

# Internal Political Dynamics and Bangladesh's Foreign Policy Towards India

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## Abstract

*Bangladesh's relations with India are multi-dimensional - ideological, political and also economic. An extreme sense of distrust, insecurity and perceived domination by India has shaped Bangladesh's foreign policy in recent years. It at the same time, hesitant and finds it uncomfortable to function within a bilateral parameter. Whether it is trade, export of gas, provision of transit or the water issue, Bangladesh has argued for multilateral arrangements. Though India played an important role in the creation of Bangladesh, it is primarily seen by the political class in Dhaka as a concern due to its overwhelming size and presence but more importantly because of the nature of domestic politics of the country. A divided polity polarised on ideological lines and an extremely sensitive political atmosphere has made Bangladesh's relations with India subject to domestic dynamics.*

## Introduction

Domestic compulsions, electoral politics and public reaction greatly influence a country's foreign policy. The political elite plays an important role in shaping public opinion and often manipulates it to suit electoral calculations. Foreign policy, therefore, is not always based on rational decision-making, but is also influenced by considerations of the political fortunes of the involved actors. This is relevant in understanding Bangladesh's foreign policy towards India. Ironically, political parties when in the opposition invariably put pressure on the government on foreign policy issues, having failed to negotiate with Delhi when in power. In Bangladesh both the government and the opposition sustain an atmosphere of suspicion to further their political interests.

Buoyed by India's role in the liberation of Bangladesh, the relations between the two countries' were initially full of expectations and hope.

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The relationship, despite the strong bonding during the liberation struggle, however, could not weather the challenges that arose from nation and state-building efforts in Bangladesh. At the same time, India's approach towards its relations with Bangladesh was often regime-centric, resulting in an atmosphere not conducive to strengthening bilateral relations.

## **Background**

Before analysing Bangladesh's policies towards India, the emotions and expectations that underline the relationship need to be understood. The structural characteristic of Bangladesh's political parties and their perception of India's role in the 1971 liberation war are clearly reflected in the policies towards India.<sup>1</sup> The 'India factor' is significant in the domestic politics of Bangladesh and it is often dragged into the political rivalry between the two dominant parties. The domestic political compulsions in Bangladesh have severely restricted Indo-Bangladesh relations and have made both the countries circumspect about dealing with each other. Extreme cautiousness, especially on the part of Bangladesh, has stymied progress on bilateral issues.

It needs to be stated that India's role was already politicised during the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh. A number of factors contributed to this misunderstanding. The factionalism among the various groups that fought the liberation war, and the charge that India was selectively aiding groups close to the *Awami League* (AL)<sup>2</sup> (first the *Mukti Bahini* and later the *Mujib Bahini*), created an atmosphere where India's actions were seen by the rival and smaller political groups as serving the AL's political interests. Moreover, the close ties that the Bangladesh Government in Exile (BGE) based in Kolkata had with India were viewed with suspicion particularly by those groups<sup>3</sup> that operated outside the AL's leadership but worked in tandem to achieve their common goal of independence. A point of irritation for some freedom fighters was the requirement that Bengali armed forces officers, formerly with the Pakistan Army but later fighting the liberation war, send in reports to the Indian army authority to enable coordinated action<sup>4</sup>. Some liberation warriors were troubled by the induction of mostly Mujib loyalists into the armed *Mujib Bahini*<sup>5</sup> when it was formed. There is a view that believes this was done without the concurrence of the provisional government.<sup>6</sup> It was indeed a difficult task for the Indians to bring groups with differing ideologies under a unified command.<sup>7</sup>

India channelled its support to various groups through the BGE in Kolkata. The Bangladeshi left parties due to lack of support from India played a secondary role in the liberation struggle.<sup>8</sup> The BGE tried its best to keep the radical left at a distance because it feared that in case Bangladesh was liberated before Mujib was released from the jail in Pakistan, it would occupy the political space left vacant as a result of Pakistan's defeat in the war. Another influential group, the *Kader Bahini*, fought the war on its own. Its leader Kader Siddiqi played a prominent role in the liberation war<sup>9</sup>. He and Abu Taher resented the presence of the Indian Army during the ceremony held for the surrender of the defeated Pakistan army and none of the senior officers of the Bangladesh forces were present. The liberation war, therefore, had ruffled the ego of many groups who had been sidelined by the AL, which was the only elected political entity representing the popular will in former East Pakistan at the time of its independence.

It is not surprising that owing to their ideological orientation and, more importantly, being a product of Pakistan's political culture, some of these groups were inherently anti-Indian. These groups played an important role in the post-liberation political development of Bangladesh. India became the new whipping boy, a source of all the woes that befell the young state. Rumours about a secret pact with India worsened the situation with the *Mujib Bahini* and Sheikh Moni falling prey to this propaganda.<sup>11</sup> What made matters difficult for India was that domestically the country was divided between the people who had taken part in the liberation war as armed cadres and those confined to Dhaka and under the control of the Pakistan army. Simultaneously, another line of division existed between the collaborators of Pakistan army and the supporters of the liberation war. Various other groups or individuals that took part in the liberation war also challenged those who fought under the *Mujib Bahini*. With each contending to appropriate the glory of liberation without acknowledging the contribution of the other, the political situation became contentious. Those who did not get Indian help in their efforts to fight the Pakistan army as also those who had opposed the liberation war questioned India's intentions. They interpreted India's objective as being limited to dividing Pakistan and gaining strategic and economic advantages from the emergence of Bangladesh. Bangladesh, even after more than three decades of its independence continues to debate on the role of its national heroes and the collaborators of Pakistan army.

### **Post-Liberation: Euphoria vs. Realism**

Independent Bangladesh's relation with India was shaped by significant Indian contributions to the liberation of the erstwhile East Pakistan. This explains the signing of the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1972. This was later supplemented by various treaties on trade and cultural cooperation. Even the idea of having an open border allowing for the free movement of people was contemplated. However, the euphoria over the liberation war was soon tempered by deliberate caution. India did not agree with Mujib to erect a memorial in Dhaka dedicated to the Indian soldiers killed during the liberation war.<sup>12</sup> Free movement of people between Bangladesh and West Bengal was regulated at the insistence of Delhi.<sup>13</sup> It was India who insisted on the withdrawal of the army before Smt Gandhi made a state visit to Bangladesh in March 1972.<sup>14</sup> Also, India established state-to-state trading relations to neutralise the fear of West Bengal domination keeping in mind the pre-1947 apprehensions.<sup>15</sup> India was sensitive to Bangladesh's domestic political sentiments. While delineating its relations with India, Mujib was also conscious of the fact that his opponents would interpret Bangladesh's over dependence on India as the sign of a 'client state'.

#### *The Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1972*

The most controversial issue for Mujib's political opponents was the 1972 Treaty. This treaty formally brought Bangladesh into India's security perimeter.<sup>16</sup> It needs to be emphasised that this treaty in no way compromised Bangladesh's security concerns. Rather the treaty was a complimentary framework to address each other's apprehensions. However, the opposition parties in Bangladesh accused India of deliberately trying to "transform this natural pre-eminence into an imposed pre-dominance."<sup>17</sup> The underlying attitude as perceived is expressed by a Bangladeshi scholar in the following words, "From such a perspective the sense of Bangladesh's gratitude to India for the latter's role in 1971 may be reasonably tempered by the realisation that India had certain well-conceived and cogent calculations of its own in extending assistance to Bangladesh."<sup>18</sup>

The issue of India's 'strategic considerations' as alleged by Bangladeshi scholars and politicians needs to be put in perspective. What this perception fails to take into account are the ground realities in Bangladesh while

attributing motivations to the 1972 Treaty. In fact, some of the actions taken by India since then need to be examined. It needs to be stated here that India withdrew its forces from Dhaka soon after the creation of Bangladesh and never exhibited any inclination to station its troops or occupy the country. It is Mujib who wanted the Indian troops to remain in Bangladesh for another six months.

It is a biased analysis to attribute India's intervention only to strategic considerations without factoring the flow of the refugees. In fact, India criticised the army crackdown in East Pakistan in a carefully worded statement so as not to be seen as supporting the AL, which would have made Mujib's efforts to negotiate with the Pakistani military government difficult.<sup>19</sup> Throughout 1971 till the outbreak of the war, India argued that any political settlement in East Pakistan had to include a provision for the return of all refugees belonging to both the communities. This condition was not acceptable to Pakistan, which perceived the refugees as 'enemies' who had migrated to India and were collaborating with Indians.<sup>20</sup> In such a scenario and fearing an undue influx of refugees, it was felt unless Bangladesh was created, there was no way this problem could have ended.<sup>21</sup> Also, the fact was that the area where the refugees stayed was communally sensitive and this could have created internal problems for India. It also needs to be borne in mind that the military intervention in the former East Pakistan was not the first option of India.<sup>22</sup> According to Sission and Rose, "by June, in contrast to India's inability to develop international support Pakistan had received at least tacit support from all, and formal commitments from most of the major power and Muslims states on its position".<sup>23</sup> Smt Gandhi visited the US and other Western countries and tried to apprise them about the situation in the subcontinent. The world community remained a mute spectator to the developments in East Pakistan. The recent State Department declassified document is revealing. It brings into light how the US had approached China to intervene in the 1971 war against India.

