (JP) from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1986. The JP was an "Umbrella Party" that assembled under its banner some well-known turncoat politicians whose ideological orientations ranged from socialist left through moderate to conservative right. Ershad organized his JP with the elements of Muslim League, Awami League, BNP, Jatiya League, Democratic League, National Awami Party, BSD, UPP and Ganatantrik Party. Actually, political elements assembled under the banner of JP mainly to reap the benefit distributed by Ershad who made politics a profession for making money and wealth.<sup>13</sup> The JP became a platform for civilian defence of military rule. It helped Ershad enormously to materialize his predilections of achieving a veneer of legitimization and civilianization of military rule.

### The Referendum, 1985

Ershad attempted to hold a national referendum towards his civilianization process. The referendum was held on March 21, 1985 on the issue of whether the people had confidence on General Ershad's policies and programs until the formation of an elected civilian government. It was viewed to approve the martial law regulations made by the martial law regime. The 18-point program placed before the voters by Ershad. It included, among other, rural development, self-sufficiency in food production, land reforms, development of cottage industries, proper distribution of national income, opportunities for maximum employment, medicare for everybody, elimination of corruption, and control of population explosion.<sup>14</sup>

A contradictory and confusing result was the main feature of the 'referendum'. The Election Commission declared that the voter turnout was 72.14 percent and 94.14 percent of them voted affirmatively for him.<sup>15</sup> The number of 'no votes' was 5.50% and invalid votes 0.36%.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A.N. Shamsul Hoque, "Nation Building in Bangladesh: The Process of Institution Building: in M.A. Hafiz and A. Rob Khan, eds. *Nation Building in Bangladesh: Retrospect and Prospect*, Dhaka: BIIS 1986, p.169.

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad, A. Hakim, *Bangladesh Politics, The Shahabuddin Interregnum*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1993, p.22.

<sup>15</sup> *Weekly Bichitra*, 3 January 1986.

On the other hand, independent local and foreign observers found these figures much too inflated and claimed that the voter turnout was not more than 15 to 20 percent.<sup>17</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA), who in this region are considered as impartial sources of information, observed that only 5% to 15% voters voted in the referendum.<sup>18</sup> A London based newspaper, The Times mentioned a 2% turnout in its editorial 'Learning to Live with a Lie' and termed the referendum a 'fraud'.<sup>19</sup> While the regime defenders explained the referendum as an "important milestone" in Ershad's quest for political legitimacy, the opponents of the regime viewed it as nothing more than a "futile exercise."

Actually, the government claimed the percentage of the turnout was too inflated and unusual because the mainstream political parties at large opposed the referendum. Nevertheless, after holding the referendum Ershad treated it as a genuine mandate of the voters and moved ahead to hold other elections.

### The Parliamentary Election, 1986

Ershad's next step was to hold parliamentary election toward his civilianization process. On March 21, 1986, President Ershad in his address to the Nation through Radio and Television agreed to fulfill the maximum demands of the opposition political parties and guaranteed that election would be free and fair, and administration would play a neutral role.<sup>20</sup> Due to the assurance of the President, 8-parties of the 15-party alliance headed by Awami League decided to take part in the election suddenly.

At the same time Jamat-I-Islami also decided to take part in the election.<sup>21</sup> While the 7-party alliance led by BNP and the 5-party left's alliance boycotted the election on the ground that election under Ershad,

who was desperate to perpetuate his rule, could never be free, fair and impartial. They believed that this election would not restore democracy.<sup>22</sup> The third parliamentary election held on 3 March 1986.<sup>23</sup> The results of the election showed that ruling Jatiya Party won the election bagging 153 seats while Awami League secured the second position with 76 seats.<sup>24</sup>

Table-1

Performance of Major Parties and Independents in the Third JS Election

| Party/Independents | No. of Votes Received | % of votes Received | No. of Seats Won | % of Seats Won |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|
| JP                 | 12,079,259            | 42.34               | 153              | 51             |
| AL                 | 7,462,157             | 26.16               | 76               | 25.33          |
| JIB                | 1,314,057             | 4.61                | 10               | 3.33           |
| CPB                | 259,728               | .91                 | 5                | 1.66           |
| NAP                | 368,979               | 1.29                | 5                | 1.66           |
| JSD                | 725,303               | 2.54                | 4                | 1.33           |
| BML                | 412,765               | 1.45                | 4                | 1.33           |
| Other Parties      | 1,285,377             | 4.43                | 11               | 3.66           |
| Independents       | 4,619,025             | 16.19               | 32               | 10.66          |

Source: Bangladesh Election Commission, Dhaka.

The officially claimed voter turnout in the election was 60.31 percent. It was the highest since independence.

