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BANGLADESH'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS:
THE STRATEGY OF A SMALL POWER IN A SUBSYSTEM

by
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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of International Relations,
Australian National University
December 1980
This thesis is my own original work.

Iftekhar A. Chowdhury
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to register my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Mr G. Jukes, for assisting me in my task in many different ways; and to Professors T.B. Millar, G.T.R. Fox and Annette Baker Fox, Dr M. Ayoob, Dr Ralph Pettman and Dr John McGuire, whose advice and guidance were of invaluable help. I should like to make a special mention in sincere appreciation of the late Professor Sisir Gupta of the Jawaharlal Nehru University who spent many hours in discussions with me during my field trip.

I am beholden to the subjects of my interviews, in particular, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, former President Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, former Deputy Prime Minister Moudud Ahmed and former Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain, who despite the heavy schedule of their public lives, found time to talk to me.

Special thanks are due to Mrs Shirley Steer, my typist.

I owe Nicole, my wife, more than words can say. Naureen, our daughter, though she only arrived halfway through my research, was a source of boundless inspiration.
SYNOPSIS

The thesis examines how Bangladesh relates herself to her international environment. While the central concern of the study is the behaviour-pattern of a single state actor in the international arena, the fact that the subject shares certain characteristic attributes with many others, invests the inquiry with wider relevance.

The thesis argues that Bangladesh's two foreign policy aspirations, the search for security and the quest for external resources for development, have led to co-terminous rather than mutually exclusive policies, that have for their thrust the weaving of a web of extra-regional linkages. These linkages, which are described and analyzed, are meant to buttress Bangladesh's sense of security vis-a-vis the regional preeminent power as well as to support her developmental aspirations. The various policies and postures that Dacca tends to adopt towards events and issues of international significance, as well as the factors influencing such policies and postures, are also explained.

The study reviews the intricate problems that Bangladesh as an aid-recipient country confronts with regard to aid-donors. It focuses on how her ability to manoeuvre in policy-making is curtailed due to this relationship. It explores the role, interests, and predilections, particularly with regard to foreign affairs, of the leading category within the community, which is a segment of the international elite.
# THE REGIONAL POWER BALANCE (?)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. Subject and Scope

The thesis is a micro-study from a macro-perspective, an analysis of the behaviour pattern of a single state actor in a particular geo-political setting. The state actor is Bangladesh, and the setting is the South-Asian subcontinent. Bangladesh shares many characteristics with a large number of States in the contemporary world; she is an ex-colony; she is weak; she has scarce resources; she is non-aligned, non-Christian and non-white. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that the study provide us with some understanding of unit behavior in comparable milieux. Hopefully, therefore, the research had wider relevance.

At her independence in December 1971, Bangladesh was confronted with a mostly hostile world. China and the U.S. among the Great Powers had opposed her emergence. The Arabs were unhappy at the dismemberment of a powerful Muslim State, Pakistan. Many Third World countries, some with incipient secession movements within themselves, were chary of approving a phenomenon that might set in motion the forces of balkanization in their own backyard. The Global State system was a club unto itself and it appeared doubtful if Bangladesh, the presumptuous new Actor whose arrival on the international scene was so unconventional (hers being the only successful secession movement in recent times) would gain ready admittance.
Her initial problem was therefore to seek this admission, to be accepted by the Club of International State Actors as one of their own, to get it to recognize her sovereignty, whose extinction, at that stage, was the declared goal of Pakistan and some of her friends. Bangladesh's desire to maximise her manoeuvrability appeared to be threatened not only by those who opposed her, but also by her dependence on close allies. The situation was a ready testing ground for skilful diplomacy.

The retention of flexibility in the country's external policies and thereby the maintenance of a sufficient degree of independence was a problem that was compounded by the urgent need for external assistance for her very survival, given the scarcity of domestic economic resources. Thus it was that security and the need for external resources became her primary interests. These two objectives imparted saliency to her foreign policy which was seen as a major instrument for securing them.

This is not to say that there exists a well thought out and carefully formulated 'foreign policy' for that would convey more than what is actually there. Also to speak of 'policy goals' would smack of a precision that is probably absent. A more appropriate term would be what Arnold Wolfers has called the 'aspirations' of foreign policy.¹ This does not, however, mean that the area of external relations is one

of low priority to the Bangladeshi policy makers. In fact, as this thesis hopes to demonstrate, the truth is quite the reverse.

The leadership of Bangladesh has given public expression to the significance of foreign policy in the securing of certain basic objectives of the polity.\(^2\) Attempts are indeed being made to gear external relations for the above purpose. The basic objectives, as the study will reveal, appears to be the search for security and the quest for external resources. However, several factors, as we shall soon see, act as constraints in Bangladesh's foreign-policy endeavours and introduce complexity.

The time-frame chosen for investigation is the first decade of the country's existence, 1971 through 1980. These ten years have seen several different governments in operation in Bangladesh as well as in the countries of her immediate concern. It is therefore sufficiently long enough a time period for analysis to be made with a view to determining a general behaviour pattern with some implications for the future. Also, the period has seen Bangladesh recover from the trauma of her genesis and steady herself into concentrating on more permanent goals.\(^3\) This is a part of what the title of the thesis describes as the 'Strategy of a Small Power in a Subsystem'.


\(^3\) Such goals, as Christopher Clapham states, can only be articulated as the immediate aftermath of independence recedes. C. Clapham (ed), *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States: A Comparative Approach* (Farnborough, Hants; Saxon House, Reprinted 1979), p.17.
First one must define one's terms. What is 'smallness' in an International Actor? David Vital has furnished us with some criteria for measurement. This is largely on the basis of population - ten to fifteen million in the case of economically advanced countries and less than twenty or thirty million in the case of underdeveloped countries.\(^4\) The Vatican and Fiji obviously fit the bill. But what about an advanced country with less than fifteen million in population but a vast territory, like Australia, or a developing state of a teeming eighty million crowded into 54,000 square miles, like Bangladesh? Population, therefore, is an inadequate criterion.

Keohane suggests influence instead. To him a Small State is one whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the System.\(^5\) The crucial criterion is thus a very subjective consideration of the leadership. But what if the leaders of a particular State considered it powerful and acted accordingly, when in objective terms the State actually lacked such power? Nkrumah's Ghana, for instance?

At another level, military power has been suggested as a possible index. Robert Rothstein has attempted to define a Small State as 'one which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by its own capabilities and that

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it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes or developments to do so. But would this not confuse the status of Japan or India, both of whom have fairly inadequate defence capabilities (compared to Israel or Sweden for instance) but can hardly be termed small?

Should the criterion then be economic strength? Karl W. Deutsch emphasizes this aspect. However, in that case we would end up assigning a disproportionate priority to Saudi Arabia. If economic power is computed not in terms of GNP or resources, but in terms of the level of industrialization, Hong Kong or Singapore would have to be considered near-Great Powers.

All these definitions suffer from one common fallacy that render them inadequate; their tendency to generalize. But is there, in fact, a Small State *per se*? Small States are not all States, as we have seen, that are underpopulated or undersized, uninfluential or weak, poor or underdeveloped. It might therefore be more appropriate to use 'smallness' as a relative expression. State 'A' may be described as 'small' in comparison with State 'B' with regard to one, some, or all of those criteria.

It may of course be that 'A' is smaller than 'B' by one criterion and larger by another. It may, for instance, have a smaller population, but more strategic power: Iran, compared to Pakistan, for example. In that case 'A' cannot

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be generalized as being smaller than 'B'. This can only be done when 'A', as compared to 'B', has less population, less territory, less influence, less military power potential, less resources and a lower level of development; just as Bangladesh *vis-à-vis* India.

Using smallness as a relative concept has the advantage of limiting its scope. Otherwise the number of what could be called 'Small States' would be so large as to render the concept an inadequate tool for analysis, as Peter Baehr so powerfully argues it is. In any case, though Bangladesh is doubtlessly a Small State *vis-à-vis* India, we may give its attribute of large population some recognition by calling it a 'Small Power' (emphasizing the limitation of influence rather than size) instead of a 'Small State'.

The expression 'Subsystem' also requires some explanation. Michael Brecher has described Southern Asia as a 'Subordinate System' fulfilling six necessary conditions, i.e. (i) its scope is delimited with primary stress on geographic region; (ii) there are at least three actors; (iii) taken together they are objectively recognised by other actors as constituting a distinctive community, region, segment of the Global System; (iv) the members identify themselves as such; (v) the units of power are relatively inferior to units in the Dominant System (i.e. Superpowers) and (vi) changes in the Dominant System.
System have greater effect on the Subordinate System than the reverse.  

Brecher's Southern Asia, however, encompasses a vast and diverse territory. The diversity is more pronounced now than even when Brecher wrote. Indo-China, the ASEAN states, Burma, the Subcontinent, all now have their own distinctive interests and preoccupations. This, then, evidently calls for a further reclassification.

It is possible to conceive of a smaller Subsystem within the larger 'Subordinate System' to render it a more useful category for the purpose of analysis. This is a three-body concept comprising India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. These three countries share a common ethos rooted in their social, ethnic and historical tradition which binds them together and at the same time sets them apart from other States in the region. It is this concept that is used in the ensuing study. It is wise to point out, however, that the expression 'Subsystem' is being used in this thesis merely to describe a setting. It does not mean that the inquiry is based on what is known in the social sciences as systems theory.

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10 His definition covers not only all states from Pakistan to Indonesia, but, arguing that the subordinate system is a political as well as geographic concept and that the region is a necessary but not sufficient basis for definition, also includes the vital peripheral State of China. Michael Brecher, 'International Relations and Asian Studies: The Subordinate State System of Southern Asia', World Politics, Vol.15, No.2 (January 1963), pp.213-35.

11 'Systems theory' in vogue in the behavioral sciences was introduced into international relations primarily by Morton Kaplan in his System and Process in International Politics (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1957). Kaplan's work is global. This is not an attempt to use his theory at a narrower level of area studies, as the following discussion on the general frame of analysis will indicate.
All that is being done is that the international state system is being viewed as a set of units in interaction and a subsystem is seen as a conglomerate of several of these units possessing some common characteristics. 

This thesis will endeavour to delineate and explain the manner in which Bangladesh acted in order to live in concord with but distinct from her powerful neighbour, India. The concord was necessary because Bangladesh too, to borrow an expression from a Nepalese Prime Minister describing Nepal's situation, is largely 'India-locked'; the distinction is essential because Bangladesh's own separate identity can only be defined in those terms. The interactions within the 'regional core' have had significant bearings on Bangladesh's relations with the outside world.

The thesis does not encompass the total gamut of Bangladesh's external relations. It leaves out, for instance, Bangladesh's relations with the U.K. except for that component that could be subsumed under relationship with the West in general. This has nothing to do with what Professor Northedge would call Britain's 'descent from power'.


exists a near mystical bond between Britain and Bangladesh. London remains for Dacca's middle classes a continual source of intellectual nourishment and at times, even, political inspiration. Over a hundred thousand Bengalis, including some politically very articulate ones, live in Britain. An editorial article of The Times can still have a profound impact on Bangladesh politics. Yet, Britain, as the empirical evidence in the thesis will substantiate, is no longer critical to the major aspirations of Bangladeshi foreign policy, security and the obtaining of external resources.

Also excluded, for the same reason, are the links with South East Asia. Bangladesh has often been described as a 'bridge' between South and South East Asia, but to date, in terms of both security and development, the latter region seems peripheral to Dacca's interests.

It would also be wise to enter a caveat here. The thesis is by no means an attempt to generalise. It is primarily an effort to discern a behavior pattern for Bangladesh, for each international actor in the States-system is unique and merits separate examination. However, this study may help to provide, if not a model of small-power behavior, at least some key to the understanding of the problems, as it endeavours to surmount them, of a weaker state locked into a perennial relationship with a far more powerful neighbour by the 'tyranny of geography'.

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16 This concept seems to have found enthusiastic expression at rhetorical levels at various points in time. See for instance, the Bangladesh-Burma Joint Communiqué of April 1974 (Bangladesh Documents, Vol.2, No.4 [April-June, 1974], p.8) or Prime Minister Shah Azizur Rahman's speech in Parliament in course of a debate on foreign policy in February 1980 (Bangladesh Observer, 29 February 1980).
II. Approach and Methodology

Contemporary literature on foreign policy analysis tends to be either 'process-oriented' mostly with respect to modernized, industrialized, Western States, or 'function-oriented' as with the traditional 'least developed countries' (LDCs). The former concentrates on the detailed analysis of foreign policy-making processes with emphasis on such institutions as bureaucracies, political parties and pressure-groups and the influence they exert on foreign policy outcomes. On the developing countries the argument has been advanced that their institutions, still being rudimentary, deserve less attention than the functions of foreign policy or the purposes they are put to. In other words their foreign policies are seen as a function of functions.

There is indeed a strong case for this line of argument. Firstly, in the LDCs, government agencies are often small, intellectually inadequate establishments unable to wield policy-making influence. Secondly, developing countries are often characterised by the presence of charismatic-

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revolutionary leaders, described by Henry Kissinger as 'the Prophet'. Examples would be Kemal Ataturk, Gandhi, Jinnah. Thirdly, the developing countries are circumscribed in their economic behavior due to their situation of 'dependency' i.e. the fact that they are on the 'peripheries' of the global economy, being structurally linked in dependent relationships to the 'Metropolitan Centres'. Fourthly and finally, the military wields a disproportionate influence in many developing societies and has been, and is, in effective control of government in many countries from Turkey to South Korea.

To what extent does this stand the test of detailed examination?

First, to argue that bureaucratic institutions in the developing countries (most of whom are also traditional societies) wield no influence in policy-making would be untrue. Indeed, scholars have argued strongly to the contrary. Karl Wittfogel, for instance, insists that the 'common

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22 One explanation of this has been that a large proportion of the intelligentsia in these countries is to be found in the Army, the only sector in such societies whose development received the attention of the Colonial Powers. Edward Shils, Political Development in the New States (Gravehow: Morton & Co., 1967).
substance in the various oriental societies appeared most conspicuously in the despotic strength of their authority, which of course, was a hierarchy structured to form bureaucratic systems. He notes the existence in these societies of the phenomenon which contemporary social analysts in their esoteric parlance have called 'bureaucratic politics'. For instance, he tells us

All bureaucracies have certain technical features in common: and some methods of intra-bureaucratic competition appeal universally in serving, controlled and ruling bureaucracies.  

Secondly, in spite of developed systems and institutions Kissinger's 'prophets' have not been lacking in modernized societies. Churchill, De Gaulle, Franco and Kissinger himself serve as obvious examples. These individuals have had a profound influence on their respective countries' policies, including those relating to external affairs.

Thirdly, while economic dependency undoubtedly reduces the maneuverability of the small/weak powers, economic interdependence also imposes restrictions on the developed states. Current literature on transnationalism points to that fact. Others such as the 'functionalists' and the 'neo-functionalists' would encourage such a process and see this trend already developing. The 'functionalists' argue that complex

24 ibid., p.337.
technetronic developments have thrown up equally complex issues whose solutions need to be handled by international agencies with tasks defined by the nature of these problems rather than by the interests of Governments. The 'neo-functionalists' will go even further in the hope that future technical agencies would so integrate states as to make them lose all the attributes of sovereignty. Moreover, some social scientists have in very recent times pointed to a situation of 'reverse dependency' where the industrialized nations experience a critical need; for example, of oil.

Fourthly and finally, to say that the military has no lever in developed countries is to totally ignore the influence of what Eisenhower has called 'the military industrial complex' and what has in fact been a cause for worry of some distinguished western intellectuals.

The above examination shows that to presuppose that developing countries are qualitatively so different from developed countries that they require a distinctly different set of tools for analysis cannot be sustained beyond a point. This type of intellectual dichotomy would imply a rather superficial study of the developing world. What implications does this have for research, then?

27 Ernst B. Haas, Beyond the Nation State: Functionalism and International Organization (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1964).
It indicates that it is necessary and important to study the process of foreign policy along with its functions in the case of all international actors; in other words the 'hows', 'whys' and 'whats' are equally important in all foreign policy analyses, irrespective of the country's size, power, or state of development, if a proper understanding of its external affairs is to be attained.

It also underlines the hazards of prejudging a certain international actor and categorizing it before the research commences, and of simultaneously choosing a particular model of analysis (to the exclusion of other such models) which is determined a priori as suitable for the subject. It is obvious, then, that empiricism should decide in the end as to which category the subject belongs. It is only appropriate that a proper approach should be eclectic in nature, keeping options open at the outset and adopting a 'model-mix' only after an initial survey of the existing data on any given issue area.

Another reason why any particular prevalent model is discounted, and no attempt has been made to establish a new one is because in such a case the ensuing study would become

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Migdal has identified four broad conceptual models presently being used for foreign policy explanation: (1) the 'geo-political model', whereby physical location assumes prime importance and internal changes in regimes or ideologies have little significant impact; (2) the 'Organizational Process model' which sees all foreign policy as Organizational output; (3) the 'bargaining model' whereby 'players' bargain with one another to produce 'political outcomes' and (4) the 'Rational Policy Model', which assumes that policy is a result of actions which are calculated responses to achieve certain ends. Joel Migdal, 'Internal Structures and External Behavior: Explaining Foreign Policies of Third World States', *International Relations*, Vol.IV, No.5 (May 1974), pp.510-26.
more an attempt to test the model rather than an effort to acquire a proper comprehension of the subject under examination, in this case, Bangladesh's external behavior.

The approach adopted in this particular investigation, then, is the eclectic one; one of 'models-mix'. The method is basically analytical, that is, it relies on 'the proposition that policy rests on multiple determinants including the State's historic tradition, geographic location, national interests, purposes and security needs'. To these could be added developmental requirements, ideological beliefs (religion or nationalism, for instance), and elite perceptions. Policy is the resultant outcome of the interplay of these variables.

Though these determinants will be identified and due emphasis given them in the course of the study, they are not neatly arranged in a taxonomic order. The reason is that while such neatness would lend the investigation both form and discipline, it would divert the researcher from a proper appreciation of the constant shifts and changeability which the thesis argues is a part of the subject's external strategy.

III. Note on the Sources

The contemporaneousness of the study posed some problems with regard to sources. Most relevant documents, except for

some Treaties, Joint Communiques and Trade Agreements, have not been made public and there was, therefore, a great reliance on interviews with individual 'policy makers'. Since South Asian bureaucrats are somewhat chary of public exposure, more so as some of the issues involved are still active, many of these interviews assumed the form of less formal discussions (these have been identified as such in footnotes). Many individuals directly involved with events in South Asia over the decade were interviewed including Prime Minister Gandhi, former Bangladesh President A.S. Choudhury, former Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Hossain, and a large number of other politicians, senior bureaucrats from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. 32

Some private papers have immensely benefited the study, particularly those on the struggle for Bangladesh's independence, made available by the former Bangladesh Deputy Prime Minister, Moudud Ahmed.

Press clippings were widely used from files at the Australian National University, Sapru House (New Delhi), Chatham House (London), Queen Elizabeth House (Oxford), the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (Karachi), the

32 Perhaps a brief note is necessary to explain why in the thesis Subcontinental public leaders have been called at times by their surnames and on other occasions by their first names. In all cases the name by which they are more popularly known have been used. With Indians this is mostly the surname such as Gandhi, Desai and Nehru. For Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims, it is more complicated. Usually they are known by their first names such as Ayub or Yahya. However when 'Mohammed' forms a part of the name, it is not used by itself out of respect for the prophet of Islam. 'Mohammed Ayub Khan' thus becomes 'Ayub'. In some cases a shortened version of the name is commonly used, e.g. Zia for Ziaur Rahman or Mujib or Mujibur Rahman. These rules are not followed at all times and Muslim leaders have been known by surnames (Jinnah, Suhrawardy, Bhutto). Throughout the subcontinent government officials, perhaps because of the British legacy, traditionally use initials followed by the surname (such as G. Parthasarathy, M.M. Ahmed or S.A.M.S. Kibria).
Foreign Office (Dacca) and the Bangladesh Missions in New York, London, Cairo, Abu Dhabi and Canberra. A wide range of newspapers, Subcontinental, Middle Eastern and Western, were relied on. Most were English language 'Dailies' or 'Weeklies', though some Bengali and Urdu ones have also been used. Where such sources have been in another language, such as Arabic, translations have been used.

Government publications and Press hand-outs, particularly those from the External Publicity Division of the Bangladesh Foreign Office or the Planning Commission, proved valuable. Minor publications from some embassies abroad, such as Press releases from the Bangladesh Representation at the U.N. have also been utilized. U.N. documents proved useful for examinations of General Assembly debates and those in various committees. Reports from the World Bank provided some valuable data.

The secondary sources used have been from a wide range of disciplines – Political Science, Economics, History, Sociology and International Relations. Reliance on secondary sources is more evident in the Second Chapter, where strictly historical research was neither intended nor undertaken. Through the rest of the thesis secondary sources have been interspersed with primary ones.

IV. Structure and Organization

The questions that the thesis seeks to answer, then, are as follows: What influence does the Bangladesh community's historical inheritance have on her contemporary external behavior? How does she now relate herself to her immediate environment? What ramifications do such relations have for
her interactions with other states in the wider international arena? And to the more comparable states in the regional periphery? What is the relevance of international institutions to Bangladesh? How does she, in her capacity as an aid recipient, respond to the donors? How do her external policies and postures emerge, and who, indeed, give them shape?

The chapters are organized as follows: the current chapter, the first, introduces the subject, discusses the approach and methodology and includes a note on the sources.

Chapter 2 deals with the historical backdrop of the development of Bangladesh's national consciousness and attempts to present a 'theory' of external behavior within the regional parameters. The historical approach in this chapter is, however, not undertaken with the specific interest that would motivate a historian, who, as Professor Olafson would have us believe,

is primarily interested in getting a correct account of what happened over a particular period of time in some particular place or places, and if some theory of economics or sociology put at his disposal helps him to understand his material, well and good; but he is not likely to be very strongly interested either in working out such a theory himself or even confirming it in the way that the social scientist is. The latter, by contrast, will to the degree that he is theoretically oriented, be drawn to the study of a particular set of events only if they earlier suggest or partially confirm some theory he is concerned to establish.33

Chapter 3 is a study of the influence of the geographical setting, an events-analysis of interactions within the 'core' region. It seeks to discern what ramifications the intra-regional interactions have for Bangladesh's extra-regional attitudes, particularly the importance of 'Indo-centrism' in Bangladesh's extra-regional behavior.

Three sets of states have been identified as crucial extra-regional 'areas': (i) the Superpowers, (ii) China, and (iii) the Middle East. These are covered in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively, and the method followed is one of events-analysis.

Does Bangladesh react in the same manner to comparable powers in the neighbourhood as she does to India? If not, what are the differences? Chapter 7 concerns itself with these questions and examines Bangladesh's relations with less powerful (as compared to India) neighbours, Burma and Nepal.

What attitudes does Bangladesh adopt in the wider international arena? What postures does she assume on the various crucial international questions? What is the relevance of the United Nations to her external expression? Chapter 8 attempts to answer these questions.

Chapter 9 deals with the importance of economic factors, particularly aid requirements, on Bangladesh's international relations; the developmental philosophy of the State is scrutinized along with a detailed examination of donor-recipient relationship and has, therefore, a wider theoretical relevance to such relationships in other parts of the world. The method adopted is descriptive-interpretive.
Chapter 10 concentrates on the Elites and the Foreign Policy System, an attempt to explain the 'how' of foreign policy. Bureaucratic politics is discussed and the study adopts a sociological perspective when it seeks to explain the behavior pattern and the motivation of the powerful middle class.

Finally Chapter 11 is a 'Summing Up' of what has gone before. Since each chapter, except for the first, contains a concluding section, the final one is meant more as an overview of the entire discussion in the context of some of the prevalent literature on 'Small' or 'Weak' Power Foreign Policy.

The research commences with the attempt to answer the first of our queries, the one regarding the influence of the past in the conditioning of Bangladesh's contemporary external behavior.
CHAPTER 2

'PREHISTORY' OF BANGLADESHI NATIONALISM
AND A 'THEORY' OF TRIPARTITE BALANCE

I. Introduction

The growth of the consciousness of the Bengali Muslims as a distinct social and political entity, that culminated in their carving out for themselves a separate state in 1971, was the product of historical evolution whose beginnings date back to one and half centuries. Their past experience is important inasmuch as it continued largely to condition their external expression even after their distinctiveness was sharply defined by their attainment of sovereign international personality.

II. The Colonial Period

Two factors assisted this process up to the Partition of 1947. One was British policy decisions during the Colonial Period and the other, certain social and political developments within the two major communities of undivided Bengal, the Hindus and the Muslims.¹

¹ After the advent of the Muslim conquerors in Bengal in the 13th Century, there were large conversions of the inhabitants, partly because of the Hobson's choice before them and partly because of their distaste for 'a rigid system of caste discipline' (E.A. Gait, Census of India, 1909, Vol.6, Part 1, Report, p.165). This happened largely in the deltaic east Bengal, but the western portions because of better communications and more stable forms of cultivation that contributed to social differentiation, was integrated into the Hindu culture of the Upper Gangetic Plains. Eventually, by the turn of the century, a majority of the population of the whole of Bengal became Muslims. See Premen Addy and Ibne Azad, 'Politics and Society in Bengal' in Robin Blackburn (ed), Explosion in a Subcontinent (Penguin, 1975), pp.80-82.
A. British Colonial Policies:

Of the several policy decisions during the Colonial Period that one might allude to, the first was the Permanent Settlement scheme introduced by Lord Cornwallis in 1793, whereby revenue demands of the government were fixed in perpetuity with the incumbent landholders.

The Permanent Settlement had several important effects on both the major communities in Bengal. First, because the fixed quantum of revenue was high and collection by the British far more efficient than collection from the peasants by the landlords (many of whom were Muslims, remnants of the period of 'Nawabi' rule), these landlords (zamindars) fell into arrears and were compelled to alienate their properties to mainly two Hindu groups, one, the city based commercial class of rising businessmen\(^2\) and the other, those employed in tax collection establishments of the larger zamindaris (estates) or of the East India Company.\(^3\) Secondly, because it was the revenue to the Government that was fixed in perpetuity and not the rent from the peasants to the zamindars, the new class of zamindars endeavoured to extricate as much as possible from the former, who were mostly Muslims. This was not conducive to inter-communal harmony which tended to get enmeshed with class conflict as the sense of deprivation of the Muslim peasants (including the jotedars or richer

\(^2\) Addy and Azad in Blackburn (ed), op.cit., pp.87-88.

peasants) sharpened. Thirdly, the *nouveau-riche* commercial-class *zamindars* preferred to be 'absentee landlords' which encouraged subinfeudation, further adversely affecting the *ryot*. Subinfeudation also resulted from the fact that the British sealed off the apex of the feudal hierarchy with their corps of civil servants, permitting only undergrowth.

A second policy decision that affected the Muslims was the shift from the use of Persian in government offices to English and Bengali. This led to a loss of positions on their part in the administration, especially of the *high-born* *Ashraf* class. This tradition-bound aristocracy displayed no eagerness, at least at that stage, to learn

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4 Rajat and Ratna Ray state that 'the social peculiarity of East Bengal which fed the growing political conflict in the province was that the *Zamindars* and *Talukdars* (bigger landlords) in the area were mostly high caste Hindus, while the *jotedars* under them were invariably Muslims of peasant stock'. Rajat and Ratna Ray, 'Zamindars and Jotedars: A Study of Rural Politics in Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 9 (1975), p. 101.


6 Dietmar Rothermund, *The Phases of Indian Nationalism and Other Essays* (Bombay: Nachikita Publications Ltd., 1970), pp. 177-78. Rothermund argues that while the European bourgeoisie overthrew feudalism in their own countries, they did not perform the same service as colonial rulers in Asia. For instance in India, while reserving the capitalist mode of production for themselves, they endeavoured to keep the rest of the country at the level of pre-capitalist production, which required the maintenance of 'the stunted and ossified remnants of feudalism', capped by a salaried, efficient bureaucracy (p. 177).

7 Initially the *Ashraf* Muslims who claimed descent from the Turco-Afghans, spoke Persian and Urdu, and the *Atraf*, or functional groups, spoke Bengali. The latter were of course numerically superior, and eventually by early 20th Century Bengal became the mother tongue of most Bengal Muslims. However in course of the 19th Century a special patois came into vogue especially in eastern Bengal, known as *Musalmani Bangla*. Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Calcutta: Ratna Prakashan, 1974), p. 14. A large number of Muslims in Calcutta continued their links with the Urdu-Persian ethos of their co-religionists in the rest of India, and the ranks of Urdu speakers among Calcutta Muslims swelled with the arrival of migrants after the 1850s from Bihar, the (cont'd)
Nor were they given much encouragement to do so either by the authorities or by the Bengali Hindus, as evidenced by the fact that when in 1817 the first secular institution, the Hindu College was established, its charter stipulated that none but Hindus could be admitted. 9

The Census of 1871 reports:

Hindus, with exceptions of course, are the principal Zamindars, talukdars [owners of large subinfeudatory estates] public officers, men of learning, money lenders, traders, shopkeepers, and [are] engaging in most active pursuits of life and coming directly and frequently under notice of the rulers of the country: while the Mussalmans with exceptions also, form a very large majority of the cultivators of the ground and day labourers and others engaged in the humblest forms of mechanical skills and of buying and selling. 10

This social decline engendered disaffection among different Muslim classes, whose interests appeared to blend for a while and found expression in three peasant led

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United Provinces and the Punjab (Kenneth McPherson, 'The Muslims of Madras and Calcutta: Agitational Politics in the early 1920s', South Asia, University of Western Australia, No.5 (December 1975), p.33.)


9 M. Mujeeb, The Indian Muslims (London: John Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966), p.521. R.C. Majumdar, Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1960), p.48. A privately founded institution initially, it was not just the Muslims who were excluded, but the lower caste Hindus as well. Eventually the British authorities intervened and the College (later known as the Presidency College) was thrown open to all castes and communities, but this was not to happen until the middle of the Nineteenth Century.

movements - the Faraizi Movement (1810-1831), the Indigo riots (1859-60), and the Pabna Rent Revolt (1873)—as well as in the communal riots in Calcutta in the 1890s. The Faraizi Movement was the Bengali version of the Pan-Islamic Wahabi Movement, that sought to revive the pristine glories of Islam: initially the content was religious but eventually the bias became socio-economic, aiming at the two-fold objective of 'protecting the peasantry [largely Muslims] from the oppression of the Hindu zamindars' and 'securing social justice for the masses of the Muslims'.\(^{11}\) The Indigo riots resulted from coercion of the peasants by the indigo planters to produce the plant at a loss.\(^{12}\) The third movement, the rent revolt was a protest against absentee landlordism in the district of Pabna in 1873;\(^{13}\) the Calcutta riots in the 1890s grew from the rise of 'community consciousness' among the jute-labourers of Calcutta, especially after the


\(^{13}\) There were, however, some Hindus among the leaders of the revolt. See Kalyan Kumar Sengupta, 'The Agrarian League of Pabna, 1873', The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol.7, No.2 (June 1970), pp.253-270. Some of the grievances of the peasants were later attempted to be removed by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. Initially, the British tended generally to favour the landlord and their legislations facilitated rent extraction. The tenancy protection that gradually emerged, and which had for its aim the forestalling of peasant agitation, flowed from rent recovery Acts. Dietmar Rothermund, Government, Landlord and Peasant in India: Agrarian Relations Under British Rule (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1978), p.89.
influx of Urdu-speaking labour migrants into Bengal from Northern India. The Hindus participated in only those of the above movements where the thrust was against the British but, quite understandably, remained uninvolved when the Islamic features were emphasized.

Two traits become evident at this stage. First the growing formation of a loose alliance of interest between the Ashraf (the old aristocracy) and the Atraf (the more indigent functional groups, rural peasantry and urban workers) poised against the State authority (the British) and the burgeoning Hindu Middle Class, the bhadralok; and second, the power of religion as the means of rousing Muslims of all classes.

The simmering discontent among Bengali Muslims that had begun to foster the development of separatist consciousness

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15 Addy and Azad, Blackburn, op.cit., p.104.

16 Contemporary historians and sociologists have assigned a Weberian 'status group' to the powerful bhadralok, who, unrelated to the processes of production, do not strictly constitute a class. J.H. Broomfield has described them as being 'distinguishable by many aspects of their behaviour - their deportment, their speech, their dress, their style of housing, their eating habits, their occupations and their associations - and quite as frequently by the cultural values and their sense of propriety'. *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society* (University of California Press, 1968), pp.5-6. John McQure sees them as a composite group of middle class and rentier class of Calcutta who continued to retain strong residual ties with their own pre-capitalist past. He notes the absence of any industrial bourgeoisie among them as the paradox of the colonial situation demanded that the latter was found in Britain only. (Development and Underdevelopment: Calcutta and the Bhadralok, 1857-1885; A.N.U. Conference Paper, December 1979), p.11. However, S.N. Mukherjee has argued that to describe the bhadralok as a mere status group or even a category would be to ignore the economic changes and social mobility in nineteenth century Bengal. Mukherjee would go a step further and call the bhadralok a Class. S.N. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta 1815-38' in Edmund Leach and S.N. Mukherjee (eds), *Elites in South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.51.
was yet unarticulated in any major way except for the occasional local 'uprisings'; but this incipient 'community-consciousness' was brought a step closer to nationalism by yet another decision of the Colonial Power, the partition of Bengal (1905) that gave it a territorial content.