The 1972 Treaty remained a mere paper agreement throughout the 25 years it was in force. The security clauses of the Treaty led to immense political controversy and raised doubts about the nature of Indo-Bangladesh relations. It needs to be mentioned here that Bangladesh faced various challenges after its creation. The Treaty was signed when Bangladesh was not recognised by many countries, most importantly Pakistan. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan had made a reference to Bangladesh as a part of

the country. It read, "The Constitution shall be appropriately amended so as to enable the people of the province of East Pakistan, as and when foreign aggression in that province and its effects are eliminated, to be represented in the affairs of the federation."<sup>24</sup> This certainly created an apprehension regarding the political future of the new state.<sup>25</sup>

There were no organised armed forces of Bangladesh after its independence and the country was in disarray with various armed groups retaining their arms. Mujib's call to surrender arms was not successful. Moreover, these groups were divided into pro and anti-liberation camps.<sup>26</sup> In this context, the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty provided the much-needed security umbrella to the infant state. It should also be underlined that the Treaty did not restrict the diversification of Bangladesh's foreign policy.<sup>27</sup> From the Indian perspective, the 1972 Treaty was a formal recognition of the fact that India would not like any intervention by external powers in its neighbourhood, which could affect its security. The circumstances in which Bangladesh was born necessitated such an explicit acknowledgement. The attitude of various countries was extremely hostile to the division of Pakistan and India's intervention. The UN membership, which would have ensured Bangladesh's independent status, was not forthcoming due to the Chinese veto with Pakistan's concurrence.

Moreover, the often attributed India's security interest by Bangladeshi scholars who felt it was one of the motivating factors in concluding the Treaty, was not fully served by it given the dynamics of Bangladesh's politics, which later led to the assassination of Mujib and the imposition of martial law. There are also different opinions regarding what motivated both the countries to sign the treaty and under whose insistence it was signed. One scholar believes that the negotiation process was informally discussed and decided by the provisional government of Bangladesh, which insisted in having such a treaty.<sup>28</sup> Another scholar points out that it was Mujib who insisted on having the friendship treaty.<sup>29</sup> Some have even argued that this was a political insurance for Mujib's regime because Article 9 of the Treaty gives such guarantee.<sup>30</sup> However, as is evident, in the 25 years that it was in existence, the Treaty was not been evoked for any of the speculative apprehensions put forward by scholars and politicians nor did it restrain Bangladesh from pursuing an independent foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> One of the reasons for suspicion could be that the Treaty came up for discussion in the *Jatiyo Sangsad* of Bangladesh only on April 13, 1973.<sup>32</sup> The haste in

which the treaty was signed gave rise to misgivings but there was no doubt that given the internal and external circumstances Bangladesh's 'special relation' with India was thought to be beneficial.<sup>33</sup> Some Bangladeshi scholars also believe that it was this treaty which prevented many countries from giving recognition to Bangladesh because they doubted the extent to which the country was independent.<sup>34</sup> However, according to Dr Kamal Hossain, Foreign Minister during Mujib's regime, it is Pakistan which had a role in preventing these countries from giving recognition.<sup>35</sup>

### **Issue of Secularism and the Constitution**

Many Bangladeshi scholars are of the firm opinion that India had an overwhelming influence over Bangladesh and therefore it was believed that it dictated its constitution. The case in point is Mujib's emulation of secularism as one of the foundational principles in the Bangladesh constitution. However, according to Dr Kamal Hossain, who played a major role in the framing of the Constitution, "During the process of drafting Bangladesh Constitution, Constitutions of many countries of the world were studied. Given the background of the liberation struggle, both the foundational principle and the articles were formulated. India did not have any role either in the drafting or in its adoption."<sup>36</sup> However enshrining secularism in the Bangladesh Constitution had a different religious-political connotation. First, the creation of Bangladesh necessitated de-emphasising the factor of Islamic bonding as the basis of the state formation as had happened in 1947. Second, the whole liberation movement was based on cultural and linguistic bonding. Moreover, the earlier efforts of Pakistan to undermine the aspirations of the people of East Pakistan on the basis of religion also contributed to the rejection of religion in politics. It is important to mention here that the leftist elements had championed the cause of secularism way back in 1952. They had played a great role in shaping the agenda of the Awami League, which dropped the word 'Muslim' from the party's nomenclature in 1953 and in its early years defined its goal to be secularism, socialism and democracy.<sup>37</sup> Secularism which was one of the foundational principle of 1973 Bangladesh Constitution, in fact, was specifically written into the preamble to the Indian Constitution only in 1977.

## Other Issues

Another aspect that impinged on Bangladesh's foreign policies towards India in the post-liberation phase was the induction of many pro-Pakistani elements into the government and civil services to accommodate them and broaden the ruling party's support base. They influenced AL's policies toward India. For example, when India gave Bangladesh two Fokker aircraft and a couple of cargo ships, anti-Indian elements interpreted these to be of sub-standard quality and said that India's motive was only to prevent Bangladesh from acquiring superior aircraft and ships.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, it is generally believed that India had confiscated all the heavy military equipment in the 1971 war with Pakistan with the ulterior motive of rendering the Bangladesh army weak.<sup>39</sup> Though later these equipment and ammunitions were handed over to Bangladesh, the damage to the relationship had been done.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, economic assistance to the country was interpreted as India's desire to dominate the Bangladesh economy and interfere in its internal politics. The *Rakkhi Bahini* was regarded as an 'extension of India's authority in Bangladesh'. This is because military equipment was supplied to them by India as per the request of the Bangladesh government and they also had an identical uniform like that of the Border Security Force (BSF).<sup>42</sup> The service provided by the Indian bureaucrats, at the request of Bangladesh government, was considered as interference and the looting - the 'spoils of war' - is a much overstated incident. The opposition in Bangladesh and Mujib's detractors played a major role in undermining the goodwill between both the countries. Mujib's authoritarian policies and the introduction of one-party system, under the infamous *Bangladesh Krushak Sramik Awami League* (BAKSAL) resulted in widespread dissatisfaction. What precipitated the discontent was widespread corruption and smuggling across the border. In some cases, Mujib's close family members were involved. This, coupled with natural disasters, and the spiralling prices of essential commodities added to domestic political instability. Ironically, both the ruling party and the opposition were engaged in India bashing. The opposition used India to condemn Mujib's policy while Mujib criticised India to establish his nationalistic credentials. In the emerging divisive internal political dynamics, India became the victim. Bangladesh's high expectation and India's limitation shattered the cozy relationship. The unresolved issue of Farakka contributed substantially to the prevailing sentiments against India.

Simultaneously, the diversification of Bangladesh's foreign policy was underway. The prime objective of this broad-based policy was to get maximum economic assistance and recognition as an independent nation state. This could not be done without political recognition from Pakistan, which also held the key to the country's recognition by other Muslim countries and importantly China. In this context, the most significant country that did not initially recognise Bangladesh was Saudi Arabia, and for Bangladesh with a dominant Muslim population, this had both socio-cultural and political connotations. Therefore, Mujib did not hesitate in compromising on the question of releasing prisoners of war and withholding war crime trials in order to establish relations with Pakistan.<sup>43</sup> After 1975, Bangladesh developed good relations with China based on the philosophy of 'balancing India'. Recognition by Pakistan provided Bangladesh political legitimacy and assuaged apprehensions regarding its intentions.

### **The Military Coup**

With the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the Bangladesh political situation entered a turbulent phase. After a brief period of political instability, Zia-ur Rehman took over in 1976. He consolidated his position by winning the Presidential election held in 1978. Later, he formed the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and held parliamentary elections in 1979. The BNP managed to muster the support of the constituency that belonged to the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and the Muslim League as no credible political party was located at the centre-right position.<sup>44</sup> After liberation, both these parties were banned for collaborating with the Pakistan army. Article 39 of the Constitution was amended to accommodate the religious rights. The emergence of these parties, hitherto treated as political pariahs, resonated in Bangladesh's foreign policy. Mujib was perceived to be close to India, thus with his assassination a deliberate anti-India policy was followed as part of the military government's quest for legitimacy. "In bilateral relations with India," Zia's "greatest concern was to be regarded at home as a vigorous protector of Bangladesh independence, avoiding any conciliatory actions reminiscent of Mujib's pro-India stance."<sup>45</sup>

India was critical of the military takeover whereas Pakistan welcomed it and was the first country to recognise Zia-ur-Rehman as the President. India's reaction created misgivings in Dhaka, as historically, the Awami

League was considered close to it. To quote a Bangladeshi analyst, “the main threat perception emanates from India’s excessive sensitivity towards domestic political developments in Bangladesh. This creates a vicious circle as it permeates Bangladesh politics with an overwhelming concern about India.”<sup>46</sup> Zia’s anti-India posture also stemmed from the fact that after Mujib’s assassination many of his supporters in *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini* fled to India. A number of them operated from India and were engaged in a guerrilla operation against Zia’s regime, adding another dimension to the sagging bilateral relationship.

