

## **Capital Accumulation through Lumpen-development and the Emergence of Lumpen-bourgeoisie in Bangladesh**

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**Abstract:** This article tries to examine the recent defaulted development process in Bangladesh through reviewing the articles of different daily newspapers and journals from the time period of May 2014 to December 2014, specifically those are written on the issue of illegal accumulation of capital through wide-scale corruption by the so-called patriotic political leaders, government officials and unscrupulous business magnets. It is based on the assumption that deficiencies in democratic governance and a strongly centralized state authority intensify the process of capital accumulation through lumpen-development by the emerging lumpen-bourgeois class in Bangladesh as well as the process is limiting the opportunities of vulnerable group to claim their rights. It attempts to explore the emergence of a new brand of politicians since our return to democracy about two decades ago, who are interested more in consolidating their grip on their constituencies than promoting in-house democracy, which should have been their major aim. A content analysis of articles and books written on the criticisms of illegal accumulation of capital and the actions taken by the government to counter it reveals how our people are suffering immensely due to spiraling corruption in almost all sectors of administration and the situation has been further aggravated by weak political direction.

**Keywords:** Lumpen; Lumpen-Development; Lumpen- Bourgeoisie; Lumpenproletariat; Neoliberal Modernization

### **Introduction**

Today both hope for the future and worries characterize Bangladesh. Akanda (2014) mentions Bangladesh erased its negative branding of Kissinger's bottomless basket case in the 2000s. He articulates that our economy attained an average growth rate of 6.3% in the early 2010 from a mere of 3.7% in the 1980s; meanwhile the economic system has been transformed into market capitalism (Akanda 2014). The growth has been benefited many, but has not been able to improve the situation for those most vulnerable and poor. Though considerable progress has been made in the fight against poverty and the strong population growth has now ceased, half of the country's population is still living in poverty and the country has major development problems. Hashmi(2011) states that our country like other 47 least developed countries(LDCs), suffers from a vicious cycle of capital formation, low level of human capital, technological deficiency and macroeconomic instability.

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This study examines the changes in the class structure of our societies under the influence of the neoliberal development strategy and the restoration of peripheral capitalism. It mainly focuses on the changes that have taken place in the very composition of the ruling lumpen-bourgeois class, of its fractions and elites. In particular, it analyzes the social profile of the lumpen-bourgeoisie and its political elites, as well as the detrimental effects they have on the future and the development of our society. Through uncritical acceptance of the neoliberal strategy of dependent modernization and obedience to their western mentors, the satellite pseudo-elites have contributed more to the processes of destruction than those of creation. They have brought about the peripherization of economy, society and culture and have pushed our country into the zone of peripheral capitalism. This article reveals the social position and the role of the given groups in the social structure, in the system of the division of social power and in the current social changes in our society. This article mainly reveals that the lumpen-development is the result of widespread corruption and illegal activities of the politicians in our country.

#### **Andre Gunder Frank's Lumpen-development and Lumpen-bourgeoisie: Conceptual Clarification**

Tenenbaum defines the term 'lumpen' as 'the disenfranchised, drive from the economically depressed areas and are for the most part oppressed nation's people' (Tenenbaum 1975: 12). He delineates that Lumpen are an essential part of the laws of social development, especially in the imperialist stronghold (Tenenbaum 1975). In Marx's theory of social relations of production lies the question of ownership that is what 'class' owns the tool and what 'class' uses the tools. In the imperialist society, the lumpen neither own nor use the tools. They are excluded from production and live under the heel of capitalist relations of production (Noble 2000). Lumpen-bourgeoisie is a term used primarily in the context of colonial and neocolonial elites in Latin America, which became heavily dependent and supportive of the neocolonial powers. It is a hybrid of compound of the German word 'Lumpen' (rags) and the French word 'bourgeoisie'. The term had been used first by C. Wright Mills in his book named *White Collar* in 1951 to designate the multitude of white firms 'with a high death rate , which do a fraction of the total business done in their lines and engage a considerably larger proportion of people than their quota of business'(quoted in Marshall 1998: 238). Then the term was used by Franklin Edward Frazier who was a member of the Chicago School of Sociology and the former president of the American Sociological Society. Frazier described the black business class in the USA as a 'lumpen-bourgeoisie', which exaggerated its economic well-being to help create a world of make-believe into which its members could escape from their inferiority and inconsequence in American society (quoted in Marshall 1998: 238). Lumpen-bourgeoisie is a term most often attributed to Andre Gunder Frank to describe 'a type of middle class and lumpen class (merchants, lawyers, industrialists, etc.); one that has little collective self-awareness or economic base and who supports the colonial masters' (Frank 1972: 59). Andre Gunder Franks' writings on the origins of the term noted that he created this neologism lumpen-bourgeoisie from lumpenproletariat and bourgeoisie because while the Latin America's colonial and neocolonial elites were