The Partition of Bengal (1905) ostensibly had a two-fold objective, 'reinvigoration of Assam and relief of Bengal'. Eastern Bengal was hived off and joined to Assam creating a separate province. It was hoped that the reduction of Bengal's size would make it more governable and that Assam's acquisition of the port of Chittagong in East Bengal would invigorate the rather neglected province, which together with its now larger size and population would make it attractive for the Covenanted Civil Servants.

Curzon was certainly motivated by his desire to curb the rising power of the Calcutta bhedralok. A senior British official, H.H. Risley, recorded that

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\text{Bengal united is power. Bengal divided will pull in different ways. That is what the Congress leaders feel; their apprehensions are perfectly correct and they form one of the great merits of the scheme ... one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.} \]

17 Minute by Curzon, June 1903, para 49, cited in John R. McFaulane, 'The Decision to partition Bengal in 1905', The Indian Economic and Social History Review (July 1965), p.223.

18 Ibid., pp.222-223.

Apart from dividing Bengal another way of minimising bhadralok influence was to encourage the Muslims by giving them a separate Province of their own. In fact Curzon himself urged Nawab Salimullah of Dacca that

by means of their numerical strength and superior culture, the Mussalmans would have the preponderating voice in the province that would be created and that would invest the Mussalmans of Eastern Bengal with a unity which they had not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalmans and kings.20

A period of good relations between the Raj and the Muslim leaders in Bengal began and the latter encouraged the establishment of the All-India Muslim League with its stipulation of loyalty to the Government.21 The anti-British stirrings of the 19th Century among the Muslims were now calmed.22

The Partition of 1905 was then the first significant step towards the recognition of the separate identity of the Bengali Muslims. It accorded a more definite shape to their growing 'community-consciousness' by investing it with


22 This period of improved relations between the British and the Muslim community also saw a more intense development of the process of what Professor D.A. Low has described as the 'neo-darbari' politics, which involved, on the part of the British 'a multiplicity of initiatives to associate non-official Indian "notables" with the workings of the higher level of the Raj so as to extend the linkages through which Indian society could be controlled'. D.A. Low (ed), Congress and the Raj (London: Arnold-Heinemann, 1977), p.5. This process largely induced the growth of a selective leadership among the Muslims which resulted in a spell of harmonious relationship between the Muslim elites and the British, that continued even beyond, as will be seen shortly, the rescindment of the Partition of Bengal.
a territorial content, which found ultimate fruition six and a half decades later in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

The Partition provoked convulsive outbursts from the *bhadralok* who often reached back into their mythological past and drew inspiration from *Kali* the goddess of destruction, which obviously did not find sympathy with the Bengali Muslims. The resultant polarisation politicised and galvanised Muslim opinion. An added impetus towards communalism was given by such journals as *Lal Ishtihar* ("Red Pamphlet") and *Krishak Bandhu* ("Friend of the Peasants"). This polarisation was so complete that even when Partition was revoked in 1911, the deep sense of shock of the Bengali Muslims found expression, not in any anti-British fury, but in antipathy directed more towards the Hindu community in Bengal.

This suited the Bengali Muslim leadership, conservative and feudal in background. Nawab Salimullah had clearly seen the advantage of remaining on the right side of the authorities. The strategy was to secure as much advantage as possible by portraying the Bengali Muslim as the aggrieved party without resorting to any lawlessness. As a sop came the

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23 *Lal Ishtihar* for instance urged the Muslims: "In Bengal consider you are the majority; you are the peasant. From agriculture comes all wealth. From where did the Hindu get his wealth? He had nothing, he has stolen it from you and become wealthy ..." Bengalee, 5 May 1907 cited in Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (Delhi: Peoples' Publishing House, 1973), p.209. Similarly *Krishak Bandhu* attacked the Congress as a Hindu body and warned that 'Swaraj' (self rule) implied Hindu domination. Sarkar, op.cit., p.214.
Secondly, the decision to shift the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi was a blow to *bhadralok* power, which was not unpalatable to Bengal's Muslim leaders. Thirdly, the Indian Councils Act of 1909 recognised Bengal's political maturity and signalled the commencement of a series of reforms that could gradually lead to devolution of power in Bengal as well as increased legislative politics. The Muslims being the overall majority stood to gain from this. For all these reasons it was the Hindu community, rather than the British, which began to be perceived as a source of threat, so much so the Bengali Muslim leadership reacted adversely to the Lucknow Pact of 1916 between the Congress and the Muslim League, which reflected an understanding between India's two major communities at an All-India level.

The Lucknow Pact, basing itself on the principle that minority communities ought to have weightage in representation, granted the Hindus major concessions in the Muslim majority province of Bengal where the Muslims with 52.6% of the population were to have only 40% of the seats. This was of course because Muslims were obtaining advantages in the provinces where they were minorities. Clearly this was against Bengali Muslim interest. Salimullah was now dead and the leadership passed to conservatives like Nawab Nawabaly Chowdhury who argued that the Muslim League could not and

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24 On 31 January 1912 Salimullah and some other East Bengali Muslim leaders like Nawab Ali Chowdhury and A.K. Fazlul Huq in an address to the Viceroy stressed the point that the annulment of Partition would retard progress in education of the Muslims. The Viceroy promised to recommend the establishment of a University in Dacca. On 2 February 1912 a communique to that effect was published, and the University was established by an Act on July 1, 1921. Abdul Hakim, 'University of Dacca', *The Journal of the Pakistan Historical and Social Review*, Vol.16 (January 1968), Part 1, p.50.

did not represent the interest of the Bengali Muslims.\textsuperscript{26} 
This position stiffened with the Hindu-Muslim communal riots in Bihar in 19\textsuperscript{11} and more significantly in Calcutta the following year.\textsuperscript{27} It was beginning to be perceived that the interests of the Bengali Muslims need not necessarily coincide with those of their co-religionists in Northern India, a matter of considerable significance for later political developments.

This partly explains the rather lukewarm response of the Bengali Muslims to the call for the 'Khilafat Movement' (as a mark of protest against the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire). Such All-India Muslim Causes still retained some support among the Urdu speaking Muslim Calcuttans like Mowlana Abul Kalam Azad, but were by and large of peripheral interest to those representing the more indigenous Bengali speaking Muslims of Bengal.

Finally, British policies with regard to the gradual devolution of power and the extension of legislative politics in Bengal were leading inexorably to the solution of the major problem that confronted the Bengali Muslims, the translation of their demographic majority into political power. The Reforms that came into operation in 1921 introduced a system of 'dyarchy' in the Provinces \textit{viz.}, a


division of powers between Executive Councillors responsible to the Governor administering 'reserved' subjects and Ministers answerable to the legislature controlling 'transferred' subjects. Besides the principle of transferring responsibility for certain functions while reserving control over others, the idea was to establish substantial provincial autonomy. This autonomy worked to insulate Bengal somewhat from the rest of India, with communal politics there developing dynamics of their own. Muslim politicians entered into an alliance with the Swarajists on the eve of the 1923 elections. But when the government was formed, two of the three Ministers turned out to be Muslims; so when the Swarajists assumed an opposition role and attacked the Cabinet, it was interpreted as a threat to a Muslim-majority Ministry from a Hindu majority Swaraj Party. Ultimately, the government was defeated and the Governor suspended the Constitution until after the 1927 elections. The prospects of Hindu-Muslim unity received a severe jolt and Muslim politicians closed ranks for the elections, in which only one out of 39 Muslims elected to the Bengal Council was a Swarajist. The short-lived Swarajist Muslim alliance


29 This section of the Congress led by C.R. Das aimed at Swaraj (self rule) through participation in electoral bodies.


proved how brittle such understandings could be when confronted with communalist sentiments.

It was now clear that as the scope of legislative politics broadened, Muslim domination of such politics was inevitable. This shift of power resulted once again in the expression of *bhadralok* discontent with their old weapon, terrorism. In April 1930 the Chittagong Armoury was raided.

The disturbances assumed communal proportions when a Muslim police inspector was killed by a Hindu boy in August 1931 which led to rioting in the bazars. The District Magistrate of Chittagong imposed a Curfew on 'Hindu *bhadralok* youths' who had organised themselves into a terrorist organisation named the 'Indian Republican Army (IRA)'. At the level of Constitutional Politics the *bhadralok* demanded a Second

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32 Initially, the Muslims seemed to feel that their interest lay in the continuation of 'consultative politics' rather than in the extension of legislative politics, and that any system of open elections could easily be dominated by the powerful *bhadralok*. It was only a gradual realization on the part of their politicians that 'they had many technical advantages in the new system, and that the sheer size of their community gave them great agitational and electoral strength, which awaited only the perfection of those techniques for its realisation'. Broomfield in D.A. Low (ed), *Soundings in South Asia*, p.220.


Chamber 'to form a breakwater against sudden storms, sudden tidal waves', of extended franchise. In other words the bhadralok were asking for an institutional check against the power of the lower house being increasingly dominated by the lower-caste Hindus and Muslims. Muslim leaders like A.K. Fazlul Huq vigorously opposed it and when put to vote the motion was lost, 46 to 44.

The Government of India Act 1935 enlarged the electorate manifold and further enfranchised the low-caste Hindus and Muslims. It was obvious that the Muslims would be the dominant force in legislative politics and that their energy would now be directed towards ameliorating the problems of the tenantry at the expense of the bhadralok. Under the Act which, on pursuance of the policy of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims (separate electorates further engendered separatist tendencies), gave in a House of 250, 117 seats to Muslims, 78 to Hindus and 30 to 'Scheduled Castes' (lower castes), the Muslims in Bengal received 'a built-in bias to power'.

An opportunity for improved communal relations was lost when after the 1937 elections Fazlul Huq, who had floated the Krishak Praja Party (Peasants, Tenants, Party) in 1929,

36 Bhadralok leader S.M. Bose called for such a House 'representing an aristocracy of intellect, men of education and experience in the service of the state, men representing the great social and industrial interests in the country, men of sufficient strength to avoid the evils which might possibly flow from the unbridged powers of an autocratic lower chamber'. ibid., p.813.

37 ibid., p.815.

having fought the Muslim League led by Khwaja Nazimmudin, turned to the Congress for coalition. The Congress turned down this opportunity for an understanding with 'the most secular segment of Muslim leadership' as well as 'progressive' Hindu elements. Huq therefore sought Muslim League support for a coalition, a move that had significant long term impact on Bengal's future politics. Firstly, rebuffed by the Congress, Huq's alliance with the Muslim League once again led to a closing of ranks by the Bengal Muslims; secondly, the Muslim League, because of its association with the various reforms that followed, gained a radical flavour that it really never possessed, which aided its image as a friend of the impoverished Muslim tenantry; thirdly, because the Congress was unresponsive to Huq, the latter had to turn to more extremist Hindu groups for alliance when he fell out with the League, thus exposing himself to criticism from the Muslim majority.

The Muslim victory in Bengal led the Urdu Poet-Philosopher Sir Muhammed Iqbal to ask M.A. Jinnah why the Muslims of North-West India and Bengal should not be entitled to self

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39 Though the League had 43 seats, and Congress 52, Fazlul Huq with 36 KPP seats was best placed to lead coalition either in alliance with one of the above or with support from the 108 Independents, and some others (Statistics of result from Humaira Momen, Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of KPP and the elections of 1937 (Dacca, 1972), p.77.

government just as other nations. Huq, who had himself joined the League in October 1937, was used by Jinnah in March 1940 to move the famous Lahore Resolution which demanded that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.  

Two points emerge from this: firstly, that the Partition should be on communal lines and secondly, the new units should be 'autonomous' and 'sovereign' rather than part of a single political entity. It can well be argued, therefore, that the solution in the Subcontinent in 1971 was more in conformity with the original Lahore Resolution than the Partition of 1947. What eventually happened in 1971 (i.e. the emergence of Bangladesh) could therefore be viewed as the second and final phase of the realisation of the original Lahore Resolution.

When Jinnah wished for Huq's resignation from the Defence Council, the two leaders fell out. Huq was now receiving threat perceptions from his co-religionists in Northern India. Prominent Muslim Leaguers like Suhrawardy

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41 Iqbal asked: 'Why should not the Muslims of North-West India and Bengal be considered as nations entitled to self-government just as other nations?' (italics mine) Kamruddin Ahmad, A Social History of Bengal (Dacca, 1970), edn.3, p.31. Iqbal's use of the plural 'nations' indicates that in his mind Bengal was a potential sovereign Muslim entity, rather than an integral part of a single Subcontinental Muslim State.


and Nazimuddin quit the Ministry. Huq began to talk of Hindu-Muslim Unity. Deserted by the Leaguers, rebuffed by the Congress, Huq turned to his extremist arch-rival Shyama Prasad Mukherjee for an alliance. Once again in order to counter threat perceptions from Northern co-religionists and their allies in Bengal, the indigenous Muslim Bengalis forged an alliance with a section of the Hindu *bhadralok*, a tactic that was to be repeated years later in 1971.

Mukherjee left the Ministry in protest against the Government's failure to heed its advice on food procurement prior to the 1943 famine; Huq now unsupported by all major elements was edged out of office by the Governor Sir John Herbert in May 1943. The Muslim League with Nazimuddin as Premier was now in full command, and Bengal came into line with All-India Muslim League Politics. In the 1946 elections the Muslim League, basing its campaign on the All-India Muslim demand for Pakistan, won all the six Muslim seats from Bengal to the Central Assembly, and in the Province 113 out of 121 territorial Muslim seats. Shila Sen has argued:

> The election result also proved that in Bengal the Pakistan Movement was mass based and democratic. They reflected the aspirations of Bengali Muslims for a Muslim majority state in Northern India.\(^45\)

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44 In June 1942 he said in Calcutta: 'Hindus and Muslims must realize ... that they have got to live together, sink or swim together, and if needs be lay down their lives together for the good of their common motherkind'. (*Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta, 21 June 1942 cited in Shyamoli Ghosh: 'Fazlul Huq and Muslim Politics in Prepartition Bengal', *International Studies*, Vol.13 (New Delhi, 1974), p.457.

However, Suhrawardy, who succeeded Sir Khwaja Nazimuddin as Premier in April 1946, had a vision of Bengal as an independent sovereign unit. He was backed in this project by some Bengali Muslim politicians like Abul Hashim and Fazlur Rahman. Even a document was drawn up, a blueprint for a 'Socialist Republic of Bengal' (which implied they had more than a Dominion status in mind for the proposed unit). But opposition came from the *bhadralok* who, fearing a perennial Muslim domination of a United Bengal, preferred partition along the lines of the Radcliffe award, and on 9 June 1947 the Council of the All-India Muslim League in New Delhi accepted a partition of Bengal as a compromise solution. East Bengal was to be separated from West Bengal and to constitute a part of Pakistan.

B. Developments within the two Communities:
The communal separatism in Bengal engendered over the decades by colonial policies periodically received simultaneous

46 Interview with M. Masood, Director Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Karachi, 10 May 1978. Masood was a Private Secretary to Suhrawardy during that period. M. Ayoob however has argued that Suhrawardy's line for United Bengal was a direct outcome of his having been passed over for the leadership of the East Bengal Muslim League. Mohammed Ayoob, *India, Pakistan and Bangladesh: Search for a New Relationship* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1975), p.4.

47 Shyama Prasad Mukherjee wrote to the Central Congress leader Sardar Patel: 'We demand the creation of two provinces out of the boundaries of Bengal, Pakistan or no Pakistan'. Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, op.cit., p.227.

48 It seems for a while the fate of the *bhadralok* stronghold, Calcutta, was in doubt. A government Circular in February 1946 read: 'The question whether Calcutta should be included in Eastern Bengal is one which raises some very serious issues. If Calcutta is not so included Eastern Pakistan will obviously be a very poor thing and Pakistan as a whole will be heavily unbalanced as between agriculture on the one hand, and industry, commerce (cont'd)
impetus from certain developments within the two communities themselves during the Colonial Period. First was the series of revivalist movements in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century experienced by both. The whole of India was undergoing a spell of Hindu revivalism that found expression in the establishment of such institutions as the Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875. The Samajists carried out Shuddhi (Purification) and Shanghatan (union) programmes that naturally clashed with the proselytising work of the Muslim revivalists. The conflict in Bengal would have been sharper had it not been for the fact that there 'the need of a re-examination, re-explanation and re-interpretation of the traditional religion of the people by their contact with modern European thought and culture and the conflict between Hinduism and the evangelical Christian missions had been very largely met by the Brahma Samaj (a reformist movement started by Raja Rammohan Roy 1772-1833).

The Muslims had revivalist movements of their own. The Faraizi movement had a religious component as evidenced by the Dini (religious) branch in their organisation, as opposed to the Siyasi (Political) branch. Eventually


this orthodoxy gave way to a more liberal trend initiated in Northern India by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. In Bengal contemporary flag bearers advocating similar lines were Nawab Abdul Latif and Sir Syed Amir Ali. While the orthodox revivalists sought to restore Islam's 'lost glories', the modernists emphasised the material aspect of the competition with the Hindus. Both, however, had the same effect of acting as a catalyst to instil in the Muslim mind a feeling of distinctiveness from the Hindus.

A second development would be the rise of bhadralok, the category from whom the Muslims were by and large excluded. The attitude of this group towards the Muslims has been summed up by the writer Nirad C. Chaudhury who, recalling his boyhood days wrote:

In the first place, we felt a retrospective hostility toward the Muslim for his one time domination of us, the Hindus; secondly, on the plane of thought we were utterly indifferent to the Muslims as an element in contemporary society; thirdly, we had friendliness for the Muslims of our own economic and social status with whom we came into close personal contact; our fourth feeling was mixed, concern and contempt for the Muslim peasant, whom we saw in the same light as we saw our low-caste Hindu tenants, as in other words our livestock.

52 See his passionate appeal to the Indian Muslims in 'In Support of Western education, art and science', Appendix F in Karunakaran, op.cit.


A third development would be the migration of Muslims from other Indian provinces into Bengal in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. They represented an extension of Northern Indian Muslim ethos into Bengal, throwing into relief certain intercommunal differences that had eroded in Bengal over centuries but were very much alive in the rest of India. One evidence is the sudden emergence of 'cow-sacrifice' as a factor of dispute among the factory-hands in Calcutta.\footnote{Dipesh Chakrabarty, op.cit., p.9.}

A fourth factor was the Bengal Renaissance and certain directions that it assumed.\footnote{Susobhan Sarkar has compared Bengal's role in the awakening of India to that of Italy in the European Renaissance. \textit{Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays} (New Delhi: Peoples' Publishing House, 1970), p.3. It would be more correct to compare it to the English renaissance, which was literary in flavour (just like Bengal's) rather than the Italian counterpart, which concentrated on the fine arts and whose literary expression was only classical.} It was largely expressed through literature, the luminaries being Henry Derozio, Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dinabandhu Mitra, Bankim Chatterjee, Debendranath and Rabindranath Tagore. \textit{Shahitya Shadhak Charitmala} a collection of 102 literary figures of the 19th and 20th centuries in Bengal includes only one Muslim, Meer Mosharaff Hussain.\footnote{Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p.166.} In the absence of Muslim participation, many of these literary works were open to Muslim criticism. An example was Bankim Chandra's \textit{Anand Math}, a pseudo-historical novel published in 1882 depicting the struggle of 'Hindu patriots'...
against 'Muslim intruders'. In the words of a later writer, such authors 'instilled in the minds of the Muslims suspicion and fear which subsequent events did not eradicate'. The symbols and heroes of the renaissance literature were alien to the Muslim tradition. Muslims of the day were extremely sensitive to the treatment they received in contemporary literature, and endeavoured to retaliate in their own, though minimal, literary activities.

The various economic, social and political factors gave rise to the consciousness of the Bengali Muslim as being distinct from the other major community in Bengal, the Hindus. The identity of interest that appeared to exist with their co-religionists outside Bengal in India led to an alliance, the experiment of Pakistan, that flowed from the Partition of the Subcontinent in 1947 which in reality was a 'trifurcation of British India masquerading as a bifurcation'.

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58 There was for instance adoration of heroes identified with the glories of Hindu history such as the Mahratta Chief Shivaji who opposed the orthodox Muslim Emperor Aurangzeb. B.C. Pal wrote of Shivaji: '[He was] the symbol of a grand idea, the memory of a noble sentiment, the mouth piece of a great movement. The idea was the idea of a Hindu Rashtra [state] which would unite under one political bond the whole Hindu people united already by communities of tradition and scriptures'. Quoted in Nimai Sadhan Bose, The Indian Awakening and Bengal (Calcutta, 1969), p.245.


60 Peter Lyon, 'Bangladesh Fashioning a Foreign Policy', South Asian Review (April 1972), p.231.
III. The Pakistan Experiment

After partition, for the East Bengali Muslims the central problem remained constant. This was the translation of their demographic majority into political power, now within the framework of Pakistan. From the very outset, this proved to be a difficult task. Firstly, there was the overriding personality of Pakistan's Karachi based Governor-General, Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Secondly, since the Central Constituent Assembly comprised entirely of Muslim Leaguers, all local aspirations were subordinated to the 'central theme of Pakistan'; also many of East Bengal's representatives were not 'sons of the soil' but Muslim migrants from Northern India. Thirdly, in 'a society heavy reliant on its permanent bureaucracy', the East Bengalis were disadvantaged by their minimal representation in the upper reaches of the Civil Service. Finally, the

61 A contemporary observer, Alan Campbell-Johnson, described Jinnah thus: 'If Jinnah's personality is cold and remote, it also has a magnetic quality - the sense of leadership is almost overpowering. He makes only the most superficial attempts to disguise himself as a constitutional Governor-General ...Here indeed is Pakistan's King-Emperor, Archbishop of Canterbury, Speaker and Prime Minister concentrated into one formidable Quaid-e-Azam [Father of the Nation]', Mission with Mountbatten (London: Robert Hale Ltd., Reprinted 1953), p.156.


64 In 1959, out of 690 senior civil servants, only 51 were East Pakistanis. See Ramkrishna Mukherjee, 'The Social Background of Bangladesh' in Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (eds), Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p.410.
focal point of political power, the capital (first Karachi and then later in the 1950s Rawalpindi-Islamabad) was located in West Pakistan, a thousand miles away from Eastern Bengal. It was not, surprising, therefore, that the honeymoon period was brief.

The attempt to impose Urdu as the state language acted as a catalyst for East Bengali Protest, in very much the same way as the Partition of 1905 had done in Swadeshi Bengal. As the Movement was brewing, a new Party, the Awami League was born under the aegis of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. The Language Movement assumed significant proportions after police firing on students' demonstrations in Dacca on 21 February 1952. Anti-Muslim League feelings were running high. This encouraged Fazlul Huq to revive his old Krishak Proja Party under the new name 'Krishak Sramik Party' (Peasants, Workers Party), which combined with the Awami League as the United Front and dislodged the East Bengal Muslim League from the Provincial Government in the 1954 Provincial Elections. The rejection of the Muslim League in East Bengal initiated a period of conflictual relations between the Provincial and the Central Governments.

The Provincial Government now representing the more indigenous urges of the East Bengalis became suspect in the

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65 M. Rashiduzzaman, 'The Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan', Asian Survey, Vol.10, No.7 (August 1970), p.576. The Awami League was, therefore, the first major Opposition Party. The Communist Party was there but most of their following of 20,000 were members of the Communist Party of India and Hindus, at least two-third of whom migrated to India after the 1950 Communal riots. Marcus Franda, 'Communism and Regional Politics in East Pakistan', Asian Survey, Vol.10, No.7 (July 1970), pp.588-606.
eyes of the Centre. Huq's coalition-cabinet was shortlived, soon to be dismissed by the Centre ostensibly for Huq's 'treasonable' views. Not long afterwards, the United Front disintegrated and eventually the Awami League, which had left the Front in 1955, emerged as the Party in power in East Bengal (East Pakistan since 1955). At the Centre, after a period of instability, the Awami Leaguer Suhrawardy held the Prime Ministership for a period of thirteen months in 1956-57.

The Awami League, with its avowed policy of obtaining 'autonomy' for the regional units was now caught on the horns of a dilemma, being in power in the Centre as well, laying itself open to NAP criticism that the Party had failed to give autonomy to the Provinces. Provincial autonomy became the major demand of both these parties which henceforth vied with each other with regard to its extent.

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66 After a closed door meeting with the Prime Minister in Karachi Huq issued a statement to the Press stating that East Bengalis desired to be independent. *New York Times*, 23 May 1954.


68 Shyamoli Ghosh, 'The Awami League in East Pakistan's Political Development' (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, unpublished M.Phil thesis), p.16.

69 *Pakistan Observer*, 25 July 1957.
The imposition of Martial Law in October 1958 and the assumption of power by General Ayub Khan had significant impact in eroding the prospects of any such autonomy. If legislative politics were allowed to run their course it was likely that the Bengalis would have been able to achieve power in the polity as Bengali Muslims had in pre-partition Bengal. It was in the representative institutions where the Bengalis with their majority could air their views. Now in its place the Civil-Military bureaucracy clearly emerged as the dominant Ruling Elite. The East Pakistanis with their limited representation in this group were clearly disadvantaged. 70

To Samuel Huntington, Ayub had come close to filling the role of 'a Solon, or Lycurgus or Great Legislator on the Platonic and Rousseauan model'.71 Though it is indeed true that major reforms were initiated by the regime during the Martial Law period, there was unequal progress in different regions creating an 'imbalance which inevitably intensified Bengali alienation'.72 In order to take politics directly to the people, Ayub introduced the system of Basic Democracy, 'the cornerstone' of his policy 'which also proved to be its tombstone'.73 Involving rural masses by superseding

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70 Till 1956 there was not a single East Pakistani among the 24 Major and Lieutenant Generals in the Pakistan Army. *Dawn* (Karachi), 9 January 1956.


the cities did not appeal to the rising middle classes, the new bhadralok, of Dacca and Chittagong. By limiting franchise to the Basic Democrats, which had developed into a vested interest, Ayub ensured his return in the 1962 elections. The results in East Pakistan reflect a growing disaffection among even the Basic Democrats there; for although they had much to lose by dislodging Ayub, his margin of victory in that Province was only 2,578 votes.

Ayub, who throughout his military career had been in favour of reducing 'provincialism' to 'the minimum', inevitably headed for a collision course with the East Pakistani leadership. Though the 1965 War appeared to paper over the differences, in effect, it exacerbated it. The rising star of East Pakistan leadership, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (who succeeded Suhrawardy as the Awami League leader after his death in 1963) was bitterly critical of the fact that there had to be dependence on a foreign power, China, for the defence of the Eastern Wing and argued for self sufficiency of his province in this regard. Secondly, the closure of trade with India (especially West Bengal) was perceived to have been detrimental to East Pakistan's economy; it was alleged that it rendered East Pakistan a closed market for West Pakistani products. Thirdly, the

76 Interview with Dr Rafiqual Huda Chowdhury of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Canberra, 8 October 1979.
West Pakistani sharp reaction to the Tashkent Declaration of January 1966 that formally ended Indo-Pakistani hostilities through Soviet mediation was not shared by the Bengalis who felt that they had more to lose by the continuation of belligerency. The feeling that the East Pakistanis had a distinct set of interests intensified and culminated in Mujib's 'Six Point Programme' announced in Lahore in February 1966.

The Central Government reacted by levelling charges of conspiracy against Mujib in what is known as the 'Agartala Conspiracy Case'. This led to a violent protest movement that obtained Mujib's release and also catapulted him to the position of East Pakistan's foremost political leader. A combined movement against Ayub in both the Wings of Pakistan resulted in his resignation and the assumption of his mantle by the Army Commander-in-Chief General Yahya Khan. Yahya promised elections on a 'one-man one vote' and adult franchise

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78 Briefly, the salient features of the Six Points were demands for (i) a Federal Constitution and Parliamentary form of government with Supremacy of Legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise; (ii) only two subjects, Defence and Foreign Affairs to be dealt with by the Centre and residuary subjects by the Provinces; (iii) either two separate but freely convertible currencies for two wings or one currency to be maintained with effective constitutional provisions to check flight of capital from East to West Pakistan in which case Separate Banking Reserve to be made and separate fiscal and monetary policy to be adopted for East Pakistan; (iv) powers of taxation and revenue collection to vest in the federating units; (v) two separate accounts of foreign exchange earnings of the two wings, with the earnings of each Wing under its control with the requirements of the Centre being met either equally or in a ratio to be fixed; and (vi) a militia or a para-military force for East Pakistan. See Bangladesh Contemporary Events and Documents (Dacca: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, u.d.), pp.16-28.
basis to an Assembly that was to frame a new constitution for Pakistan. However he foreclosed the proposed Assembly's options by issuing a *Legal Framework Order* (LFO) that was to guide Constitution-making. This purported to ensure (a) Islamic ideology, (b) territorial integrity, (c) independence of judiciary, (d) the federation principle, and (e) full opportunity for participation in government of all regions. Also the new Constitution would have to be authenticated by the President. Clearly, now that the passage of power to the demographically superior Bengalis was almost certain, steps were being taken to preserve West Pakistani interests. Mujib's Awami League considered the LFO 'restrictive' but nevertheless decided to participate in the forthcoming elections.

In the 1970 elections the Awami League won 167 out of 169 East Pakistani seats in the National Assembly. In West Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) secured 85 seats, the largest number in that Wing. Neither Party won any seats in the other wing. Barnds points out that the elections demonstrated that Pakistan was 'two separate polities'; on the one hand there was the Awami League in East Pakistan with its advocacy of normalisation of relations with India, provincial autonomy and moderate socialism, and on the other hand there was the PPP in the West

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80 *Bangladesh: Contemporary Events and Documents*, p.56.
with its manifesto of extreme socialization, a harsh anti-
Indian policy, and a stronger Central Government. 81

Bhutto and Mujib fell out on the Six Points issue,
and Yahya postponed *sine die* the scheduled National Assembly
session on March 1 which triggered off a massive popular
Movement in East Pakistan where Mujib was in virtual control
of all sectors of public life. A well known academic at
the Dacca University wrote on Yahya's action:

Yahya's decision on March 1 to save Bhutto's
crumbling position in the West by postponing
the Assembly session *sine die* brought to the
surface the fear that had been dormant in
Bengal since the successful completion of
the elections that the generals never really
wanted to transfer power. 82

Yahya initiated tripartite negotiations in Dacca between
himself, Mujib and Bhutto from 15 March 1971 which ended
with the military crackdown in Dacca on 25 March. 83 With
that began the War for a sovereign East Bengal, which was
achieved with Indian assistance, in December that year.

While political development as analyzed above fanned
the nationalist sentiments of the Bengalis, a deep sense
of economic deprivation provided added fuel.

There were, firstly, complaints about the comparative
minimal share of central government expenditure for East
Pakistan. In spite of higher population, the East's share

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of central development expenditure over the First Five Year Plan Period (1951-1955) was only 20%; there was an upward trend in the Plans to follow but even during the Third Plan Period (1965-1970) it did not exceed 36% with private investment being less than 25%.\footnote{See M.A. Sattar, 'United States Aid and Pakistan's Economic Development' (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Tufts University 1969), passim. $ will indicate US$ throughout this thesis unless otherwise indicated.}

Secondly, East Pakistan attracted only a small percentage of the total quantum of foreign aid. For instance the bulk of $3 billion U.S. aid till 1969 went to the Western Wing.\footnote{Report of the Advisory Panels for the Fourth Five Year Plan, op.cit., p.75. Faaland and Parkinson, however, contend that this figure almost nearly represents the upper limit but nevertheless agree that the transfer was considerable. They suggest a figure between Rs.15,000m. and Rs.30,000m. which in terms of U.S. dollars range from US$1.5b. to $3b. (Just Faaland and J.R. Parkinson, \textit{Bangladesh: A Test Case for Development} (Dacca: The University Press Ltd., 1976), pp.7-8.}

Thirdly, East Pakistani economists pointed to a massive transfer of resources from Eastern to the Western Wing since partition in 1947. One group suggested a figure of Rupees 31,120 million.\footnote{Reports of the Advisory Panels for the Fourth Five Year Plan 1970-1975 (Islamabad, Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, Vol.1, July 1970), p.6.} A prominent Bengali economist has argued that the rural population of East Pakistan were 'subjected to a high rate of primitive capital accumulation which were transferred to finance the growth of West Pakistani capitalism and industrialization'.\footnote{Azizur Rahman Khan, \textit{The Economy of Bangladesh} London: MacMillan, 1972), p.29.}
Fourthly, there was discontent regarding what was perceived to be 'internal colonialism'\(^8^8\) perpetrated in East Pakistan by the Western wing. This was seen to assume three principal forms: (a) utilising East Pakistan's cash crops as the major foreign exchange earner and awarding the province only 25-30% of the total imports; (b) 'penetration' of 'West Pakistan based industry' to 'exploit East Pakistan's raw material and cheap labour' and (c) use of East Pakistan 'as a market for the mother country's manufactures'.\(^8^9\) This feeling was current among Bengali higher officials serving the Pakistan Government.\(^9^0\)

Partha Chatterjee has argued that 'when there is perceptible uneven development within the political boundaries of a nation state' and 'the lines of division between the developed and backward regions are perceived along the lines

\(^8^8\) This term connotes a process of domination and exploitation of one ethnic group by another within the same country. See Zillur Rahman Khan, 'Leadership, Parties and Politics in Bangladesh', *Western Political Quarterly*, Vol.XXIX (1976), p.102.