Zia redefined nationalism as ‘Bangladeshi’ rather than ‘Bengali’ and this had its own identity connotation. Zia’s takeover changed the character of the Constitution, which until then had secularism as one of its foundational pillars. With the incorporation of Islamic symbolism as an effort to legitimise his regime,<sup>47</sup> Zia emphasised his objective to further Bangladesh’s relations with Muslim countries.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, a clause was added to Article 25, which stated that Bangladesh would consolidate and strengthen its relations with the Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity. In the background of deteriorating bilateral relations with India, this signified a major change. Domestically, it implied a proclaimed diversion from the secular policy followed by Mujib and externally, it meant the assertion of Bangladesh’s Islamic identity and formal consolidation of conservative forces in the polity. This effort to forge closer ties and the identity dilemma took a definite turn that culminated in Islam becoming the state religion in June 1988.

The institutional support to the BNP came from the army, which opposed Mujib’s secularist policy and pro-Indian stances,<sup>49</sup> while its intellectual leadership came from pro-Beijing and left leaning political parties, who were opposed to the Awami League and were critical of its links with India. One of its supporters, the *National Awami Party*-leader Maulana Bhashani had backed the Ayub government and its relations with China.<sup>50</sup> The BNP cadre also included former supporters of the Muslim League and many deserters from the AL. Some of those who were accused of collaborating with the Pakistani military during the liberation war found in the BNP a respectable forum for political rehabilitation.<sup>51</sup> The only parties opposed to Zia’s rule were the AL and *Jatiyo Samajtantric Dal* (JSD), a radical left group that had separated from the AL. However, many of the JSD leaders, especially Abu Taher, had played an important role in installing

Zia to power. The civil services provided institutional support to the Zia regime. Interestingly, Mujib himself had played on the anti-Indian perception by raising the Indian bogey. Zia on his part also played on these sentiments as well as anti-Mujib feelings to strengthen his position domestically. Bangladesh improved its relations with China and the latter invested in infrastructure like building roads and establishing defence ties, thereby cementing the misgivings that existed during the liberation war.<sup>52</sup> It gave a psychological comfort to Bangladesh's apprehensions against India, which, "however intangible, does soothe an Indophobic Bangladesh. It is also a major arms supplier to Bangladesh."<sup>53</sup>

Relations between India and Bangladesh soured over the Tinbigha issue, ownership of the New Moor Island and the dispute over Ganga water sharing. New Delhi not submitting to Dhaka's demand was perceived as hegemonic. Moreover, in a country where water is not only needed for agriculture but also for transportation, this issue added passion to domestic politics. Gen. Zia's uncompromising approach made him a hero and a saviour of Bangladesh's interests. Given the politics of that period, varied motives were attributed to India's role in the liberation war, the water issue was viewed from a narrow nationalistic perspective. In 1977, the Farraka Water Sharing Agreement was signed on an *ad hoc* basis.<sup>54</sup> Coupled with these issues was the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) with an alleged Indian role that contributed further to the worsening of the relations between the two countries relations. Domestically, the perception was that India was not only unreasonable in its relations with Bangladesh, but it was also trying to encourage insurgency and creating difficulties for Bangladesh.

General Ershad, who succeeded Zia, did not have the popular mandate and his political illegitimacy compelled him to engage in anti-India rhetoric thereby diverting people's attention from issues of governance, with the opposition in Bangladesh upping the ante. Domestic politics got the colour of nationalism based on anti-Indianism. Gen. Ershad declared Islam as the state religion. Non-ratification of the 1974 Treaty and delay in handing over Tinbigha defined Dhaka's political sentiments. Especially the issue of leasing Tinbigha corridor became a political albatross for India. New Delhi's delay in keeping its promises compounded the domestic distrust of the country. Relations between Bangladesh and India improved when the Indian Supreme Court in a landmark judgment approved the transfer of

the Tinbigha corridor to Bangladesh.<sup>55</sup> However, this singular incident could not jettison the historical baggage that Bangladesh carried.

### **Restoration of Democracy: India and the Dynamics of Public Discourse**

The restoration of democracy in 1991 redefined Indo-Bangladesh relations. India became a flavour in Bangladesh's domestic politics and nationalistic discourse. India has been a dominant theme in the election campaigns. For example, the AL manifesto that talked of secularism and return to the 1972 Constitution was attacked by the BNP as selling the country to India. Since the AL was perceived as pro-India, for the BNP, anti-Indianism became a major tool. It is important to note that the BNP's political discourse hinged on it being 'a saviour'- having saved the nation from an autocratic regime and loss of sovereignty to its powerful neighbour India.<sup>56</sup> India, on the other hand, found itself in a difficult position having to manoeuvre its foreign policy concerns with Bangladesh. In this context, the road to forging good relations was marked by extreme sensitiveness. Democracy and political mobilisation made India an essential factor in domestic politics. BNP ascendancy to power created certain degree of apprehension in India given the nature of bilateral relations under the BNP in the past. The relations this time around started on a positive note, as Khaleda Zia talked of joint endeavours to strengthen Indo-Bangladesh relations. However, there was no understanding on the basic disagreement over various issues, such as border fencing and immigration of Bangladeshis into India. Khaleda Zia publicly supported the separatist movements in the Northeast referring to them as a 'freedom movement'.

Geographically, India surrounds Bangladesh from three sides. From the river waters dispute to trade issues, India has played an all-pervasive role in both the economic and political life of Bangladesh. Social life was also to a large extent coloured by the dynamics of the two-nation theory. Even today, the historical memory of exploitation by the Hindu landlords remains politically relevant in the nationalistic discourse. In this context, India is portrayed as synonymous with the Hindus due to the partition of India on the basis of two nation theory.<sup>57</sup>

It needs to be underlined that the AL was more cautious with its policy towards India because of domestic political compulsions. Equally important from the perspective of domestic political dynamics is the fact that as the

party that had signed the 1972 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, it pressed for its abrogation in order to establish its credential as a nationalist party in the 1990s.

The 2001 elections and the return of the BNP to power have their own significance. The post-election violence, which was directed against the Hindus, added another dimension to Indo-Bangladesh relations, even as the issue of Bangladeshi migration to India remained a sore point. Though India initially downplayed the events regarding the extent of Hindu migration to India, the then Home Minister L.K. Advani criticised Bangladesh for violence committed against the minorities. At the same time, issues pertaining to river linking in India, trade and the existence of Indian insurgent camps with the alleged patronage of anti-Indian elements in Bangladesh dominated the relations after the BNP came to power.

### **Bilateral Issues: Crafting a Mutually Benefiting Relationship**

A country's foreign policy is dictated by its national interest and is tempered by its geo-strategic location. The lack of appreciation of each other's constraints has made both India and Bangladesh wary of each other's intentions. Since the political elite operates within the parameters of national interest and is constrained by its political survival, it is not easy to come to a common understanding.

#### *Issue of Immigration of Bangladeshis to India*

Illegal immigration from across the Bangladesh border is a major issue for India. Bangladesh not only refuses to recognise the issue but also denies that such migration has been occurring at all. Failing to address the issue bilaterally, due to the denial of Bangladesh, India has unilaterally tried to foil attempts of Bangladeshis to cross the border. This issue, which has created tension between the two countries many times, is projected in the Bangladesh media as numerous Indian attempts to push the "Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims" into Bangladesh. This has created a different context altogether in Bangladesh regarding the issue of immigration. Surprisingly, Bangladesh media has played to the government propaganda and its reports are mirror images of their government statements. Bangladesh's response has been rhetorical. Not surprisingly, India's offer to provide 'work permits', - an idea that was proposed during the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure - has remained a non-starter.