similar to European bourgeoisie on many level. They had one major difference; this difference was their mentality of the Marxist lumpenproletariat, the 'refuse of all classes' easy to manipulate to support the capitalist system, often turning to crime. Similarly, the colonial elites would- while not involved in crime activities- hurt local economy by aiding the foreign exploiters. Foreign colonial powers want to acquire resources and goods found in the colonies, and they find this facilitated with incorporation of the local elites into the system, as they become intermediaries between the rich colonial buyers and the poor local producers. The local elites become increasingly reliant on the system in which they supervise gathering of the surplus production from the colonies, taking their cut and before the remaining goods are sold abroad. Frank termed this economic system lumpen-development and the countries affected by it, lumpenstates (Frank 1972).

The 'unequal exchange theory' of Samir Amin traced the roots of the backwardness of Third World to the nature of the pre-colonial bourgeoisie towards the colonial rule. Even after their independence, the ex-colonies, says Amin, continue to be the periphery of the capitalist world system. There is no halt to the disarticulation of their economies, to unequal exchange and to the resultant pauperization of their peoples (quoted in Noble 2000: 152).

### **The Strategy of the Dependent Neoliberal Modernization, the Production of Peripheral Capitalism, Comprador Neo-bourgeoisie, Lumpen-elite and Our Society**

This study reveals that the recent condition of our society is characterized by destroyed society, i.e. lumpenpolitics and lumpen-development. It has found itself in the jaws of the neoliberal strategy of dependent modernization that produces sub-development, peripherization of economy, society and culture. The degenerate social structure then sees the emergence of new aspects of neo-bourgeoisie as well as the emergence of the new fraction of its elites (the entrepreneurial fraction, the nomenclature fraction and the lumpen-bourgeoisie). The structural characteristics of the ruling elite are needed to be highlighted to show which faction of the exploiters is holding controlling power of the state machinery and using it to enact a consumption behavior that is detrimental to local production and people. Bertocci (1982) identified an amalgam of three institutional groupings exercising power in Bangladesh, namely:

1. The politicians and their parties;
2. The civil bureaucracy; and
3. The military.

Bertocci thinks that to posit the ruling hybrid group of elite that control Bangladesh in capacities similar to colonial relations, it is important to understand the origin and social structure of the Bengali elite. The British colonial power created a middle class of bourgeois collaborators to ensure easy exploitation and control while the subsequent Pakistani colonial power created a small-scale industrialist-trader-businessman class for the same purpose. Following independence in 1971, responsibilities for the national decision-making and for the economy suddenly came to rest with the then subservient