\(^9^0\) A senior Civil Servant formerly of Pakistan and currently Bangladesh's Secretary for External Resources, M.A. Muhith, has observed: 'Through a system of tight control over trade a colonial relationship was established between the two regions. The policy of industrialization followed in West Pakistan demanded heavy import of capital goods, spares and industrial raw materials. Foreign aid as well as export earnings of the country were utilized to meet these demands. The products of these industries were marketed in Bangladesh under heavy protective cover. The export earnings of Bangladesh and its large market were harnessed for the development of West Pakistan's industries. Even in the import of consumers' goods West Pakistan was given preferential treatment. By depressing consumption in Bangladesh and raising unduly excessive revenues from these the claims of Bangladesh were neutralised'. A.M.A. Muhith, *Bangladesh: Emergence of a Nation* (Dacca: Bangladesh Books International Ltd., 1978), p.90.
of division of the ethno-cultural communities of nationality', the result is 'the growth of separatist national movements'.

Michael Hechter has concluded that ethnic solidarity will be bred in groups relegated to inferior cultural and economic positions. That has been the case with the growth of Muslim Bengali Nationalism, through the colonial period and the Pakistan experiment, springing from a 'sense of alienation ... aggravated and strengthened by awareness of economic differences but with its root in political and cultural discontinuities'. As the 1960s drew to a close the new Bengali middle class were 'ready and willing to accept the newly fashioned ... materially more relevant asocial philosophy of modern secular, territorial nationalism bred on language and culture'.

IV. Conclusion

Historically, then, what is now the Bangladesh nation has had to deal with two other major communities in South Asia, the West Bengali Hindus under bhadralok leadership and

their fellow Muslims in the rest of South Asia, the latter eventually assuming the form of Pakistan. After experience had indicated a distinct set of interests for them, their basic strategy in countering threat perception from one was to seek an alliance with the other. It was in other words the principle of balance in a three-body system. This traditional behaviour has considerable role in conditioning their external attitudes after they became a sovereign international actor in their own right.

There were certain differences, however. In 1971 this balance was no longer one of a three-body system but that of a many body system. From the backyard of the Subcontinent, Bangladesh was cast out into the world beyond. But this behavioural inheritance, i.e. attempting to counteract potential source of threat by building external linkages, was too deeply rooted in their past ethos to be easily shaken.

Secondly, the two essential attributes that distinguish the Bangladeshis from the major regional communities are a combination of their Muslimness and Bengaliness. Both have relevant linkages in the region. These are invoked when one or the other attribute is threatened. That is, when their 'Muslimness' is threatened, linkages with the Muslims of the rest of the Subcontinent are invoked and the Muslim character of the Bengali Muslim is emphasized. When their Bengaliness is threatened, there is a tendency to relate to the Hindu Bengalis and this linguistic attribute is underlined. This behavioural tradition also formed a part of the political heritage of the Bengali Muslims, and consequently of Bangladesh.
CHAPTER 3

INTRA-REGIONAL RELATIONS:

INDIA AND PAKISTAN

I. Introduction

As discussed earlier, these three countries, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, form the regional 'core' of the subcontinent. Their continuous interactions have bred cooperation and conflict, and each is a significant factor in the external expression of the other. For Bangladesh this 'core' is the inner circle that largely determines her interactions with the 'outer areas' of her globe. This chapter will concern itself with Bangladesh's relations with the two other actors of this regional 'corral', India and Pakistan.  

II. India

A. India's role during the Bangladesh war:

India's role during the 1971 war was of prime importance to Bangladesh for three broad reasons: first of all, it largely helped the very emergence of the new state; secondly, it determined the initial international alignments of the new state actor and thirdly, the interactions between the

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1 See Chapter I.
Government of India and the Bangladesh Provisional Government provided the Bangladeshis their first exercise in international relations.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's policy towards the political agitation in East Pakistan clamouring for autonomy (swadhikar) was of utmost circumspection even before Yahya's military crackdown of March 25, 1971. There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, an intervention on behalf of a secessionist movement would be unpopular with other members of the International States System and would certainly be construed as a gross interference in the affairs of another country. Secondly, there was always the possibility that the leaderships of East and West Pakistan might indeed arrive at a rapprochement during the Yahya-Mujib-Bhutto tripartite talks that would make any Indian interference look somewhat foolish. At one stage it seemed that Mujib would emerge as the Prime Minister of all-Pakistan, which would be very welcome to India and Mrs Gandhi saw no reason to embarrass Mujib at this stage by openly appearing to support him, which would only give credibility to the growing feeling in West Pakistani quarters that Mujib was an 'Indian Agent'. Thirdly, any encouragement to the incipient secessionist movement (or even 'autonomy') in East Pakistan could create difficulties for the Central Government in New Delhi vis-à-vis such Indian states as West Bengal, Mizoram and Haryana where some degree of separatist tendencies were latent.
This caution was evident when India, though aware of the large movements of Pakistani troops into East Pakistan, made no attempt to forestall it either by initiating some sort of tension along the West Pakistani borders which would render the release of troops from West Pakistan difficult, or by giving Pakistani troop movements wide publicity to draw international opprobium.

Of necessity, therefore, the Indian strategies that evolved in 1971 were extremely complex. Broadly, two phases can be marked off: one was at the outset when a political settlement was considered desirable, and military action on India's part to force a settlement, an alternative option. The second phase was roughly from August onwards, when the alternative option gained increasing salience, transforming itself into the principal strategy.

The political settlement, considered during the first phase could consist of any of the wide variety of statuses for the eastern wing of Pakistan between 'autonomy' and 'independence' that was acceptable to the elected Awami League leadership. Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh told the Lower House (Lok Sabha) of the Indian Parliament on 28 March:

We naturally wish and hope that even at this late stage it would be possible to resume democratic processes leading to the fulfilment of the vast majority of the people there.  

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While hoping for a settlement at this stage, the prospect of military intervention as an alternative was not ruled out. Mrs Gandhi issued formal directives in April to the Army Chief, General S.H.F.J. Maneckshaw, to prepare for the eventuality of war. Maneckshaw was told if the Government's efforts to find a peaceful solution did not succeed, the armed forces would be ordered to achieve 'specific objectives of opening the door to the return of the refugees', and because of the international public pressure that India was likely to invite upon herself if she intervened, the Army could be given only 'three to four weeks' to achieve those ends.\(^4\)

With the passage of time the option of military intervention came to the fore and the desire to seek some sort of political settlement receded to the background. This took place around August when it was clear that Yahya's version of a political settlement involved Bengali 'collaborators' and obscurantists, something that was far from satisfactory to India, for it would not result in the return of the Hindu refugees. It would be a mistake to assume that Mrs Gandhi herself was transformed over time from a 'dove' to a 'hawk'. At no stage was she either one or the other. Various options were being simultaneously considered by her, their pros and cons being continuously weighed. At the outset she moved a resolution that the Parliament unanimously passed. It said that

\[\text{the House records its profound conviction that the historic upsurge of the 76 million people of East Bengal will triumph. The}\]

House wishes to assure them that their struggle and sacrifices will receive the wholehearted sympathy and support of the people of India.\(^5\)

It was still *East Bengal* rather than *Bangladesh* and she subtly avoided declaring support from the Government of India.

Pressure for formal recognition of Bangladesh came from the provisional Government in-exile set up by the Awami League leaders.\(^6\) Such calls were also forthcoming from West Bengali leaders as Pranab Mukherjee M.P., Secretary of the Bangla Congress and Tridib Chaudhuri M.P., General Secretary of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India.\(^7\) A strike was observed in West Bengal on March 31 to express popular solidarity with the Bangladesh Movement.\(^8\) Mrs Gandhi appeared to take the position that Indian recognition might hurt the Bangladeshi cause by seeming to substantiate the Pakistani allegations that the struggle was engineered by India and was being kept alive with Indian assistance.\(^9\)

The eventual option for Indian military intervention was influenced by certain factors. Firstly, there was tremendous economic pressure on New Delhi. The refugee

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\(^5\) *The Times* (London), 1 April 1974.

\(^6\) In a letter dated 24 April 1971, the Acting President of the Provisional Government Syed Nazrul Islam requested the Indian President V.V. Giri that immediate recognition be given and envoys be exchanged. Indira Gandhi, *India and Bangladesh: Selected Speeches and Statements, March to December 1971* (New Delhi: Orient Longman's 1972), p.180.

\(^7\) *Times of India*, 28 March 1971.

\(^8\) *Guardian* (Rangoon), 2 April 1971.

exodus into India that followed Yahya's crackdown threatened to stunt her economic development. The number of refugees were expected to swell to nine million by December and expenditure on this count in Fiscal Year 1971-72 was stipulated at US$700m. Foreign donors pledged only US$200 m. and even if this was entirely met, the Indian burden would remain at US$500m. The total Aid to India club commitment for that year was likely to be $1b., of which $600m. was expected to be used for amortization and debt repayment. The balance, $400m. was obviously not enough to cover the refugee bill, and a large call on internal resources was anticipated. 10

Secondly, as the Civil War raged unabated, it was feared that the hold of the moderate pro-Indian Awami League would slacken and Maoists and left-wingers would gain ground, forging an alignment between extremist Bangladeshis and pro-Peking West Bengal elements. 11 Such developments were likely to have adverse effects from New Delhi's point of view and needed to be nipped in the bud. This called for intervention in favour of the Awami League before its grip on the Movement weakened.

Thirdly, by the autumn of 1971 it was becoming increasingly clear that the U.S. and China, particularly the former, was urging Yahya to seek a solution to the East Bengal problem.

11 The Times (London), 26 April 1971. Also, 5 May 1971.
Nixon had managed to establish links in India with certain exiled Awami League leaders.\textsuperscript{12} Yahya was already holding out the olive branch to acceptable sections of the Awami League. It was not unlikely that some sort of Bangladesh could emerge, under Sino-American auspices, which would serve their interests but would be contrary to India's. Such a political solution would be unacceptable to the Hindu refugees who would remain a burden on India. It was therefore necessary to arrest this development by intervening.\textsuperscript{13}

Fourthly, the influx of refugees portended a threat to certain delicate balances in the Indian polity. Most of the refugees were Hindus, so as they poured into the Indian state of West Bengal, they upset the demographic balance of some of the Muslim-majority West Bengali border districts, increasing the likelihood of communal tensions there. Also since the refugees were Bengali-speaking, those who went to the states of Meghalaya and Assam threatened to heighten the dormant Bengal-Assamese conflict in those areas. In fact, Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, observed a 12-hour General Strike on 9th June, in response to a call given by the Tribal Youth Welfare Association to protest against Bangladeshi refugee presence in that region.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{13}This point is elaborated in G.S. Bhargava's \textit{Indian Security in the 1960s} (Adelphi Papers No.125). He argues that if East Bengali commandos remained in India they could pose a security threat to her. To him, the emergence of Bangladesh was not itself a security gain for India except in the marginal sense that sanctuaries for Mizos and other rebel tribes in the North-East would no longer be available (p.11).

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Times of India}, 10 June 1971.
It was clear, therefore, that the refugees had to go back; and they could only go back to an independent Bangladesh achieved under Indian aegis.

Fifthly, there was growing pressure to act from the general Indian community which a popular-based Government could hardly afford to ignore. Almost without exception all other political parties wanted Mrs Gandhi to extend moral and material support to the Liberation Front and accord Bangladesh recognition.\(^\text{15}\) The Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of India regretted New Delhi's failure to 'discharge the responsibility in due measure to support the freedom struggle in Bangladesh'.\(^\text{16}\) Demand for recognition came from such varied quarters as Indrajit Gupta, the pro-Soviet Communist leader,\(^\text{17}\) A.B. Vajpayee of the Hindu Nationalist Jana Sangh Party,\(^\text{18}\) P.C. Chunder, President of the West Bengal Parliamentary Congress Committee,\(^\text{19}\) and Dinesh Singh, former External Affairs Minister.\(^\text{20}\) In fact, within Mrs Gandhi's own cabinet a 'hawkish' strain emerged. A study of public statements shows that while Foreign Minister

\(^\text{15}\) One opposing voice was that of M.R. Masani, the Swatantra Party leader who commended Mrs Gandhi's 'policy of caution' and said that India should not be the first country to recognise Bangladesh, for 'besides the authority of the West Pakistan Government, what other authority is there in Bangladesh to recognise?' *Times of India*, 19 May 1971.


\(^\text{17}\) Peter Hazelhurst, 'Mrs Gandhi refuses Bangladesh Recognition', *The Times* (London), 8 May 1971.

\(^\text{18}\) *Ibid*.

\(^\text{19}\) *Times of India*, 16 May 1971.

Swaran Singh toed the cautious line, Defence Minister.

Jagjivan Ram pressed for early action.\textsuperscript{21}

Sixthly, there was the tremendous psychological satisfaction in being able to hit that implacable enemy, Pakistan, where it hurt most, especially when from the debris of this enemy's defeat, a friendly neighbour would emerge. In New Delhi's calculation if the Movement came to fruition it would negate the religion-based ideology of Pakistan and bolster the secular Indian ethos.\textsuperscript{22}

Seventhly, a research report from the prestigious Indian Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, prepared by its Director, K. Subrahmanyan, urged that India would be well-advised to go to war. The Report, entitled, 'Bangladesh and India's National Security - the Options for India', suggested that India carve out a segment of East Bengal,

\textsuperscript{21}The Swaran Singh line was clearly expressed in his forthcoming Rajya Sabha (Upper House) statement: 'If at any stage we feel that recognition is necessary, we will not hesitate to do so ... There are certain norms which have to be carefully weighed such as the extent of territory controlled by the quantum of support, the extent of writ, and the repercussions of recognising a country which was till now a part of Pakistan'; Times of India, 26 May 1971. As late as October, Singh argued at the All-India Congress Committee that the political solution of the Bangladesh issue which India had been advocating could take the form of a settlement within the framework of Pakistan, or an independent Bangladesh or a greater autonomy for the region. Times of India, 9 October 1971. This was long after exiled Awami League leaders had publicly totally rejected as unacceptable anything less than independence. Jagjivan Ram, on the other hand, held that it was true India was in favour of a political solution, but what this solution should be had already been spelt out by the elected representatives of Bangladesh, who had opted unequivocally for independence and sovereignty, Times of India, 10 October 1971. Mrs Gandhi, who was earlier sympathetic to the Swaran Singh line and was gradually drawn towards Ram's over time, found it necessary to retract Singh's AICC statement saying that what Singh meant was if the Awami League leaders agreed to remain within the framework of Pakistan, the Indian Government would have no objection, Times of India, 14 October 1971.

\textsuperscript{22}See Ajit Bhattacharya, 'Fumbling for a Policy: India and Bangladesh', Times of India, 17 July 1971.
vest it with the attributes of *de facto* and *de jure* independence, relocate the refugees there, and attempt to win for it international recognition. The newly established state of Bangladesh could be thus made a recognised party to the dispute without whose approval no cease-fire could be agreed upon and which would not approve such cease-fire till all the objectives were attained. The Report argued that the chances of Chinese intervention were minimal. Even if China doubled her force strength of 100,000 that she retained in Tibet, the mountain passes would pose acute deployment problems, especially against the superior well-armed Indian presence in the region. If Chinese incursions did take place in spite of these odds, they could hardly stay for long as Winter was forthcoming when snowed-in passes would render withdrawal impossible. Considering the limited Chinese stake in this issue, the report concluded that it would not be militarily meaningful for them to intervene. Without Chinese intervention, the Indian military position vis-à-vis Pakistan was vastly superior.\(^{23}\)

Finally, what may have clinched the decision in favour of Indian military action was the evaporation of the hope that the international community would bring to bear pressure on Yahya for an acceptable settlement. In May Mrs Gandhi said she wanted the International Community to realise that what had begun as Pakistan's internal problem was gradually becoming an internal problem for India.\(^{24}\) She wondered why


\(^{24}\) *Times of India*, 19 May 1971.
help was not forthcoming from the richer nations. At the Lok Sabha she regretted that the Western countries, who had allegedly fought the Second World War 'to save Democracy', were not responding now when democracy was 'so flagrantly and so brutally being destroyed'. She was very critical of U.N. Secretary General U Thant's offer in July for the placing of observers on both sides of the border. She argued that in the first place it tended to equate India and Pakistan, implying part Indian responsibility for the crisis and secondly, it would support the Pakistani projection that the issue was a bilateral one between the two countries. Mrs Gandhi was now convinced neither the world community nor the U.N. could be counted on, and India needed to act by herself.

The decision could not be acted upon at once. The Indian Armed Forces needed three to four months to make necessary preparations. Moreover the appropriate time to act would be winter when the Monsoons would not bog down the invading forces and the Northern passes would remain snowed-in reducing the probability of Chinese intervention. Mrs Gandhi had now some time to concentrate on politics, whose extension the forthcoming war was likely to be. She now had two major objectives: one was seeking a superpower deterrence to potential Chinese or American (or a combination of both)

25 Indira Gandhi, op.cit., p.20.

resistance to Indian plans and the second was the building up of favourable international public opinion to dilute as much as possible adverse reaction to future Indian intervention.

As to the first, the Sino-American rapprochement boded ill for India. Concern was evident in Swaran Singh's statement that India could not 'view it with equanimity if it means the domination of the two superpowers over the region or a tacit agreement between them to this effect'. The Soviet Union was the only possible counter to any potential Sino-American entente. As yet the USSR had an ambivalent attitude towards the South Asian Crisis. Mrs Gandhi calculated that the best way to win Moscow over was to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation which had been under discussion for two years now. She knew her offer to do so would be too tempting for Moscow to resist.

The Treaty was thus signed in August. Indo-Soviet consultations were held in terms of the Treaty thus signalling to Peking and Washington that both signatories took the Treaty seriously. The fact that in private the Soviets advocated 'restraint' did not matter so long as the world read into the pact a firm commitment to India's security by the Soviet Union. Though New Delhi had very nearly ruled out by this time the possibility of serious Chinese military

27 The Times (London), 21 July 1971.
28 See Chapter 4.
intervention, especially in winter when the Indian initiatives were scheduled, the Indo-Soviet Pact was meant to be a reassurance.

The second objective of creating a favourable international public opinion was being simultaneously pursued. The means employed were the holding of seminars and conferences, and visits abroad by Indian leaders. The Gandhi Peace Foundation organised a three-day international seminar in New Delhi in September, attended by 60 unofficial delegates from 26 countries. Memories of the Spanish Civil War were rekindled by such suggestions as the formation of an International Brigade and the staging of an international March to Islamabad.\(^\text{29}\)

As an additional public relations project, Mrs Gandhi undertook in October-November a three-week tour of Belgium, Australia, the U.K., the U.S.A., France and the Federal Republic of Germany. In her own words, she undertook this journey 'to leave nothing unexplored which might lead to an easing of the burden imposed upon us and to discourage those who are bent upon excuses to threaten our security'.\(^\text{30}\)

The visits were only partially successful: firstly, because of her recent rejection of the U.N. offer and secondly because it was now clear that the solution acceptable to her implied the dismemberment of a recognised international State Actor, the leaders of the world seemed to shy away

\(^{29}\) *Asian Recorder* (October 8-14, 1971), pp.10396-7.

\(^{30}\) Indira Gandhi, op.cit., p.59.
from the Indian point of view. Her dissatisfaction was evident, for on her return she said:

I must make it clear that we cannot depend on the international community, or even the countries which I visited to solve our problems for us. We appreciate their sympathy and moral and political support, but the brunt of the burden has to be borne by us and by the people of Bangladesh.  

There was some success, however. For instance though her personal relations with Nixon marked no improvement, she was probably able to take a reading of the attitudinal division in the American community on the South Asian crisis. The Indian attempt was to deepen this division. The idea was to neutralise the strength of the U.S. Administration to militarily commit itself on the Pakistani side when the actual conflict occurred.

Sensing his deep danger Yahya mellowed and on 19 November in his greetings to Mrs Gandhi on the Muslim festival of Eid, appealed for the easing of tensions. But New Delhi rejected the overture as the offer of a 'denuded olive branch'.

For Mrs Gandhi it was too late to stem the tide of the urge towards the ultimate denouement. Her Armed Forces were ready awaiting the Green Signal. The entire nation was poised for action. The Provisional Bangladesh Government was getting

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31 ibid., p.105. 'East Bengal' had now been replaced by 'Bangladesh' in her formal speeches.

32 Interview with Mrs Gandhi, New Delhi, 30 April 1978.

33 Yahya's message read: 'India and Pakistan have long frittered away their energies and resources arming each other, resources which should have been used to reap the real fruits of independence for our two people'. The Times (London), 20 November 1971.

34 Age (Melbourne), 22 November 1971.
increasingly restive. Soon after the midnight of December 3, Mrs Gandhi ordered troops into Pakistan's eastern wing claiming that the Pakistan Air Force had already struck.\textsuperscript{35}

Thus ensued the War that was to end in the emergence of Bangladesh on 16 December.\textsuperscript{36}

The big question remains: what sort of impact did the Indian policies throughout the unfolding crisis have on the Bangladeshi leadership? This is of cardinal importance as it has considerable bearing on future Indo-Bangladesh relations. Needless to say, the exiled leaders were all profoundly grateful to the Indian authorities for according them refuge, and letting them organise the government-in-exile, before India was able to formalise her attitude towards this problem. The Awami League leaders were, however, anxious to obtain formal Indian recognition, as evidenced by Acting President Nazrul Islam's letter to the Indian President on 24 April 1971.\textsuperscript{37} Even when the main conflict seemed imminent and recognition was still being withheld, on 4 December

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\textsuperscript{35} Indira Gandhi, op.cit., p.128.

\textsuperscript{36} War had become inevitable by early December because by now Pakistan too, was eager to broaden the conflict, primarily for two reasons: firstly, a full-scale bilateral War between India and Pakistan would attract international intervention, necessary for Pakistan because even without the War, the Pakistani troops were being badly mauled by the \textit{Mukti Bahini} (Liberation Forces). Pakistan hoped that the outbreak of War would force on both parties a Cease Fire after which the \textit{Mukti Bahini} could hardly carry out their guerilla activities without international approbation. Secondly, by December there had already been considerable fighting involving both ground and aerial troops in the Eastern Sector. The Pakistanis, therefore, saw no reason not to extend the fighting to where they were comparatively stronger than in the East, i.e. in the Western Sector.

\textsuperscript{37} See f.n.6 ante.
Nazrul Islam and the Provisional Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed pressed again. Recognition finally came on 6 December. However it does not appear that the Indian reluctance to accord the Provisional Government formal recognition had any substantial adverse impact on their mutual interactions.

In fact once the Indian decision to intervene had come to the fore, there were numerous contacts at high levels between the exiled leaders and Indian authorities. In September the Indian Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul visited Calcutta to brief Bangladeshi leaders. D.P. Dhar, Mrs Gandhi's close confidant, continued the liaison. Shortly after Dhar's visit, three emissaries of the Provisional Government went to New Delhi and attended meetings at the External Affairs Ministry. Tajuddin Ahmed, who had earlier welcomed the Indo-Soviet Treaty had close personal relationship with Indian leaders. Not all Awami Leaguers shared this close rapport with the Indians. When Nixon made his contacts with some Awami League hierarchs, in particular Mushtaq Ahmed, the latter came to be viewed as veering close to the U.S. which might have been the reason for his removal from the Foreign Ministership immediately after Bangladesh's independence. Therefore it appears that by the concluding

\[\text{\cite{38}}\]

\[\text{\cite{39}}\]

\[\text{\cite{40}}\]

\[\text{\cite{41}}\]
phases of the Struggle, opinion among the Awami Leaguers vis-à-vis India had dichotomised, though by and large a majority were sympathetic to New Delhi.

The bureaucrats of the Bangladesh Foreign Office set up in Calcutta seem to have attempted a very cool assessment of the Indian position. A Position Paper circulated in the Office read, and is worth quoting at length:

India's support for Bangladesh basically comes out of her negative approach towards Pakistan. For political, historical, and economic reasons, India desires to weaken Pakistan, both West and East. It is not for her love of democracy or sense of brotherhood of the people of Bangladesh that India wants to uphold the cause of the liberation struggle of our people. The whole thing has a deep political motive...

Another similar document warned:

[After independence] we may resign ourselves to a period of Indian influence but we must try to minimise it as much as possible. In this way the interest of both Bangladesh and India would be served.

It appears, therefore, that Bangladeshi bureaucrats in exile, who were destined to play a key role in the shaping of their policies in the post-independence period were dispassionately calculating Indian actions as arising from their own-self interest rather than from any nobler motives.

Segments of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and Mukti Bahini were unhappy with the overall Indian strategy. This is

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42 'Position Paper: Crisis of Bangladesh Movement' (Calcutta), 23 September 1971. This and some other similar papers, which were not official documents in any way but individual memos being circulated were handed to me as Private Collections of some of the participants in the Bangladesh Movement.


44 Laurence Lifscheltz, op.cit., p.1395.
partly evidenced by the fact that the Bangladesh Army Chief Colonel (later General) M.A.G. Osmany was absent at the ceremony when the Pakistanis formally surrendered in Dacca on 16 December, even though the surrender was technically made to the Allied Command.45

The Indian authorities were unable to win over the various shades of left-wing Bangladeshi political leadership, except of course the moderate pro-Soviet Muzaffar NAP. Moulana Bhashani, who had also sought refuge in India and accorded strong support to the Movement had his freedom restricted.46 There were allegations that left-wing youths were screened prior to being accepted as members of the Mukti Bahini to weed out possible pro-Peking elements, or even sympathisers of Bhashani NAP.47 On their part the pro-Chinese left in East Pakistan were opposed to the Indian involvement from the very outset.48

While the Indian decision to intervene had gratified a majority of the Awami League hierarchs 49 (though it did not come about without some promptings from the latter) some sections of the Awami League itself were not pleased.50

45 The highest ranking military officer from the Bangladesh Forces present at the Ceremony was Group Captain (later Air Vice-Marshal) A.K. Khandker, who was to become the Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh Air Force.
47 Discussions with Mr Rashed Khan Menon (now M.P.), London, 20 October 1978.
48 Badruddin Omar, 'India-Bangladesh Relations', Holiday, Weekly (Dacca), 28 August 1972.
49 E.g. Syed Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed.
50 E.g. Khandkar Mushtaq Ahmed.
Even at that early stage important sections of the left-wing parties, the *Mukti Bahini*, and the Bengali bureaucracy were taking a dim view of Indian actions. While the Indian authorities invested heavily in some senior Awami Leaguers, they failed to win over other important elements. Though New Delhi was able to ensure a friendly Government initially in Bangladesh by assisting its allies within the Awami League to power, it left room for potential strains in case of any change of government in Dacca, and a future salience of any one or a combination of, the opposing, alienated elements.

B. Politics of Euphoria:

Even prior to the actual emergence of Bangaldesh on 16 December 1971, it was apparent that India would lend the future Government of Bangladesh a helping hand. It was announced that a number of senior Indian civil officers would be seconded to Bangladesh and Orissa State Government in fact named three such civil servants. Immediately after the Pakistani surrender India and Bangladesh pooled their administrative resources to jointly work out a plan for disarming and reorganising the guerillas as soon as possible.

India was, not surprisingly, the first foreign country to host the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad. At the New Delhi Airport upon arrival he said, signalling that the euphoric relations were well under way:

> The Frontiers between the independent sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh and India are just healed scars of the

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events of 1947 and there do not exist any frontiers on the hearts of the people of Bangladesh and the great people of India.

If the Bangladeshi leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (on his way back from Pakistani prison via London) displayed a modicum of caution by declining the offer of an Indian Airliner to carry him home to Bangladesh after his release and choosing a British aircraft instead, it seemed to evaporate entirely when on his brief stop-over at New Delhi he described the 'people of India' as 'the best friend of[his] country', and Mrs Gandhi, as 'not only a leader of men, but also of mankind'.

During his first official visit to India in February, Mujib saw 'the friendship between India and Bangladesh as everlasting' and that 'no power on earth will be able to make any crack in this friendship'. Two important decisions emerged from Mujib's discussions with Indira Gandhi: one, the withdrawal of the Indian Armed Forces was to be complete by 25 March 1972, and the other that trade between their two countries should take place on state-to-state basis as far as possible. Both these decisions reflected a concern of

52 *Times of India*, 6 January 1972.

53 Mujib was reported to have said that he owed too much to India and therefore it was advisable to strive for some balance. See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 January 1972, p.5. The former Bangladesh Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain, who travelled with Mujib on the same aircraft said that the choice of aircraft was not deliberate and since they were anxious to get home from London soon, they took whatever was made available earlier, which was the British plane. Interview with Kamal Hossain, Oxford, 15 October 1979.


56 *Bangladesh Documents*, op.cit., p.6.
the leaders lest there be criticism of the Indian troops overstaying their welcome, or that of private Indian tradesmen exploiting their Bangladeshi counterparts. Such bilateral issues as the Indian construction of a barrage at Farakka to divert the water of the Ganges—a dispute dating back to the Pakistan era—assumed a low profile, and the announcement simply said that Farakka and other problems relating to the development of water and power resources were discussed. 57

The Indians decided to update the target date of troop withdrawals from 25 March to 12 March. This decision followed a visit to Dacca by the Indian Defence Secretary, K.B. Lall, in late February. 58 Two considerations seemed to have weighed in favour of this decision: first, Lall may have detected a slight anxiety on the part of Bangladesh officials regarding the decline in the popularity of stationed Indian troops and secondly, it was thought politic that no Indian troops be present on Bangladeshi soil when Mrs Gandhi returned Mujib's visit on 17 March. 59

Mrs Gandhi received a tumultuous reception when she arrived in Dacca for the visit in the course of which two

57 ibid.

58 Times of India, 2 March 1972.

59 Western sources however said that elements of two battalions of the 57th Division of the Indian Army began returning on March 16, and were soon participating in combing operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region to weed out Indian Mizo rebels, sheltered and trained there by the Pakistan as well as the remnants of Pakistani paramilitary forces. New York Times, 21 March 1972. India was reluctant to publicise this, firstly because continued Indian presence might be unpopular with some Bangladeshis and secondly, some countries, particularly the U.S. and China had made their recognition of Bangladesh contingent upon the withdrawal of Indian troops.
important documents were signed. One was the Joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers signed on 19 March. Three points in this were worth noting. First the decisions regarding the trials of Pakistani prisoners-of-war 'in accordance with international law'. Mujib apprised Gandhi of the 'steps being taken' by his government 'to expedite the trials' and in return Gandhi assured cooperation. This was ample signal to her that Mujib gave the matter priority. Secondly, it was decided to establish a Joint Rivers Commission comprising experts of both countries on a permanent basis to carry out a comprehensive survey of the river systems of both countries, and, formulate and implement flow control projects. Farakka had not yet surfaced as an issue. Thirdly, the principles of Border and Transit Trade were approved and it was stated that a Trade Agreement should be signed before March. 60

The second document was 'The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace', whose operating clauses harkened to the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty. Both parties agreed not to enter into any military alliance directed against the other. They were not to allow their respective territories to be used in a manner constituting threat to each other's security. Mutual consultations were to be held if either party was attacked or was 'threatened with attack'. 61

60 See Joint Declaration of Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh on 19 March 1972 at Dacca Bangladesh Documents, Vol.I, No.2 (Dacca: External Publicity Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), pp.5-7.
61 ibid.
Article 2 of the Treaty stipulated that 'The Parties shall cooperate with other states' in rendering support to the struggle against colonialism, racialism, and for national liberation. The expression 'other states' may have been a reference to the Soviet Union and her allies. This Treaty, then, not only formalised relations between India and Bangladesh but also to some extent drew the new State close to the Indo-Soviet Orbit. At the same time the Treaty also underlined Bangladesh's sovereign status in being treated as an equal by the Indians. In any case the Treaty was the high water mark of Indo-Bangladesh amity. Few doubted that there could be any breach in Indo-Bangla friendship. In the words of one analyst:

Aside from the long term treaty of friendship with India which India and Bangladesh have signed, it is manifest that Bangladesh will continue to rely on India for economic and defence purposes for several years to come. Only developments of a radical nature, which might place anti-Indian leadership in power nad which drew its strength from the sources outside the nation's borders, could jeopardise the present friendship between the two countries. Current leadership in both countries was deter­mined to prevent this from happening.62

C. Seeds of Discontent:

(i) Economic: The fact that the Joint Declaration emphasised that the Trade Agreement should be signed by the end of March,63 gave ample indications that political


63 See n.60 ante.
considerations at this stage were directing the course of economic relations. During the euphoric stage of bilateral relations, both sides entered into economic contracts that were later to prove difficult to observe.