Earlier, during Khaleda Zia's visit, both the countries in a joint communique issued on May 11, 1991, has expressed their determination to stop illegal immigration by all possible means, including existing arrangements and mutual cooperation. Bangladesh agreed to take back any such illegal immigrants after proper verification if they are caught while crossing the border. However, the implementation of this understanding and specially the complex verification process has made deportation well nigh impossible.<sup>58</sup>

Language, physical similarity and cross-border ethnic linkages make it difficult to check immigration. There also operates a well-knit group of greedy middlemen who facilitate these immigrations and in many cases the border forces are hand in glove. At the same time the people staying in the border areas of Bangladesh find it expensive to go to Dhaka for a grant of visa. It is cost effective to cross the border with a fee.<sup>59</sup>

The illegal immigrants have in turn become important determinants of local vote bank politics in India as the immigrants have managed to acquire ration cards through unscrupulous politicians in West Bengal and Assam.<sup>60</sup> To curb both illegal crossing and smuggling across the border, fencing is thought to be an effective method. Bangladesh has objected to fencing, citing the 1974 Indira-Mujib Land Boundary Act and has taken the plea that it would affect friendly ties.<sup>61</sup> The issue of immigration is rooted in domestic politics and is also intertwined with governance and economic security, and therefore has become a volatile issue in Bangladesh. No government in Dhaka will admit to this issue.<sup>62</sup> This problem needs to be addressed urgently as it has a reverberation on Indo-Bangladesh relations. This is because the issue of illegal immigration has become a part of internal political dynamics in India.<sup>63</sup>

#### *Balance of Trade Problem*

Balance of trade is another problem between the two countries. Bangladesh has been opposing the requirement of 40 per cent indigenous content, as per rules of origin, in the items that it wants to export to India. This is opposed by India because Bangladesh has a free trade agreement with a number of countries, which enables it to import many items duty free. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that India offered to Dhaka on the lines of the Sri Lanka FTA is not acceptable to Bangladesh because of various apprehensions.<sup>64</sup> According to Farooq Sobhan, former Bangladeshi

diplomat, a bilateral FTA would be beneficial to Bangladesh.<sup>65</sup> It would check informal trade and smuggling.<sup>66</sup>

On the issue of investment, the Indian private sector can play an important role in bridging the trade gap by investing in Bangladesh. The recent example in this regard is of the Tatas decision to invest \$2.5 billion in steel, fertiliser and power sectors in Bangladesh, which would be by far the largest single foreign private investment in that country. Apart from this there exist potential investment opportunity for both Bangladesh and India in the bordering areas of both the countries. India needs to take steps to remove trade barriers by reducing duties and withdrawing restrictions on Bangladesh goods and services to bridge the trade gap. As an initial step, India as the largest trade partner should consider providing duty free access to at least some Bangladeshi products. It is understandable that Bangladesh wants to engage in commodity trade rather than service only. At the same time Bangladesh's approach strictly to trade in commodities without giving transit or transshipment rights create problem at the Indian end internally. Bangladesh, on the other hand should be willing to trade consumer goods and services with India. It also needs to broaden its economic engagement with India. Providing transshipment rights to India for facilitating export of goods from the Northeast via the Chittagong port will to a great extent correct the balance of payment situation as it will help Bangladesh to earn more revenue.<sup>67</sup> According to a Bangladeshi scholar, Bangladesh can earn about 800 crore taka by way of freight and other charges levied on Indian goods if transit corridor facilities are provided.<sup>68</sup> Bangladesh's apprehensions regarding these issues can be addressed through short-term agreements with a mid-term review. However, a blanket rejection of such proposals citing security concerns without carefully examining the issue will only serve ultra-nationalistic sentiments. Export of gas to India can boost bilateral trade and correct the balance of payment problem. Preliminary reports indicate the potential of a vast gas reserve but there is a certain constituency within Bangladesh against gas export to India despite the fact that trade in energy will be beneficial, with India selling electricity and Bangladesh selling gas to India. The tri-national gas pipeline between Myanmar, Bangladesh and India has run into trouble. Bangladesh as a transit country wants certain bilateral concession from India. Consequently, India has held bilateral negotiations with Myanmar to construct the gas pipeline through its Northeast, which though costly would nonetheless nullify Bangladesh's frequent threats. Bangladesh clearly

views that any benefits to India has to come with a price. It is a typical small state syndrome – clinging on to few advantages in order to equalise relations with a bigger partner. In such cases, insecurity of being sidelined, a sense of being ‘exploited’ or ‘disadvantaged’ operates on the mind of policy-makers.

### **Indian Insurgent Camps in Bangladesh**

The issue of terrorist camps inside Bangladesh has remained a contentious issue between the two countries. However, the request for the arrest of some of the leaders of a banned ultra group operating in the Northeast and presently taking refuge in Bangladesh needs to be acted upon. Bangladesh has denied their existence but there are reports that suggest their presence.<sup>69</sup> Many Bangladesh scholars become defensive on the question of camps. Some even feel perturbed by the suggestion that Pakistan and Bangladeshi intelligence agencies are working together and operating these camps. The people some of whom have witnessed or participated in the liberation war feel that there cannot be any cooperation between Bangladesh and Pakistan against India given the history of the liberation war. The fact is that even no Bangladeshis are willing to acknowledge that Bangladesh government needs to take any steps to assuage India’s concern. Though the law enforcement authorities have arrested ULFA operatives in Bangladesh but they do not show any interest in capturing some of the leaders and dismantling the insurgent infrastructure. A sensitive approach based on accommodation and understanding can help Indo-Bangladesh interactions more towards a mutually beneficial relationship. Curbing insurgency and ensuring political stability in the Northeast depend on cooperation with Bangladesh. Without Dhaka’s cooperation, it is difficult to crack down on insurgent groups that cross the border and seek sanctuary in Bangladesh. Yet Bangladesh has not been cooperative and in the past had denied the operation of ULFA cadres till Anup Chetia was arrested in Dhaka in a shootout.<sup>70</sup> It is well known that the dense forests of the CHT provide natural cover for the insurgent groups to operate from Bangladesh territory.<sup>71</sup> It is important to mention here that Khaleda Zia in her first term in office had referred to the Indian insurgents as freedom fighters. Therefore there exist genuine Indian concerns regarding Dhaka’s approach to the issue. Rather than parroting the usual “no terrorist camps exist in Bangladesh” Dhaka needs to appreciate that an unstable Northeast will have grave security

implications for Bangladesh.<sup>72</sup> It needs to be mentioned here that some military actions were taken against Indian insurgents during the Awami League rule in 2000. Bangladesh has problems of small arms proliferation and related violence. It is also a major drugs and arms transit route. These concerns cannot be addressed without mutual cooperation. Intelligence sharing can play a crucial role between the two countries. There is a strong feeling in Dhaka that India is deliberately trying to tarnish Bangladesh's image by making such accusations. Bangladesh, which earlier denied the existence of Harkat-ul-Islam, Jagrata Muslim Janata and Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh, banned these groups later due to both internal and international pressure. Even the media in Bangladesh, which reported the existence and activities of these groups, was accused of being irresponsible before the ban was imposed. Dhaka's approach has been similar vis-à-vis the Indian insurgent groups operating from its soil. It is important to mention that Dhaka has constantly accused India of sheltering some of its wanted groups but has shied away from initiating any joint mechanism to check cross border criminal activities.

### **Transport and Transit Issue**

The transport linkages between the two countries need considerable improvement. Though Bangladesh had agreed in principle through Article V of the March 28, 1972 Agreement to extend facilities for use of its ports, roads and railways to transport goods and passengers to India's Northeast, there are major stumbling blocks in its implementation.<sup>73</sup> India had transit facilities through former East Pakistan till the 1965 war. There is reluctance on the part of Bangladesh to restore these facilities citing unfounded security reasons. A former Bangladeshi diplomat to China and currently Editor of *The New Age*, Enayetullah Khan said that Pakistan had denied transit facilities to India after the 1965 war on China's request. According to him, "the issue of transit is a strategic issue (and) not an economic issue as India says. One is not sure of the future of Sino-Indian relations. In case there is a conflict, this area would be vulnerable. The Chinese would not be happy if transit is given. It will be given only at the cost of our friendship with China."<sup>74</sup> Some scholars dismiss the transit issue keeping in mind that Bangladesh does not have adequate infrastructure. However, a study published in the *National Defence College Journal* dismisses such views. It argues that the traffic density over the proposed transshipment route is low.<sup>75</sup> Another problem in the implementation of the transshipment

agreement is the deep-seated misgivings among certain quarters regarding India's intention, which gets intertwined with the issue of 'sovereignty'. Though these views are alarmist and have no basis, given the domestic compulsions it will be mutually beneficial for both the countries to frame short-term agreements. It needs to be emphasised that if Bangladesh wants to be part of the trans-Asian railway and road links, it cannot afford to be unduly apprehensive about providing transit and trans-shipment to India because in future it would have to provide transit rights to the Southeast Asian countries and China as a part of the proposed Asian highway.<sup>76</sup>

The implementation of the 1974 Indira-Mujib Accord concerning the land border is one of the major concerns of Bangladesh. India needs to take some immediate measures to demarcate the boundary and remove the legal hurdles for the ratification of the treaty.<sup>77</sup> India while endeavouring to address its security concerns, needs to attend to some of the apprehensions of Bangladesh.<sup>78</sup> Both the countries need to engage in regular consultation with each other. Bangladesh has held the issue of transit or transshipment, permitting the use of Chittagong Port and action against Indian insurgent groups as a trump card to extract concessions on the issues of trade and river water sharing. Bangladesh needs to re-evaluate its approach towards India and take recourse to constructive measures rather than restricting its relations to a 'blame India' policy.

