

PL-134-165



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Fifth Floor, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 328-3136

■ FAX (202) 939-3166
■ Telex 5106015068 NDIA

86272

USAID QUARTERLY REPORT BANGLADESH: PARLIAMENTARY PROJECT October 1 to December 31, 1993 Contract No: 439-0002-A-00-3004-00

Summary

During the fourth quarter of 1993 (October 1 to December 31, 1993) NDI staff prepared and delivered a memorandum to Bangladesh's Speaker of the Parliament containing conclusions and recommendations derived from the September 1993 parliamentary seminar. NDI also consulted with USAID Dhaka on plans for the next activity. Because of the number of seminars with the Parliament being planned by others in December, NDI postponed follow-on activity until the first quarter of 1994. USAID-Dhaka agreed to extend the end date of the project from December 31, 1993, to December 31, 1994.

Program Activities

Fourth quarter activities consisted mainly of follow-up to the previous quarter activities and of preparation for the next phase of program implementation.

After returning from the September 1993 seminar, NDI staff wrote a trip report assessing the seminar and a memorandum to the speaker of the Parliament (attached) enumerating a number of conclusions drawn from the discussions at the seminar. Included also were a number of specific recommendations for the Parliament to consider. A copy of the memorandum was forwarded to State Department and USAID officers in Dhaka, and to others who had participated in or followed the September seminar.

Drawing on the observations made at the September seminar, NDI staff began to develop plans for the next phase of the program in consultation with the USAID mission in Dhaka. Among the ideas was a plan to hold more intensive consultation with one or more committees of Parliament in order to help strengthen the committee system and increase the involvement of Members of Parliament in the legislative process.

NDI originally intended to conduct this next phase toward the end of the quarter. However, a number of other international and local non-governmental organizations scheduled parliamentary workshops and seminars for December 1993, making any additional activity difficult and possibly redundant. NDI sought and



obtained a one-year extension of the project that moved the end date from December 31, 1993, to December 31, 1994.

Next Quarter Activities

NDI will send a team to Dhaka during the first quarter of 1994 to plan the next round of activities. The team will consist of NDI staff members and an international team of elected officials. The team will consult with the Parliament on plans for further activities and draw up a workplan for the coming year.



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Fifth Floor, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 328-3136

■ FAX (202) 939-3166
■ Telex 5106015068 NDILA

Consensus Report to the Jatiya Sangsad

by the International Delegation
organized by

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

Parliamentary Secretariat

During many of the discussions M.P.s raised problems posed by the fact that the pending bill to establish an independent Parliamentary Secretariat has not yet been enacted despite the apparent constitutional requirement (Article XX) that it be done. Inaction means that the technical assistance and staffing provisions called for in the Asia Foundation's assessment cannot go forward. As a result, the kind of back up elementary secretarial and informational assistance which might then be available to M.P.s is not there, reducing every Member's effectiveness in debating policy issues and legislation.

One suggestion would be to enact a modified version of the pending proposal, involving a low level of expenditure. This would allow at least a few of the interested professional staff members to be engaged by the Parliamentary Secretariat to provide assistance to the Members of Parliament. Thus, the various issues associated with the secretariat could be examined for the longer term on the basis of some actual experience in the interim.

Committees

Many M.P.s agreed that parliamentary committees do not play as full a role as they could and should, in the shaping of legislation and oversight of government. Participants felt that the Parliament as a whole, and Members of Parliament as individuals, could play a more significant role if the committees were more active. In addition, more active committee work would allow back-benchers in all parties to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to become effective legislators and one day in the future ministers.

The chairs of most committees are government ministers. Often these Ministers do not have the time to attend committee meetings. Meetings are often cancelled at the last minute if the Minister has other pressing business. The suggestion was made that, even if Ministers remain as chairs, perhaps the next most senior government party M.P. could chair committee meetings in the absence of the Minister. This would allow the committees to meet more regularly and thus function more productively.

In addition, many M.P.s said that the press of business often means that bills before the Parliament are not fully debated in committee. A mechanism to ensure full debate of the bills will again allow M.P.s to fulfill their role in the legislative process, and may contribute to more informal and focused debate on the floor of the Parliament as well.