Even prior to the formal Agreement, there were economic interactions through Letters of Exchange. There was to be, from India to Bangladesh, a Rupees 25 crore commodity grant for the immediate procurement of such essential items from India as petroleum and petroleum products, fertilizer, cotton, cotton yarn, cement, oil seeds, steel products, chemicals, power equipment and vehicles. Simultaneously there was to be a credit of $5 million to meet Bangladesh's foreign exchange needs, repayable in fifteen equal instalments commencing five years after the date of disbursement.

Initially prospects of mutual trade looked good. For Bangladesh there was a vacuum created by Pakistan's withdrawal on the trade front especially with regard to her two primary commodities, jute and tea. In jute, Bangladeshi production rate was 6.5 million bales a year out of which 3.5 million bales were used in domestic mills. Indian jute mills normally had a shortfall of 5 million bales annually. It was therefore an attractive proposition for India to buy up the Bangladeshi jute surplus. As for tea, the average annual production in Bangladesh was 31.5 million kg. Out of this 27 million kg were formerly sold to West Pakistan.

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64 One crore = 10 million.
65 Times of India, 18 January 1972.
Now this massive surplus posed a problem not only to Bangladesh but also to Indian exporters, who had reasons to worry unless a joint tea export policy was worked out.

The Agreement signed on 28 March 1971 envisaged a three-tier trade structure: (a) border trade to the tune of Rs. 50 crores; (b) rupee trade and (c) trade in hard currency. It was generally expected that the Agreement would go a long way to achieve economic complementarity. For instance in India, now that a large portion of the required jute was available next door, part of the jute acreage could be released for more worthwhile and essential crops like rice. Though the Indian Foreign Trade Minister Mishra warned Indian monopolists against abusing trade with Bangladesh, insisting that it should be at a State-to-State level, the Times of India, later, more pragmatically argued that it was difficult to do away with private trading altogether, particularly along the sprawling border between the two countries. It was, however, being optimistic when it added that 'such a trade need not give rise to any unpleasant complications if it is kept within reasonable limits'.

Trade: It was on the Trade front that cracks in bilateral relations began to appear. Till June 1972, trade was valued at only $13.7 million. Formal blame for the small size was placed on (i) disruption of transportation in Bangladesh during the War; (ii) absence of formalised banking arrangements; and (iii) procedural and administrative difficulties.

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67 Pakistan Times, 1 April 1972.
Feeling in Bangladesh was growing that the quantum of formal trade was reduced largely because the major Indian import, jute, was finding its way into the Indian market illegally through smuggling. Analysts were predicting that the Bangladesh Government however unconcerned it might seem then, would find it difficult to become reconciled to the loss of an estimated US$65 million in foreign exchange through the smuggling of jute.  

The Dacca Government might have seemed unconcerned, but not so the Opposition Parties, and soon Bhashani was complaining that jute mills on the Hoogly river (in the Indian State of West Bengal) 'had started in full swing with the jute from Bangladesh'. The Indian official import target of Rs.7.5 crores of jute was not materialising. While some Bangladeshis explained it as being due to smuggling having met the requirement, the Indians were criticising high Bangladesh prices.

A Fish Trade Protocol, signed in August 1972, stipulated an export of fish worth Rs.9 crores into India. For this the Bangladesh authorities wanted 17 Centres to be set up along the border. The Indians considered it an impractical proposition, given the poor state of communications on the Bangladesh side, thereby laying themselves open to the charge that they were uninterested in formal institutional arrangements, as their needs were being met in any case through

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71 Quoted in Pakistan Times, 18 August 1972.
72 Times of India, 18 September 1972.
73 ibid., 4 September 1972.
smuggling. The Indian Press noted that the common man in Bangladesh was critical of the protocol, because exports of fish were likely to push up the local price beyond his reach.\textsuperscript{73}

Trade in coal was also causing some heartburn on the Bangladeshi side. The first coal supplies from India to Bangladesh were made by the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation at a relatively high price. Several private collieries offered a lower quote, and Bangladesh was interested, but India insisted that trade be channelled through the relevant Government Corporation as private collieries often failed to adhere to quality specifications. Ultimately, however, the Corporation agreed to reduce the price but there was some mutual bitterness already.\textsuperscript{74}

The Fish and Coal episodes were later to bring forth complaints from the Bangladesh Commerce and Foreign Trade Minister, M.R. Siddiqui, to the effect that Indian State Corporations took a long time to organise trade and also charged higher prices than export houses.\textsuperscript{75} It was uncommon for a senior Awami League politician to be publicly critical of the Indian authorities. Strains on economic relations were obviously being felt. Siddiqui's Ministry had already taken the initiative in October in scrapping the border trade agreement, since it felt that without adequate control measures along the borders, its meaningful implementation was impossible.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Times of India}, 18 September 1972.
\textsuperscript{75} ibid., 19 November 1972.
Soon Bangladesh was running into large trade deficits, which according to the Agreement would have to be paid for in foreign exchange unless a mutually acceptable alternative was found. By March 1973 under the Limited Payments Agreement (LPA) Bangladesh had contracted Rs.14.6 crores for exports and Rs.19.4 crores for imports as against Rs.25 crores target each way. Since Bangladesh could not afford to pay for her deficits in hard currency on March 17, 1973 she asked for an extension of three months, eleven days before the Agreement was due to expire.

After the March 1973 elections in Bangladesh, Mujib effected some cabinet changes. M.R. Siddiqui was replaced as his Foreign Trade Minister by A.H.M. Kamaruzzaman. Though trade problems with India, particularly Siddiqui's views on the subject, might not have been the principal reason for this change, Kamaruzzaman was reputed to be more favourably disposed towards India.

Kamaruzzaman visited India in June and held talks with his counterpart, D.P. Chattapadhaya. On 5 July a new Rs.180 crore Trade Agreement was signed. This was to cover a period of three years. It incorporated balanced trade and payment arrangements. Annual exports from either country were stipulated at Rs.30 crores. Bangladesh was to be allowed to adjust her export shortfall of Rs.2 crores incurred in the First Agreement (1972-73) in the first year of the new Agreement instead of having to pay the deficit in foreign exchange, a clear concession by India.

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The First Annual Trade Plan under the new Three Year Agreement met the same fate as the First Agreement. In February 1974 Kamaruzzaman handed over the Foreign Trade Portfolio to Khandokar Mushtaq Ahmed, whose political career so far reflected a less friendly attitude towards New Delhi. The growing imbalance continued in India's favour and in October the first Annual Plan was extended by another three months. In December Mushtaq and Chattapadhaya scrapped the rupee trade arrangements. From 1 January 1975 all payments were to be made in freely convertible currency. From now on the special arrangements between India and Bangladesh disappeared and trade was to be conducted as between any two sovereign states. In the private trade sector, Indian businessmen (the so-called 'Marwaris') were accused of dumping inferior goods upon a helpless Bengali population at exorbitant prices. Senior Opposition politician, Mowlana Bhashani, was highly critical of the role of the 'Marwaris' in an interview with an Indian analyst.

The following Table reflects annual trade patterns between the two countries between 1973 and 1975.

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78 *Asian Almanac 1975*, p.6832.


81 *Bangladesh Observer, 18 April 1971.*
TABLE 3.1
(in Bangladeshi Taka)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Imports (into Bangladesh)</th>
<th>Exports</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>75.38 Crores</td>
<td>14.52 Crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>28.82 &quot;</td>
<td>9.92 &quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table shows that inspite of the very best efforts made throughout this period to improve trade turn-overs, as exemplified in the series of agreements and discussions, there was a steady decline accompanied by a modicum of bitterness. The euphoric friendship, when tested by realistic factors governed by economic pragmatism, seemed to erode. In December 1974 Mushtaq was to warn that it would be a mistake to expect the political relationship between the two countries to be strengthened if a fruitful trade relationship could not be established.\(^{82}\)

Aid: On the other aspect of economic relationship, the Aid front, the case was similar. There was initial optimism and even in June 1972, India retained the status of Bangladesh's largest donor, having announced for the current Financial Year and the next, an aid quantum of $275 million (the U.S. came next with $214m).\(^{83}\)

Prior to the commencement of the following Financial Year, the Indian Planning Minister, D.P. Dhar, visited Dacca, and a Rs.60 crore short-term credit and grant to Bangladesh

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was announced. But there were built-in potential seeds of conflict. The fact that procurement was tied to India, which could enable Indian suppliers to charge higher prices, was bound, in the long run, to displease Bangladeshi officials.

Dhar also announced Indian assistance in the setting up of a few major projects. India was to provide 60% of the plant and machinery for a fertilizer project with an annual capacity of one million tons, and agreed to canvas for third country loans. India was later to buy up the production surplus on a long term basis. Help was also promised in setting up a cement factory with an annual capacity of 240,000 tonnes, and on the financial aspect of a 500,000 tonne sponge iron project, subject to its techno-economic feasibility. On his return to Calcutta Dhar told reporters that only a small section of the people in Dacca was moved by the 'subtle and invidious propaganda of the enemies of Indo-Bangladesh friendship'. The Indian Press credited Dhar with having achieved a 'breakthrough' in economic relations between the two countries.

However, the proposed fertilizer project led to an internal debate among Bangladeshi decision-makers. Critics took the line that if the production was aimed at the Indian market, as was planned, it would create a 'structural' link that would be difficult to break should there be need to do so; secondly, if and when India attained self-

84 Statesman Weekly (Calcutta), 2 June 1972.
85 ibid.
86 ibid.
sufficiency with regard to fertilizer, Bangladesh could be landed with a huge surplus without a market for it; thirdly, from experience, there was a risk that equipment procured from India could be deficient in quality.\textsuperscript{87} Contrary to the analysis in the Indian Press, therefore, the announcement of aid did not necessarily signal a 'breakthrough'.

Bangladesh's aid requirements were far more than India could possibly hope to satisfy. An Aid to Bangladesh Group under World Bank auspices was therefore formed to meet the latter's needs in an institutionalised form in 1974. Though India was earlier invited to join the Group, she turned it down for a rather interesting reason: she feared domination of the Group by the U.S. (which was expected to contribute something like 50\% of the total aid channelled through this body) and rather than be classified as a minor donor, opted out of the Consortium. She also felt that membership would bind her to conform to Consortium decisions and deprive her of flexibility.\textsuperscript{88} The following table details Indian aid over the years:\textsuperscript{89}

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
Commitment & 111 & 23 & 52 & 18 & 7 & \ldots \\
Disbursement & 73 & 31 & 13 & 20 & 30 & 19 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Commitment and Disbursement of Indian Aid (in Million US Dollars)}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{87} Interview with Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, Section Chief and Joint Secretary External Resources Division, Planning Commission, Dacca, 19 July 1978.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Times of India}, 2 December 1972.

\textsuperscript{89} Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dacca.
An analysis of the above table brings out certain features. First, there is a gradual tapering off of aid starting from $111m. in 1971-72 to $7m. in 1975-76. Not surprisingly, the quantum is lowest when political relations are at their nadir. Secondly, the figures indicate a slow rate of disbursement. Out of a total of $211m. only $186m. were disbursed, an unhappy picture of aid utilisation, which could be for a number of reasons such as high prices and poor commodity quality, as indeed, the critics alleged.

To summarise, then, the reasons why Indo-Bangladesh economic relations had come to such a sorry pass were as under: firstly, long unpoliceable borders facilitated smuggling of essential Bangladeshi cash items as jute, fish and rice causing a decline of these commodities in formal trade, and inflating their domestic prices. This alienated both Bangladeshi officials and the common man. Secondly, Indian insistence on trade on a state-to-state basis was unfavourable to the Bangladeshis who claimed that Indian State agencies were incompetent and charged higher prices. Thirdly poor quality procurements from India caused widespread reaction among the general Bangladeshi public with concomitant effects on trade relations. Fourthly, Indian 'Marwari' businessmen were perceived as exploiters. Finally on the Aid front, Bangladeshi Planning Officials were critical of aid-tying and higher prices which led to slow utilisation and disbursement.

Broadly, then, the attempt to achieve complementarity between two competitive economies was doomed to failure. Economic interactions with India seemed to alienate two important segments of the Bangladesh bureaucracy, the Ministry
of Commerce which handled Foreign Trade and the Ministry of Planning which was concerned with aid relations.

(ii) Political: Dissatisfaction with economic relations, now openly expressed from the Dacca end, led to a general reassessment of political relations as well. The segment of the bureaucracy in formal charge of conduct of foreign relations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or the Foreign Office) was slower to be converted to the points of view of the Trade and Planning authorities (the economic bureaucracy) because of two main reasons: firstly, India was the conduit that linked Bangladesh with the International state system. Indian assistance was essential in obtaining formal recognition by other state actors necessary to underline Bangladesh's sovereignty. The primary goal of Dacca's Foreign Office was to ensure Bangladesh's status as a sovereign state. Secondly, Bangladeshi diplomats were using facilities provided by Indian Missions in various parts of the world, as those of the nascent Bangladesh Foreign Office were inadequate.90

It was during the Simla Talks between Mrs Gandhi and Bhutto in June 1972 that it began to emerge that Bangladeshi and Indian interests need not always coincide. In April that year Mujib had declared that India 'will not and cannot negotiate' any settlement with Pakistan concerning the 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war without the approval of Dacca and that the Bangladesh Government would try as many as 1,500

90 The use of telex and other communication facilities in Indian embassies abroad by Bangladesh officials is a good example. This was particularly useful when Bengali special envoys, travelling in countries that did not recognise Bangladesh, wanted to liaise with Dacca.
of them for war crimes, (later the figure was reduced to 195). The Simla Talks brought to the fore the fact that the attitudes of Dacca and Delhi toward Islamabad were divergent. For Bangladesh the objective was total disentanglement from Pakistan (a country with whom she shared no borders) and getting the latter to recognise that situation. For India, the problem was one of mending fences with a neighbour, and helping the latter recover from the wounds and shame of defeat. From this flowed the difference that while the POWs for India were a source of embarrassment, for Bangladesh they were a supreme trump card. To dispel any Bangladeshi fear that New Delhi and Islamabad might reach an accord at Dacca's expense, Mrs Gandhi's Principal Secretary, P.N. Haksar, was despatched post-haste to brief Mujib on Simla. There was appreciation in the Indian Press that 'establishing a stable long term relationship with Bangladesh is proving to be a far more delicate and complex affair than most Indians expected'.

In the elections of March 1973 in Bangladesh, Mujib's Awami League won a sweeping victory capturing 292 out of 300 parliamentary seats. Certain Cabinet changes reflected a more nationalist approach vis-a-vis India. The reputedly pro-Soviet, pro-Indian Abdus Samad Azad was replaced as

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91 The Times (London), 26 April 1972.
92 Times of India, 20 July 1972.
93 ibid., 3 November 1972.
94 Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 March 1973. Later Awami League also won 15 seats reserved for women for which the MPs were the electorate.
Foreign Minister by the generally uncommitted Dr Kamal Hossain. Tajuddin Ahmed, also known to have pro-Indian sympathies, was relieved of the Planning portfolio which went to Mujib himself. However neither was dropped from the Cabinet and there were no major changes in the Awami League hierarchy. When Haksar visited Dacca in April with the message that the general atmosphere was conducive to taking initiatives in settling outstanding problems with Pakistan, he had to do his rounds calling on the same familiar Awami League figures - Kamal Hossain, Mushtaq, Kamaruzzaman, Tajuddin and Samad.  

A Bangladesh-India joint plan emerged out of Dr Kamal Hossain's visit to India the same month. The two governments called for a 'simultaneous repatriation', meaning a three way exchange involving most of the POWs, the 175,000 to 200,000 Bengalis in Pakistan and 260,000 non-Bengalis ('Biharis') in Bangladesh. While India had managed to obtain Bangladeshi consent to return most of the POWs who were by now proving to be a financial strain and political embarrassment to her, Bangladesh, unwilling to surrender her total leverage, was insisting on trying those with criminal charges against them.

The rules for the three-way exchange were laid down in the August Agreement between India and Pakistan (in the

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97 The cost to India by 31 December 1972 was computed at US$17m., *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 March 1973, p.19.
absence of Pakistani recognition Bangladesh could not be a formal party to the Agreement). All but 195 of the POWs (to be tried for war crimes) were to be repatriated and there was to be mutual exchange of hostage populations between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The fact that the question of Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh was sidestepped, was a concession by the latter made at some political cost as evidenced by sharp adverse reactions in certain quarters. 98

There was, however, easing of tension in the subcontinent and Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh in February 1974 cleared the way for the Tripartite talks and Agreement between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh reached after five days of arduous deliberations on the 9th of April. Bangladesh dropped the trials and Pakistan as a quid pro quo agreed to accept more Biharis. Mujib blessed the Pact during a brief halt in Delhi on his way back from Moscow and pledged intensive drive for peace in the subcontinent. 99

Ironically, the relaxation of tension between Bangladesh and Pakistan had the effect of bringing to surface the bilateral issues between Bangladesh and India, on which the spotlight

98 Bhashani of NAP and Jalil of the Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) argued that the Agreement 'would not serve the interests of the people of Bangladesh' and that it was a further proof of Dacca's subservience to New Delhi. See TOI 3 September 1973.

99 The Age (Melbourne), 11 April 1974.
now turned. Two such bilateral issues (Farakka and Territorial Waters) and two Indian unilateral decisions (the Nuclear Explosion and the Annexation of Sikkim) provided ample grounds for the seeds of discontent to germinate.

**Farakka Barrage:** The problem arose from the construction of a barrage by India across the Ganges at Farakka, eleven miles upstream of the border with Bangladesh, in order to divert the river flow into the Bhagirathi-Hoogly through a link canal. The purpose was to resuscitate the port of Calcutta by flushing out the deposits of silt in the Hoogly river, and combat saline intrusion and the frequent tidal bores.

Most of the Ganges water consists of monsoonal flows that run out to sea. During the lean period of March to May, the discharge at Farakka is insufficient, less than 55,000 cubic feet per second (cusecs) in the last ten days of April. The Indians claimed that the purpose of flushing the Calcutta port required a diversion of at least 40,000 cusecs of water, thereby leaving only a small balance for Bangladesh.\(^{101}\)

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\(^{100}\) With the Pakistani recognition obtained, Mujib was increasingly anxious to project a 'non-aligned' image for Bangladesh between India and Pakistan. He was transmitting signals that he would like to see himself somewhere on neutral ground between the two subcontinental protagonists. He was willing he said, to contribute 'his bit' in his 'own humble way' to help India and Pakistan sort out their differences. *The Times* (London), 24 February 1974. India's disenchantment with the shift was reflected in the timing of the departure of the first Indian High Commissioner to Dacca, Subimal Dutt, who quietly left Bangladesh after relinquishing charge barely twenty-four hours before the arrival in Dacca in June 1974 of the Pakistani Prime Minister A.Z. Bhutto. *Economic & Political Weekly* (Bombay), 6 July 1974, p.1047.

\(^{101}\) *Asia Week* (Hong Kong), 11 November 1977.
The Bangladesh case was that if India abstracted the above quantum, the result would spell disaster for Bangladesh. Water supplies were needed particularly during the dry period from November to May (the problem during the Monsoon Period from June to October was one of excess) for agriculture, domestic and industrial purposes, for maintaining river depths, for sustaining fishery and forestry and for preventing the inland penetration of salinity from the Bay of Bengal. The key issue therefore, was how large the volume of diverted water should be.

The adverse effects of the Farakka Project on the lower riparian regions were anticipated as early as 1951 when the proposed plan was reported in the newspapers. Pakistan took the matter up with the Indian authorities and protracted negotiations between the two countries followed, with no result. Meanwhile, India started construction of the barrage in 1961 and completed it in 1975. The issue, though live, was lost sight of temporarily during the post-liberation euphoria, but attained salience with the turning of focus on Indo-Bangladesh bilateral problems following Pakistan's recognition as the proposed date for the completion of the barrage drew near.

The matter was broached with Mrs Gandhi by Mujib during their discussions in May 1974. The Communique signed at the end of the talks (which was delayed by five hours, presumably due to last-minute haggling) stated that the problem should

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102See Ganges Water: Crisis in Bangladesh (Dacca: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh) u.d. passim.
be resolved 'with understanding so that the interests of both countries are recognised and the difficulties removed in a spirit of friendship and cooperation'. Both Governments were now publicly admitting at the highest level that 'difficulties' existed that had to be 'removed'.

In April 1975 the Indians pointed out that while discussions on allocation of water were continuing, it was essential to run the feeder canal of the barrage during the remaining lean period of the year. Accordingly on 18 April an interim agreement was signed allowing the Indians to test the feeder canal for the period between 21 April and 31 May with discharges varying from 11,000 to 16,000 cusecs. Bangladesh was to allege later that India continued to withdraw water, in large quantum, even after the specified period.

Perhaps to signal a modicum of disaffection, Bangladesh displayed a low level of enthusiasm at the inauguration of the Farakka Project on 21 May (even though it was within the period of the interim agreement) by cancelling the visit of Mujib's Water Resources Minister, Serneabat, who was invited to be present on that occasion. The pill was sugar-coated by the announcement the following day that Bangladesh would be represented at official level instead.

103 The Times (London), 17 May 1974.
104 Ganges water: Crisis in Bangladesh, op. cit.
105 Statesman (Calcutta), 19 May 1975.
106 ibid., 20 May 1975.
With the Project commissioned, Bangladesh could only wait and see what its effects on her were likely to be. Farakka remained a potential sore point between the two countries.

**Territorial Waters**: The second bilateral issue which surfaced as a rather sensitive one in early 1975 involved the demarcation of territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal. The region was believed to contain undersea oil reserves. Bangladesh had already signed contracts the previous year with a number of foreign firms for oil exploration and development.\(^{107}\)

In March Dr Kamal Hossain, who, in addition to the Foreign Office, also held the portfolio of Oil and Natural Resources, arrived in India for a three day visit, primarily to discuss this issue.\(^{108}\) He delayed his return to Dacca by a day for further talks with Indian leaders on the disputed maritime boundary, for full scale off-shore exploration could not commence until the demarcation was settled. Bangladesh argued that the definition of the Continental shelf be effected by a reference to international law and usage.\(^{109}\) Though the dispute still remains largely unresolved, its importance has eroded with the lack of success in the exploration. It still remains a potentially contentious issue. But at that time it was not allowed to be blown up out of proportion as Kamal Hossain with his Foreign Office

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\(^{107}\) *The Times* (London), 4 February 1975.

\(^{108}\) *Straits Times* (Singapore), 31 March 1975.

\(^{109}\) *Pakistan Times*, 12 April 1975.
was involved in negotiations, and they may have been persuaded of the political futility of taking on India on another issue, especially when some very intricate bargaining with Pakistan on assets and liabilities lay ahead.

The Indian Nuclear Explosion: This was the first of the two unilateral policy decisions of New Delhi that had some adverse effect on Delhi-Dacca relations. Though official quarters maintained a formal silence, no effort was made by Bangladeshi authorities to disentangle themselves from the spate of reactions in unofficial circles. Opposition politicians were whipping up anti-Indian sentiments by attributing aggressiveness to Indian policies with some impact.

Bhashani declared that the May 1974 explosion was a 'veiled threat' to 'India's smaller neighbours'.\footnote{Pakistan Times, 23 May 1974.} Even the normally pro-Moscow newspaper SANGBAD commented that it was 'a matter of grave concern' and raised the question, as to how the explosion was 'consistent with India's image'.\footnote{Quoted in ibid.}

Official Bangladeshi reaction was muted because just prior to the explosion Bangladesh herself was engaged in negotiations with India on the exchange of nuclear technology. In April the Director of the Bhabha Research Centre in India, Dr Raja Ramanna has visited Dacca and signed an Agreement for cooperation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy. A Research Reactor which was set up at Roopur in the Pabna district of Bangladesh, was to be modelled after

\footnote{Pakistan Times, 23 May 1974.}
\footnote{Quoted in ibid.}
the Indian Apsara Research Reactor at Trombay. India was to provide computers and raw materials for the purpose. The April Accord which was not initially disclosed, seems to have been timed to precede the Indian explosion, taking the wind out of the sails of the Bangladesh official reaction.

Silence was enforced on the Dacca Government for how could it be critical of the Indian decision when it could itself be accused by domestic Opposition of collaboration? Though Mujib's government was silent on this, it was not necessarily happy, for should India become a potential adversary (and the growing discontent did point to such a situation) any major accretion of power to India was for Dacca a source of worry.

Annexation of Sikkim: The other unilateral Indian decision with some bearing on Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations was the one formally annexing Sikkim. Sections of the Bangladesh Press were highly critical. One weekly complained:

> Without going into the possibilities which only the future can unfold, it can be said that the Indian action over Sikkim will throw a fresh spanner in the way of normalisation and understanding in the subcontinent.

There was strong adverse reaction at the Dacca University. Some students demonstrated against the Sikkim action and a group of teachers, condemning it, issued a statement that

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113 *Holiday*, 8 September 1974.
'... this kind of expansionist policy is a serious threat to India's small neighbour'. The government reaction was cautious. Almost as if it was an attempt to convince himself a spokesman commented: 'We are larger than Sikkim, and are a member of the United Nations. So there is no need for us to be afraid'. The statement reflected a dependence on external safeguards as a measure of security against any potential Indian threat.

D. The Crisis-Slide

(i) Political:

Though discontent was by now apparent particularly on the Bangladesh side, given the virulent anti-Indian feelings in Opposition political quarters in Dacca, Mujib's government was still the best bet for New Delhi. When in early 1975 Mujib introduced a one-Party system in Bangladesh and consolidated his power, Mrs Gandhi sent warm greetings. Her enthusiasm might have arisen from two calculations. Firstly, she may have analyzed Mujib's actions as a move to create a somewhat leftish United Front which would square Bangladesh on a pro-Moscow line, thereby easing the posture towards India, and secondly she may have hoped that a stronger Mujib would be more able to suppress the burgeoning anti-Indian feelings. These calculations were upset by the

115 ibid.
116 In doing so she opened herself to criticism from her Opposition who interpreted her enthusiasm as a sign that she planned to concentrate power in her own hands in a similar fashion. The Times (London), 4 February 1975.
Coup in Dacca of 15 August 1975, led by some Army officers, in the course of which Mujib was killed and Mushtaq proclaimed President.

A crisis-slide leading to a rapid deterioration of mutual relations began with a series of political crises in Dacca, resulting in rapid changes of government between August and November 1975. Dacca's anger was fanned to white heat with India's harbouring of dissidents, and continued withdrawal of waters at Farakka. Bad political relations had adverse effects on economic relations as well.

**Changes of Government in Dacca:**

Though the immediate post-Mujib government was still composed of Awami Leaguers, the leaders, particularly Mushtaq, belonged to the faction that the Indians had failed to cultivate even during the War of Liberation. There was, therefore, ample reason for New Delhi's concern. This was compounded by two factors; firstly, Pakistan's being the first country to recognise Mushtaq's government, which it described as an 'Islamic Republic' and secondly, in Mushtaq's first radio broadcast he displayed eagerness to cultivate relations with countries with which Bangladesh did not yet have formal relations. Both these factors combined to project an impression that Bangladesh would be veering towards Pakistan in the Subcontinental System, and towards the Islamic group of nations and China at the global

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117 *Pakistan Times*, 16 August 1975.

118 ibid.
level. Indian official reactions were circumspect. She was 'carefully studying the reports' and 'watching developments', in the words of a spokesman. 119

Bangladesh made the first move to establish contact following the Coup when on 19 August her High Commissioner in Delhi, Shamsur Rahman called on the Indian Foreign Secretary Kewal Singh at the former's request. High Commissioner Rahman confirmed that Bangladesh had not transformed herself into an 'Islamic Republic' (in other words, it was still secular) and that the new government would abide by all existing international agreements. 120 The following day the Indian envoy in Dacca, Samar Sen, called on Mushtaq to convey Delhi's 'best wishes' to the new government. 121 On the 25th, Shamsur Rahman conveyed a message from Mushtaq to Mrs Gandhi. Mrs Gandhi, in that meeting, expressed her deep concern regarding events in Dacca. 122 The envoys helped to restore working contacts though it was obvious that it was a far cry from early 1972 when Delhi and Dacca handled relations directly, and saw no need to post Ambassadors in each other's capital. 123

119 Times of India, 21 August 1975.
121 Times of India, 23 August 1975.
122 Interview with High Commissioner K.M. Shamsur Rahman, New Delhi, 15 May 1978.
123 For the first couple of months Delhi-Dacca relations were conducted at the highest levels directly. In fact neither thought it necessary to post an Ambassador. This was changed on 16 February (the Missions were headed by comparatively junior officers) when India announced that appointment of Subimal Dutt. Bangladesh followed suit on 16 March by naming A.R. Mallick. Report (1972-1973) (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs), p.6.
After these conciliatory gestures, it was deemed natural that Delhi-Dacca links would continue, though not at the same level as before. However, in order not to fall behind Pakistan in according recognition to the new government, India took the line that she continued to recognise Bangladesh and therefore there was no need of a formal declaration to that effect.\(^\text{124}\)

In early November 1975 there were a series of complicated developments in Bangladesh. There was an abortive putsch staged by Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf which was reportedly 'India-backed'.\(^\text{125}\) While the Coup attempt was on, some prominent Awami League leaders were killed in prison. Khaled's attempted putsch was quashed, and around 7 November Major General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the strongman. An Indian Foreign Office spokesman said that India had been watching with considerable anxiety the complicated situation which has developed in Bangladesh ... the developments in Bangladesh are its domestic affairs but India cannot remain indifferent and unconcerned about developments taking place there.\(^\text{126}\)

The statement had an ominous ring to it as far as Dacca was concerned. Colin Legum of The Observer (London) reported that since the Coup that killed Mujib there were Indian military movements along the Bangladesh border.\(^\text{127}\)

\(^{124}\) *Times of India*, 28 August 1975.


\(^{126}\) *Times of India*, 8 November 1975.

\(^{127}\) Cited in *Pakistan Times*, 19 November 1975.
To compound the problems, some assailants in Dacca wounded the Indian High Commissioner in a kidnap attempt.\textsuperscript{128} It seemed that the situation was nearing a flash-point.

That was when Bangladesh took some initiatives to defuse the crisis. President Sayem, who had replaced Mushtaq telephoned Mrs Gandhi to convey his 'regrets' at the kidnap incident and eventually despatched a Special Mission to Delhi to placate the Indian authorities.\textsuperscript{129} This particular crisis-slide was thus arrested, but there were other issues resulting in mutual bitterness. These were border incidents and the continuing problem of Farakka.

**Border Incidents and Bangladeshi Dissidents in India:**

In April 1976 Bangladesh alleged that the Indians had been training and arming some Bengali civil and military dissidents who were sneaking back across the borders to fight units of the Bangladesh Army.\textsuperscript{130} The same day Delhi lodged a protest with Dacca against what it described as an 'unprovoked shooting incident', it being the first official admission of border trouble since the creation of Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{131} In May, the Indian Defence Minister, Bansi Lal, confirmed in Parliament that during the previous month there were four incidents of shooting across the border.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{128} Four of the six attackers were shot dead by Bangladeshi and Indian Security Guards. An Indian official statement said: 'The Government of India takes a grave view of this dastardly attack and condemns it in the strongest possible terms', *New York Times*, 27 November 1975.

\textsuperscript{129} *Times of India*, 28 November 1975 and 7 December 1975.

\textsuperscript{130} *New York Times*, 22 April 1976.

\textsuperscript{131} *Times (London)*, 21 April 1976.

\textsuperscript{132} *Times of India*, 6 May 1976.
In September 1976, the leader of the Bangladesh delegation to the United Nations, Admiral M.A. Khan, raised the issue at a press conference in New York. His complaint was that India was encouraging military 'border incursions' into Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{133} The two governments organised border talks in late January 1977 but the Bangladesh Rifles Chief, General Dastagir alleged that India's refusal to 'accept the truth of harbouring dissidents' had made the situation difficult.\textsuperscript{134} The problem seemed intricately linked with the state of bilateral political relations. India found herself in an awkward position, unable to refuse refuge to the pro-Mujib forces that sought shelter. Nor was she particularly chary of doing so, given the sour bilateral relations, brought about largely by the continuing Farakka problem.

The Continuing Problem of Farakka:

The Dacca authorities alleged continued withdrawal of water by India even beyond the period specified in the Interim Agreement of May 1975. Several bilateral discussions proved fruitless. In the meanwhile Bhashani initiated a public agitation against India. He organised what has been described as the 'longest' procession 'in living memory in the subcontinent'.\textsuperscript{135} High Commissioner Shamsur Rahman was

\textsuperscript{133} *Pakistan Times*, 26 September 1976.