Adverse public opinion built by the opposition (both BNP and AL) has made both the parties while in the government cautious about giving a go-ahead to the transit proposal. In July 1999, the Bangladesh cabinet had agreed to the setting up of joint expert committee to examine and discuss the proposal for the movement of Indian goods in transit by Bangladesh transport using the land route. However the recommendation got embroiled in party politics and the issue of 'sovereignty'. To make the issue politically viable the transit proposal has now been converted to transshipment of Indian goods through Bangladesh territory by using Bangladesh transport. Due to domestic compulsions the route is not operational. The heightened distrust and apprehensions can be understood from the following lines of a Bangladeshi analyst, "There are hardly two opinions that India is determined to capitalise on Bangladesh's geo-politically locked situation on the one hand and domestic weakness on the other to do everything that compounds the insecurity and vulnerability of the country."<sup>79</sup> Evaluating economic interest through political symbolism do

not serve the interest of Bangladesh. Such views, based on pre-conceived notions, have done incredible damage to the objectivity of better understanding. An agreement on this issue has not yet been reached even though it would benefit both Bangladesh and India economically.<sup>80</sup>

## **Challenges to Bilateral Relations**

### *Multilateralism vs Bilateralism*

While bilateralism gives more scope to a smaller country to negotiate on the basis of equality, Bangladesh is more comfortable in a multilateral agreement with India. As a Bangladeshi scholar points out, "India's principled position of bilateralism in dealing with Bangladesh even on issues that are fundamentally regional is a source of major concern for Bangladesh."<sup>81</sup> Opinions vary between Bangladesh and India on what constitutes regional and bilateral issues. Bilateral agreements are always based on the spirit of give-and-take depending on mutual advantage and disadvantages whereas multilateral organisations are less accommodative. For example, in the FTA meeting of BIMSTEC held in September 2004 in Bangkok, Bangladesh was left out and was asked to join the multilateral trade agreement at a later date. Therefore, multilateral agreements may not always work in favour of the smaller, economically weaker countries where economic interests dominate. However, in a bilateral framework, if a smaller neighbour does not agree on an issue, no agreement can take place. The semantics of bilateral discourse, especially between India and Bangladesh should exhibit more accommodation and less dictation and rhetoric.<sup>82</sup> Bangladesh needs to make a conscious effort not to drag India into its populist domestic political discourse whether it is the migration issue or the August 17 bomb blast.

### *Populist Politics*

The sheer size of India, its economic and military strength, and plurality of culture creates insecurity within the political class of Dhaka. The 'blame India' policy also needs to be understood in the context of internal political dynamics and ideological polarity between the two major parties. If the AL concludes a bilateral agreement with India, the BNP has to adopt an anti-Indian stance.<sup>83</sup> The political culture of Bangladesh is marked by agitational politics. The problem with both the parties is that they do not

have any strong socio-economic programmes or foreign policy goals. Each move is calculated through a populist barometer and the perceived political mileage. Both the parties hardly cooperate on major foreign policy issues. Till now, the conceptualisation of Bangladesh identity and its components have been controversial. The intensity of the division is compounded by the dynastic leadership of both the AL and the BNP and their “personal struggle to restore their patrimonial right to control the state.”<sup>84</sup> The rise of religious parties in politics and the use of religious symbolism has its own political dynamics. It churns out intolerance and creates bias against India. There are elements in Bangladesh who never wanted liberation and they exert influence on public opinion. Their political articulation is based on religion, setting a tone for anti-Indianism, which is inherent in such an articulation. The contest is between the AL and the BNP and its allies consisting of a faction of the *Jatiyo Party*, *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Maulana Aziz-ul-Haq’s Islamic Oikyo Jote*. The partners of the BNP are ideologically anti-India, which arises out of their support structure. According to Badruddin Umar “... anti-Indianism and communalism is connected with each other deeply.”<sup>85</sup> In this context, “Islamic identity became the centre of resistance against Indian predominance in Bangladesh politics.” This trend continues at present in the context of national identity construction in Bangladesh.

An attitude of ‘oppose India’ has its symbolism. Not conceding on an issue with India has its own dynamics. It means independence; it projects a big country (India) dependent on a smaller country to manage the economic and security aspects of its turbulent Northeast. All this translates into a huge psychological advantage to a country, which otherwise cannot provide an effective challenge to a neighbour who is considered to be a ‘big brother’ and a ‘hegemon’. Before any issue comes up for bilateral discussions, opinion is formed regarding its negative impact. The political parties in Bangladesh are largely responsible for creating such an atmosphere and later become its victim when they are required to negotiate from a position of responsibility. There is a clear lack of political will in Bangladesh to strengthen bilateral relations since a ‘resist India’ policy translates into popular support and vote. To a great extent, negative opinion adversely affects Bangladesh’s bilateral negotiations with India. For example, the river-linking proposal that was initiated by the NDA government created a lot of furore in Bangladesh. Though the project is in the conceptual stage and the civil society in India is still debating it, there were seminars

in Dhaka, which urged the donor countries to pressurise New Delhi not to take up the project. Citing under-development and basing its arguments on a weak-state-strong-state paradigm, Bangladesh raises its expectations from India without a corresponding *quid pro quo*.

Political instability and weak democracy in Bangladesh has politicised various issues with India. The credibility of politicians in Bangladesh is measured through their pro-India and anti-India stances. This has influenced popular psyche. Converting political language to populist discourse tends to compartmentalise the discourse into 'good' or 'bad' policies. It is important to note that India's participation in the liberation war and its later policies towards Bangladesh did not converge. Therefore, various motivations are attributed to India's role. The public perception is that India, as a bigger country, should be giving unconditional concessions to Bangladesh since it argues that it supported the war on humanitarian and political grounds. India's insistence on transit, permission to use the Chittagong Port, perceived unwillingness to correct trade imbalances, and the perceived 'unfair' deal on the Ganga water sharing are all attributed to India's intention to exploit Bangladesh and its 'real' purpose in participating in the liberation war. The underlying rationale for the Bangladeshis who believe in this discourse is that India would have found these issues hard to resolve had Bangladesh remained as East Pakistan. The fact however is that India was provided with transit facilities in the former East Pakistan.

Bangladesh's perceived security threats from India are not military in nature. The domestic politics of India's neighbours are to a large extent influenced by their relations with India and their foreign policies are based on expectations that strive for constant and greater accommodation by India. Since India is a dominant power in the region, its security imperatives invariably overlap with the smaller neighbour's security calculations. This is often perceived as hegemonic in design and create more misunderstanding and suspicion in the neighbourhood.<sup>88</sup> Since state security is no more confined to sovereign territorial boundaries but is interlinked to other states, mutual cooperation is needed. Writings that portray a role for India in the region immediately strengthen the alarmist's views in Bangladesh leading to a degeneration of relations.<sup>89</sup> Such apprehensions need to be assuaged by creating a friendly bilateral atmosphere.<sup>90</sup>

The responsibility in this context lies more with India than Bangladesh. The question remains as to how Bangladesh is going to balance its interests and needs. Often there have been tendencies to blame India without taking into consideration the internal dynamics that are at play as also the changes in the global economy and strategic environment. To address the problems, a more proactive policy from both sides supported by a strong political will is needed. Bangladesh must endeavour to come out of its 'victim syndrome' and seriously rethink its foreign policy. India, on the other hand, needs to pursue serious confidence-building measures. As a part of this initiative, India could encourage private companies to invest and actively participate in the economic development of Bangladesh. To start with India should think of providing duty free access to the Indian market to some commodities that Bangladesh is producing. The frequent border skirmishes are also a matter of concern. Demarcation of the border needs serious attention from the Government of India. However, Bangladesh's domestic political positions need to be tempered with greater pragmatism for crafting mutually beneficial relations and creating a positive trade and investment environment.

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### **References/End Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Partho S. Ghosh. *Cooperation and Conflict in South Asia*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1989, p. 64.
- <sup>2</sup> The East Pakistan Student League 'led by Sirajul Alam Khan, Abdur Razzaq, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni and Tufail Ahmed were given the task of recruiting students and youth to the Mukti Bahini. The Awami League did not trust those who had contested against its six-point programme. Attempts to control the Mukti Bahini, including deciding who would be recruited, created misunderstanding between various groups equally committed to fight. See Anisuzzaman, *Identity, Religion and Recent History*, MAKIAS, Kolkata, 1995, p. 54.
- <sup>3</sup> These groups were mostly radical left parties.
- <sup>4</sup> Anisuzzaman, no.2, p. 53. General Osmani, Bangladeshi Commander of the Joint Force wanted to be seen in an operational role in planning the war strategy.

It was Prime Minister Tajuddin who persuaded him to cooperate with the Indian Command which irritated him at times. Relations between Osmani and Indian Commanders remained prickly at times. J.N.Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond: Indo-Bangladesh Relations*, Picus Books, Delhi, 2003, pp. 103-4. Abu Taher, Major Ziauddin, and Major Zia-ur-Rahman and some other sectors commanders of Bangladesh supported the idea that all the military command should be moved inside the Bangladesh border while Major Khaled Musharaf, Major Shafiullah and Gen. Osmany wanted it to stay inside the Indian territory.