political-bureaucratic-military elite. This brought in a euphoric sense of possession of vast, if not endless, resources followed by a feverish scramble for grabbing the resources in a colonial abandon. One may like to term this as a 'plunder' of a nation's wealth in a manner similar to primitive accumulation (Bertocci 1982: 92). According to Hashmi such accumulation has occurred in at least six ways in Bangladesh over the last forty years of its independence: firstly, the expropriation of enemy properties; secondly, the endowed control of the nationalized industries; thirdly, the government construction contract jobs; fourthly, the bank loans or credits; fifthly, the licenses and special permits; sixthly, the export of nontraditional items, such as shrimp harvesting and sewing garments (Hashmi 2011). He further states that political allegiance was the only collateral needed by those who wanted loans and privileges. The illegal accumulation of funds in the industrial sectors is affected through a variety of techniques-principle ones included: over invoicing for the purchase of obsolete equipment and obtaining loans to establish new industries and transferring the money out of the country. He describes it as a phenomenon where the system of imperialism works by 'manufacturing consent' within the ruling class, accommodates them within the larger global capitalist system to partner them in grabbing resources, and control the total economy and its potential((Hashmi 2011)). There are, of course, different political parties that comprise the ruling class. We have seen them in power in different phases of our history, we have experienced military rule too. Although the parties do not like each other or quarrel often among themselves, they implement the same policies, as the policies represent the same classes and the same global corporate interests. The local ruling classes find their existence, power, security and affluence by being connected with the global empire. Syeduzzaman states that this is a negotiated arrangement of contract, the local and the global ruling classes have with so-called foreign aid, they have built a major support base - consultants, big private sector owners and beneficiaries from different projects. In the process, these bureaucrats, consultants, the media and the ruling classes have become a vital pillar of global capital and they try to rationalize these grabbing of common resources as 'development' (Syeduzzaman 2014).

The group of exploiters in Bangladesh did not develop through a normal capitalistic mode of production, i.e. through production and exploitation of the working class. The focus of our analysis is comprador bourgeoisie and the fraction of pseudo-lumpen elites, which, as agents of social change, produce underdevelopment and the culture of dependence, i.e. lumpenpolitics and lumpen-development. A critical analysis of the social role of this bourgeoisie can show all the detrimental effects of the strategy of dependent modernization, of the actions of comprador bourgeoisie and the satellite political elites on the development of our contemporary society. As industrialization has destroyed the rural areas and their inhabitants, so the transition of the given type is currently destroying cities, the working and the middle class. Our country is currently experiencing production of dependent societies which have entered the zone of neocolonial debtor slavery. Comprador bourgeoisie is the main force behind sub-development and subservience to the World of the super capital. According to Mitrovic (2010), it develops 'bandit economy' and invests its capital in the peripheral sectors of trade, and, if necessary, in the

narcomarket, too. As far as its social profile is concerned, it is an amalgam and recruits its members from the various groups involved in the neobourgeois ways of production, from the nomenclature bourgeoisie, lumpenbourgeoisie and partly from the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. It possesses no developed national consciousness and blindly follows its interests at all costs. It creates clones with a European and transatlantic trademark, it produces people who have sold their souls to capital, and who are ready to act against national interests in order to increase their wealth. Comprador bourgeoisie is neither an agent of progressive ways of production nor does it have developed social consciousness so as far it to become a leading class (Mitrovic 2010). In our country, they can primarily find support in those parties that are not nationally oriented, and that are profit and client oriented.

### **Capital Accumulation through Lumpen-development in Bangladesh: Historical Sketch**

“A look at its recent history and an empirical study of the present state of chaos, lawlessness and abject poverty of the people shows that Bangladesh has never enjoyed peace and prosperity in the last two hundred odd years. The ‘Golden Bengal’ or ‘Sonar Bangla’ of Tagore is a historical concept, a myth, which never existed, at least not for the ordinary Bengalis. The peasant masses’ desperation to get their mythical land of abundance led to the formation of Pakistan in 1947 in the region that is now Bangladesh. They in their quest for equality and justice- social as well as economic- targeted Hindu landlords and professionals, and finally created the eastern wing of Pakistan. Soon the marshy, overpopulated, underdeveloped predominantly Muslim region, which had been just a jute producing hinterland of the industrialized, urban and predominantly Hindu region of western Bengal up to the partition of 1947, again became disillusioned with Pakistani rulers. As the Pakistani ruling elite, predominantly non-Bengali Muslim Punjabis and north Indians, did not treat East Bengali Muslims as equal partners, the latter were forced to fight for independence. And thus Bangladesh came into being after much bloodshed in 1971. The creation of Bangladesh, despite all the promises made by its founding fathers, did not improve the lot of the ordinary people. Rather the bulk of the population became much poorer and malnourished than what they used to be under Pakistani rule from 1947 to 1971” (Sen 1986: 34).