\textsuperscript{134} *ibid.*, 31 January 1977.

\textsuperscript{135} The procession was 8 km long and comprised nearly 500,000 people. *Straits Times*, 17 May 1976.
summoned to the Foreign Office in New Delhi and told of India's 'regret and concern' at the Dacca Government's failure to check inflammatory propaganda against India over Farakka'.

Bangladesh now saw fit to internationalise the issue. At the 42 nation Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference in Istanbul in May 1976, the issue was raised by Dacca and the joint Communique noted the Farakka project's adverse effects on Bangladesh. The Indian Foreign Minister Chavan had earlier warned Bangladesh that its attempts to internationalise the issue would only complicate matters, and please only those who harboured ill will against the Subcontinent.

In August Bangladesh formally requested the Secretary General of the United Nations to include Farakka as a Supplementary item in the agenda of the General Assembly. In a Memorandum explaining the reasons for the request, Dacca argued that Bangladesh was confronted with a 'problem of crisis proportions' and that 'the failure to resolve this issue expeditiously and satisfactorily carries with it the potential threat of conflict affecting peace and

136 Times of India, 14 May 1976.
139 The item was entitled 'Question of the Unilateral Division of the Waters of the International River Ganges in Contravention of all International Laws and Regulations and Traditional Usages and in Violation of Solemn Pledges on the use of such Waters'. Ancillary Documents on Agenda Item 121: Thirty-First Session of the UN General Assembly (Bangladesh Mission to the U.N.) u.d. p.l. Dacca took the position that the Ganges was an international waterway and consequently Bangladesh was entitled to the rights of low riparian regions.
security in the area and region as well'.\footnote{Bangladesh Times, 1 September 1976.} To the Indians, Bangladeshi action in involving the U.N. was 'unfortunate and regrettable' since such problems were 'amenable to a constructive solution which will take into account the needs and rights of the two countries in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation'.\footnote{Times of India, 26 August 1976.} This reaction was in conformity with New Delhi's principles as explained by Mrs Gandhi in an interview with the Editor of \textit{The Canberra Times} on 12 May 1976. She said, 'We think that bilateralism is the best way of doing things. We are capable of sorting out our relations with our neighbours'.\footnote{Cited in ibid., 21 May 1976.}

Bangladesh did not agree. At the U.N. the Chief of the Bangladesh delegation, Admiral Khan, argued that without third party intervention Bangladesh would be 'left with no redress in the face of continuing injury' from her powerful neighbour.\footnote{Statement of the Chairman of the Bangladesh Delegation in the Special Political Committee, Thirty-first GA Session on Item 121 (Bangladesh Mission to the U.N., Press Release, 15 November 1976), p.23.} After one week's hard bargaining and mediation mainly by four non-aligned states, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Guyana and Algeria, both Parties, according to a statement read by Assembly President Amarasinghe,

undertook to give due consideration to the most appropriate ways of utilising the capacity of the U.N. system. It is open to either party to report to the
General Assembly at the 32nd Congress on the progress achieved in the settlement of the problem.\textsuperscript{144}

There was a return to bilateralism, with a difference that now it was with the sanction of the world forum, which Bangladesh had already sounded on the issue, and to which she was certain to go back if the renewed attempts at talks failed. There were some fruitless discussions in December 1976 and January 1977, but it was obvious that the stalemate could only be cleared by a major political breakthrough.\textsuperscript{145} However elections in India were due in March 1977 and it was unlikely Mrs Gandhi could afford any concessions on this touchy issue till afterwards.

(ii) Economic:

Economics had become inextricably linked with Politics in Indo-Bangladesh relations as is evidenced in the period of crisis slide on both Trade and Aid fronts.

Trade: In January 1976 after six days of talks, Agreed Minutes were signed on coal trade. India undertook to supply 500,000 tonnes over the next five years at what the Indian Commerce Secretary, Alexander, described as 'internationally competitive and advantageous price'.\textsuperscript{146} The price must have been hotly disputed for Alexander's Bangladeshi counterpart, Nurul Islam, asked for a 'realistic approach' to the coal price, alleging that the sharp increase the previous year had adversely affected road transport and

\textsuperscript{144} Cited in \textit{Pakistan Times}, 26 November 1976.

\textsuperscript{145} For Admiral Khan's disappointment with talks, see \textit{Times of India}, 8 December 1976.

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Times of India}, 13 January 1976.
and construction industry in Bangladesh. More pointedly, Nurul Islam argued that with her substantial natural resources and large industrial base, unless India assisted Bangladesh to increase her flow of trade, trade would become one-sided. Underlying his statement was the theme that India shirked the responsibilities that naturally devolved on her as the senior trading partner.

That mutual trade had reached a new low was evidenced by the statement made by Nurul Islam's successor as Commerce Secretary, Matiur Rahman, later that year. In Calcutta Rahman said that Bangladesh was committed to exporting fish to India worth Rs.3.5 crores that year but was unable to fulfil even a part of this commitment due to shortage in the home market. He referred to the failure to reach an Agreement in this connection when a team of Indian officials visited Dacca soon after.

The existing Trade Agreement was renewed for a further three years in October 1976. Agreed Minutes between the two governments were signed in October 1979 following Trade talks and the Indian side reaffirmed its commitment to intensify efforts for the promotion of imports from Bangladesh. By then, however, it had become evident that mere signing of Agreements were insufficient to bring about significant improvement in trade relations.

147 ibid.
148 ibid., 1 September 1976.
149 Bangladesh Observer, 13 October 1979.
Aid: Bangladeshi reaction towards future Indian aid was adverse. Reports from Dacca said that Bangladesh would summarily reject any offer of financial aid from India. Since India's unilateral withdrawal of water from Farakka was bound to cripple Bangladesh's economy, Dacca thought that India's offer of aid at this juncture would be farcical.\textsuperscript{150}

E. \textit{Detente}

(i) \textbf{Political:}

Just as the change of government in Dacca in August 1975 initiated the stage of crisis slide, another such change of government, this time in New Delhi in March 1977, portended to reverse that trend.

\textbf{Changes of Government in Delhi:} With the assumption of office by the new Janata Government of Desai, Dacca took the initiative in attempting to break the ice. Ziaur Rahman despatched the Presidential Adviser for Foreign Affairs in Dacca, Professor Shamsul Huq to Delhi in April 1977, to convey Dacca' 'warmest greetings' to the new Government in India.\textsuperscript{151} Delhi responded eagerly and within days after Huq's Delhi's visit the new Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, arrived in Dacca,\textsuperscript{152} setting the tone for an upward trend in mutual relations. This movement received a fillip when Zia and Desai had two sessions in London in June during the Queen's

\textsuperscript{150} BBC, cited in \textit{Pakistan Times}, 6 April 1976.

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Times of India}, 6 April 1977.

\textsuperscript{152} ibid., 16 April 1977.
Jubilee Celebrations. The improved atmosphere enabled the Gordian knot of Farakka to be cut, thus paving the way for a Subcontinental détente.

Mrs Gandhi's return to power in January 1980 seems unlikely to adversely affect the existing détente. In his address to the first session of the Indian Parliament following elections, the Indian President, Sanjiva Reddy, emphasized the continuing need for regional stability and cooperation among Subcontinental states especially after the recent developments in Afghanistan, which according to him, highlighted the 'reemergence of Cold War'. Zia led a Bangladeshi delegation to New Delhi the same month becoming the first head of State to visit India after Mrs Gandhi's victory, and after discussions with the Indian Prime Minister, described the bilateral relations as being 'very good'.

The Farakka Agreement: On 5 November 1977 the Agreement on Farakka was signed in Dacca by Admiral Khan and the Indian Irrigation Minister, Barnala. It allocated to Bangladesh between 60 and 62 per cent of the total flow of the Ganges. It was agreed that during the leanest period (April 21 to 30) India would divert only 20,500 cusecs out of a total flow of 55,000 cusecs. The Agreement was for five years, to be reviewed by both governments at the end of a three year period. Barnala referred to the 'considerable sacrifice'


India had made in reaching the Agreement and anticipated criticism by certain sections of the Indian Press and public. However, all that was stated on All-India Radio was that the Ganges 'would no longer carry within its banks the waters of discord'.

Border Incidents & Bangladeshi dissidents in India:
Anxious to please the authorities in Dacca, Desai and Foreign Minister Vajpayee made it clear to the Bangladeshi political dissidents in India, that they would not be allowed to carry on political activities against India's neighbour while in India.

Perhaps as a result of this, no further border incidents were reported, for the first time since early 1976.

Visits by leaders: A favourable impact was created by the visits to each other's country by the leaders. Ziaur Rahman visited India in December 1977. The All-India Radio saw the visit as drawing 'the curtain on a barren two year long spell in the relations between the two neighbouring countries'. Desai returned the visit in April 1979.

By then the process of detente in South Asia was well under way. In May 1978 Vajpayee said in an address at the

156 India and Foreign Review (New Delhi), 15 November 1977. Barnala was not wrong in anticipating criticism (p.6.). Soon Calcutta Press was accusing New Delhi of sacrificing the interests of West Bengal for foreign policy aims of the new Janata Government. See Jugantar (Bengali) 7 November 1977. For reaction among West Bengal intelligentsia, see Jayanta Kumar Ray, 'Farakka Agreement', International Studies (Jawaharlal Nehru University Quarterly, New Delhi), April-June 1978, pp.235-246 passim.

157 All-India Radio, Spotlight Talk, 7 November 1977.

158 India and Foreign Review (New Delhi), 1 December 1977, p.6.

159 Spotlight Talk, 1 December 1977.
Jawarhalal Nehru University, New Delhi that 'the subcontinent as a whole pulsates with a new confidence in peace and desire for cooperation'.

The political relations did create a framework which was able to contain and absorb minor problems. This was evident in Bangladesh-India cooperation in July-August in 1979 in avoiding escalation of religious tensions after anti-Muslim riots in India. About 20,000 Indian Muslims had crossed into Bangladesh from West Bengal in June-July 1979 creating a potentially dangerous situation. But the Bangladesh Foreign Minister announced that India was willing to take back her 'nationals', carefully eschewing terming them as 'Muslims' or 'refugees'. Ordinarily, an issue of this nature would have led to acrimonious exchanges between the two governments. Bangladesh displayed her eagerness in continuing this detente when in January 1980 President Ziaur Rahman became the first Head of a foreign government to visit New Delhi after Mrs Gandhi's return to power.

(ii) Economic:

The Economic Relations however could not keep pace with political developments. Trade was being conducted under the Agreement signed on 5 July 1973, being renewed at the end of each three year period. Bangladesh continued

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162 See f.n.154 ante.
to face major imbalances, as indicated by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Imports (Taka Crores)</th>
<th>Exports (Taka Crores)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>68.62</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>32.72</td>
<td>7.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>67.70</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The poor performance of Bangladeshi export sector could only be circumvented by massive purchases by India. Small wonder, trade was the 'focal point', in the words of the Indian Foreign Secretary during Zia-Desai talks in Dacca during the latter's visit to Bangladesh. This was in recognition of the potential danger that poor economic relations could spell for political relations, as evidenced during the period of euphoric interactions.

III. Pakistan

A. From Disentanglement to Recognition

Even after the surrender of the Pakistani troops to the Allied Command in Dacca on 16 December 1971, the new Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto continued to make efforts to keep Pakistan united. He proposed to Mujib,

163 Bangladesh Observer, 18 April 1979. In fact in course of Bangladesh's First Five Year Plan (1973-1978) she faced an overall trade imbalance, totalling Taka 233.61 crores in her bilateral trade with India.
164 ibid.
President-in-absentia of Bangladesh, still in a Pakistani prison, a loose confederation, similar to the one in which Egypt, Libya and Syria had joined, with a formula envisaging virtual independence for both regions, Pakistan and Bangladesh, with separate economies, political institutions and foreign relations. 165

The possibility of Mujib's acceptance was very limited. Even if Mujib agreed to consider it at all, which was again unlikely, given the mood in Bangladesh, it would mean political suicide for him. In any case it was naïve to presume Mujib would accept it while still in a Pakistani prison. Bhutto's best bet would, therefore, be to let him go. In releasing Mujib, Bhutto also intended to appear to make a 'generous gesture' calculated to obtain such long term benefits as the return of Pakistani prisoners of war.

In London, on his way to Dacca, Mujib dispelled the notion of a confederation by stating in a press conference that the way West Pakistan had behaved had made it impossible to 'live together'. 166 He did, however, seem to balance some sharp word about the Pakistan Army's brutality with a conciliatory gesture that he bore no ill-will toward the 'people' of West Pakistan. 167 Pakistan interpreted this as not ruling out totally the hope of interactions, but Bhutto's Press Secretary, Khalid Hassan, held the view that

166 ibid., 9 January 1972.
167 The Times (London), 10 January 1972.
'the last word had not been spoken' on any future constitutional links.\textsuperscript{168}

The chance of any future link was pushed further back each time a country accorded formal recognition to Bangladesh. Moreover, theoretically to Islamabad, that territory still formed part of Pakistan. Bhutto, therefore, floated some sort of a Pakistani 'Hallstein doctrine', warning that diplomatic relations would be severed with any country recognising the Dacca Government. To enforce this, he broke off diplomatic links with Bulgaria, Poland and Mongolia.\textsuperscript{169} However, Bhutto was soon to soften this rigid attitude.\textsuperscript{170}

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Samad's proposals to Islamabad to exchange Bengalis in Pakistan for non-Bengalis in Bangladesh were carried there by the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative Vittorio Winspeare.\textsuperscript{171} The Pakistani Press reaction was hostile. It was argued that

unlike the bulk of the Bengalis serving in West Pakistan, the non-Bengalis in the East are domiciled there. They migrated there from India, made their homes there and settled there permanently. They are as much a part of Bangladesh as any other people; the exchange, if at all, could only be voluntary and on a restricted scale.\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{168} ibid., 13 January 1972.


\textsuperscript{170} As the number of countries recognising Bangladesh increased, Pakistan ran the risk of becoming diplomatically isolated. Secondly, Pakistan could hardly break off links with her major donors. The Head of the Press Department at the Islamabad Foreign Office admitted that Pakistan was 'too small to try to halt the spate of recognition of Sheikh Mujib's government'. \textit{Times of India}, 19 February 1972. The pretension to a Hallstein doctrine was, therefore, soon given up.

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Times of India}, 13 February 1972.

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Pakistan Times}, 17 February 1972.
While Bangladesh was offering this exchange of hostage population, she was reserving the more important lever, the POWs, to obtain Pakistani recognition of her sovereignty. Dacca was signalling, prior to Bhutto-Gandhi Talks in Simla in June 1972, that India could not solely negotiate the POWs with Pakistan. Therefore it was essential that Bangladesh be a party to such negotiations. Mujib was, however, insistent that Bangladesh could not talk to Pakistan without the latter's formal recognition. At the same time he was politically committed to try those POWs charged with war crimes.

The political equation stood thus: Bangladesh had about 730,000 non-Bengalis (Biharis) she was offering to exchange for 400,000 Bengalis in Pakistan. Pakistan, not unwilling to release the Bengalis, wanted the 93,000 POWs back. For this Dacca insisted on negotiations, but only after recognition. At the same time Dacca was committed to the trial of some of the POWs, though this could be a strategy to strengthen her bargaining position, for in the long run, the POWs would have to be returned.

Bhutto wanted the POWs back, and quickly, to soothe his sword-arm, the Punjab, which supplied most of the held soldiers. For this, he knew he had to accord recognition, which his political enemies, bent on degrading his effectiveness were out to block. At the same time, he did not want such a large number of 'Biharis', for they would

173 See f.n.91 ante.

174 Bangladesh Observer, 22 March 1972.
invariably wish to settle in Karachi in Sind, thus exacerbating the Sindhi-non-Sindhi conflict there. Pending the return of the POWs, Pakistan was using whatever means she had, such as her influence with China (which vetoed Bangladesh's application for U.N. membership) to block Bangladesh's major foreign policy goals such as admission to the United Nations. 175

For Bhutto, the question of recognition of Bangladesh was complicated by its transformation into a major domestic political issue. While he himself was willing to accept the separation of Bangladesh as a fait accompli,176 he was opposed by the right wing parties, particularly the Islamic fundamentalist Jamat-e-Islami. The Jamat leader, Mowlana Moudoudi, believed that Bhutto wanted to recognise Bangladesh to justify his own assumption of power in December 1971, for if Pakistan remained united, power would have gone to Mujib.177

Bhutto's argument for recognition was basically that it would be in Pakistan's interest in three ways. Firstly, of course it would mean a return of the POWs. Secondly, and this was to circumvent right-wing opposition, he argued that Bangladesh was a Muslim state and interactions with Pakistan

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175 The Pakistani position was explained by her leader of the U.N. delegation, Raja Tridiv Roy, who said that Pakistan would favourably consider not only the recognition of Bangladesh but also her entry into the U.N. only after the repatriation of POWs from India and after Bangladesh gives up her stand on the War-Crimes trials. *Pakistan Times*, 13 October 1972.

176 He had begun to advocate the acceptance of the 'reality of the situation'. *The Times* (London), 28 October 1972.

177 *Pakistan Times*, 12 November 1972.
would minimise Indian influence there.\textsuperscript{178} Thirdly, he held that the recognition issue involved the repayment of foreign debts, the total burden of which would otherwise fall on Pakistan.\textsuperscript{179}

Bangladesh seemed to receive the signals of Bhutto's awkward domestic situation, and relaxed her own rigid stance when in April 1973 Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain, along with his Indian counterpart came up with the proposal of 'simultaneous repatriation' of hostage populations including POWs except for the 195 Pakistanis who were to be tried. This was still unsatisfactory to Bhutto, for trials were unacceptable to Pakistan's powerful military constituency. He therefore seemed to tighten the screw by threatening to 'react accordingly',\textsuperscript{180} implying that many Bengali officials in Pakistan were likely to be similarly tried for 'treason'.

There was taking place in the subcontinent in the meanwhile a subtle change in the political climate. First, the warmth was ebbing away from Indo-Bangladesh amity, slowly but surely. Secondly, \textit{vis-à-vis} Pakistan's new aid donors, the Muslim states of the Middle East, Pakistan's rapprochement with Bangladesh, one of the largest of Muslim countries in terms of population, was a preferred development. Recognition was increasingly becoming a matter of mutual interest. The calculation that under the circumstances, war

\textsuperscript{178} ibid., 21 December 1972.
trials might only be of chimerical value to Bangladesh and also that it might be an additional lever that Bangladesh would give up when a more favourable climate was achieved, played a large part in the Agreement between India and Pakistan on 28 August 1973 (which Bangladesh backed) by which Pakistan agreed to accept a 'substantial number of Biharis' and to detach the question of the trials of the 195 officials from the repatriation of the POWs.¹⁸¹ In fact reports were soon appearing in the Pakistani Press that Bangladesh might not actually hold the trials at all as she was anxious to improve relations with Pakistan.¹⁸²

On 30 November Dacca helped to improve the climate further by declaring a general amnesty for about 40,000 Bangladeshi prisoners who were detailed on various charges of 'collaboration' with the Pakistanis.¹⁸³ This prompted the Pakistani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Aziz Ahmed, to indicate to the Parliament that Bangladesh was well on the way to fulfilling the three preconditions for recognition, viz. (a) repatriation of POWs, (b) abandoning war crimes trials, and (c) stopping the 'persecution' of those who sided with Pakistan in 1971.¹⁸⁴

By January 1974 the climate of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations had improved considerably, though formal contacts were still lacking. All Bangladeshi defence and civil service

¹⁸¹ See f.n.96 ante.

¹⁸² See, for instance, Pakistan Times, 12 October 1973.


¹⁸⁴ ibid.
personnel who had opted for Bangladesh had been repatriated, in response to Dacca's request that their cases be dealt with on a priority basis. 49,608 POWs were returned to Pakistan, and 42,000 awaited repatriation. The total number of Biharis repatriated to Pakistan stood at 63,180. Pakistan had also cleared an additional 59,394 Biharis for repatriation, and was expected to clear a further 25,000 persons on grounds of hardship. Such was the state of affairs when Pakistan issued a formal invitation to Bangladesh to attend the Islamic Summit Conference scheduled to be held in Lahore on 23 February 1974. But Dacca could not attend without formal recognition.

There was some hectic mediation by the Secretary-General of the Islamic Secretariat Hassan el-Toamy and representatives to the Conference from Kuwait, Lebanon, Somalia, Algeria, Senegal and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. On 22 February Bangladesh and Pakistan accorded each other mutual recognition, the former undertaking to sympathetically consider dropping the war crimes trials, (which was now a foregone conclusion). The next day Mujib flew to Pakistan to attend the Islamic Summit Conference.

The use of the Islamic Summit for formal rapprochement had some significant implications. Firstly, it underlined a common characteristic of both these countries, i.e. their 'Muslimness,' that set them apart from India; secondly, it

helped Bhutto silence the Jamat-i-Islami Opposition which was against recognition; thirdly, Mujib was able to widen his constituency to embrace those elements opposed to his secularist principles, and, finally it provided a new dimension in Bangladesh's foreign relations, by opening up for interactions the Muslim Middle East and Pakistan's friend, China.

Recognition, however, did not entail complete rapprochement. There were major pending issues such as (a) the 195 POWs; (b) the repatriation of Biharis; and (c) the division of assets. Recognition only made bilateral negotiations on these issues possible. There were however two major implications of the recognition. Firstly, the disentanglement of Bangladesh from Pakistan was formally seen to be complete which further confirmed Bangladesh's sovereign status. Secondly, it helped create an atmosphere of goodwill. At the same time it brought to salience the unresolved issues, i.e. the three noted above.

B. The Salience of Issues - Some hard bargaining

The 195 POWs: The path was now cleared for tripartite discussions between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh which were held in April and led to the signing of an Agreement. At issue lay two major problems: first, the fate of the 195 POWs awaiting trial and second, the repatriation of the Biharis. Pakistan deeply regretted 'the war crimes', agreed that 'excess and manifold crimes' were committed by the 195 POWs but appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past in order to promote
reconciliation. In the light of all this, Bangladesh agreed to drop the plans for war-trials 'as an act of clemency'. The POW issue was thus resolved.\textsuperscript{187}

**The 'Biharis':** Pakistan agreed to accept four categories of 'Biharis': (a) those of West Pakistani origin; (b) those with family links in West Pakistan; (c) former Central Government employees and (d) 'hardship cases', generally meaning those whose lives were in danger in Bangladesh because they supported the Pakistan Army during the war.

Also the Pakistanis agreed to 'upon request, provide reason why any particular case has been rejected' and any aggrieved applicant could, at any time, seek a review of his application provided he was able to supply new facts or further information to the government of Pakistan. This implied increase in the numbers of Bihari intake. More than 500,000 had applied for repatriation; till then Pakistan had accepted around 70,000.\textsuperscript{188}

This issue was not as easily soluble as the one of the POWs. The Pakistanis were unwilling to accept them, as they swelled the ranks of refugees in Karachi, exacerbating local-non-local conflicts in the Sind Province. Pakistan's Aziz Ahmed was quite blunt about it to the Bangladesh Foreign Minister.\textsuperscript{189} The problem revolving round the 'numbers game' dragged on, and was given a fillip by the general failure of Bhutto's forthcoming visit in June. At that point, during

\textsuperscript{187} New York Times, 8 April 1974.

\textsuperscript{188} ibid.

\textsuperscript{189} Interview with former Foreign Minister, Dr Kamal Hossain, op.cit.
Mujib-Bhutto talks, the latter showed unwillingness to accept a larger figure than 115,000 out of the 400,000 eligible Biharis, according to the Bangladesh side.\textsuperscript{190}

Bangladesh raised it in the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in December 1974. When the Bangladesh representative Fazlul Karim pointed out that 400,000 Biharis still awaited repatriation, his Pakistani counterpart Hassan Mahmud said that while his country would be willing to receive some more of the 'hardship cases', it would be 'too much to expect Pakistan to accept from Bangladesh every domiciled non-Bengali'.\textsuperscript{191} Mujib raised it again at the Commonwealth Leaders Conference in Jamaica in May 1975 when he criticised Pakistan's failure to take back 63,000 Bihari families.\textsuperscript{192}

Even in the late 1970s there were Biharis who were anxious to settle in Pakistan and rejoin their kin, many of whom had been repatriated earlier.

In 1977 Pakistan agreed to take back 25,000 Biharis. Out of these 4,790 were repatriated by sea, till the process was halted due to the disturbed political situation in Pakistan. Following fresh talks between the two governments, and agitation by the stranded Biharis in Bangladesh, repatriation by air was resumed in September 1979.\textsuperscript{193} The issue has now lost its urgency.

\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Pakistan Times}, 2 December 1974.
\textsuperscript{192} ibid., 7 May 1975.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Bangladesh Times}, 15 September 1979.
Division of assets: This emerged as the most intractable of the three major issues, and is still largely unresolved. It also halted the rapidly developing rapprochement between the two states and led to the failure of Bhutto's visit to Dacca in June 1974.

The visit, which was to be a 'journey of amity', proved to be a failure mainly on this score. In the course of their talks, Mujib proposed the following: (a) Pakistan should agree in principle that former assets and liabilities should be shared equitably; (b) that a joint commission should examine the details, and (c) that Pakistan should make a 'token payment' within two months, consisting of Bangladesh's share of quantifiable assets (such as gold resources, ships, aircraft) to meet her increasing needs. Bangladesh's demand of the share of Pakistan's gold and foreign exchange reserves came to $11,000,000 and other assets totalled $4,000 million. Bhutto rejected the proposal for an immediate payment and suggested that the question be referred to an expert committee which would report within six months. To this, Dacca did not agree. The progress towards complete normalisation of Dacca-Islamabad relations was thus abruptly halted, with the failure of talks on assets.

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196 *Straits Times* (Singapore), 17 January 1975.
197 Dr Kamal Hossain was expressing his government's 'feelings' when he said: 'We are disappointed that a great opportunity has been missed in taking a giant step forward in reconciliation ... We found a total lack of response to the problems that are basic'. *New York Times*, 30 June 1974. His views were not shared by his Pakistani counterpart, Aziz Ahmed, who saw two
With the pressure from the Muslim countries of the Middle East to establish diplomatic relations growing, Pakistan at this stage was anxious to do so. But Bangladesh now linked this to the question of division of assets. Bangladesh strategy was as follows: Kamal Hossain went to the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference in Jeddah in July 1975 with complete authority from Mujib to establish diplomatic relations with Pakistan. There he proposed arbitration on the question of assets by Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Kuwait or any one of the three, and announced his government's decision to abide by the outcome. By transferring the onus to the Arab states, Hossain achieved three things: firstly, the Arabs were forced into a position of neutrality from that of identity with Pakistan; secondly, by placing complete confidence in the Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia, he earned their gratitude and cleared the way for Saudi recognition which was still pending and thirdly, he placed Pakistan in an awkward position from which she would find it difficult to extricate herself without making some substantial concession. It was agreed that the matter would be settled after the forthcoming non-aligned conference in the following months, i.e. August 1975.

197 (cont'd)

principal achievements: (i) resumption of trade and (ii) cessation of mutual hostile propaganda. To Aziz Ahmed, Kamal Hossain's disappointment with the talks arose presumably because Dacca had 'set its expectations in the matter of some of its proposals too high. Dawn, 1 August 1974.

198 The question of liabilities (as opposed to assets) was settled not through bilateral negotiations between Pakistan and Bangladesh but through separate discussions between Pakistan and external donors on the one hand and Bangladesh and external donors on the other, whereby Bangladesh accepted liability for projects visibly located in her territory.

199 The account is based on the interview with Dr Kamal Hossain, op.cit. Also see Chapter 6.
On 15 August the Mujib government was overthrown in a Coup, and the new Mushtaq e government projected strong Islamic characteristics. Pakistan made early overtures and following a meeting between Aziz Ahmed and the new Bangladesh Foreign Minister Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury in New York, diplomatic relations were established. The question of division of assets receded into the background. Soon Pakistan herself was immersed in a political turmoil, and the Bhutto government was in no position to negotiate on this issue. The asset question remains unresolved to date and is a potential bone of discontent, that is likely to become salient should any future government in Dacca choose to make it so.

C. The Detente

(i) Political relations: Perceiving the strong Islamic tenor of the new government in Bangladesh, and wrongly assuming that an Islamic Republic had been proclaimed in Dacca (something that Dacca denied to the Indians forthwith), Bhutto announced fresh recognition (taking the credit of being the first to recognise the new regime) and urged others, particularly the Islamic countries to do likewise. Mushtaq, the President in Dacca, who had on the day of his

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200 *Pakistan Times*, 5 October 1975.

201 The Mushtaque Government apparently paid a higher priority to the establishment of diplomatic relations, largely due to the fact that relations with India had deteriorated.

202 *Pakistan Times*, 16 August 1975.
inauguration spoken of normalising relations in the Subcontinent, had a message to Bhutto delivered through the Swiss Embassy in which he said his government looked forward 'with confidence to the earliest opening of a new chapter between [our] two countries, the normalisation of relations and the forging of friendly and brotherly ties between [us]' THEREAFTER Mushtaq sent a personal emissary to Bhutto, Pir Mohsenuddin.

The first official high level meeting took place when the Foreign Minister of the Mushtaq Government, Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, met Aziz Ahmed in New York on 25 September during the U.N. General Assembly session. Following A.S. Chowdhury-Aziz Ahmed talks, on 4 October, it was jointly announced that diplomatic relations at the level of Ambassadors would be stablished.

The Coups in Dacca in November 1975 delayed the implementation of this decision as perhaps fresh choices needed to be made. On 9 December Pakistan announced the appointment of M. Khurshid, who presented his credentials in January 1976. The envoy from Bangladesh, M. Zahiruddin, left Dacca for Islamabad on 29 December.

Pakistan Times, 26 August 1975.
Interview with Dr Kamal Hossain, op.cit.
Pakistan Times, 26 September 1975.
The announcement was made at a Press Conference by the Pakistani and Bangladesh Ambassadors to the U.N., Iqbal Akhund and S.A. Karim. Pakistan Times, 5 October 1975.

ibid., 10 December 1975 and 29 December 1975. Khurshid, a retired civil servant had a long career of service in the Eastern Wing of Pakistan. Zahiruddin, a senior politician was once a Minister in the Central Government of Pakistan.
When Bangladesh took the Farakka issue to the U.N. in 1976, Pakistan accorded her support. The Pakistani Ambassador to the U.N., Iqbal Akhund, underlined the common problem of weaker countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh vis-à-vis powerful neighbours like India when he said:

In the absence of respect for the decisions and resolutions of the U.N. and of effective machinery for enforcing settlements the more powerful state can always make its will prevail over the less-powerful - even without the use of force.209

The displacement of Bhutto did not make any difference to 'the framework of harmonious relations' that had already been established. President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh visited Pakistan in December 1977, and with the new Pakistani strongman General Ziaul Huq 'reiterated [their] conviction that the continuance of [bilateral visits] would promote closer bilateral cooperation and strengthen their historic and cultural ties'.210

There was in the meanwhile a general easing of tension between India and Pakistan as well, resulting in the Indian Foreign Minister Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan in February 1978.211 This on the backdrop of improved Indo-Bangladesh relations, provided a modicum of general détente in the Subcontinent. An illustration of this significantly changed atmosphere was

209 ibid., 26 September 1976.

210 Joint Communiqué issued at the end of the visit of H.E. President Ziaur Rahman of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on 22nd-23rd December 1977 (Dacca, Ministry of External Affairs), December 1977.

211 Far Eastern Economic Review, 24 February 1978. There was obviously the hand of Iran in encouraging this Subcontinental détente between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in furtherance of the Shah's pet project of the regional 'common market' stretching from Dacca to Tehran. See Asia Week (Hong Kong), 24 February 1978.
provided in October 1978 when Pakistan and India both supported Bangladesh's candidature for the United Nations Security Council, when for the first time since 1971 a major foreign policy aim of one of the three countries was supported by the other two.

In reacting to the developments in Afghanistan in late 1979, Bangladesh's views were in concert with those of Pakistan, which felt threatened by the proximity of the Soviet presence. Bangladesh, at the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference held in Islamabad in January 1980, strongly voiced her demand for withdrawal of 'foreign troops' from Afghanistan. Such reactions, naturally, were pleasing to Pakistan.

(ii) Economic Relations:

Aid: The major area of economic cooperation between Bangladesh and Pakistan has been in that of trade relations, rather than aid relations. Given Pakistan's own security of resources, Pakistan did not, as expected, emerge as a major external donor, as regards Bangladesh. There were small allocations made, in grant form, from time to time, however, which had more demonstrative rather than substantive effects.

Till 30 June 1978 the total amount of aid received from Pakistan had been $33,520 all as grant. The entire amount had also been utilised.

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212 Bangladesh Observer, 28 January 1980.

no serious problems with the utilisation of this comparatively small amount of Pakistani aid.