- <sup>5</sup> Mujib Bahini was formed because many of Sheikh Mujib's confidants like Fazlul Haq, Sirajul Alam Khan, Abdur Razzal, Tofael Ahmad feared that (the increasing popularity of Mukti Bahini. which had considerable political influence in local areas, may lead it to eventually take over from the older AL leadership in the event of Mujib not returning from his imprisonment in Pakistan. See Talukdar Maniruzzaman, *Radical Left and the Emergence of Bangladesh*, Mowla Brothers, Dhaka. 2003, p. 100.
- <sup>6</sup> Anisuzzaman, no.2, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>7</sup> The Mujib Bahini later split into two groups headed by Sheikh Mani and Serajul Alain Khan on ideological grounds.
- <sup>8</sup> Talukdar Maniruzzaman, no, 5, p. 101.
- <sup>9</sup> Kader Siddiqui was leading a group in Tangail. Abu Taher who later led the Jatiyo Samjtantrik Dal was leading a group in Tangail and Chilmari area. His group was critical in breaking Pakistan military's control over North Bengal which was significant in the liberation war.
- <sup>10</sup> See Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman*, UPL, Dhaka. 1983. pp. 1-2. According to him, during the days of Tajuddin Ahmed, had the Indian Army not been there he would have been overthrown by the freedom fighters who established their political influence in the absence of a government. Abu Taher who helped Zia to capture power also resented the Indian Army presiding over the surrender ceremony of the Pakistan armed forces. See Lawrence Lifschultz, *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution*, Zed Books, London, 1979, p. 37. According to J.N.Dixit Indian military' High Command failed to ensure the presence of General Osmany, commander of Bangladesh side of the joint Command. The formal explanation was his helicopter did not take off. This event generated much resentment among the political class in Bangladesh. See J.N.Dixit, no. 4, p.109. Lt Gen J.F.R. Jacob in his book just mentions that M.A.G.Osmany 'was not to be seen' during the surrender ceremony. See J.F.R Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca*. Manohar Publishers, 1997, p.146. ....
- <sup>11</sup> Sheikh Moni, the nephew of Sheikh Mujib, was close to him. See Anisuzzaman, no. 2, p. 57.
- <sup>12</sup> The reasons given were India did not want to burden the war ravaged country financially; it did not want to hurt sub-conscious Islamic values of the Bangladeshis. It was also felt that it may be seen as a reminder of the process

in the creation of Bangladesh. Moreover if at any point of time the relationship suffers from distance and tension the monument will be a target of attack which would aggravate antagonism between India and Bangladesh. J.N.Dixit, no.4, p.150

- <sup>13</sup> The free movement of people created unnecessary apprehension. Vested interests in Bangladesh rumoured that the Bengali Hindus who had migrated from the former East Pakistan have come back to reclaim their properties. It needs to be mentioned here that many Bengali Hindus visited their birth place due to nostalgic reasons which was not possible during the Pakistani period.
- <sup>14</sup> This is because Smt Gandhi thought a visit to Bangladesh undertaken when the Indian Army is present in Dhaka would not be seen in right perspective.
- <sup>15</sup> Certain quarters in Bangladesh feared that their country should not emerge as a supplier of raw material to the West Bengal jute industries. The fear of Hindu domination resurfaced with vested interested spreading rumours.
- <sup>16</sup> The allegation was brought by the opposition political parties, intellectuals and academicians. Though the Awami League signed the Treaty later it did not defend the signing of the Treaty due to serious domestic opposition. Since the treaty was not debated before its signature there were apprehensions regarding the timing and its objectives.
- <sup>17</sup> AKM Abdus Sabur, "Bangladesh-India Relations: Retrospect and Prospects". Paper presented at International Conference on Bangladesh and SAARC: Issues, Perspectives and Outlook. BIISS. Dhaka, August 23-24, 1992, p. 4. However, for a different perspective on the 1972 Treaty see Shahiduzzaman. "Alliance Reliability in the Post-Cold War Context and Bangladesh's Military Strategy". Ibid. p. 5.
- <sup>18</sup> M.G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan, *Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy*. Bangladesh Society of International Studies, Dhaka, 1989. p. 34. Also see the account of Major (retd) Akhtar Ahmed, who after acknowledging the fact that many Indians lost their lives concludes India's sacrifice with a limited objective. *Advance to Contact: A Soldier's Account of Bangladesh War*, UPL, Dhaka, 2000. p. 220.
- <sup>19</sup> Richard Sission and Leo E. Rose. *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh*, Vistaar Publications, Delhi, 1990, p. 142.
- <sup>20</sup> Some of the considerations were repatriation of refugees to prevent serious communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in Eastern India and the growing tension between the Bengalis and non-Bengalis. Moreover, it was feared that without the liberation of Bangladesh the evacuees could never go back. Quoting Indira Gandhi the author writes "the creation of independent Bangladesh was necessary for the protection of the political system in India." Talukdar Maniruzzaman. *The Bangladesh Revolution and its Aftermath*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. UPL. Dhaka, 2003, p. 119. For detailed analyses of Indian considerations to intervene, see pp. 118-20.

- <sup>21</sup> Richard Sission and Leo E. Rose, no. 19, p. 148, 205. For details regarding Mrs. Gandhi's insistence on having a political solution, see pp. 152-53 and also p. 209.
- <sup>22</sup> India studied the situation carefully and watched the reaction of the world community. It signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union in August 1971, a Treaty which was proposed few years earlier by the Soviet Union but was not signed due to India's reluctance. For the decisions that influenced India's decision to go to war. See K. Subramanyam and Mohammad Ayoob. *The Liberation War*. S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1972, pp. 184-208. For the list of armed forces personnel who sacrificed their lives in the 1971 Liberation War see, Salam Azad *Contribution of India in the War of Liberation of Bangladesh*, Ankoor Prakashan, Dhaka, 2003, pp. 323-481.
- <sup>23</sup> Richard Sission and Leo E. Rose, no. 19, p. 163.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Hindu*, January 1, 1973, and April 11, 1973, as cited in Shaukat Hassan, "Indo-Bangladesh Political Relations During the *Awami League* Government, 1972-75" Unpublished PhD Thesis. Australian National University, April 1987, p. 113.
- <sup>25</sup> According to Kamal Hossain, "The Treaty agreements have been based on the principles of our foreign policy, and by doing so our sovereignty and independence have been preserved." See *Jatiyo Sangsad Debate*, (National Assembly Debates), April 19, 1973, First Session, 7<sup>th</sup> sitting, p. 288.
- <sup>26</sup> Mujib banned *Mukti Bahini* on February 24, 1972 and the *Mujib Bahini* on February 27, 1972.
- <sup>27</sup> Three groups of people having a vested interest protested against the Treaty: (i) pro-Chinese Communist group like Md. Toaha's Communist Party of Bangladesh (ML), Maulana Bhasini's National Awami Party and other splinter groups like the Maoist Party; (ii) those wanting the revival of Islamic connection with Pakistan (Muslim League and Jamaat Islami) and the right wing group led by Khondekar Mostaq Ahmed; and (iii) those who genuinely felt that Bangladesh's autonomy in charting an independent course has been minimised. Important among these groups was the militant wing of Awami League that later formed the Jatiyo Samajtantric Dal. See Shaukat Hassan, no. 24, p. 111.
- <sup>28</sup> According to Amirul Islam, who reportedly participated in the discussion regarding a treaty with India further said that there were four essential points regarding the treaty; (i) India's recognition of Bangladesh (ii) Request for Indian army to participate directly in the struggle, in addition to assistance for the *Mukti Bahini* in training, sanctuary and arms (iii) actual operation and stay of the Indian Army in Bangladesh: how the war was to be conducted, how destruction was to be minimised, and how to plan a short and quick victory: and (iv) withdrawal of the Indian army as soon as the Bangladesh government requested it. Shaukat Hassan, no. 24, p. 117.
- <sup>29</sup> S.M. Ali, *After the Dark Night: Problems of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, Thompson Press, Delhi, 1973. pp. 153-54.
- <sup>30</sup> Article 9 of the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty reads: "Each of the high contracting

parties shall refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an armed conflict against the other party. In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the high contracting parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure peace and security of their countries." Ishtiaq Hossain, "Bangladesh-India Relations: Issues and Problems", in Emajuddin Ahamed (Ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh*, UPL, Dhaka, 1984. p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> According to Enayetur Rahim, the 1972 Treaty which pledged mutual consultation made Bangladesh an equal partner with India. See Enayetur Rahim, "Bangladesh: A Historical Ledger", in A.M.Chowdhury and Fakrul Alam, (Eds), *Bangladesh on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2002, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Shaukat Hassan, no. 24, p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> S.M. Ali, no. 29, p. 158. Though some scholars maintain that signing of this treaty made many countries suspicious about the degree of independence that Bangladesh enjoys but countries like China, and the Muslim world had their own logic to delay the recognition. Their approach to Bangladesh's independence had a different context due to the Pakistan factor and the arguments put forward by them were not logical. For example, in spite of a special treaty between India-Nepal and India-Bhutan, they are formally recognised by these countries. Moreover the 1949 treaty between India and Bhutan where Article 2 clearly stipulates that Bhutan in its external relations will be guided by India, China refused to conduct Sino-Bhutanese border talks with India. Rather it wanted to initiate talks independently with Bhutan because it considers Bhutan as sovereign. The treaty did not obstruct China to negotiate with Bhutan on the basis of sovereign equality.