Parliamentary Parties

Both Bangladeshi and visiting M.P.s stressed the importance of holding more regular parliamentary party meetings. These meetings which in most democratic legislatures are convened on a weekly basis, are generally seen as vital to the work of parliaments. They give back benchers a chance to express their opinions and the views of their constituents/voters about issues important to the leadership. These meetings provide the leadership with the opportunity to explain to back benchers the reasoning behind positions taken and to assure that the parties most visible advocates -- the M.P.s -- are informed and supportive of the party's positions.

Regular parliamentary party meetings are important for government and opposition alike, but in particular provide government parties with the opportunity to build effective support for its decisions which, after all, are likely to become the law of the land. Some government party M.P.s said that they must occasionally vote for bills without prior discussion. By vetting bills in regular parliamentary party meetings, the government can also build public support for important policy changes.

Discipline Rule

Many M.P.s from both government and opposition said that Article 70 of the Constitution which stipulates that M.P.s will lose their seat for voting against their party, reduces the incentive for leadership to consult with back-benchers in decision-making and policy development. While many added that the article contributed in the short term to stability in all the parties, they expressed the importance of consultation even though leaders can be assured that M.P.s will vote as instructed.

Walk-outs and Boycotts

Nearly all the visiting M.P.s said that their own party had at some point used the walkout as a tactic in parliament. However, all had learned that it was ineffective and reduced the influence of the party in the parliament and in the eyes of the public. The Australian M.P. noted that when his party once walked out, the governing party was then able to pass important legislation without opposition or even debate over the issues. In addition, the visiting M.P.s said the tactic lowered public opinion, not only of the boycotting party, but of the Parliament as an institution.

Constituent Relations

In general, there was concern that M.P.s spend too much time and energy dealing with small highly personal constituent demands, whether they be personal problems of individual constituents, or demands of groups of constituents for services better provided by local government. This problem, which is shared by parliamentarians around the world, makes it difficult for M.P.s to play their role as legislators and policy makers. Some suggestion was made that strengthened local government could help ease some of this burden. In the meantime, M.P.s should take time to discuss with constituents the large policy issues under consideration in the parliament, and explain the ramifications of these to their constituents. This will help build public support for important issues such as economic restructuring programs, and will strengthen the public's perception of the vital role the Parliament plays. The strengthening of the parliamentary secretariat would help in this regard, as would more frequent meeting of the parliamentary parties.

National Democratic Institute For International Affairs

conducting nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions



Fifth Floor
1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 328-3136
FAX (202) 939-3166
TELEX 5106015068 NDIIA

January 31, 1994

Acting Chair
Rachelle Horowitz

Secretary
Kenneth F. Melley

Treasurer
Marvin F. Weissberg

Finance Chair
Elizabeth F. Bagley

Board of Directors
William V. Alexander
Thomas F. Eagleton
Barbara J. Easterling
Eugene Eidenberg
Dante B. Fascell
Geraldine A. Ferraro
Patrick J. Griffin
John Hendricks
Maxine Isaacs
Geri M. Joseph
Peter G. Kelly
Paul G. Kirk, Jr.
Peter Kovler
Elliott F. Kulick
Leon Lynch
Lewis Manilow
Azie Taylor Morton
Sally Shelton
Mark A. Siegel
Michael R. Steed
Maurice Tempelsman
Andrew J. Young
Raul Yzaguirre

Senior Advisory Committee
Michael D. Barnes
John Brademas
Bill Bradley
Richard F. Celeste
Mario M. Cuomo
Patricia M. Derian
Christopher J. Dodd
Michael S. Dukakis
March Fong Eu
Martin Frost
Richard A. Gephardt
John T. Joyce
John Lewis
Mike J. Mansfield
Donald F. McHenry
Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Edmund S. Muskie
Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.
Bill Richardson
Charles S. Robb
Stephen J. Solarz
Esterban E. Torres
Cyrus R. Vance
Anne Wexler

Chairmen Emeriti
Walter F. Mondale
Charles T. Manatt

Mr. Paul Greenough
Project Officer
USAID
P.O. Box 2593
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Re: Grant Agreement No. 499-0002-A-00-3004-00

Dear Mr. Greenough:

I enclose the quarterly report for NDI's program under the subject agreement to assist the parliament of Bangladesh.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Tom Melia, Mary Curtin or me.

Sincerely,


Eric C. Bjornlund
Director of Program
Coordination

Enclosures

cc: USAID
PPC/CDIE/DI
Washington, D.C. 20523-1802