There were some other areas of increased contact in the economic sector. In November 1976 the Bangladesh Railway Secretary visited Pakistan to finalise the details of the supply of railway coaches worth US$5 million. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed involving the transfer of 28 carriages manufactured in Turkey and in Pakistan.214

As a gesture of goodwill, Bhutto decided to make a gift of a Boeing 707 aircraft to Bangladesh.215 This helped to mollify Bangladesh somewhat, though the latter had made formal claims on a larger share of the Pakistan International Airlines' assets including planes.

**Trade:** Even prior to the signing of the Trade Agreement between Bangladesh and Pakistan in May 1976, there was considerable trade between the two countries as the following table reveals:216

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Imports into Bangladesh</th>
<th>Exports from Bangladesh</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Balance of Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>34.06</td>
<td>172.6</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>70.75</td>
<td>297.05</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>73.22</td>
<td>256.76</td>
<td>329.98</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

214 *Pakistan Times, 5 November 1976.*


216 Figures obtained from the Bangladesh Trade Commissioner's Office, Karachi.
The table reveals an adverse balance of trade for Bangladesh in the first two years, but a considerably favourable balance in the third. There is a greater scope for increase in the exports from Bangladesh especially in tea, pharmaceutical products, hides and skins and teakwood.  

There is a possibility therefore that economic relations with Pakistan will continue to grow, if the political climate remains stable. Various kinds of accords continued to be signed between the two governments, such as one in November 1979 for the avoidance of double taxation of income between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

IV. Conclusions

The late 1970s witnessed a growing spirit of détente in the Subcontinent with marked improvement in the mutual relations between the three actors of the Subsystem, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. India continued to occupy the pivotal point in Bangladesh's external relations. Though some basic problems have come close to being solved, three

217 Interview with Mr Quamrul Huda, Bangladesh Trade Commissioner, Karachi, June 1978.


219 While Mrs Gandhi's return to office does not immediately portend a reversal of détente, the process may come under severe strain in the 1980s, if the U.S. mounts any arms aid programme to Pakistan in reaction to Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Such aid has been assured by President Carter in his State of the Union Message to Congress in January 1980. Pakistan is reportedly pressing for such sophisticated items as A-7 and F-15 aircraft *(Time*, February 1980) and India is not likely to look upon this kindly for, while this may be initially directed against possible Soviet threat, it is bound to have implications for regional strategic balance.
factors in Indo-Bangladesh relations are likely to inspire growing concern. Firstly, future changes of government in either country. Traditionally changes of governments have played crucial roles in setting the tone in mutual relations. While Dacca may have good working relations with a government in New Delhi, Bangladesh will need to be in ready preparation for a successor Indian government which may not be as friendly (the same would of course be true of Delhi). Secondly, the economic relations have not kept pace with the political. There is therefore the constant risk that at any point in time the former may affect the latter adversely. Thirdly, domestic political situations in both countries tend to affect their bilateral relations. Communal riots are one example. When the inter-religious communal harmony in either state breaks down, for whatever reason, it is likely to have implications for inter-state relations. For all these reasons Bangladesh continues to seek a balance against any potential sense of threat from her powerful neighbour.²²⁰

Traditionally, this balance was obtained by a coalition with the community now represented by Pakistan. But vis-à-vis any potential threat from India, Pakistan no longer constitutes a sufficient deterrent. This is for three main reasons: firstly, the 1971 war had left her militarily by far the weaker; secondly, Pakistan herself was acknowledging Indian

²²⁰ For a senior academic's reaction to the present state of inter-State affairs in the region, see Professor M.A. Aziz, Can There Be a Durable Peace in the Subcontinent? (Dacca: Dahuk Publishers, 1978), passim. Dr Aziz argues that there cannot be a durable peace though obviously this represents an extreme, but powerful, viewpoint.
pre-eminence if not predominance in the region;\(^{221}\) thirdly, Pakistan was becoming more involved with the Muslim Middle East and turning away from South Asia.\(^{222}\)

As a structural response to India, Bangladesh sees it necessary to build external linkages to bolster her sense of security. This policy continues even in the absence of specific threats. Regional détente might moderate the intensity of the search for linkages but does not eliminate it. At the same time the process of détente is fed by the satisfaction of this sense of security, as in the period following the Farakka Agreement.

Farakka remains the crucial issue upon which the structure of Indo-Bangladesh relations hinges. With Mrs Gandhi's return to power in 1980, a reappraisal by her of her predecessor's policies on this matter cannot be ruled out. If her government effects any significant change of posture, it might provoke Dacca's adverse reactions, and thereby, upset the apple-cart of détente in the Subcontinent.

Bangladesh's search for extra-regional linkages involves her in interactions with several actors in the global arena, in particular, the two superpowers, China and the countries of the Middle East.

\(^{221}\)William J. Barnds, 'United States Policy toward South Asia: Shifting Perceptions and Policy Choices', *Pacific Community*, Vol.8, No.4 (July, 1977), p.656. This will only change if there is considerable accretion to Pakistan's strength because of the promised American military assistance in the 1980s.

CHAPTER 4

EXTRA-REGIONAL RELATIONS: THE SUPERPOWERS

I. Introduction

In one crucial aspect Bangladesh's relations with the Superpowers differed from that of Pakistan in the previous years. Pakistan was linked to the Dominant System as an ally of one of the Central Protagonists, the U.S.A. For Bangladesh such a linkage with the global Dominant System was not practicable, for two broad reasons. Firstly, it is difficult for a minor power to break into the Dominant System on its own without invitation. With the heat of the Cold War gradually cooling with the resultant change in the global politico-strategic situation, such an invitation was unlikely.

Secondly, even if it was forthcoming, it was unlikely that Bangladesh herself would accept it. Traditionally, the region that is Bangladesh was opposed to alliances, and the Awami League was publicly committed against such military pacts. Hence neither Superpower could be looked upon as a possible source for accretion of military power.

Even then, the Superpowers remained important for Bangladesh. Firstly, both Superpowers have constituencies

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in Bangladesh, though the reverse is not so. The Soviet Union has a sympathetic segment among the left wing parties (e.g. NAP Muzaffar and the pro-Soviet Bangladesh Communist Party (Moni Singh Group)). The United States holds significant interest for the Middle Class, structurally linked to her economically and culturally. For these reasons for a small power like Bangladesh, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. are not just two other State Actors to be dealt with in accordance with the ordinary rules of inter-State relations. Relations with each have dimensions that have considerable domestic relevance. Secondly, both were important sources of much-needed material assistance.

It was, however, unlikely that Bangladesh could involve either Superpower to her advantage in the major preoccupation of her foreign policy, i.e. relations with India. What sort of policies could and did Dacca evolve vis-à-vis those two countries, given the above constraints? This chapter attempts to make a detailed examination of this question.

II. The U.S.S.R.

A. Soviet Role during the Struggle for Bangladesh:

(i) The Background

Several factors determined the Soviet attitude towards South Asia on the eve of the 1970s. Firstly, it was felt in Moscow following British withdrawal from 'East of Suez'

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3 For a theoretical expose of how the local elites in the developing world become thus linked see Susan George, How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger (London: Pelican, 1977), pp.69-88. Also Chapter 10 of this thesis.
that the U.S., Australia and Japan were casting longing glances at the area. This, together with the growing rivalry with China, occasioned Brezhnev to announce at the World Communist Party Conference in June 1969:

\[\text{We are of the opinion that the course of events is putting on the agenda the task of creating a system of Collective Security in Asia.}\]

Both Pakistan and India were looked upon as potential allies in such a scheme. An essential requirement of its success was stability in the Subcontinent.

Secondly, not only did the Soviets favour Subcontinental stability but they also viewed themselves as the guardian of such stability, having initiated the peace-talks between India and Pakistan following the 1965 war leading to the conclusion of belligerency by the Tashkent Declaration of January 1966. The Tashkent Declaration symbolised the mediating and peace-keeping role of the Soviet Union, and this was demonstrated by the regular observance of its anniversary by the Soviet authorities. On the eve of such an anniversary on 9 January 1971, Tass wrote:

\[\text{The spirit of the Tashkent Declaration confirmed that in the present conditions the only possible approach to the settlement of disputes between states is the renunciation of force and the settlement of these problems at a Conference Table.}\]

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6 Quoted in Asian Recorder, 29 January-4 February 1971, p.9987.
The Soviet aim therefore was to bring India and Pakistan together. The Soviets were happy with Mrs Gandhi, who credited the U.S.S.R. with being more interested in economic cooperation than in military alliances. The Indian Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh was reported in the Russian Press as saying that the essence of the Soviet [security] plan is the development of cooperation among Asian countries for strengthening of peace.

Small wonder Izvestia exulted in Mrs Gandhi's election victory in March 1971 as another convincing evidence of the fact that the Indian people came out consistently for strengthening their national independence for social progress and for peaceful foreign policy.

Upto that point, the Soviets were also happy with the political developments in Pakistan, where after the election victory of December 1970, Mujib's Awami League was poised for victory. Over the years Moscow had altered her former unfavourable attitude towards the Awami League and had now begun to see it in a more favourable light, since the more left-wing parties in Pakistan were assuming a pro-Peking

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colour. It was argued on a theoretical plane that the most radical parties objectively aided reactionary forces by narrowing the united front, and that the correct path of non-capitalist development was through bourgeois democratic reforms.\(^{11}\) Seen as a 'centrist' party in March 1970,\(^{12}\) the Awami League within months was raised to the status of a 'left' force with reforming tendencies and desire for friendship with the Soviet Union,\(^{13}\) conforming to the Soviet ideal of the 'correct path to non-capitalist development'. Mujib, to Moscow, was 'the Nehru of Pakistan - a votary of non-alignment, secularism, socialism and democracy'.\(^{14}\)

(ii) Initial Soviet Appraisal: Pakistan's 'Internal Affairs'?

Moscow's hopes were rudely jarred by Yahya's military crackdown of 25 March 1971, the imprisonment of Mujib, and the escape to India of the Awami League leadership. On 2 April 1971 Podgorny sent a message to Yahya which is quoted in detail because of its importance:

... We have been and remain convinced that the complex problems that have arisen in Pakistan of late can and must be solved politically without use of force.

Continuation of repressive measures and bloodshed in East Pakistan will undoubtedly make the solution of the

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\(^{13}\) A. Filippov, Pravda, 14 August 1970, ibid.

problem and may do great harm to the vital interest of the entire people of Pakistan.

We consider it our duty to address you ... with an insistent appeal for the adoption of the most urgent measures to stop the bloodshed and repression against the population of East Pakistan and for turning to methods of peaceful political settlement.¹⁵ [emphases mine.]

The letter is most significant in that while urging 'peaceful political settlement' which would no doubt mean transfer of power to the Awami League, the use of words as 'bloodshed' and 'repression' (twice each) were calculated to transmit Soviet firmness and cognizance of Pakistan's brutal policies, though the mention of the 'entire people of Pakistan' seemed to favour a solution that retained territorial integrity.

Yahya's reply was sharp. He asked the Soviet Union to use her undeniable influence over India to prevent the latter from 'meddling in Pakistan's internal affairs'. No country, including the U.S.S.R., could allow 'anti-national and unpatriotic elements to proceed to destroy, or to countenance subversion'. Mujib's rival, the pro-Peking West Pakistani Peoples' Party leader Bhutto described Podgorny's letter as 'blatant interference' and found it regrettable 'that the Soviet Union could have forgotten Lenin's socialist

¹⁵ Asian Recorder, 14-20 May 1971, p.10160.
principles, the foremost of which was to refrain from interference in the affairs of other countries'.

The Soviet Union reacted strongly to this attempt to tutor her leadership on the principles of Leninism. But this was confined to unpublished confidential notes between Moscow and Islamabad, which, according to a former Minister in Yahya's Cabinet, were more acrimonious than the published exchanges. However, in the interest of maintaining the unity of Pakistan, the Soviets publicly continued their efforts to convince Yahya of the need for 'a political settlement' rather than a 'military solution'. Reiterating Soviet support for the territorial integrity of Pakistan, one journal warned that 'the imperialists would not be averse

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16 Ibid., p.10158. Bhutto may well have been wrong in analyzing how Lenin would have viewed the situation. The other side could have, as they indeed, did, quoted Lenin more justifiably. For, 'On the National Question' Lenin held that 'the masses know perfectly well, the value of geographical and economic ties and the advantages of a big market and a big state. They will, therefore, resort to secession only when the national oppression and national friction make joint life absolutely intolerable and hinder any and all economic intercourse. In that case, the interests of capitalist development and the freedom of the class struggle will be best solved by secession'. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.20 (Moscow: Progress Publishers), p.17. Lenin would have encouraged the demand of national self-determination of the Bengalis (Lenin referred not only to nations but also to nationalities), because he saw the demand for such right, and the consistent struggle to achieve it, as being in the interest of the class struggle of the proletariat for the victory of socialism, since it facilitated the differentiation of the classes [in any given country] raising the class consciousness of the proletariat and promoting international solidarity and unity of all workers of different nations against domestic and foreign exploiters. See V.V. Zenin, 'Lenin on the National and Colonial Question', Lenin: The Great Theoretician (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), pp.316-317.


to taking advantage of the situation in Pakistan to further their selfish neo-colonial aims'.

So far the Soviets while disapproving strongly of Yahya's methods, were addressing only Islamabad in urging solutions. Implicit in this was the Soviet view that this was an internal affair of Pakistan. Moreover, Moscow was firm in reiterating the need to retain the unity of Pakistan as a single state, lest 'imperialists' and China takepickings from any disintegration of that country.

(iii) Soviet Reappraisal: More than 'An Internal Affair'

Till May 1971 the Soviets were content to treat the troubles in Pakistan as the latter's internal affair. Little note was taken of the fact that in April the Bangladeshi leadership-in-exile had constituted a separate government.

The nascent Bangladesh provisional government sought and obtained the support of pro-Moscow Bengali left wing parties who were now appealing for Soviet support. Muzaffar Ahmed of NAP (Pro-Moscow) combined his declaration of allegiance to the new government with an appeal to Moscow on 20 April 1971. A few days later Abdus Salam, Secretary of the Communist Party of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) emphasised their struggle as one 'against a ruthless and barbarous enemy armed to the teeth by the imperialists and having the support of the Maoists of China'.

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21 ibid., p.317.
pro-Peking Bhashani sent cables to the Soviet leadership
appealing in Lenin's name. In May the Communist Party of
Bangladesh (pro-Moscow) adopted an 18-Point Programme whose
salient features concerned the complete 'liberation' of
Bangladesh, as an 'independent, sovereign, democratic,
republican state with a view to advancing along the path
of socialism'.

The pro-Moscow Bangladesh parties were pointing out
three things to the Kremlin. Firstly, the newly formed
Bangladesh Government in exile conformed to 'the correct
path within the framework of a broad united front'; secondly,
that the situation exemplified a classical Leninist scenario
that called for support to the struggle for self-determination
and thirdly, that China was beginning to be seen as being
ranged on the other side. These were powerful arguments
before the Soviet leadership who claimed ideology as the
basis of state policy. Then there was of course the added
opportunity to wean away some pro-Peking sympathisers,
notably Bhashani and his followers.

The Soviets were therefore constrained to make a
concession, but not directly to the Bangladeshi leadership-
in-exile but to India. On 8 June, following the visit of
the Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh to Moscow, the
Joint Communique noted that both the Soviet Union and India
considered it necessary that Pakistan should take urgent
measures 'to stop the flow of refugees from East Pakistan'

22 ibid., pp.300-301.

23 Eric Stromquist, Yearbook of International Communist Affairs (Hoover
and 'that further steps be taken to ensure that peace is restored for the safe return of the refugees to their homes'. Furthermore, Moscow and Delhi agreed to hold 'exchange of views' in the future in this connection.24

[Emphases mine.]

An analysis of the communique shows that the Soviets now recognised the refugee issue as having drawn India into what was formerly Pakistan's internal affair. Promise of future interactions on the subject pointed to more of it. However the Soviets, while reappraising the situation were refusing to draw India into discussions, beyond the refugee problem, on the substantive issues. The steps to be 'taken to ensure that peace is restored' were related only 'to the safe return of the refugees' (in which India was involved) and not to the ultimate political solution (in which India was not). Reference to the troubled province as East Pakistan in the communique must have been on Soviet insistence, as the Indians would have liked to call it 'East Bengal'.

The Indians, however, played their cards well. For years the Soviets had been anxious to formalise their close ties with India, and the increasing possibility of a Sino-American entente, Kissinger's initiatives to that end having already begun with the secret trip to Peking in June, heightened its need. India now indicated her willingness to sign a Treaty, and in course of Gromyko's visit to New Delhi on 9 August 1971 the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was signed.

24 Pravda, 9 June 1971. CDSP, XIII (23), 17.
It is likely that in signing this treaty Moscow was motivated by three considerations: firstly, to formalize bilateral links with India; secondly, to checkmate Chinese diplomatic and political intrusion into the Subcontinent and thirdly, to restrain both India and Pakistan from adventurist actions. While the Agreement may indeed have signalled the recognition by the Soviets of 'the possibility that stability and status quo could no longer be reconciled', the Soviets seemed to have succeeded in convincing the Pakistanis what Pravda did indeed argue on 11 August, that the treaty was not directed at any third party. The Pakistani Foreign Secretary S.M. Khan, while justifying such an agreement between two states as sanctioned by the U.N. Charter, did indeed hope that the Soviet Union would use her influence to prevent India from attacking Pakistan.

But given Pakistan's strong links with China, such a view could not be sustained for long. The Pact had obvious anti-Chinese implications. Moreover, whatever the Soviet Union's objective might have been, India had managed to convert her into an ally; Pakistan was now left to seek out hers and the obvious candidates were China and the U.S. The Treaty therefore had the effect of deepening the division in the Subcontinent and dichotomising major power attitudes.

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26 Quoted in *Times of India*, 12 August 1971.

Soviet hopes of a united Pakistan under Awami League government were fast eroding, as were prospects of peace in the Suncontinent. The actions of the Pakistani government were running contrary to Soviet advice. Mujib's trial reportedly opened on 11 August. Secondly, Yahya installed a Civilian Government of his own choice in Dacca on 31 August, making it obvious that Yahya's kind of 'political solution' was one that did not involve the Awami League. Thirdly, Mrs Gandhi visited the Soviet Union in September and sought Soviet support in the conflict that looked increasingly imminent. Fourthly, Soviet initiatives undertaken by Podgorny, during the celebration of the Iranian monarchy's 2,500th anniversary, in course of which he met both Pakistan's Yahya and the Indian President Giri in order to bring upon a rapprochement, failed. Fifthly, the Bangladeshi leadership was adamant in its claim to independence and Firyubin's efforts of 24 October, when he met such Bengali leaders as Tajuddin Ahmed and Mahbub Alam Chashi, to persuade them to scale down their demands, did not succeed. There was no doubt that the events in the Subcontinent were rushing towards a denouement. It would be necessary for Moscow to choose sides. Events were soon closing off the options.

29 ibid., 1-7 October, 1971, p.19389.
30 See p. ante. Footnote deleted
31 The Times (London), 18 October 1971.
(iv) Soviet Support to India and Bangladesh

The last straw on the camel's back was Pakistan's public and explicit courting of Chinese support when Bhutto led a military mission to Peking in November. In a banquet speech on 7 November Bhutto spoke of some countries having succumbed to Indian pressure, which was interpreted to be critical of the Soviet Union. Pakistan further gave Moscow cause for annoyance, by refusing to permit Marshal Kutakhov's aircraft to overfly her territory during his visit to India in November. Also unless the Liberation War ended successfully soon, there was a danger that more radical pro-Peking groups would come to lead the struggle.

As the December hostilities began, the Soviet stratagem came out in relief. In a public speech to the Sixth Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party Brezhnev analysed the conflict as being caused by the 'bloody suppression of the basic rights and clearly expressed will of the population of East Pakistan'. Brezhnev suggested what was to be the theme of Soviet argument at the United Nations. He called for a cease-fire and insisted that Pakistan simultaneously take effective action aimed at a political settlement based on the will of the East Pakistani people 'as expressed in the December 1970 elections'. He insisted that these two points were inseparably linked.

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34 *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 5 November 1971.

In the same vein, a Soviet analyst argued:

It was impossible to separate the question of cessation of military operations from a political settlement in East Pakistan. These are the two aspects of the same problem. Anyone who insists on resolving the first question while brushing aside the second question, is whether he wants or not, objectively preserving the causes of the current conflict and facilitating its resumption, sooner or later.  

This stand deserves some analysis. On the surface it appeared that by urging cessation of hostilities and political settlement the Soviets wanted to stop short of complete independence for Bangladesh. But by linking the two 'inseparably', the Soviets vetoed the prospects of the first preceding the second. Thereby, by allowing the fighting to continue (since settlement was impossible while the fighting lasted) the Soviets ensured the ultimate end of the drama, the surrender of the Pakistani troops and the creation of Bangladesh. This was contrary to the U.S. stand in the Security Council which called for the cease-fire to be effected first and which was opposed by the Soviet Ambassador Yakov Malik for evading the root cause of the fighting via West Pakistan's military suppression of East Pakistan, and for equating the two belligerents India and Pakistan.  

Though Brezhnev called for a settlement according to the will of the East Pakistanis as expressed in the 1970

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36 V. Kudryavtsev, 'Flames Over South Asia', Izvestia, 12 December 1971. CDSP, XXIII (50), 9.
elections (which should have implied not independence for Bangladesh, but transfer of power to the Awami League within the framework of Pakistan), the line was taken that the 'will' had now transformed into a 'demand' for independence 'in reaction to the massive repressions the [Pakistani] Government employed to impose its will on the absolute majority of East Pakistan's people'. Independence was endorsed as it was 'a reflection of the peoples' indignation at the policy of the ruling circles which had trampled the elementary human rights of the East Pakistani population'.

While, at the United Nations, the Soviets assisted the fulfilment of Indo-Bangladesh aims by preventing a cease-fire and allowing a fight to the finish, direct support was also being rendered close to the theatre of conflict. As a signal to the world, and more specifically to the Chinese and the Americans, of firm Soviet commitment to the Indo-Soviet pact, the first Deputy Foreign Minister V.V. Kuznetsov arrived in New Delhi on 11 December 1971 when the war was being fiercely fought. Reassurance came from the Soviet Ambassador to New Delhi, N. Pegov, who told Mrs Gandhi on 13 December that in case of Chinese intervention, the Soviets would open diversionary action in Sinkiang, an assurance that boosted the Indian morale. Finally, the Soviets reacted to the American fleet in the

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Ocean with their own presence, precluding the former's inter­
vention in Pakistan's favour which would have triggered off a conflict of global dimensions.\(^{41}\)

Soviet support was therefore invaluable in bringing to fruition Bangladesh's emergence.

B. Post-Independence Bangladesh and the Soviet Union:
   (i) Initial Soviet and Bangladeshi circumspection

Despite Soviet support to Bangladesh at the time of her birth, the nascent state did not receive immediate Soviet recognition. The U.S.S.R's policy was once again couched in utmost circumspection, just as it was when the struggle for Bangladesh's independence had commenced in 1971. There were three-fold reasons for this delay.

Firstly, Soviet support to the newly emergent state was so obvious that they could afford to delay formal recognition in order to gauge the international reaction without offending Dacca. Secondly, the Soviets were hoping that Yahya's successor in Pakistan, Bhutto, could be persuaded to either recognise Bangladesh or drop the Pakistani version of the 'Hallstein Doctrine'.\(^{42}\) Once that happened Moscow could accord her recognition without annoying Islamabad. Now that the fear of possible Chinese

\(^{41}\) U.S. Task Force 74, comprising the Enterprise, helicopter Carrier Tripoli and seven destroyers and frigates, detached from the Seventh Fleet sailed through the Strait of Malacca on their way to the Bay of Bengal on 14 December 1971. They were followed three days later by six Soviet ships includ­ing one Kresta and one Kynda-class frigates. \textit{Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Ninety Third Congress, Second Session, February/March 1974}, p. 205.

\(^{42}\) The Soviets lost no time in their efforts to befriend Pakistan. That they had regained some of their lost influence is evident from the fact that Moscow encouraged Bhutto to release Mujib in early January. Reportedly the Soviet Ambassador flew especially to Lahore to deliver a note from his government to Bhutto. \textit{The Times} (London), 4 January 1972. Bhutto was also invited to visit the Soviet Union. \textit{New York Times}, 10 February 1972.
influence in Dacca was absent (due to the Chinese role during the war), and Dacca was already under considerable debt to Moscow, the importance of winning Pakistan back assumed salience in Soviet policy. Finally, another cause for Soviet delay must have been the opposition that the dismemberment of Pakistan aroused in the Middle Eastern countries Moscow was courting.

In any case to put the Bangladesh authorities at ease, the Soviet Ambassador to India Pegov stated on 25 December 1971 that the Soviet Union would recognise Bangladesh at 'an opportune moment' in consultation with 'Indian friends'.

In Dacca, the head of the Soviet Trade Delegation, V.V. Zurev, met the Bangladesh Trade & Industry Minister, Mansur Ali, and informed him of his country's desire for a trade pact, which implied recognition. When the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Abdus Samad Azad, visited Delhi in January, he was formally met at the Airport by the Soviet Ambassador with his colleagues from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, GDR, and Mongolia. Considerable public enthusiasm had been generated in Bangladesh for the Soviet Union, exemplified by the setting up of a Bangladesh-Soviet Friendship Society in Dacca on 15 January 1972.

43 Times of India, 26 December 1971.
44 ibid., 29 December 1971.
45 The Times (London), 8 January 1972.
The Kremlin watched Bhutto's sharp opposition to external recognition of Bangladesh gradually blunt.
Initially Bhutto had broken off diplomatic relations with Bulgaria, Poland and Mongolia for recognising Bangladesh. But for others, like Nepal and Burma, his measures were less drastic and were confined only to the recall of Ambassadors. As Pakistan was obviously employing different yardsticks for different countries (relations with India, for instance, was formally intact), it was unlikely that Islamabad would react to Moscow's recognition of Dacca too hastily. Satisfied of this, on 24 January 1972 Moscow formally recognised Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, on her part, did not take the Soviet delay amiss. It was becoming obvious to her that in order to gain admission into the 'Club' of States, mostly hostile till then, the Soviet linkage could be a liability rather than an asset. Mujib did not want to lean too heavily on Moscow, especially now that 'non-alignment' was the cornerstone of his policy. Also there was China to be borne in mind, and Bengali leaders were anxious for their acceptance by China.

(ii) Political Relations

On 5 March Kosygin and Mujib signed a Joint Declaration in Moscow - the Soviet Union was, not unnaturally, the

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second country Mujib visited, the first being India - in which Mujib expressed gratitude for the 'consistent support' of the Soviet Union and Moscow announced its intention to endorse Bangladesh's entry into the U.N. The political element of Mujib's visit was underscored by the presence during some of the discussions of Boris Ponomarev, the senior CPSU official who was responsible for liaison with fraternal parties outside the Soviet Union. This also indicated that while the Soviets preferred to deal with Bangladesh on a state to state basis, their political party of choice was the Awami League, which, in Soviet assessment had assumed a 'progressive' role.

Moscow's connections with the pro-Soviet left wing parties were of a level lower than those with the Awami League. Of two such parties one, Muzaffar Ahmed's NAP, in any case seen as a 'B' team of the ruling Awami League, because of its 'me too-ism', was of peripheral value to Moscow. The other, the Communist Party of Bangladesh,

50 Footnote deleted.
52 Note 12 ante.
54 From the Soviet standpoint, Muzaffar Ahmed had respectable credentials. He had previous CPI contacts. In Pakistan he had joined the Awami League but broke away in 1957 with Bhashani's radical followers who formed the National Awami Party (NAP). As the Communist Party has been banned in Pakistan since 1954, it was NAP that provided legal cover for the left. Within the NPA Muzaffar Ahmed led the pro-Moscow group. When the Party finally split along Moscow-Peking lines in December 1971, Ahmed became the President of the pro-Moscow NAP. See Asian Analysis, (March 1972), pp.2-3.
led by Moni Singh had more autonomous existence. A delegation from it visited Moscow in August 1973 and reportedly emerged with a model of government from their discussions with the CPSU leadership, which prescribed a presidential system of government with 'progressive efficient and honest persons' at the helm drawn from 'national patriotic parties'. However, the relative insignificance of both these parties was confirmed in the March 1973 elections, when they failed to capture any seat in the Bangladesh Parliament.

Calculating that the Awami League's power base would not be eroded by a semblance of the traditional United Front tactics, and that it would have the benefit of Moscow's blessings, Mujib initiated a three party alliance in October 1973 called the Gono Oikko Jote (Peoples' United Front), which was welcomed by the Soviets as 'the result of a consistent policy of the Communists designed to rally all political groups that oppose imperialism and champion national independence and social progress'.

Mujib was, soon enough, about to embark upon constitutional reforms of much greater significance, i.e. a one party system on largely Tanzanian model. The Party was to be

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55 In pre-independence India, Moni Singh was one of the first Marxists. In the 1920s and 1930s, he was involved with organising the Kidderpore dock hands, Calcutta jute workers and peasants in the East Bengal district of Mymensingh. He joined the CPI in 1937 and the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) after the 1947 Partition. When the CPP was banned in 1954 Moni Singh went underground. Arrested by the Ayub regime in 1967, he was released in 1969. He was an exile in India in 1971 where he was an ardent advocate of a United Front. See ibid., p.3.


57 Moscow Radio in English for South and South East Asia, 10 December 1973.
called the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL),\textsuperscript{58} which was to be launched the following year. Mujib had had ample opportunity to discuss these plans with the Soviet leadership during his long stay in the U.S.S.R. in March-April 1974 for medical treatment. The Awami League was really the core of BAKSAL and though it was not strictly a fraternal party, the Soviets preferred it to most others, given that the actual pro-Moscow parties were not significant enough to be at the helm.

Though Soviet-Bangladesh political relations during the Mujib era remained correct, they were never euphoric at any stage as was the case, for however brief a period, with Indo-Bangladesh relations. This point is illustrated by the story of the Soviet presence in Chittagong between the years 1972 and 1974.

When the Chittagong port needed to be cleared of mines and sunken ships in the aftermath of the 1971 war, the possible source of assistance was the Soviet Union, the only friend which had the technological know-how. Even then, chary of too great a reliance on the Soviets, Mujib endeavoured to obtain help from the U.N. prior to his visit to the U.S.S.R. in March 1972, but met with failure. Kosygin's offer of help in this connection in course of the visit somewhat upset him, and he took time to reply, in the meanwhile making another unsuccessful bid for U.N.

\textsuperscript{58} Meaning Bangladesh Peasants, Workers, National League. For details on the Constitution of BAKSAL see \textit{Bangladesh Gazette} (Bengali), Special Issue (Dacca: Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, 7 June 1975).
assistance. But when that was not forthcoming, Mujib was left with no option but to accept the Soviet offer.\footnote{Discussions with Mr S.A.M.S. Kibria. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, London, 30 August 1978.}

Obviously, therefore, Bangladesh's acceptance of the Soviet offer did not imply any pro-Soviet posture in the strategic arena.\footnote{It is noteworthy that the contract to clear the other port, Chalna, was awarded later that year through the U.N. to a Consortium of four salvage companies headed by a Dutch firm, to be paid through funds provided by the U.N. Relief Operations. \textit{New York Times}, 25 October 1972, p.3.}

The government in Dacca was sensitive to any criticism of the decision to engage the Soviets. In August 1972, Foreign Minister Samad said:

\begin{quote}
I would like to declare here categorically that the mischievous propaganda launched by certain interested quarters about the so-called Soviet base on the soil of Bangladesh is malicious and is completely unfounded and the Government of Bangladesh will never allow any foreign base on our soil.\footnote{Address at a Joint Meeting organised by Rotary International Zorta International and Apex Clubs, Dacca, 9 August 1972, p.5.}
\end{quote}

Soon afterwards in London he reiterated Dacca's policy 'to retain the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal area as a region of peace, free from rivalry among big powers, and foreign military bases'.\footnote{\textit{Bangladesh Documents Vol.1, No.5} (Dacca, 1972), p.17.}

In spite of the government's strong denials of any Soviet bases there were critics who objected to the very presence of the Soviets. An article in an influential Dacca Weekly stated in January 1973, that 'the continued
presence of the Soviet Union in Chittagong has been causing uneasiness and resentment among a large section of the people of Bangladesh'.  

Though the Soviet presence was increasingly becoming a source of public embarrassment to the government, their work was actually yielding substantial results (seventeen vessels were salvaged), so much so that they were in effect persuaded to stay on for a further period of six months by a Protocol signed on 20 December 1973. By June 1974 the last batch of the Soviet team had returned home.

Though Mujib remained non-committal on Brezhnev's 'Collective Security' scheme, he was a known quantity to the Soviets, and was therefore preferable to other unknown quantities. The Soviets, as a result, worried when the latter surfaced to pre-eminence following the Coup in Dacca on 15 August 1975. Two days later Pravda made a cautious comment: 'How difficult the processes of national liberation are shown by the happenings of Friday in the overthrow of the government in the Republic of Bangladesh'. By referring to the country as simply the 'Republic of Bangladesh', the Soviets seemed to avoid being drawn into the controversy, then raging, as to whether Bangladesh remained a 'Peoples' Republic' or had transformed into an 'Islamic Republic'.