<sup>34</sup> In spite of India's bilateral treaty with Nepal and Bhutan, they are still recognised as sovereign countries by the world community. Same is the case with the Soviet treaty with Afghanistan in 1979 and also Pakistan, which joined the Western sponsored treaty of SEATO and CENTO.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Dr Kamal Hossain, Dhaka, June 30, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. . . . ;.

<sup>37</sup> Talukdar Maniruzzaman, no. 5. p. 20, and pp. 25-32. Formed in 1951, the Youth League's objective was to "mobilise maximum number of people of all classes on the minimum programme of secularism, anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, world peace, unfettered democracy and employment opportunity for all people within the country." See p. 27.

<sup>38</sup> J.N. Dixit, no. 4, pp. 175-77.

<sup>39</sup> C.H. Bateman, "National Security and Nationalism in Bangladesh". *Asian Survey*, 19 (8). 1979. p. 751. India confiscated the weapons because it was determined to prevent sophisticated weaponry from falling into the hands of Left wing guerrillas. See Lawrence Lifschultz, no. 10. p. 37.

- <sup>40</sup> J.N.Dixit, no. 4, pp.147-48 and p. 176.
- <sup>41</sup> Anisuzzaman, no.2, pp. 54-55
- <sup>42</sup> Moudud Ahmed, no. 10, p 62
- <sup>43</sup> J.N. Dixit, no. 4, p. 157.
- <sup>44</sup> Akhtar Hossain, "Anatomy of Hartal Politics in Bangladesh", *Asian Survey*, 40 (3). May/June 2000, p.519.
- <sup>45</sup> Kathryn Jacques, *Bangladesh, India and Pakistan: International Relations and Regional Tensions in South Asia*, Palgrave, New York, 2000, p. 105.
- <sup>46</sup> Mohmodul Haque, "Problems of National Integration and Security in Bangladesh: Internal and External Dimensions", p. 10, Paper presented at the International seminar on Newer Source of National Insecurity in South Asia, RCSS, Colombo, November 7-11, 1996, held at Paro, Bhutan.
- <sup>47</sup> It is important to note that secularism was not a political issue or there is nothing to give credence that this foundational principle was unpopular. Mujib during his regime tried his best to explain the concept. In the 1973 election, the AL was elected to power with an over whelming majority on the basis of 1972 Constitution. However this concept was used by Mujib's detractors to malign him. Propaganda equated secularism with irreligiosity and Mujib was compelled to use Islamic idioms towards the end of his regime. In the background of the coup, Zia wanted to have an alternative to Mujib's ideology and in this context religion became handier.
- <sup>48</sup> Scholars like Kathryn Jacques believe that diversification was necessary for economic reasons rather than political. For such an exposition, see Kathryn Jacques, no. 45, pp. 113-20.
- <sup>49</sup> The Bangladesh military was internally fragmented into two groups. One group that fought the Pakistan Army. i.e., *Mukti Bahini*, and the other group that constituted the Bengali army officers who had fought along with the *Mukti Bahini* in the Liberation war. The army group was more conservative and ideologically did not favour any close Indo-Bangladesh relations. *Mukti Bahini* cadres considered themselves as true nationalist and Mujib's trust on this group caused dissatisfaction in the army.
- <sup>50</sup> Akhtar Hossain, no.44, p. 512.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*,p. 512.
- <sup>52</sup> China recognised Bangladesh on August 31, 1975. Its attitude towards Bangladesh changed after the tripartite agreement between India-Pakistan and Bangladesh. See Sharmina Nasreen. "China-Bangladesh Relations: Need for Economic Partnership", *Journal of International Affairs*, January 1999-June 2001, 5 (3), p."44. Zia moved closer to China and the US. Regionally it moved closer to Pakistan to provide joint opposition to India's domination in South Asia. See Md. Nuruzzaman, "Redefining Bangladesh's India Policy", *Journal of International Relations*, July-June 1996-97, 4 (1-2), p. 79. Also see, Shyamali Ghosh, "Political Dynamics in Bangladesh: Relations with Bangladesh and India", *International*

*Studies*, July-September 1995. 32 (3), p. 244.

- <sup>53</sup> M.G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan, no. 18, p. 14.
- <sup>54</sup> During Morarji Desai's tenure, Indo-Bangladesh relations took on a better shape compared to the previous regime.
- <sup>55</sup> Agreement regarding this corridor was signed in 1972 and 1982. The Tinbigha corridor is rent free and is perpetually leased to Bangladesh for access to its enclave of Dahagram and Angorpotta. This perpetual lease provided for the retention of Indian sovereignty over the leased land with free movement of Bangladesh citizens living on the either side of this corridor.
- <sup>56</sup> S. Aminul Islam, "Political Parties and Future of Democracy", in A.M. Chowdhury, and Fakhru Alam, no. 31, p. 67.
- <sup>57</sup> For example, in September 1, 2004 a news item was published in a leading Bangladeshi English newspaper with a photograph of the main mosque in Kathmandu desecrated by some Nepalese as a protest against killing of Nepalese in Iraq. The picture showed a person picking up reportedly the burnt piece of Koran. However, one did not see any repercussion against any Hindus in Bangladesh. Even the newspaper columnists did not even bother to write about this incident. However a similar incident happening in India would have had severe repercussion to the Hindus.
- <sup>58</sup> The Bangladesh government had identified three conditions for accepting deportees: (i) they must be apprehended while crossing into India; (b) they must be identified and deported within seven days; and (c) they must be deported after fair trial in a court of law, See Rehman Sobhan, (Ed.), *Bangladesh-India Relations; Perspectives from Civil Society Dialogues*, CPD and UPL, Dhaka, 2002, pp. 134-35.
- <sup>59</sup> Based on a visit to the border areas. While interacting with students from border areas currently pursuing their studies in Dhaka, some said that they have walked across the border to India since some of the portions are not well guarded. It is easy to pay an agent and get across the border. The fee varies from a meagre 100 tk to 500 tk per person. Generally, the border crossing is done in night. They have to walk across the border and walk into the villages near the border a little further inside the Indian territory and board transport from there. Especially in the Satkhira area people take boat and cross Ichhamaati river to come to India. This happens with the connivance of the security forces in both the sides. Some of the observations are based on interviews with Bangladeshi immigrants staying in Delhi.
- <sup>60</sup> *Indian Express*. August 19, 1984. Also refer to Sanjib Baruah, "Immigration and Ethnic Conflict and Political Turmoil - Assam, 1979-85", *South Asian Studies*, 5 (1), 1986, pp. 1203-5.
- <sup>61</sup> Bangladesh feels that fencing violates the Land Boundary Act of 1974. The Act provides that no defence structure can be created within 150 m of the Indo-Bangladesh border. The Indian contention is that the fence is not a defensive

structure; therefore it does not violate the 1974 Agreement.

- <sup>62</sup> According to General H.M. Ershad, he was aware that migration from Bangladesh to India was happening during his regime. But he chose to deny it. This is because as the President of Bangladesh it would have been politically suicidal for him to accept the issue. Interview with General Ershad, former President of Bangladesh on December 28, 2004, Dhaka.
- <sup>63</sup> For the reason of illegal immigration from Bangladesh see Kulbir Krishan, "Policing Indo-Bangladesh Border" *Strategic Analyses*, 25(5), August 2001, pp.663-674. N.S Jamwal, "Management of Land Borders", *Strategic Analysis*, July-September 2002, 26 (3), p.415. The Left government in West Bengal is critical of Bangladesh on the issue of illegal immigration.
- <sup>64</sup> Bangladesh has proposed to have FTA with Malaysia. See *Daily Star*, "Bangladesh to Propose FTA with Malaysia", June 5, 2005. The two-way trade is heavily tilted towards Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur's export bill stood at US\$ 254.66 million against Dhaka's US \$ 8.66 million in 2003-04. It also has free trade agreement with Morocco with which Dhaka has a slightly favourable trade balance.
- <sup>65</sup> Nearly US \$ 2 billion worth of Indian goods are smuggled into Bangladesh annually, in addition to the US \$ 1.5 billion worth of goods that enter the country legally. The Bangladesh market is already flooded with Indian goods, many of which enter the country on a duty-free basis, since they are smuggled across the border. The bilateral FTA would give Bangladesh the opportunity to gain something in return. It would also encourage Indian investments in Bangladesh, on a much larger scale than that has taken place so far. See Farooq Sobhan, "Indo-Bangladesh Relations: The Way Forward", *Daily Star*, June 5, 2005. For an extensive analyses of issues involved with the FTA, see Nurul Islam, "Indo-Bangladesh Economic Relations: Some Thoughts", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39 (36), September 4-10, 2004, p. 4075.
- <sup>66</sup> For detailed study on informal trade see Nisha Taneja, and Sanjeev Pohit. "India's Informal Trade with Bangladesh: Qualitative Assessment", *ICREAR Report*, 2000, pp. 8-21.
- <sup>67</sup> According to a study by Muchkund Dubey in 1995, India was interested in investing a sum of \$200 million for expansion of Chittagong port to enable it to handle additional Indian cargo. See Muchkund Dubey, "Indo-Bangladesh Economic Relations", Paper presented at the Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue on Economic and Trade Cooperation, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi and Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka, November 1995 held at Dhaka.
- <sup>68</sup> See Mustafizur Rahman, "Bangladesh-India Economic Relations: Current Status", *Peace Initiative*, 17 (1-3), January-June 2001, p. 173.
- <sup>69</sup> For details, see Praveen Kumar, "External Linkages and Internal Security: Assessing Bhutan's Operation All Clear", *Strategic Analysis*, 28 (3), July-September 2004, p. 402.
- <sup>70</sup> Anup Chetia, founding general secretary and the commander of ULFA's arms

wing, was arrested in Shymoli area of Dhaka in 1997 and was jailed for travelling without visa and carrying satellite phone. Bangladesh repeatedly turned down India's request to hand him over on the ground that it does not have an extradition treaty with India.