Bertocci (1982) argues that the malady was not caused by a single factor: firstly, the region was not self-sufficient in food, and secondly, the leaders were neither experienced nor qualified to run an independent country, along with their incompetence were their avarice, nepotism, clannish or tribal behavior and lack of political will, long term economic planning and sense of belonging to a nation. Consequently despite attaining self-sufficiency in food and marginal growth in per capita income and GDP/GNP in recent years, the inequitable distribution and primitive accumulation of wealth through corruption, bank default, smuggling, bribery, extortion (chandabazi), grabbing public or private land and assets by abusing power and using connections with government high-ups- has left the average Bangladeshi among the poorest and most malnourished, illiterate and backward in the World. It is not surprising that while mega NGOs like BRAC and

Grameen Bank have been portraying a rosy picture vis-à-vis the future of Bangladesh, their unaccountability and self-aggrandizing propaganda have not helped the country to reach the 'take off' stage in relation to development in the true sense of the expression. Consequently politicians, members of the parliament, teachers, students, priests, bureaucrats, businessmen, bankers, drivers, cooks and people in general are calling names and portraying each other as 'traitors', 'liars', 'conspirators', 'enemies of the country', 'half educated', 'lame' and what not! The way the prime minister and the leader of the opposition portray each other may be cited in this regard. What is reflected in the culture of name calling and undermining each other is typical peasant behavior. A peasant not only does not know how to respect, tolerate, thank or congratulate another, he is also unaware of the virtues of trust and peaceful co-existence with others besides his own clan members and immediate patrons, hence the prevalence of the 'holier-than-thou' mentality in almost every section of society. The lack of trust for the law-enforcing agencies and the government itself is inherent in the popular culture of the people (Prothom Alo, 30 June. 2014, p.1). According to Ahsan (2014), this culture of alienation has justified both extortion and bribery. He mentions that government officials, members of parliament, and ministers are expected to make money as they invest substantial amount of money to get these positions. It is not uncommon that candidates bribe high ups in the police, customs or taxation departments to get the aspired positions which guarantee them good return in the form of bribe and other illegal gratifications. The average Bangladeshi considers those who do not make money by abusing power as 'boka' or 'idiots' not as honest and normal people. Honesty is no longer considered the 'best policy' among the hoi polloi, consequently one comes across the Bengali saying: churi bidya baro bidya jadi na paro dhara (stealing is a great art or technique unless you are caught). This attitude is reflective of the people's sense of deprivation and alienation from the polity. This alienation from the government has led them to the destruction and vandalization of public property and to the mentality of not paying anything to the government. The newly entrenched elite do not want to pay anything to anybody; they are reluctant to pay income tax, customs duty, electricity and telephone bills in Bangladesh. They even do not want to repay their bank loans. One often hears on the streets of Dhaka, or elsewhere people bragging about what they can do- kill someone, kidnap someone, and destroy someone's property with impunity- as they know some influential politicians, government servant or gangster or they come from the same clan, village or belong to the same political party. Consequently there has been a tremendous rise in violent crimes throughout the country- including gang rapes and acid throwing on women. The organized mafia and not-so-organized criminals belonging to particular districts or faction chiefs have proliferated in the dormitories of college and universities. The political use of these criminals has been so endemic that gangsters and armed criminals have been glorified by their respective patrons as 'armed cadres' with a view to justifying their crimes so long as they are committed outside the perimeter of the faction, group or party. Many hardcore criminals and professional killers from different social backgrounds mainly lower peasant and lumpen elements have become mafia bosses. Some of them since the late 1980s have been sitting in the parliament as 'elected representatives' of the people. Influential political leaders,

including ministers, harbor these criminals as their ‘armed cadres’. Thus terror and extortions, killing of political rivals and others in public, often in front of media photographers, have lost their novelty since the 1990s (Ahsan 2014).