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65 Pakistan Times, 2 July 1974.
66 Quoted in Times of India, 18 August 1975.
Moscow was more sure of the nature of the regime in Dacca when a few days later the Soviet media expressed that 'the friends of Bangladesh people hope that the Peoples’ Republic [emphasis mine] of Bangladesh will be loyal to the principal trends of its foreign policy and continue the line of cooperation with its neighbours and other countries in the interest of security and peace the world over'.

That the Soviets would like the new regime in Dacca to have good relations with India is stressed by their urging for 'cooperation' with 'neighbours'. The Soviets had little reason to be pleased with the reputedly West-leaning new President in Dacca, Mushtaq, who was also eager to cultivate China! They were soon wondering whether 'forces hostile' to the aspirations of Bangladesh people now exerted 'an influence on future development ...' However, Moscow informed Mushtaq through the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires that the U.S.S.R. recognised the new regime.

Sensing potential Soviet hostility which Mushtaq had no wish to heighten, he sent a Special Envoy to the U.S.S.R. in September - Mohiuddin Ahmed, a former Vice President of the Awami League and a moderate left-winger, likely to be acceptable to the Soviets. But Mohiuddin could cut no ice.

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68 Mushtaq had had a brief meeting with Chinese officials in Baghdad in 1974, which received publicity. Also as Commerce Minister, he was instrumental in sending a Trade delegation to China in 1975.


70 Bangladesh Radio, 24 August 1975.
He was unable to meet any prominent Soviet leaders, and handed Mushtaq's letter to Podgorny to A.M. Klychev, a Vice Chairman of the Presidium.  

Mushtaq's term of office lasted only three months and in the first week of November 1975, Major General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the strongman under the formal presidency of Justice Sayem. There was a rapid decline of the Indo-Soviet influence. This aroused considerable Soviet ire. The Leftists were criticised as a proxy-target, and the Dacca Government was advised to distance itself from the extreme Right and Left. On 23 November Pravda warned

> the situation [in Bangladesh] is developing in such a way that if the Right Wing and Leftist forces are not rebuffed, the democratic gains of the Bangladesh people and the results of many years of struggle for national liberation and state independence would suffer badly.  

This warning was repeated a few months later by Z. Kondrashev in an Izvestia article on 23 March 1976 where he argued that the purpose of the extremists was to make the Bangladesh authorities abandon the implementation of progressive social and economic transformation. Without directly criticising the Dacca Government the Soviets were time and again signalling their sensitiveness to any extremist


73 Quoted in Pakistan Times, 4 November 1975.

74 Quoted in Times of India, 26 March 1976.
influence on the Bangladesh authorities. At the same time the Soviets had no reason to be happy with the increasing rapport between Dacca and Peking.

If the Soviet attitude towards Bangladesh was linked to the state of Indo-Bangla relations and conversely to Sino-Bangla ties, Bangladesh wanted a delinking of such, and the placing of Dacca-Moscow connections on a bilateral basis. Just as Mushtaq had sent a special envoy to Moscow the Sayem-Zia government also despatched an envoy, Foreign Secretary Tabarek Hossain, in December 1975. Tabarek Hossain had had previous experience of dealing with Moscow as the Director General for Socialist Countries in the Pakistan Foreign Office and was successful enough in his mission to restore bilateral relations with the U.S.S.R. to a more even keel. There were, however, some murmurings in the Dacca Press about the fact that in December 1975 S. Huq, the Bangladesh Ambassador to Moscow, presented credentials to Michael Yashov, the Deputy President of the Soviet Union rather than to President Podgorny.\textsuperscript{75} There is no evidence to suggest that the Dacca Foreign Office took any serious notice of it.

That the Soviets subordinated their policy towards Bangladesh to their India policy was attested by the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Firyubin's pointed insistence on

\textsuperscript{75} Achinta Sen, 'Queer Diplomacy', \textit{Holiday}, 21 December 1975, Sen's criticism might, however, have been based on incomplete knowledge of the system of Soviet Protocol.
negotiations with India on the Farakka issue during his visit to Dacca in December 1976. This, one may recall, was more in line with Indian demands, for Bangladesh was then eager to internationalize the issue. However, publicly Firyubin extolled Soviet-Bangla friendship. Firyubin's visit was an important indication of renewal of Dacca-Moscow ties, as he was the most senior Soviet politician to ever have visited Bangladesh.

Political relations have since remained correct. Ministerial visits, at least from the Bangladesh end, continued. In August 1979, the Minister for Information, Habibullah Khan visited Moscow. This was assisted by the improvement in Indo-Bangladesh relations that followed the assumption of office in India by Prime Minister Desai in 1977. While remaining a close friend of China, Bangladesh has so far been successful in avoiding being drawn into the Soviet-Soviet dispute in any large measure.

However, Moscow is unlikely to look kindly upon Dacca's reactions to Soviet actions in Afghanistan in late 1979 and early 1980. The Bangladesh Foreign Office called for 'immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan'. The fact that the statement refrained from mentioning the Soviet Union by name might be interpreted as an attempt to

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76 Interview with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca, 12 November 1978.
77 Bangladesh, Vol.1, No.3 (Dacca, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting) 1 January 1977.
78 The Bangladesh Observer, 14 August 1979.
79 The Bangladesh Observer, 1 January 1980.
soften its impact on the Kremlin. Also Bangladesh might have hoped to stave off possible Soviet ire by seeming to act in the guise of Third World international 'Trade Unionism'. More serious problems lay in the sphere of economic relations.

(iii) Economic Relations

Aid: There was an early realisation on the part of the Soviets that they were not equipped to meet the massive aid requirements of Bangladesh. Secondly, the Bangladesh leadership had made it obvious in the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) that its socialist goals would be achieved through a Western parliamentary system which would preclude the Soviet model calling for total mobilisation. Thirdly, Bangladesh's agreement to the formation of an Aid Club under World Bank auspices, showed a willingness to be mostly dependent on sources other than the Socialist countries for external assistance. Because of these reasons the Soviets maintained a very businesslike attitude towards their economic relations with Bangladesh.

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80 This point whereby small states may obtain indulgence from the Great Powers is made elsewhere in the thesis. See Chapters 8 and 9.


82 It is noteworthy that the theoretical basis of the U.S.S.R's policy of giving aid is derived from a resolution of the Twenty-second Party Congress in 1961 which stated that 'the CPSU regard it as its international duty to assist the peoples who have set out to win and strengthen their national independence, all peoples who fight for the complete abolition of the colonial system' [The Road to Communism: Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), p.491]. Apart from this, Soviet aid has also been meant to stimulate 'interest in socialism and engender a desire to use socialist methods in order to build a thriving economy'. [B.N. Ponomarev, 'Some Problems of the Revolutionary Movement', World Marxist Review, No.12 (Prague, 1962)] On both these counts, the evolving policies of the Bangladesh Government must have been distressing to the Soviets.
As of 30 June 1978 the total amount of Soviet assistance received was $229,895 million of which $199,895 was in loans and only $30 m. in grant. This was less than the amounts received during the same period from the US ($1101.267m.), Japan ($506.399m.), West Germany ($413.258m.), Canada ($358.244m.), U.K. ($347.049m.) and India ($301.447m.). The undisbursed amount in June 1978 was $63,132, a large figure. Also, most of the Soviet aid was received prior to 1976.

These figures illustrate several features. Firstly, the smallness of the grant component, which meant an erosion of the value of the aid received. Secondly, the large undisbursed amount shows inefficient utilisation, which could be either due to higher Soviet prices (since procurement was tied to Soviet sources, an additional disadvantage) or due to the hesitancy of Bangladesh to procure inferior quality Soviet goods. One could conclude that since the utilisation of Soviet credit was difficult, recipient agencies in Bangladesh could not have been happy to receive allocations from Soviet aid.

Trade: The first Trade Agreement between Bangladesh and the U.S.S.R. was signed on 31 March 1972, during a visit to Moscow by Dacca's Foreign Trade Minister, M.R. Siddiqui, who signed it along with his Soviet counterpart Nikolai Patolichev, extending to each other 'a most favoured nation' status. This Agreement was for a period of three years.

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83 Statistics from A.M.A. Muhith, 'Is Foreign Aid Essential for Development in Bangladesh?', op.cit.

84 Times of India, 2 April 1972.
to be extended automatically for a similar period, as indeed was the case. Under the broad umbrella of this Trade Agreement, six annual barter protocols were signed.\textsuperscript{85}

On an average it seems that Bangladesh under barter agreements initially exported slightly more than what she imported. For instance, in 1973-74 she exported goods with 151.168 million takas and imported goods with 1511.64 million takas. The figures for 1974/75 were 256.877 million takas worth of exports and 223.174 million takas worth of imports.\textsuperscript{86} Under normal trade this would have meant a favourable balance of trade for Bangladesh. But in barters, since goods are paid for in kind, it meant the Soviet Union was paying Bangladesh (since Bangladeshi imports were less) less, and therefore owed her some amount. Under barter agreements such owed amounts have a minimal rate of interest. In other words by exporting more and importing less, Bangladesh was ironically in effect creating 'soft' credit for the more affluent partner, the U.S.S.R.

Secondly, it was felt in Dacca that the Soviets were charging higher prices for their commodities under barter. This became evident when the sale of pig iron (Bangladesh made some cash purchase of this commodity) under barter was priced higher than the cash sale. While Bangladesh had to

\textsuperscript{85} Barter 1, however, was signed in Dacca earlier on 8 February 1972, in anticipation of the formal Trade Agreement.

\textsuperscript{86} Figures from Table 1 in Abdul Chafur, 'Barter Trade Between Bangladesh and East European Countries: Some observations', in Mohiuddin Alamjir and Sultan Hafeez Rahman (eds), \textit{The New International Economic Order and Unctad II: Proceedings of the Bangladesh National Seminar} (Dacca: Bangladesh Institute of Development Economics, May 1977), p.165.
procure through Soviet State Agencies, the latter were able to make purchases at competitive rates from the open market in Bangladesh.  

Thirdly, while Bangladesh made cash purchases outside the scope of the barter from the Soviet Union, the latter made no such reciprocal cash procurements. This led to an unfavourable balance of trade for Bangladesh in free convertible currency.

Fourthly, it was generally believed in Bangladesh that Soviet banks imposed heavy bank charges for advising, issuing, and negotiating letters of credit. The burden of such excessive charges were passed on to Bangladesh exporters and importers.

C. Some General Points:

From the outset it would seem that Soviet-Bangladesh relations were fraught with certain built-in difficulties. Firstly, if the grand design of the Soviet policy towards the Third World was to detach these countries from alliance with either the West or China, Bangladesh posed some difficulties because of her heavy economic dependence on the former and psychological closeness with the latter. Secondly, the higher priority the Soviets placed on India,
tended to affect at times their relations with Bangladesh because of the fluctuating nature of Indo-Bangladesh ties. Thirdly, in spite of serious endeavours, the cultural penetration of the Soviets into the Bangladeshi elite was difficult because of the latter's heavy Western orientation.

Because of all these perhaps the Soviets may have felt that Bangladesh was not worth investing in to any large extent politically or economically. Politically it is significant that not a single Soviet Cabinet Minister had ever visited Bangladesh. Economically, Moscow tended to adopt a very businesslike attitude in matters of aid and trade.90

It is noteworthy, however, that it was Bangladesh which was more eager to maintain friendly links. The Soviet Union was the first country that a Bangladeshi Head of Government visited outside the Subcontinent. Whenever good relations were threatened it was the Dacca Government that sent envoys to Moscow to explain its position. In spite of close Dacca-Peking relations, Dacca has been careful to avoid giving Moscow any offence on larger global questions. The stand on the Afghanistan issue in 1980 is a chance that Dacca risks, hoping to be seen as acting in concert with a host

90 The Soviets do not seem to have taken the opportunity of extending goodwill gestures in this area. This is illustrated by the following: in 1973 the Soviets had diverted 200,000 tons of wheat procured abroad to Bangladesh to help bridge the latter's food gap on the understanding that it would be returned. Eventually Moscow was approached to defer repayment or convert it into grant. The Soviets agreed to neither, and Bangladesh, in spite of her perennial food shortages, had to commit herself to return the amount in five instalments. Discussions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca, 12 November 1978.
of other Third World and Muslim countries and thereby reducing its adverse significance in bilateral relations.

III. The U.S.A.

A. U.S. Role during the Struggle for Bangladesh

(i) The Background

The South Asian Crisis of 1971 was unfortunately timed for the U.S. In what was considered to be a 'watershed year', there appeared to be considerable hope of success in America's foreign policy both globally and at a regional level in South Asia; globally the U.S. Administration saw 'the beginnings of a new relationship between the United States and the Peoples' Republic of China; concrete progress on important issues in U.S.-Soviet relations; a maturing relationship between the U.S. and East Asia as the Nixon Doctrine took effect and the U.S. sharply reduced its military involvement on Vietnam ... and efforts among industrialised nations to create new economic relationship increasing the trade opportunities of the developing world'.

As for Pakistan, Yahya's continuation as the head of government would have been ideal for the Americans. Firstly, he had an 'extraordinary relationship' with the American Ambassador, Joseph Farland. Secondly, he was being of invaluable help as a conduit linking the U.S. to China.

However, if there was a peaceful transfer of power to the Awami League, the U.S. would also have no cause for worries. Firstly, an Awami League government in Pakistan would have augured well for Indo-Pakistan relations thus reducing tension and thereby the scope for intervention by unfriendly Powers; secondly, an Awami League government was likely to tack close to the U.S. After all, it was an Awami League Prime Minister of Pakistan, Suhrawardy (1956-57) who had justified their Western alliance on the grounds that 'Zero plus zero equals zero' - suggesting that friendship with Muslim countries alone would not sufficiently offset Indian power. In fact what the Americans needed to watch out for was the possible resurgence of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the leader of the Pakistan Peoples' Party. Bhutto had never warmed to the Americans and there was no reason why he should in the near future.

In other words, on the eve of the 1971 crisis, U.S. interests dictated a united Pakistan preferably with Yahya at the head, failing which, with Mujib at the helm. What the Americans most needed to avoid was yet another tension spot that was likely to attract adversary attention which would adversely affect 'the emerging structure of Peace' of the 1970s.


(ii) Role of the Administration

When the Crisis broke out it had three levels in the U.S. Administration's perception: (a) the humanitarian problem of the Bengali refugees on India and the millions who remained in Pakistan, (b) the problem of political settlement between West and East Pakistan, and (c) the danger of war between Pakistan and India.\(^96\)

In response to the first level, Nixon claimed that the U.S. committed $91 million through the U.N. for the refugees in India and $158 million both through the U.N. and bilaterally for Pakistan. At the second level he claimed that he was able to obtain assurance from Yahya that Mujib would not be executed, that Civilian Government in East Pakistan would be restored and rapprochement sought with the Awami League. To that end, the Americans were able to establish contact with some prominent Awami Leaguers in Calcutta. \textit{Vis-à-vis} the third level, Nixon stated that he sought to avert the War by keeping India constantly in the picture regarding U.S. initiatives, talking to the Soviet Union, and finally, culminating in a desperate move with Secretary Rogers informing the Indian Ambassador on 11 August that the U.S. would not continue economic assistance to a country that started the war\(^97\) - a clear warning to India.

Unfortunately for the Administration, their sets of responses at all three levels backfired. Firstly, the

\(^{96}\) Nixon, op.cit., p.143.

\(^{97}\) ibid., pp.145-146.
assistance to India for refugees did not receive the gratitude that the U.S. had hoped for; the aid was, after all, a response to the call of the U.N. Secretary General and as an act to discharge what was in reality an international obligation. The relief to East Pakistan channelled through the Government of Pakistan evoked Bangladeshi criticism and the raising of such queries as whether the distribution of humanitarian assistance could be effected without discrimination and whether their use by the Pakistani Armed Forces could be prevented.

Secondly, the attempt to bring about a political solution came too late when independence had become the irreducible demand of the Bangladesh Government-in-exile. On June 6, 1971, the Acting President, Syed Nazrul Islam, dismissed any settlement within the framework of Pakistan by declaring that Pakistan was 'dead' and that 'free Bangladesh' was now a 'reality'. The U.S. Administration did in fact succeed in contacting the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Bangladesh Government, Khondokar Mushtaq Ahmed. But this was done over the head of his Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed, whose sympathy with the Americans was reputed to be minimal. But these contacts only succeeded in alienating Tajuddin from both Mushtaq and the Americans,

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98 Secretary General U Thant on 19 May 1971 appealed to all nations for contributions, in cash and kind, to help meet the needs, on an emergency basis, of the Bengali refugees. Asian Recorder, June 18-24, 1971, p.10219.
100 ibid., p.10299.
leading to Mushtaq ’s exclusion from the Provisional Government's delegation to the U.N., and following independence, his loss of the office of Foreign Minister.\textsuperscript{101}

As the crisis deepened, there was considerable evidence of Washington's leanings in favour of Pakistan.

First, though on 20 April the State Department had assured Senator Kennedy that there were no arms supplies in the pipeline for Pakistan,\textsuperscript{102} a Pakistani ship PADMA sailed from New York on June 21 with arms for Pakistan.\textsuperscript{103} The Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh told an angry Parliament that India had urged the U.S. Administration to stop the ship from proceeding to its destination.\textsuperscript{104} On 26 June, Charles Bray, a State Department spokesman said that it was legally impossible to do so.\textsuperscript{105} Not only was the shipment not prevented, there is no record of any pressure to dissuade the Pakistanis from using American arms from their operations in the Eastern Wing.

Second, the Administration was anxious to continue economic assistance to Pakistan, thus seeming to indirectly prop up the Yahya regime. In June the Aid to Pakistan Consortium under World Bank aegis met to consider a Bank report that suggested that contrary to Pakistan's protests, the situation in the East was far from normal, and

\textsuperscript{101} Lawrence Lifschultz, \textit{Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution}, op.cit., pp.113-116.

\textsuperscript{102} See \textit{Bangladesh Documents}, op.cit., p.556.


\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Asian Recorder}, 23-29 July 1971, p.10269.

\textsuperscript{105} ibid., p.10270.
under these conditions further assistance could not be fruitfully utilised. Ten of the eleven Consortium members concurred with the findings, but the U.S. did not. Later on 3 August when the House of Representatives passed the Foreign Aid bill including the Gallagher amendment for stoppage of assistance to Pakistan, Nixon protested that engaging in 'public pressures' on Pakistan would be 'counter-productive' and the crisis demanded discussions 'in private channels'.

Third, the Administration, even when the matter became public knowledge, did not disapprove of the Pakistani use of American aircraft to shift troops from West to East Pakistan. The carriers in question were two Boeing 707 airplanes, under lease from World Airways, which reportedly did half its business with the U.S. Armed Forces. It was revealed that the lease was arranged with the knowledge and explicit authorisation of the State Department, the Commerce Department and the Civil Aeronautics Board. The State Department described the deal as a 'commercial matter' but the Commerce Department sources revealed that the licenses, renewed on 18 June (over two and half months after the military crackdown in Dacca) were subject to revocation and the leases would be invalid without the licenses.

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107 ibid., 14 July 1971.
108 Baltimore Sun, 5 August 1971.
Fourth, more positively, U.S. concord with the Pakistani official line was evident in Secretary of State William Rogers' address to the U.N. General Assembly on 4 October. Secretary Rogers insisted that 'the events in East Pakistan are internal events with which the people of Pakistan must deal'\textsuperscript{110} which was entirely in accord with the Pakistani point of view.

When Mrs Gandhi visited the U.S. in November, the ensuing talks did not bring them any closer to each other. Nixon derogated the Indo-Soviet Treaty signed in August that year, by publicly stating that India and the U.S. were bound together by a 'higher morality that did not need legal documents'\textsuperscript{111} - an obvious reference to the August Treaty.

The series of evidence cited above demonstrate that even if the Administration believed in the inevitability of Bangladesh's independence, as Kissinger claimed it did, in \textit{The White House Years},\textsuperscript{112} it seems to have made little effort to befriend, or at least alleviate the suspicions of, the leadership that was likely to be in power in sovereign Bangladesh.

When the actual hostilities broke out in December 1971, the Administration laid the blame for war squarely on Indian shoulders with immediate cancellations of arms supplies.


\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Asian Almanac}, Vol.10, No.3 (1972), p.4988.

\textsuperscript{112} Quoted in \textit{Time} (15 October, 1979), p.54.
and economic aid to India. At this time, the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) held some secret sessions in the White House chaired by the National Security Adviser, Kissinger. On 3 December, Kissinger complained:

I am getting hell every half hour from the President that we are not being tough enough on India ... He wants to tilt in favour of Pakistan.

Then again on 8 December Kissinger said:

There can be no doubt what the President wants. The President does not want to be evenhanded. The President believes that India is the attacker. We are trying to get across the idea that India has jeopardized relations with the United States. We cannot afford to ease India's state of mind. The lady [Mrs Gandhi] is cold-blooded and tough and will not turn into a Soviet satellite merely because of pique.

Washington's 'tilt' towards Pakistan was confirmed in a series of actions by the U.S. at the U.N. On 4 December, the Security Council met on U.S. request and voted 11-2 for an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of foreign forces which the U.S.S.R. vetoed. When the General Assembly proceeded on 7 December to adopt a 14 nation draft resolution calling for cease-fire and withdrawal of forces, which was

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114 The proceedings were leaked to the Press and published in the New York Times on 6 January 1972. Later these were incorporated in Jack Anderson with George Clifford, op.cit., pp.281-284.
116 ibid., p.282.
117 Nixon, op.cit., p.147. At that stage a cease-fire would have prevented the creation of Bangladesh.
carried by 104 votes to 11, the U.S., along with China, voted for it. The U.S. Representative, Ambassador Bush, laid that blame for war squarely on India's shoulders by stating that the latter bears a major responsibility for broadening the crisis by spurning efforts of the U.N. to become involved, even in a humanitarian way in relation to the refugees, spurning the proposals such as the proposal of our Secretary General's offer of good offices, spurning proposals that could have begun the process of a dialogue toward political accommodation.\(^{118}\)

When the recommendation of the General Assembly for a Ceasefire and withdrawal of forces was rejected by India, the U.S. requested another meeting of the Security Council on 12 December, where Bush criticised the 'action of India to intervene militarily and place in jeopardy the territorial integrity and political independence of its neighbour, Pakistan'.\(^{119}\)

As a final act of support for Pakistan, the U.S. Administration ordered a Task Force of the Seventh Fleet including the nuclear powered aircraft carrier ENTERPRISE into the Bay of Bengal on 10 December.\(^{120}\) The Task Force entered the Bay on 15 December, too late to save the situation, at least in the Eastern Sector.

\(^{118}\) Cited in Stebbins and Adam, op.cit., p.237.

\(^{119}\) ibid., p.241. It has been reported that Nixon personally instructed George Bush to be firm with India. See T.V. Kunshi Krishnan, *The Unfriendly Friends: India and America* (New Delhi, Indian Book Co., 1974), p.29. The resulting Security Council resolution was also vetoed by the U.S.S.R. and the War ended with the surrender of the Pakistani Eastern Command to the Indian and Bangladeshi allies on 16 December 1971.

\(^{120}\) Stebbins and Adam, op.cit., p.239. Also see f.n.41 ante.
The reasons for the Administration's 'tilt' towards Pakistan can be broadly analysed at two levels, regional and global.

At a regional level, first, there was the possibility, at least at the initial stages, that Yahya might succeed in quelling the Bangladesh movement, in which case it was wise to avoid any action (such as display of sympathy for the Awami League dissidents), that might offend Yahya. Secondly, if Bangladesh came to fruition it was possible that the territory would withdraw from the American alliance and pass under Soviet influence. Thirdly, there was Nixon's strong personal predilections shaped by mutually hostile relations with Indira Gandhi, and equally positive relations with a succession of Pakistani leaders.

There were some globally relevant reasons as well, that some of Nixon's aides, in particular National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, found compelling. First, the Subcontinental crisis had relevance to the politics of Superpower relations, between the Soviet Union and the U.S. Kissinger saw a sinister Soviet design in breaking up the American alliance system as well as demonstrating Chinese impotence, by supporting India's efforts to exploit Pakistan's travails. Secondly, Pakistan was an American ally, a

121 Mrs Gandhi stressed this point in the interview with her on 30 April, 1978, op.cit.
122 Nixon, who was instrumental in the conclusion of the 1954 U.S.-Pakistan Mutual Security Pact, was assiduously cultivated by Pakistan, which he visited on several occasions as a private citizen in the 1960s, even when his political fortunes in the U.S. were at a low ebb.
123 White House Years, op.cit., p.886.
member of the Western Alliance, whose existence was now threatened by a powerful neighbour with support from a Communist Superpower. Washington ought not to, according to Kissinger, ignore its commitments. As he said,

the image of a great nation conducting itself like a shyster looking for legalistic loopholes was not likely to inspire other allies, who had signed treaties with us or relied on our expressions in the belief that the words meant approximately what they said.124

Thirdly, Pakistan was 'a friend of China and in close touch with Peking that was gingerly feeling its way towards a new relationship with [the U.S.] based on the hope that [the U.S.] would maintain the global equilibrium'. 125

(iii) Voices of Dissent

A large segment of the American body politic did not share the views of the Administration. Dissent was voiced in the media, the legislature and the Campuses. They acted to build up pressure on the Administration gradually. On 1 April 1971, Senators Edward Kennedy and Fred Harris criticised the role of the Administration in the crisis.126 On 7 April they were joined by Senator William Saxbe.127 On 6 May ten Senators cabled Secretary of State William Rogers, urging the refusal of further assistance to Pakistan

124 ibid., p.895.
125 ibid.
unless measures were taken by the latter to alleviate the sufferings of 'millions starving in East Pakistan ...'.

On several occasions Senators Frank Church and J.W. Fulbright lent their powerful voices to the Pro-Bangladesh lobby.

Apart from individual legislators, the Congress as a body on several occasions indicated a favourable attitude towards the Bangladesh Movement. In the House of Representatives the Asia-Pacific Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee commenced a hearing on the South Asian situation on 11 May when Congressman Cornelius E. Gallagher described the situation as 'potentially equal in terms of human misery to a combination of Vietnam and Biafra'. In the Senate, the Subcommittee on Refugees of the Judicial Committee, chaired by Kennedy, held three hearings on the matter, between June and October. Both the House and the Senate passed amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act urging the cutting off of further aid to Pakistan on 3 August and 11 November respectively.

Prominent members of the intelligentsia joined the large number of legislators either by counselling Pakistan moderation directly or by bringing to bear pressure on the Administration to do so. On 12 April, some intellectuals


129 ibid., pp.581-582.

130 ibid., p.542.

131 A.M.A. Muhith, op.cit., p.329.
who described themselves as 'Friends of Pakistan' made a
Press statement, urging on the Pakistani authorities that
no government had the right 'to impose its will by force
of arms on a populace that has spoken so unanimously as the
people of East Pakistan and whose aspirations are so
reasonable'. 132

Important sections of the Press took a similar stance,
and they are too numerous to mention here. As early as on
31 March, there were editorials in prominent newspapers
urging upon the Administration to withhold military aid to
the Yahya Government. 133

Within the American bureaucracy there were some
opposing voices, particularly from the officials in the
State Department involved with South Asia. The U.S.
Ambassador to India, Kenneth Keating, was urging a position
of genuine neutrality. 134 Unlike the Administration, who
initially saw the crisis as an internal affair of Pakistan,
Keating stated that it could be described such 'only to
the limited extent that it [was] happening in Pakistan'. 135

132 Washington Post, 12 April 1971. The signatories were Frank C. Child,
Edwin H. Clarke II, Paul G. Clark, James Coleman, Edward C. Dimock Jr.,
Robert Dorfman, Walter P. Falcon, John C.H. Fee, Richard W. Guble,
Robert Comer, Gary Hufbauer, John Isaacs, Kimitsu Kaneda, Maurice D.
Kilbridge, Stephen R. Lewis Jr., Edward Mason, John W. Mellor, Gustav G.
Papanak, Hanna Papanak, Stefan H. Robock, Peter Rogers, James A.F. Stoner,
John W. Thomas, Wynne Thorne, Barbara Ward, Stanislaw Wellisz, Jerome
B. Weisner and Wayne Wilcox.


134 See W. Norman Brown, The United States and India, Pakistan, Bangladesh,

Dissent in much stronger terms was expressed by Americans posted in the Consulate General at Dacca, particularly the Consul General Archer Blood, who sent a cable to the State Department on 6 April which read

> With the conviction that U.S. policy related to recent developments in East Pakistan serves neither our moral interests, broadly defined, nor our national interests, narrowly defined, numerous officers of the Am Con Gen Dacca, US AID Dacca, and USIS Dacca consider it their duty to register strong dissent with fundamental aspects of this policy.  

Blood was later punished by being transferred and given less responsible posts. Within the State Department in Washington as many of thirty officials joined the 'internal debate' on the side of dissent. But ultimately the White House prevailed.

The views of the prominent legislators, academics, sections of the media, as well as many officials of the State Department had a two-fold effect: first, they moderated the extent of the U.S. tilt. This was evident when American authorities gave a visa to Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, then Chairman of the Bangladesh Action Committee in London, for unrestricted entry into the U.S. for a period of five years. The dissent therefore deterred larger U.S. involvement in the crisis.

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137 Interview with Dr Walter Anderson, Department of State, Washington, 15 September 1978. Later Blood appears to have been rehabilitated and given a posting in New Delhi.

138 Lawrence Lifschultz, op.cit., p.159.

139 Interview with Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, former President of Bangladesh, London, 1 November 1978.
Secondly, the views of these liberal Americans helped to moderate the anti-Americanism of the Bangladeshi leadership for it led the Bangladeshis to separate informed American public opinion from the official stance adopted by Washington. The Bangladeshi leadership was kept informed of this division and internal debate within the U.S. by the large number of Bengalis including former Bengali diplomats at the Pakistan Embassy who had defected and were working as emissaries of the Bangladesh Government.140

Because of this dissent, potential good relations between the U.S. and Bangladesh were not eliminated, in spite of the attitudes adopted by the Administration. In fact, after independence, the Bangladesh Government took the line that while the U.S. Government had not approved of them, they were grateful to the American people for support. This was underlined by the Acting President of the Provisional Government, Syed Nazrul Islam, when he said: 'We have been disappointed in the United States' but 'we do not hold this against the American people'.141

B. Post-Independence Bangladesh-U.S. Relations

(i) The Establishment of Diplomatic Links

With the emergence of Bangladesh, there seemed no immediate prospects of the U.S. recognition of the new State.


First, out of sheer gratitude to the U.S.S.R. and India, Bangladesh was likely to be a close ally of the two. Secondly, the U.S. with considerable Pakistani assistance, was mending fences with China and therefore did not want to involve herself with a state whose existence was disapproved of by both China and Pakistan. That is why perhaps Secretary of State Rogers declared at a news conference on 23 December 1971 that no consideration had yet been given to recognition. Rogers soon reiterated that there were a lot of areas in the world where secession, if supported and if it were to become a way of life, could be 'very very dangerous to the rest of the world'.

However, though formal diplomatic relations did not exist, the U.S.A. continued to retain its Consulate General in Dacca. It was Bangladesh which initially moved for U.S. recognition; a request to that effect was made by Foreign Minister Samad to the U.S. Consul General, Herbert Spivak. Though Bangladesh was taking the line that there was a perceived distinction between the American government and people, Mujib was bitter with Washington when in early February he said: 'While today I express my gratitude to the many countries who have recognised us, I cannot express my gratitude to the U.S.'

142 Stebbins and Adam, op.cit., pp.243-249.
143 New York Times, 7 January 1972, p.3.
144 Straits Times (Singapore), 5 January 1972.
145 Age, 8 February 1972, p.7.
Gradually the pressure for recognition within the United States was growing. Senator Adlai Stevenson argued that 'it serves no purpose to pretend that the eighth largest country in the world does not exist'.\textsuperscript{146} Senator Edward Kennedy announced in Dacca on 14 February: 'The people of America were with you in recent months, though our Government was not. We are with you in spirit and our own government will not be far behind'.\textsuperscript{147} The Senate Foreign Relations Committee backed the Hollings-Saxbe resolution urging Nixon to recognise Bangladesh. Senator Frank Church, who presided over the committee's hearings on the question, described the resolution as 'a vehicle for expressing the widespread sympathy and understanding that exists in the Senate and throughout the United States towards the new democracy'.\textsuperscript{148}

The Administration finally relented for several reasons. Firstly, the Nixon trip to China in February 1972 resulted in a vigorous attempt to exclude, if possible, increasing Soviet influence in the Subcontinent, and not according recognition to Dacca at all at this stage would have been writing it off totally to Indo-Soviet influence; secondly, it was evident that Dacca was willing to overlook the U.S. role during the 1971 war; it had initiated giving feelers to Washington and it was only rational that the latter should reciprocate (Dacca was obviously signalling its

\textsuperscript{146} *Times of India*, 9 February 1972, p.2.