- <sup>71</sup> Kalyan Choudhury, "In No Mood for Peace", *Frontline*, 16 (27), December 27 1999- January 7, 2000, p. 51. Also see Pradip, "Haul Stumps Bangladesh", *North East Enquirer*, 2 (7), July 7-21, 2003, at <http://Avmv.nenanews.com/NEE%20July%207%20-%2021,%2003/Cover%20Story.htm>
- <sup>72</sup> The Chittagong arms haul exposed the dangers that such arms transaction can pose to the security" of the region. It also indicated close relations between arms proliferators and the insurgents. See Ahmed Hussain. "Whose Arms Are They Anyway?" *Daily Star Weekend Magazine*, 1 (4), April 6. 2004. The cache included 690 7.62 mm T-56-I sub-machine guns (SMGs); 600 7.62 mm T-56-2 SMGs; 150 40 mm T-69 rocket launchers; 840 40 mm rockets; 400 9 mm semi-automatic spot rifles; 100 Tommy Guns; 150 rocket launchers; 2,000 launching grenades; 25,020 hand grenades; 6,392 magazines of SMG and other arms; 700,000 rounds of SMG cartridges; 739,680 rounds of 7.62 mm calibre; and 400,000 cartridges of other weapons. Most of the arms and ammunition were reportedly of Korean, Italian, Chinese and American make. See Haroon Habib, "A Deadly Cargo", *Frontline*, 21 (1), May 8-21, 2004, at <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2110/stories/20040521000206100.htm>
- <sup>73</sup> The Trade Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Bangladesh signed in New Delhi on March 28, 1972, provided for the restoration of communication linkages. See Avtar Singh Bhasin, (Ed.), *India-Bangladesh Relations 1971-1999*, 2, Siba Exim Pvt. Ltd, Delhi, 1996, p. 1209. Also on October 4, 1980, a new trade agreement was signed between the Governments of India and Bangladesh which endorsed this provision provided in the earlier treaty.
- <sup>74</sup> In an interview with Enaytullah Khan, a pro-Chinese leftist who has been Bangladesh's Ambassador to China and was earlier a Minister in Zia's cabinet. He is currently Editor of the *New Nation*. June 2004.
- <sup>75</sup> Enaytullah Khan's comments at a seminar organised by the BUSS on *Indian Elections: Security Implications to Bangladesh* on May 19, 2004, at the BISS Auditorium, Dhaka.
- <sup>76</sup> See Shakil Ahmed, "Transit and Transshipment: Implications for Bangladesh", *Bangladesh NDC Journal*, (64), June 2003, pp. 6-12. A study was also conducted by the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, Dhaka to look into the issue of transit. This study undertaken by M.M. Akash, Professor Economics, Dhaka University recommended that transit would be beneficial for Bangladesh also. See M.M. Akash, *Transit Facilities for India: Past Experience and Future Prospects*, Dhaka, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1997.
- <sup>77</sup> The 1,360 km trilateral dream of connectivity announced in Yangon, Myanmar, in April 2002 will connect Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot town in Northern Thailand

through Bagan in Central Myanmar. For India, it will provide a land corridor connecting its Northeast with Thailand and Myanmar. The land corridor passing through Myanmar to link India with the South-East Asian countries will eventually become part of the Trans-Asian Highway which will open up Southeast Asia in a big way for trade and tourism by India. India has already built a road link between its border state of Manipur and Yangon, capital of Myanmar, which has a land boundary with Thailand. The World Bank has mooted a Trans-Asian Highway which will ultimately link the Indo-China region with India. <http://ncws.indiamart.com/news-analysis/bimst-ec-summit-a-mi-7074.html>.

- <sup>78</sup> Bangladesh has ratified the 1974 Treaty and India is yet to ratify it. India's position is that the border needs to be demarcated before the Treaty is ratified. This Treaty envisaged that all the enclaves in the adverse possession of each other needs to be measured, demarcated and exchanged within six months of the signing of this Treaty. India has suggested taking the census of the population in the enclaves before its exchange. Bangladesh is not agreed to this suggestion. At the same time the Treaty explicitly states that both the parties need to maintain peace and tranquility on the border and should not use force. Firing incidents and violence in the border has been hallmark of the Indo-Bangladesh border in the recent times. Both the parties accuse each other of violating the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement. For a detailed article on smuggling and firing incidents in the Indo-Bangladesh border, see Abdus Salam Chowdhury, "Bangladesh-India Land Border Issues and Management". *Bangladesh National Defence College Journal*, 2(1), June 2003.
- <sup>79</sup> For some of the concerns of Bangladesh, see Dilara Choudhury, "Management of Indo-Bangladesh Border", *Daily Star*, September 21, 2004.
- <sup>80</sup> M.G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan, no. 18.
- <sup>81</sup> Dry run of the proposed transshipment was conducted in March 2002, it was found that the Bangladesh transport industry earned a good amount in the transshipment whereas goods were delivered in India in less time with less cost.
- <sup>82</sup> MG. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan, no. 18.
- <sup>83</sup> For example, India has always 'demanded' or 'asked' Bangladesh to take action against the Indian insurgents operating from Bangladesh. After the Congress government came to power in 2004, a statement was issued by India that India "requests Bangladesh to take action against Indian insurgents. This usage of the word "request' was pointed out by Dr Humayun Kabir of Bangladesh Institute of Strategic Studies and was appreciated. Discussion with Dr Kabir at BISS in December 2004 in Dhaka. According to him, semantics matters in diplomacy where a smaller country is involved.
- <sup>84</sup> The Ganges Water Treaty signed in 1996 with India has become a political issue with the BNP. So is the case with the Chittagong Hill Tract Treaty signed in 1997. The BNP government is reluctant to implement the treaty which reflects the mindset of the party.

- <sup>85</sup> Stanley A. Kochanek, "Governance, Patronage Politics, and Democratic Transition in Bangladesh", *Asian Survey*, 40 (3), May/June 2000, p. 530.
- <sup>86</sup> Badruddin Umar, "Anti-Indianism and Communalism", *Sapatahik Swadhikar*, September 17, 1972, as cited in Badruddin Umar, *Juddhotoro Bangladesh*, Muktaadhara, Dhaka, 1975, pp. 15-16 (translated by the author.)
- <sup>87</sup> See M. Rashiduzzaman, "Changing Political Patterns in Bangladesh: Internal Constraints and External Fears", in M. M. Khan and H.M. Zafrullah (Eds.), *Politics and Bureaucracy in a New Nation*, Centre for Administrative Studies, Dhaka, 1980, p. 182. For a nationalistic discourse on bilateral issues see, Imtiaz Ahmed, "Bangladesh-India Relations: Trapped in the Nationalistic Discourse" in Abul Kalam (Ed.), *Bangladesh: Internal Dynamics and External Linkages*, UPL, Dhaka, 1996, pp. 278-282.
- <sup>88</sup> According to A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, Bangladesh-India relations are characterised by a struggle for the survival of the former and supremacy of the latter. See AKM Abdus Sabur, "Bangladesh-India Relations: Retrospect and Prospect", paper presented in a seminar on Bangladesh's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities, BISS, Dhaka, October 3, 1996. p. 5. See also, Iftekharuzzaman, "The India Doctrine: Relevance for Bangladesh", in M.G. Kabir and Shaikat Hassan, no. 18, p. 45.
- <sup>89</sup> See statement of K. Subramanyam: "A threat to Bangladesh will be considered a threat to India, treaty or no treaty... main responsibility for ensuring the security of the countries on the shores of the Bay of Bengal from the external maritime intervention will be India's." *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 6, 1972, 7 (19), p. 946. See Bhabani Sengupta, "The India Doctrine", *India Today*, August 31, 1983. Also see, C. Raja Mohan, "Ending the Regional Shift", *The Hindu*, September 7, 2004.
- <sup>90</sup> For example C. Raja Mohan's article on "Ending the Regional Shift" where he has argued for a possible role for India in the neighbourhood was criticised by Bangladeshi scholars. For Bangladesh's viewpoint on a possible intruding role of India, see Shahedul Anam Khan, "Bangladesh: Virtues of Intervention", *Daily Star*, September 9, 2004.

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