The politicization of crime and criminalization of politics in the names of ‘preservation of democracy’, ‘freedom and sovereignty of the country’, ‘the spirit of the liberation war’, ‘Islam’, and ‘socialism’, among other things, have turned politics into the by-word for everything that is despised by every urban, refined and civilized person. According to Mozaffar Ahmed, a renowned Bangladeshi economist: “while politics in the country is a business, the parliament is the market place, where members of the parliament call names at each other and spends seventy five percent of their time in praising their own leaders and party”(Prothom alo[bangali daily], august 23.2014, p. 1).

### **Recent Features of Lumpen-development in Bangladesh: Problematizing Development, Redefining Democracy**

Some of the headings from our daily newspapers (specifically, ProthomAlo[the Bengali daily] and The Daily Star) that were collected at the phase from May 2014 to December 2014, are cited here for representing the recent defaulted development process in our country:

“Fake freedom fighter certificates: ACC finds ex-state minister at fault” (Former state minister for Liberation War Affairs AB Tajul Islam abused his power to illegally issue freedom fighters’ certificates to five government officials last year, the Anti-corruption Commission has found)- Prothom Alo, 9 June. 2014, p.1, col.1.

“Turag not freed yet: half-hearted eviction drive spares many illegal structures” (Grabbers occupied several acres of the river by setting up concrete pillars and retaining walls. A three day eviction drive against the encroachment was abandoned halfway last month)- Prothom Alo, 12 July. 2014, p. 20, col.1.

“Illegal stone crushers on govt. land at Jaflong”(More than 250 crushers around tourist spot Jaflong, some 15<sup>th</sup> km north of sylhet city, are crushing stones illegally occupying land belonging to Road and Highways Department and Bangladesh Forest Department. Most of the stone crushing machines were set up uprooting trees and removing vegetation on the land of RHD) - The Daily Star, 10 August. 2014, p. 20, col.3.

“The deadly World of fake medicine” (Recently a generic medicine manufacturer was slapped with fines and a 10-year rigorous imprisonment by the Dhaka Drug Court for manufacturing and distributing adulterated drugs. The story behind drug adulteration is the lust for money that drives some people to run business at the expense of people’s lives)- Prothom Alo, 22 September.2014, p.1,col.2.

“Neighbors grab land overnight”(Two neighbors have allegedly occupied 22 decimals of land of a betel leaf planter in Barisal city over two days, with the victim alleging that police intentionally delayed in taking action despite being informed of the attempt on the first day)- The Daily Star, 30 October.2014, p.2, col.3.

“Hardly anything safe to eat”(As studies suggest, chemicals are recklessly and deliberately added to most of our food item making them harmful, and sometimes fatally so. Slowly but surely, we are poisoning ourselves, day after day) – The Daily Star, 9 November.2014, p.1, col.1.

“At cost of people: pesticide sellers cash in on growers’ ignorance, find it easy to mint money” (Apart from the pervasive adulteration of food, excessive use of pesticides, often of below per quality, in the cultivation phase poses serious threats to human health. A new study finds that almost one-third of the pesticides used in farming vegetables and fruits in the country are substandard) - The Daily Star, 11 November.2014, p.1, col.1.

“Extortion syndicate runs illegal markets”(A syndicate of politicians, traders and railway staffs are behind running of several hundred shops from which it realizes a handsome amount of money every day )-Prothom Alo, 12 December.2014, p.1, col.1.

Consequently, what one witnesses in contemporary Bangladesh- political disorder, violence, defiance of authority, authoritarianism, factionalism, predominance of the patron-client relationship in the arena of politics, corruption, backwardness and semi-feudal or semi-colonial social relationship- are but symptoms of the ascendancy of the unrefined, pre-modern rural and peasant culture throughout the country. Hashmi (2011) argues that the ruling elite from time to time have been injecting elements of pre-modern, fatalist and escapist culture or the ‘culture of poverty’, often by glorifying rustic and escapist baul or mendicant ways of life. He suggests unless one performs social-engineering like the ‘pressure cooker’ method adopted by the Meijis in Japan, or finds a suitable alternative to what has been going on in the country in the name of ‘parliamentary democracy’ with a view to establishing good governance and to promoting economic growth and prosperity like so many east Asian countries, there is no short term remedy for the maladies of Bangladesh (Hashmi 2011).