It is to be noted that the third parliamentary election was the most controversial one. It was alleged as election by design and manipulated by the administrative apparatus.<sup>25</sup> All opposition political parties including the 8-party alliance and Jamat-I-Islami accused the government of committing vote rigging, vote robbery and media coup.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the 1986 parliamentary election, BBC, The Guardian, The Times, The Financial Times, VOA, and some foreign observers reported different kind of malpractices and irregularities. All the sources reported terrorist

<sup>16</sup> Abdul Mannan, *Election and Democracy in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Library, 2005, p.91.

<sup>17</sup> Peter J. Bertocci, "Bangladesh in 1985: Resolute Against a Storm", *Asian Survey*, vol.6, No.2, 1986, p.229.

<sup>18</sup> B.B.C and V.O.A Commentary, 21 and 22 March 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Gain, P., Tahmina, Q.A., and Shishir Moral (eds.), *The Reporter's Guide: Handbook on Election Reporting*, Dhaka: Society for Environment and Human Development, 1995, p.130.

<sup>20</sup> Nirbachani Karjacram Protibedon, Jatiya Sangsad Election, Dhaka: Bangladesh Election Commission, 1986, p.22.

<sup>21</sup> Yeahia Akhter, *Election Corruption in Bangladesh*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001, p.128.

<sup>22</sup> S.R. Chakravarty, (ed.), *Bangladesh Under Mujib, Zia and Ershad*, New Delhi: Her-Anand Publications, 1995, p.168.

<sup>23</sup> Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Politics and Security of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994, p.84.

<sup>24</sup> M. Hasan Sarowardy, , *Peoples Participation in Bangladesh Politics: A Study of June 1996 Parliamentary Election*, (An Unpublished Ph.D Thesis), Rajshahi: University of Rajshahi, 2000, p.167.

<sup>25</sup> Ataur Rahman, "Elections 1996 and Bangladesh's Democratic Future", Paper Presented at the Seminar organized by Bangladesh Political Science Association, Dhaka, 1 June 1996.

<sup>26</sup> M. Anisur Rahman, *Elections in Bangladesh: Role of the Election Commission* (An unpublished Ph.D Thesis), Rajshahi: University of Rajshahi, 2006, p.158.

activities during the polls, occupation of the polling station by the ruling party, false voting and snatching of ballot boxes committed by the ruling Jatiya Party. Even the government officials and the armed forces personnel co-operated with the ruling party activities in the process of committing electoral malpractices.<sup>27</sup> On the election day at least 20 persons were killed and more than 500 injured.<sup>28</sup>

A British team of observers consisting of a former Labour Minister and a BBC journalist considered the election a “tragedy for democracy” and a “cynically frustrated exercise”.<sup>29</sup> A visiting British MP, Lord Ennals, said that he did not find a single polling stations working according to election law and procedure.<sup>30</sup> The leader of the 8-party alliance and Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina said the massive rigging in the election could be described as a ballot dacoity. She termed the election as ‘polls piracy’ and alleged that ‘result sheets of the election were prepared at the Chief Martial Law Administrator’s Secretariat.’<sup>31</sup>

BNP and 7-party alliance congratulated the people for rejecting and boycotting ‘farical polls’ and foiling the conspiracy under a blue print.<sup>32</sup> They alleged that it was an election where votes were not cast, but seats were divided between JP and the 8-party alliance on an agreed formula. Khaleda Zia directly accused Hasina of granting Ershad a further lease of life in power. Acting Ameer of Jamat-I-Islami Bangladesh Mr. Abbas Ali Khan said that the parliamentary polls frustrated the nation because of unprecedented terrorism and rigging.<sup>33</sup> The government, however, ignored the allegations and claimed that the election was free and fair.<sup>34</sup>

### The Presidential Election, 1986

In August 1986 Ershad resigned from his post of army chief and joined the Jatiya Party. A soldier thus formally tuned himself into a politician, but his image as a soldier could not be removed. After Ershad’s failure to acquire legitimacy through an extra-constitutional mechanism of referendum, he decided to earn at least a veneer of legitimacy through a

presidential election scheduled for October 15, 1986. The opposition parties learnt from their experience in parliamentary elections held a few months ago that a fair and free election under Ershad was unthinkable. Almost all major opposition parties including the AL (Awami League), BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and JI (Jamat-I-Islami) decided not only to boycott, but also resist the presidential election.

Ershad contested the election as the JP candidate. None of Ershad’s eleven rivals in the race had a support base strong enough to steer successfully a countrywide election campaign. However, two of them had some prominence. Moulana Muhammadullah (Hafezzi Huzur) was an octogenarian religious leader, and Colonel (Rtd.) Syed Farooq Rahman was the self-declared chief architect of the coup in which a civilian government was overthrown and Mujib and most of his family members were killed.<sup>35</sup> The 8-party alliance led by the Awami League demanded rejection of Faruk Rahman’s candidacy for the presidency because of his involvement in the killing of Sheikh Mujib. Sheikh Hasina called upon the people to continue the movement for establishment of democracy. BNP regarded the election as another attempt to legitimize Ershad’s illegal regime and demanded his resignation, dissolution of the parliament, release of all political prisoners, and free fair election under a neutral caretaker government.<sup>36</sup>

The Presidential election was held in scheduled time (October 15, 1986). The opposition parties attempt to resist the election. They called hartal (Strike) on the election day defying the governmental ban on anti-election activities. A government source claimed that 54 percent voted in the election and Ershad was elected securing 83.57 percent of the total vote cast.<sup>37</sup> Mohammadullah and Farooq Rahman secured 5.69 percent and 4.51 percent votes respectively. While the opposition claimed that the people had boycotted the election responding to their call for boycott. They criticized the election as a ‘farce’ and claimed that less than 3 percent voters voted in the poll, neutral observers put the voter turnout in the vicinity of 15 percent.<sup>38</sup> Later the opposition observed ‘Black Day’ on the oath taking day of the President and they called Ershad a self-declared President and persistently demanded his resignation.

<sup>27</sup> *Weekly Bichitra*, 16 May 1986.

<sup>28</sup> *The Bangladesh Observer*, 8 May 1986.

<sup>29</sup> Syed, Serajul Islam, “Bangladesh in 1986: Entering a New Phase”, *Asian Survey*, 27, 2 February 1987, p.166.

<sup>30</sup> *The New Nation*, 8 May 1986.

<sup>31</sup> *The Bangladesh Observer*, 7 May 1986.

<sup>32</sup> *The New Nation*, 8 May 1986.

<sup>33</sup> *The Bangladesh Observer*, 8 May 1986.

<sup>34</sup> Md. Abdul Hakim, , *The Changing Forms of Government in Bangladesh, The Transition to Parliamentary System in 1991, In Perspective*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies, 2000, p.53.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad A. Hakim, *Bangladesh Politics, op.cit.*, p.27-28.

<sup>36</sup> Islam, Syed, Serajul, *Bangladesh State and Economic Strategy*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1988, p.168.

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence Ziring, *Bangladesh: From Mujib to Ershad An Interpretive Study*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994, p.199.

<sup>38</sup> Samina Ahmed, “Politics in Bangladesh: The Paradox of Military Intervention”, *Regional Studies*, 9:1, (Winter 1990-91), p.58.

Table-2  
Results of the Presidential Election of 1986

| No. | Candidate                                    | Symbol      | No. of Votes Received |
|-----|----------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1.  | Olul Islam Chowdhury (Sukku Mia)             | Hut         | 1,34,211              |
| 2.  | Alhaj Maulana Khairul Islam Jessori          | Date Tree   | 3,50,391              |
| 3.  | Alhaj Major (Retd.) Md. Afsar Uddin          | Sword       | 1,11,542              |
| 4.  | Mohammad Ansar Ali                           | Turban      | 1,16,923              |
| 5.  | Maulana Mohammadullah (Hafezji Huzur)        | Banyan Tree | 15,10,456             |
| 6.  | Md. Khalilur Rahman Majumder                 | Rose        | 1,23,417              |
| 7.  | Md. Abdus Samad                              | Scale       | 1,14,116              |
| 8.  | Zahir Khan                                   | Boat        | 4,18,744              |
| 9.  | Lt. Col (Retd.) Syed Farooq Rahman           | Paddy Sheaf | 11,73,723             |
| 10. | Syed Monirul Huda Chowdhury                  | Stick       | 88,502                |
| 11. | Sq. Leader (Retd.) Moazzem Hussain Chowdhury | Umbrella    | 1,56,328              |
| 12. | Hussain Mohammad Ershad                      | Plough      | 2,17,95,337           |

Source: Bangladesh Election Commission, Dhaka.

### The Parliamentary Election, 1988

From 1987 the three opposition alliances launched a movement to force Ershad to resign. The main accusations against the regime included, inter alia, assumption of power through unconstitutional means, institutionalization of corruption at all levels of government and administration, and systematic destruction of the electoral process. The movement affected the administrative machinery as well as the economy and challenged the legitimacy that the regime was claiming to have established through the referendum, parliamentary and presidential elections. The Jamat-I-Islami MPs resigned from the third Jatiya Sangsad and MPs belonging to other opposition parties followed suit. In a last bid to continue in power the third Jatiya Sangsad was dissolved on 6 December 1987.<sup>39</sup>

After dissolving the third Jatiya Sangsad, President Hossain Mohammad Ershad declared that a fresh election would be held on February 28,

<sup>39</sup>Md. Abdul Hakim, *The Changing Forms of Government in Bangladesh*, *op.cit.*, p.54.