Tenenbaum describes the situation as the culture of fatalism and next-worldliness which glorifies death not life and poverty not prosperity, typical of any pre-modern/pre-capitalist community, has an important role in keeping Bangladesh where it is stagnating today. He believes that the eventual ascendancy of the petty bourgeois to power in collaboration with the lumpen bourgeois and lumpen proletariat after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 is also responsible for the backwardness of the polity. As historically the region had always been under foreign rule until 1971, there is hardly any tradition of self-rule and familiarity with government machinery, governance, urbanization and the concept of the rule of law. As foreign rulers, including the average West Pakistani administrator and politicians, always treated Bengalis as their subjects or tax payers, ‘government’ has always remained elusive to the people. Again, as rajniti, the Bengali equivalent of ‘politics’, literally means ‘policies or principles of the rulers’, ‘politics’ or governance is not something the ordinary people should be involved in or take interest in, so goes the Bangladeshi tradition. Thus, ‘self-rule’, ‘democracy’, ‘elections’, ‘parliament’, ‘legitimate government’ etc. have remained elusive and alien concepts to the people. Neither the British colonial rulers nor their Pakistani successors cared much

about introducing proper democracy and legitimate governments in the region. There has been only an incomplete and partial introduction of the concepts (Tenenbaum 1975). Although the situation is slightly different from the 18<sup>th</sup> century in relation to mass awareness and political consciousness, yet the ordinary people in Bangladesh do not want to interfere in the running of the state-craft by the mandarins- elite patrons- unless there is extreme hardship, terror and lawlessness in the country. Their political culture justifies corruption, bribery, debauchery, nepotism, dynastic rule and most pre-modern institutions. This is reflective in the popularity of dictators like General Ershad and ZiaurRahman or dynastic hegemons like Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. One wonders how democracy can blossom in a country like Bangladesh where no political party in the country is run democratically. The mismanagement is also due to the wrong policies adopted by the various inefficient civil and military regimes that run the country since its emergence in 1971. The introduction of 'socialism' and 'secularism' by the founding father of Bangladesh in 1972 also divided the nation and led to the pauperization of the polity and state sponsored corruption. The overnight shift to the Bengali from the English medium of instruction in all public schools and universities in 1972 has led to the creation of a 'vernacular elite', which is half-educated and ill-equipped to run the administration (Sen 1986). In short, the endemic struggle for scarce resources among the various corrupt and inefficient groups represented by political parties, NGOs and the powerful mullahs has made good governance and the consequential economic growth unattainable.

### **Conclusion**

Within the global capitalist system, Bangladesh can be considered a peripheral capitalist economy, here the state has been very effective in creating a repressive mechanism, but it has not been able to work towards formulating its own policies. This study finds that elite opportunism, dishonesty and inefficiency are at the roots of all evils in the country. Peasantization of the polity evident from the predominance of patron-client relationship and the associated violence is the main hindrance to the growth of democracy in Bangladesh. Despite optimistic assertions and wishful thinking by many scholars, many of whom are avowed patriots; it is not easy to be optimistic about the future of Bangladesh unless a sea of change takes place in the realm of the political culture and the consequential socio-economic development of the country. If the prevalence of so much corruption, violence, poverty, and misery of the people does not breed discontent among the bulk of the population, one is not sure if they are really interested in changing or improving their lot. One is not sure if the so-called state of contentment is partially a reflection of their utter frustration and helplessness as well. Tracking the main causes of the retardation process is a positive step-towards solving the problem. Since the problem did not crop up in a year or two, there is no quick solution to the problem. Bangladesh will have to go through this trial-and-error transition before the people will get rid of dynastic or guided democracy. Democracy is not an end but a means toward progress and development. An independent judiciary, modern uniform secular education and above all, people's willingness to challenge corrupt leaders at every level can guarantee the real progress of our country.

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