1988. As a result, the Chief Election Commissioner declared the election scheduled on February 2, 1988 and promised to the nation that he would ensure a free, fair and impartial election. However, on January 19, 1988 the Election Commission revised the schedule partially without assigning any reason and fixed March 3, 1988 as the polling date. All major political parties, such as the Awami League, BNP and Jamat-I-Islami decided to boycott the election and reiterated their previous demand for Ershad's resignation and a fresh poll under the Non-Party Caretaker Government. An electoral alliance, known as Combined Opposition Party (COP) led by JSD leader A.S.M. Abdur Rob, composed of over seventy politically insignificant parties contested the election. JSD (Siraj), Freedom Party and other smaller parties also put up their own candidates.<sup>40</sup> 213 Independent candidates contested in the polls.<sup>41</sup>

However, the election was held in a hostile environment. The mainstream oppositions attempted to resist the election despite an official ban on anti-election propaganda and they called nationwide hartal (strike) on the election day. According to the EC Report 54.98% of the total voters cast vote in the election and Jatiya Party got a massive victory sweeping 251 seats and obtaining 68.44% of the total popular votes cast. Combined Opposition Party (COP) stood the second position with 19 seats and 12.63% of the popular votes.<sup>42</sup> In the election JSD (Siraj) and Freedom Party obtaining 3 and 2 seats respectively and independent candidates got 25 seats.

Table-3

Performance of Major Parties and Independents in the Fourth Jatiya Sangsad Election

| Party/Independents | No. of Votes Received | % of Votes Received | No. of Seats Won | % of Seats Won |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|
| JP                 | 1,76,80,133           | 68.44               | 251              | 83.66          |
| COP                | 32,63,340             | 12.63               | 19               | 6.33           |
| JSD-Siraj          | 3,09,666              | 1.20                | 3                | 1.00           |
| FP                 | 8,50,284              | 3.29                | 2                | .66            |
| Independents       | 34,87,457             | 13.50               | 25               | 8.33           |

Source: Bangladesh Election Commission, Dhaka.

<sup>40</sup>Al. Masud Hasanuzzaman, *op.cit.*, p.170.

<sup>41</sup>Shamsul Arefin, *Bangladesher Nirbachan 1970-2001*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Research and Publications, 2003, p.36.

<sup>42</sup>Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Press Information Department, A Background Paper on Bangladesh Fifth Parliament Elections, Handout No. 429, 20 February 1991, p.25.

In a statement BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia termed the election on March 3, as an election not being participated by the voters, she added that President Ershad had failed to fulfill constitutional requirement.<sup>43</sup>

The leader of 8-party alliance Sheikh Hasina rejected the parliamentary election and termed it as another game by Ershad. She criticized that with Ershad no election can become free and fair and reiterated a united movement against the autocratic regime. Hasina said that the persons declared in the election were not true representative of the people, as they were not elected by the people.<sup>44</sup>

Actually the 1988 parliamentary election was unfair to the extent of 'farce and mockery' and was not participated by any major opposition party. It was marked by unprecedented rigging. In the absence of main opposition parties in the election voter turnout was very low and in true sense the election was voterless.<sup>45</sup>

### Conclusion

Elections are essential and inseparable part of democracy. Holding elections are, therefore, necessary events in a democratic system. The democracy and electoral process largely contribute to the stability of a government. In fact, the system of democracy and electoral process can effectively sustain the interest of government, respect for law, and co-operative feeling of the citizens. Although General Ershad had been quite able to consolidate his position within the armed forces yet he faced his unacceptability in the political front. An acute legitimacy crisis that stemmed from Ershad's usurpation of state power through unconstitutional means threw the nation into a situation of protracted confrontation between the ruling group and its political opponents. Throughout his rule, the issue, which haunted Ershad, was the question of his legitimacy to govern the country. This was both a legal and a moral issue. Ershad attempted to legitimize and to democratize his rule. For that purpose, he held several national elections. But national elections did not help Ershad earn even a veneer of legitimacy. It can rather be argued that these only compounded the legitimacy crisis of the regime. It may be said that the measures and processes through which the national elections had advanced right from start to the end under Ershad regime were completely contrary to the democratic elections. The elections were not free, fair and impartial. Actually, these were farce, vote piracy and vote rigging. Therefore, the national elections held during Ershad regime destroyed the democratic electoral process of the country and could not successfully legitimize the regime.

<sup>43</sup> *The Holiday*, 11 March 1988.

<sup>44</sup> *The Bangladesh Observer*, 6 March 1988.

<sup>45</sup> Abdul Mannan, "Civilianization of General Ershad's Military Regime: An Assessment", *The Journal of Bangladesh Political Science Association*, Dhaka: Era printing and Packaging Ltd., 1991, p.96.