\textsuperscript{147} *The Times* (London), 15 February 1972, p.6.

\textsuperscript{148} *Times of India*, 11 March 1972, p.9.
reluctance to be totally drawn into the Indo-Soviet orbit). Thirdly, by then, the U.S. had invested heavily financially in Bangladesh by responding with $95m. in cash since U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim's appeal in February for $560m. aid to Dacca that year. The acceptance by Bangladesh of this large sum indicated a realisation on the part of the latter that the U.S. would have a role in rebuilding the shattered economy. Fourthly, the pressure for recognition among popular American leaders was growing. Finally, Washington was taking a hard look at its position in Asia, trying to pick up as much as possible from the post-Vietnam debris, for which studies of 'all the relationships in South Asia were under way'. For these reasons Washington announced its recognition, on 4 April 1972. In a deliberate attempt to keep this at a low key, Secretary Rogers left an aide to make this announcement though he himself stated immediately afterwards: 'I want to reaffirm our intention to develop friendly relations and to be helpful as Bangladesh faces it immense task of relief and reconstruction'. However, Pakistan still had priority and the announcement was made with the consent, though reluctant, of Ambassador Aziz Ahmed of Pakistan.

150 Dr Kissinger's statement reported in The Age, 11 February 1972, p.6.
152 ibid., 5 April 1972, pp.1 and 4.
A jubilant Mujib hoped that this would 'open a new chapter in the development of friendly cooperation and understanding between the U.S. and Bangladesh for the mutual benefit of our two peoples' and Foreign Minister Samad described it as 'a victory of the freedom loving people of America'. The fact that the U.S. and Bangladesh were coming to terms with each other was in line with the Bangladesh policy of 'balanced relationship with all major powers'.

(ii) Political Relations

The fact that the Bangladesh-Pakistan differences were nowhere close to being reduced did not seem to have affected the U.S.-Bangladesh bilateral relations. It became evident in Washington that Pakistan had moved toward acceptance of Indian preeminence, if not predominance, in the Subcontinent. If India was the recognised preeminent power, and Pakistan had ceased to look upon itself as a counterweight, there was no further point in the U.S. siding with Pakistan vis-à-vis India and giving the latter unnecessary offence. A natural corollary was a desire by Washington to have smooth relations with Dacca, and not to let the latter's adverse relations with Islamabad affect them. The waning ardour of the U.S. for Pakistan was

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evident in that there was no immediate replacement for Ambassador Joseph Farland when he moved to Tehran from Islamabad, and in the appointment of an important political figure, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, as Ambassador to New Delhi.

At the same time a decline in Bangladesh-India relations also did not affect the bilateral the U.S.-Bangladesh relations. Washington was perhaps only interested in seeing that relations did not deteriorate to an extent that would warrant direct Indian intervention in Bangladesh, which would open South Asia to further big power involvement. It was made quite clear, however, that India came ahead in priority because of its 'new stature and responsibilities'. 157

The U.S. continued to pump aid into Bangladesh, as promised time and again. Between December 16, 1971 to March 31, 1974, U.S. aid totalled $451.94 million, 24% of the total foreign assistance of $1,903.37m. given to Bangladesh. 158 This placed the U.S. way ahead of other donors. 159 But as we shall see in our analysis of economic relations, Washington never ceased to use strong economic leverage to attain political ends which Bangladesh was quite powerless to resist.

159 India was, till then, next with $339.9m. (18% of total aid), IDA with $276,07m. was third (14%), Canada with $155.87m. fourth (8%) and the Soviet Union fifth with $134.83m. (7%). Other 29% were accounted for by FRG ($122.43m.), U.K. ($97.83m.), Japan ($64.83m.), Sweden ($59.48m.), Czechoslovakia ($42m.), Asian Development Bank ($33.70m.), Australia ($21.40m.) and others ($103m.). ibid.
At this time Mujib was quite keen to show genuine 'non alignment' in his foreign policy with implied independence of Delhi and Moscow. While he was visiting New York to address the United Nations in October 1974, Bangladeshi officials, not without difficulty, obtained an invitation for him to visit Washington and meet President Ford.\footnote{Lifschtz, op.cit., p.138.} During this visit Mujib also cemented links with sympathetic political figures like Kennedy and George McGovern and addressed meetings organised by the Senate Foreign Relations committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee.\footnote{The Pakistan Times, 4 October 1974, p.4.}

Kissinger called on Mujib on 30 September 1974. In the 40-minute discussions Kissinger approved of the current trends in Bangladesh's external relations and encouraged development of relations with China. He assured Mujib that though the U.S. no longer had the capacity to launch a prototype of the Marshal Plan in Bangladesh, all possible assistance would be provided. To assuage Mujib Kissinger explained away the lack of U.S. official support for Bangladesh as his country having some difference of opinion with India over 'China, not over Bangladesh'. Kissinger added that his forthcoming October visit to the Subcontinent underscored U.S. interest in that area.\footnote{Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca.}

That Mujib placed ample importance on his relations with the U.S. is illustrated by his decision to despatch a
former senior Awami League Minister, M.R. Siddiqui, who had many friends in Washington, as Bangladeshi Ambassador there, following certain constitutional changes in the country, leading to one party rule, which was likely to erode the interest in Bangladesh of some prominent American sympathisers.  

Post-Mujib Era

Washington had no reason to be unhappy over the change of government on 15 August 1975. The new President Khandokar Mushtaq was known to be pro-West, and the U.S. had every reason to be pleased with his early statement of desire to mend fences with Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia. The only potential problem was the rapid deterioration of relations with India, but by the end of the year Bangladesh was displaying enough initiative to defuse the situation by personal approaches of President Sayem (in November) to Mrs Gandhi and the despatch of special envoys to New Delhi. The initial fear that there might be chronic instability in the Subcontinent was soon dissipated, and the U.S. endorsed the various developments that led to the lessening

163 The new regime after August 1975 saw no reason to alter Siddiqui's proposed appointment. In fact, the Zia-Sayem regime in early November 1975 also saw fit to retain it and Siddiqui finally presented his credentials to President Ford on 24 November 1975. (Pakistan Times, 25 November 1975, p.7.) This shows the eagerness of all the three regimes to keep Washington pleased.

164 Immediately after assumption of power Mushtaq had announced: 'We will maintain close relations with the Islamic Grouping, the Commonwealth and the Non-aligned ... we will strive to establish, with the grace of God, our relations with those countries with which we could not so far build friendship'. (Asian Almanac, 1975, p.73449.)

165 See Chapter 3.
of tension between Bangladesh and Pakistan on one hand and Bangladesh and India on the other.\footnote{166
Interview with Dr Walter Anderson, Department of State, op.cit.}

The Carter Administration initially assigned a low priority to South Asia. This general attitude of the U.S. has been summed up by a Bangladeshi analyst as under:

The undeniable reality determining the U.S. interest in Bangladesh has seemed to be the fact that located on an inessential 'backwater' of the Indian Ocean and with no deepwater port, the country is much too far away from the strategic Indian Ocean lanes to be of any great importance.\footnote{167
Mizanur Rahman, op.cit., p.126.}

However, the U.S. was likely to continue rendering economic assistance to keep the local elites satisfied. American political interest only heightens in the event of any serious instability in South Asia, as it indeed has in the aftermath of the crisis in Iran and the Soviet actions in Afghanistan. This is evidenced in Carter's State of the Union Message to the Congress in January 1980 when he asserts U.S. determination 'to cooperate with all the states of the region in this regard [ the situation posed by Soviet action in Afghanistan ] - with India and Pakistan, with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal'.\footnote{168
President Carter's State of the Union Message, \textit{Official Text}, 23 January 1980 (American Centre, Canberra), p.11.} By a strange irony, a stable Bangladesh in a stable South Asia is unlikely to attract the U.S. politically.
From the Bangladeshi side, efforts are being directed to keep the relations at a very correct level. The despatch as Ambassador in 1978 of an official who had been Foreign Secretary, Tabarek Hussain, denotes an intention to maintain a stable, almost apolitical relationship. The fact that the Bangladesh Ambassador in Tehran, Humayun Kabir, met with the most senior American diplomat held hostage, the Chargé d'Affaires Bruce Laingen, no doubt was designed to obtain US appreciation.169

(iii) Economic Relations

Up to March 31, 1978 the total resources received from the U.S. amounted to $1,045.142m. out of which $299.795m. was grant and $745.347m. was loan.170 These funds were provided for Relief and Rehabilitation, PL480 Title II Grant (Food Aid), PL480 Title I loan, Project loan and Project grant.171 Project assistance concentrated on such areas as Agriculture and Rural Development, Population and Family Planning, Water Resources, Education and Social Welfare. In 1978 the U.S. indicated the likelihood of her providing Food Aid under the recently enacted PL480 (Title III), which is basically a loan, and with the proviso that the counter-

170 See Table 9.1 in Chapter 9.
171 Public Law 480 is the major legislation under which American food aid is given. Under Title I of PL480 food aid is sold on concessional terms for distribution through voluntary agencies and under Title II which is pure grant, the recipient government handles the distribution.
172 Interview with Mr Lutfullahell Majid, Joint Secretary, ERD, MInistry of Planning, Dacca, 2 November 1978.
part funds generated from sale proceeds be used up for approved projects and further grain imports. But this massive economic cooperation was not without attendant problems. Certain instances will underline the inability of a newly recipient like Bangladesh to stand up to such powerful donors as the U.S., who did not hesitate to use the badly required food aid for political purposes. In fact in the case of Bangladesh in 1974 it had led to her own 'Cuban Crisis' which led ultimately to thousands of deaths in the Autumn Famine.

A critical food shortage was expected in Bangladesh during the period from August to October 1974, to overcome which a food aid agreement was to be signed with the U.S. in mid-1974. But before the Agreement could be signed, Bangladesh Planning chief, Professor Nurul Islam, was requested by the American Embassy under instructions from the State Department to cease exporting jute to Cuba, as under a PL480 amendment a country that traded with such blacklisted countries as Cuba could not be a recipient. That a powerful donor like the U.S. could actually insist that a poor recipient should curtail its already small export, surprised and shocked Nurul Islam, but the signing of the Agreement was delayed till the last contracted shipment to Cuba left Bangladeshi port in October 1974. By then one of the most disastrous famines in the history of Bengal had struck.

173 Interview with Mr Abidur Rahman, Economic Minister, Bangladesh Embassy, Washington, 13 September 1978.

174 The story is cited in Donald F. McHenry and Kai Bird, 'Food Bungle in Bangladesh', Foreign Policy, No.27 (Summer 1977), p.82.
Bangladeshi authorities felt that the U.S. could have taken recourse to the limited exception to the law which permitted a Presidential waiver in respect of the sale of non-strategic agricultural commodities and non-strategic raw materials for agriculture or medical supplies, provided the waiver was in American national interest. However, they had very little leverage on Washington to obtain this Presidential waiver.\(^{175}\)

That American domestic politics generated certain pressure on Bangladeshi authorities which the latter was unable to resist is exemplified by the case of arrangements of shipping facilities for the food aid given. The Bangladesh Ambassador in Washington was urged to appoint a particular agent for chartering ships largely because, reportedly, the company hailed from the constituency of the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee on Foreign Assistance, Otto E. Passman. The agent was hired because the Bangladesh Government was afraid to annoy this influential Congressman who could act to reduce food aid to Bangladesh.\(^{176}\)

Also, large deliveries of U.S. Food Aid had the paradoxical effect of depressing the prices received by wheat and rice farmers in Bangladesh while helping American growers dispose of unsold surpluses. In fact this led to a debate within the American donor agency. This hurt the

\(^{175}\) Discussions with Professor Mosharaf Hussain, former Member Bangladesh Planning Commission, Oxford, 11 October 1978.

\(^{176}\) ibid.,
Bangladesh farmers who expected to receive the equivalent of 800 a pound but local traders paid them as little as 177-200.

(iv) Some General Points

In spite of these problems in aid relations, Bangladesh remains a major recipient of the U.S. aid. Bangladesh will continue to require high levels of economic assistance and the U.S. will remain a major source. Unless there is a drastic change in her ideology, all shades of governments in Dacca would need to retain a satisfactory level of relations with Washington. This has been, and is likely to be, the case in spite of the strains from various pressures, political and otherwise, that the American Administration (or the System, as evidenced in the Passman case) continued to exert. Two things will make it possible. Firstly, barring very radical changes in Bangladesh or general instability in the South Asian region, Washington will probably continue to accord low priority to Dacca politically. Consequently, the likelihood of America being a scapegoat in any domestic political issue is minimal. In the absence of any major violent anti-American public feeling, it would not be difficult for a government in Dacca to continue to take the initiative in retaining a satisfactory relationship with Washington as has been the case, especially when the former perceives it to be in its own interest. Secondly, culturally the U.S. has made deep penetration into the

Bangladesh elite society. Most senior officials in Bangladesh have at some time been trained in the U.S. Most academics who from time to time are involved in policy-making have been to American Universities. More political leaders and journalists journey to the U.S. more often than to the Eastern bloc countries. As a result the elite has a broad cultural, if not always ideological, sympathy with the general American ethos, which has a positive impact on bilateral relations.

IV. Concluding Remarks

It is obvious that for Bangladesh, historically, there has been a general swing away from the Soviet Union to the United States. The governments that followed the Awami League and 'Baksal' since August 1975 were not restricted by the same degree of gratitude to the Soviet Union as was the Awami League. This has rendered the shift easier. The Soviet Union was unable to supply the large quantums of external assistance essential for Bangladesh. The West in general, and the U.S. in particular, was the alternative source Dacca had to turn to. Besides this economic dependence, there is a cultural linkage of the domestic elite to the West. It is therefore unlikely

178 All Bengali members of the former Pakistan Foreign Service till 1960, like their Pakistani colleagues, received their training at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, Tufts University. See Chapter 10.

179 It is true of the two prominent former academics in the Zia Cabinet: Prof. Shamsul Huq (Foreign Minister) and Dr M.N. Huda (Minister for Finance & Planning).

180 See Chapter 10.
that the U.S.S.R. will attain a priority over the U.S. to Bangladesh policy-makers.

This phenomenon, however, is unlikely to be given any rhetorical or formal expression. A sense of inherent Bengali opposition to the Western Alliance coupled with the fear of giving Moscow offence, reinforced by the fact that the articulate elite aspires to a kind of leadership position in the Third World, has caused and will cause Bangladesh to actively espouse 'non-alignment'.

In order that a global detente at the Centre does not push down superpower conflict to the peripheral areas of the world, such as their own country, the Bangladeshis cultivate both Moscow and Washington, taking care not to give either any cause for dissatisfaction. In spite of Washington's opposition to Bangladesh's very emergence, Dacca took the initiative to establish bilateral links. Though obviously a low-priority subject with Moscow, Dacca endeavours to keep relations with the Soviet Union on an even keel. Bangladesh cannot afford to be drawn into a confrontation situation with either, or to be locked into a situation where alliance can be sought with only one Superpower. As an influential member of the Bangladesh Cabinet put it:

... Since Bangladesh cannot afford to offend any big power it is necessary to maintain reasonable, respectable relations with each. Relations with one may be more emphasised than relations with the other at any one point in time
but we cannot afford to sustain such emphasis at the expense of our links with the other. 181

Bangladesh's position vis-à-vis the Superpowers does underline the loss of manoeuvrability of the small power due to the global détente. Her position is very different from that of say Afghanistan in the 1960s, that is, being able to play off one Superpower against the other. Many problems that Bangladesh has had in her dealings with the Superpowers have been so trivial that their occurrence in a Cold War situation would have been unlikely (such as the linking by U.S. authorities of food aid with trade with Cuba, or the forced repayment of Soviet wheat). The price that countries like Bangladesh have to pay for Global Détente is a loss of manoeuvrability leading to a substantial erosion of their 'power'. Bangladesh, therefore, aspires to make up for this loss of 'power' by increased activity in international forums and by endeavouring to attain a leadership role among developing states.

181 Interview with Mr Moudud Ahmed, former Deputy Prime Minister of Bangladesh (then Minister for Posts, Telephones and Telegraphs), Dacca, 19 June 1978.
CHAPTER 5
EXTRA-REGIONAL RELATIONS: CHINA

I. Introduction

The progress of global détente precluded Bangladesh from following the 'Pakistan model' of behaviour vis-à-vis India, i.e. obtaining counterweight to the powerful neighbour by entering into military alliance with a superpower. As analysed in Chapter 3, Pakistan was unable to provide much assistance to bridge this substantial power-gap. The obvious actors to turn to were those, including the Superpowers, interested enough in the affairs of the region to fill the role of protagonists. China obviously fitted the bill. The state of the Sino-Indian relations were an added advantage. It was natural, therefore, for Dacca to attempt linkages with Peking. It was ironical as well, given China's adverse role during the emergence of Bangladesh.

II. Chinese Role During the Bangladesh Struggle

A. Chinese position on the eve of the crisis:

The subcontinental crisis placed China between the devil and the deep blue sea. For China, a united Pakistan, given that the cozy bilateral relations of the 1960s existed, would be ideal. This would continue to be true even if the

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Awami League came into power at the all-Pakistan level, because individual Awami League leaders had good rapport with Peking.  

What was disturbing to China, was a potential conflict within Pakistan between the Awami League and the Pakistan People's Party. That could provide the Soviet Union, and to some extent India, an opportunity to exploit the situation by picking up clients from among the disputants. Chou's concern was evident in the letters he wrote both Bhutto and Yahya after the 1970 elections in Pakistan, urging them to come to satisfactory terms.  

On the eve of the Crisis the two major pro-Peking political parties of then East Pakistan, Bhashani's National Awami Party (NAP Bhashani) and the East Pakistan Communist Party led by Mohammad Toaha and Abdul Huq (EPCP Marxist-Leninist) had developed their own attitudes towards the issue of separation from Pakistan. Abdul Huq was stronger in his view that this would aid 'Indo-Soviet expansionism', than Toaha who later initiated a two-way war against both

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2 Even though President Ayub Khan (1958-1969) was the architect of Pakistan's policy of friendship for China, the process was initiated even earlier by Suhrawardy, the Awami League Prime Minister of Pakistan, who had visited China as early as 1956 and played host to Chou En-lai. The Awami League's pro-Indian bias was not particularly disturbing to Peking because firstly, in 1970-71 the latter was in any case reassessing its relations with former enemies, and secondly, it was possible that Mujib's Awami League could play the role of a conduit between China and India as the previous Pakistani governments had done between the US and China.

3 G.W. Choudhury, op.cit., p.211.
the Pakistan Army and the Awami League. There was a consequent split between Toaha and Huq, somewhat similar in vein to that between Charu Majumdar and Ashim Chatterjee in the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). The Huq-Chatterjee line seems to have attracted Peking's favour as their views were broadcast on Radio Peking and Radio Tirana. Bhashani on the other hand sent impassionate appeals to Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai seeking assistance in the Movement for separation. There is, however, no evidence to show that either Huq or Bhashani wielded much influence on Peking's policy makers.

B. China's role as the Crisis unfolds:

The first Chinese public reaction following the Pakistani military crackdown on Dacca on 25 March 1971 came as a letter from Chou to Yahya written on 11 April and published in the Pakistan Times on 13 April. On the surface, the letter appeared to express strong support for Pakistan:

Your excellency may rest assured that should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese government and people will, as always, firmly

4 For a study of attitudes of radical Bengali parties towards the issue see Talukdar Maniruzzaman, Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh (Dacca: Bangladesh Books International, 1978), pp.51-52.

5 Tariq Ali, 'Pakistan and Bangladesh: Results and Prospects' in Robin Blackburn (ed), Explosion in a Subcontinent, op.cit., p.318.


7 For the text see J.A. Naik, India, Russia, China and Bangladesh (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1972), Appendix 7, p.138.
support the Pakistan government and people in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence.

Such support was, however, confined to the potential threat from India, and seemed not to apply to threats to Pakistan emanating domestically. On the domestic situation the letter was far more ambiguous:

We believe that through the wise consultations and efforts of Your Excellency and the leaders of various quarters in Pakistan, the situation in Pakistan will certainly be returned to normal [emphasis mine].

China, by exhorting negotiations with 'leaders of various quarters', was encouraging talks with the dissident Awami Leaguers as well. However, support for a united Pakistan was expressed thus:

In our opinion the unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength.

A Bengali foreign language expert in Peking who had translated the letter into Bengali for a Radio Peking broadcast, said later that the Pakistan Press deleted what could be the most important sentence of the letter in which Chou said 'the question of East Pakistan should be settled according to the wish of the people of East Pakistan'.

Three aspects of the Chinese stance emerge from this letter; firstly, China would support Pakistan in case of external threat; secondly, in China's calculations a united Pakistan was more desirable and thirdly in their view, the

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way to normalcy lay through negotiations with the dissidents. The third point indicated the disinclination of the Chinese to fully endorse Yahya's methods. With some deviation this was to broadly to remain the Chinese position till there was a definite veering towards Yahya in reaction to the Indo-Soviet entente.

On a theoretical plane Peking believed the Bangladesh Movement to be one of Bengali elite interests rather than a genuine grassroots peasant movement. They had no ideological motive, therefore, to support its cause.

Though they would rather see the issue peacefully resolved between the disputants at this stage, and therefore took no sides in the domestic scene in Pakistan, vis-à-vis India Peking was rendering strong verbal support to Islamabad. In April a Renmin Ribao commentator wrote:

Of late the Indian government has redoubled its efforts to interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs in disregard of repeated stern protests of the Pakistan Government. The overbearing action of the Indian Government cannot but arouse the indignation of all justice-upholding countries.

Also, on 21 May 1971 at a banquet given by the Chinese Foreign Ministry on the anniversary of the establishment of Sino-Pakistan diplomatic relations, the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Han Nien-Lung assured 'firm support to the

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Pakistan Government in their struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence and oppose foreign aggression and interference.\textsuperscript{11}

While support was being given as against India, at another level the Chinese were urging negotiations. Chou sent back a two member Pakistani delegation comprising Foreign Secretary S.M. Khan and General Gul Hassan with a request for political settlement.\textsuperscript{12} The Chinese opposition to Yahya's suppressive measures was indicated in an interview given much later in 1973 to a group of Australian National University scholars by the Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Chang-Wang Chin.\textsuperscript{13} Obviously, the Chinese feared Indo-Soviet involvement if the situation deteriorated.

Even though Yahya paid little heed to Chinese counsel against the use of force (though this is important in terms of Bangladeshi perception of Chinese role), the Chinese may have calculated they would have little to lose whether Yahya successfully crushed the movement (in which case Pakistan remains intact) or whether the movement become transformed into a protracted War of Liberation (in which case there was likelihood of the leadership of the Movement passing into Maoist hands). The Chinese, therefore, kept a low profile till India's intervention abruptly negated the prospects


\textsuperscript{12} G.W. Choudhury, op.cit., p.212.

of a prolonged struggle and the emergence of a Bangladesh under Indo-Soviet auspices seemed to be in the offing.

Their decision to lie low is evidenced by the fact that no arms were sent to Pakistan until October, i.e. until after the Indo-Soviet treaty. Also, the failure (from the Pakistani point of view) of Bhutto's military mission to China in November 1971 supports this. At a banquet in honour of the Pakistani leader who was sent to Peking by Yahya, the Chinese Acting Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei urged that 'a reasonable settlement' should be sought by 'the Pakistani people themselves'. Support was assured for the defence of Pakistan's state sovereignty and national independence, but mention of support for 'territorial integrity' was conspicuously absent. In the return banquet given by Bhutto which Chou also attended, the Chinese Prime Minister dwelt on Sino-Pakistan bilateral relations and made no mention of external threats to Pakistan. Bhutto was so disappointed that he later admitted to a journalist that 'Pakistan can hope for little real help from China'.


16 ibid., p.23. That Bhutto's visit to Peking was essentially a failure from Yahya's point of view was confirmed in an interview with the then Pakistani Ambassador to Peking, K.M. Kaiser, New, 8 September 1978. Kaiser observed that the Chinese told Bhutto in no uncertain terms to make up with the Bengalis.

However, if India's intervention foreclosed the possibility of a radical leadership of the Bangladesh movement, the Chinese would have much to lose. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of August 1971 as well as Mrs Gandhi's support-seeking travels abroad confirmed that fear. China began to stiffen her pro-Pakistani posture on an international level. On 24 November Chou En-lai expressed his concern to the Pakistani Ambassador over India's military 'provocations' along the border. Public assertion of support to Pakistan was made by Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien on 29 November on the anniversary of the Albanian Liberation.

China's hope of a protracted struggle leading to a radical transformation of the character of the movement evaporated as actual hostilities between India and Pakistan broke out in early December 1971. In the United Nations the Chinese Chief delegate Huang Hua trenchantly criticised the Indo-Soviet 'singing in a duet' and noted that the Soviet representative 'Mister' (not 'Comrade') Malik's speech had confirmed his suspicion that 'the Soviet social-imperialists are carrying out aggression, interference, subversion and expansion everywhere'.

On 6 December Huang Hua compared the nascent Bangladeshi Government to the 'puppet Manchukuo' regime, and opposed

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19 ibid.
20 ibid., Vol.4, No.50 (10 December 1971), pp.8-10.
the presence of a Bangladeshi representative on the Security Council. What the Chinese were virulently opposing was obviously the extension of Soviet influence, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region.

If the Chinese opposition found such vigorous expression in the United Nations debates, why was not their verbal support to Pakistan backed militarily? The reasons can be analysed as under: firstly, there was the possibility of a Soviet counteraction. China was militarily simply not strong enough to take on India and the Soviet Union simultaneously. Secondly, China was herself passing through a series of political crises that involved the purging of Lin Piao, Huang Yang-shen (Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces), Wu Fa Hsien (the Air Force Commander) and forty other top military men that precluded serious military engagement at that point in time. Thirdly, at a tactical level Winter was a most inconvenient season for military manoeuvres in the Himalayas as passes were likely to remain snowed-in. Finally, the Chinese may have simply given up on Yahya who had adamantly paid no heed to their counsel for moderation.

Though the Chinese did make a rather mild protest about the intrusion into Chinese territory on 15 December of 'eight armed Indian personnel' at the China-Sikkim boundary

\[\text{21 ibid., Vol.14, No.51 (17 December 1971), pp.15-16.}\]
\[\text{22 Anwar Syed, China and Pakistan: Diplomacy of an Entente Cordiale (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), p.152.}\]
and an airspace violation over the Tsayal area in Tibet, there was no ultimatum delivered as had been the case during 1965 Indo-Pakistan War.

C. Bangladeshi Perception of the Chinese role:

A survey of the Bangladeshi perception of China's role during the war should be concerned with reactions at two levels, political and bureaucratic.

At the political level, the pro-Peking parties were confused at China's support for Yahya which was apparently in conflict with the principle of contribution to revolutionary social changes everywhere. If in Maoist terms the irresistible trend of history was 'countries want independence, nations want liberation and people want revolution', then was not the Bangladesh Movement theoretically justified as a 'nation seeking liberation'? In the words of a Bengali analyst in a reputedly pro-Peking weekly:

> Does not Leninism enshrine the fact that when a nation is confronted with a colonial type domination it is entitled to wage war first against the nationalist enemy, then against the class enemy?  

While resenting Indian domination many pro-Peking Bengali leaders like Bhashani and Toaha opted for a position

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24 Naushad Al-khair, *Holiday* (Dacca), 6 February 1972. The Chinese theoretical stance, of course, was that the Movement represents elite interests rather than those of the grassroot peasantry. See footnote 9 ante.
of full support to the Bangladesh Movement, thus loosening their bonds with Peking.\(^{25}\)

Those less ideologically inclined towards China were better able to appreciate Chinese motivation arising from the needs of *raison d'état* and national security together with the twists, turns and manoeuvres necessitated by the changing world and China's domestic scenes. Among these were included Awami Leaguers at the political level\(^{26}\) and officials of the wartime Bangladesh Foreign Office in Calcutta at the bureaucratic level.\(^{27}\) Officials of the Bangladesh Government-in-exile also made note of unconfirmed reports that the Pakistani Ambassador to Peking, K.M. Kaiser, who was a Bengali, had been briefing Chou En-lai sympathetically about Bangladesh.\(^{28}\)

In late 1971 Bengali authorities were also confirmed that China would not back Pakistan militarily and that the Bhutto Mission to Peking had failed. A cable containing this

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26 Some Bangladeshi politicians might have contacted the Chinese had it not been the disapproval it was bound to attract from their Indian hosts. Interview with Mr Moudud Ahmer, Minister Posts, Telegrams and Telegraphs, Dacca, 19 July 1978.

27 A Government-in-exile Circular issued in the Bangladesh Foreign Office Calcutta noted that 'Peking Review' No.37 of 1971 had pointed in full an article from the North Vietnamese monthly *Hoc Tap* on the dangers of Japanese policies of expansionism in Asia, and which towards the end stated that 'the peoples of Thailand, the Philippines, Malaya, India and Pakistan are waging heroic revolutionary struggles'. The Circular argued the reference to Pakistan was significant which no doubt referred to the Struggle for Bangladesh. Also China was avoiding direct criticism of the Bengalis and were concentrating on India and the Soviet Union ('Crisis in Bangladesh Movement', Bangladesh Foreign Ministry, 25 September 1971), pp.5-6.

28 *ibid.*, p.6.
invaluable information, sent by the Pakistan High Commission in Kuala Lumpur to their Embassy in Washington was intercepted by the Bengali employees of the Washington Embassy and passed onto the Bangladeshi authorities. The Bangladeshis were aware therefore that the Chinese support to Pakistan in conflict-situation would be limited.

The appreciation of China's role in 1971 by sections who were to later shape Bangladesh's external relations had potentially positive bearings on future state level interactions.

III. Post-Independence Relations

A. From Chinese Opposition to their Acceptance of Bangladesh:

The appreciation of China's 1971 role among Bangladeshi policy-making circles led to a China-policy by Dacca whereby all criticism of Peking was carefully eschewed by Bengali leaders in the immediate post-independence period. Chinese officials in the Consulate in Dacca (closed since the surrender by Pakistan) were given complete safe conduct out of the country. Mujib's early public expression of high regard for the Chinese leadership seemed designed to mollify Peking. More directly, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad said in August 1972:

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29 Discussion with the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, S.A.M.S. Kibria, London, op.cit.

30 Interview with former Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Hussain, op.cit.

31 In a Press Conference in Dacca he said: 'We have great regard for the people of China. We admire their leaders and supported their revolution', Far Eastern Economic Review (1 April 1972), p.14.
We have extended our hands of friendship towards China and we sincerely hope that this will be reciprocated by the Chinese leaders who, I am sure, will find profound goodwill and respect for them among the people of Bangladesh.32

But the reciprocation was slow in forthcoming. In fact it was China who stood in the way of the acceptance of Bangladesh by the United Nations. When Bangladesh applied for U.N. membership in 1972 Huang Hua, the Chinese representative in New York vetoed the application and moved a separate resolution that consideration of the application be delayed until all the Pakistani prisoners-of-war were repatriated and all 'foreign soldiers' (meaning Indians) were removed from Bangladesh soil.33 The Soviet Union and India were subjected to virulent attack. 'Soviet Socialist imperialism' was playing a 'most insidious role in South Asia', in Huang's words, and India, in concluding 'an aggressive military alliance [with the USSR] had stripped off its own cloak of non-alliance'. It was alleged that 'the sole purpose of Soviet Social imperialism was to expand the spheres of her influence and to bully Pakistan at will'.34

Bangladesh was able to take the following readings from the Chinese position. Firstly, since China had been unable to render military support to their closest ally Pakistan

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34 ibid.
when the latter surely needed it, diplomatic support was now being given her to make up for it. Secondly, China was not fundamentally opposed to the concept of Bangladesh, and when the situation in the subcontinent untangled itself, China would eventually accept the new state. Bangladesh, therefore, desisted from affronting China by criticising her action publicly.

The strategy that Dacca followed was that while a way out of the political impasse in the Indo-Pakistan-Bangladesh relations was being sought, feelers should continue to be sent to Peking. This was done by the following means: first, by the placement of the old China-hand, K.M. Kaiser as Ambassador to Rangoon, obviously with the task of liaising with Peking (Kaiser would normally have been otherwise considered too senior for the Rangoon job); secondly, by forging close links with China's socialist neighbours like the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to which Kamal Hassain paid a visit in July 1973; third, by direct appeals to China herself, as at the Algiers Non-aligned Conference in September 1979, to take note of the overwhelming support of the non-aligned nations for Bangladesh.

35 Interview with Dr Kamal Hossain, op.cit.
36 ibid.
37 At an earlier stage Dacca had, however, failed to follow up on a lead given by China. Peking, through K.M. Kaiser, had offered to initiate trade relations through the purchase of a quantum of Bangladeshi jute in May 1972. The Bangladesh Government actually accepted the proposal in principle, (Times of India, 12 June 1972) but perhaps from fear of annoying India delayed its reactions. By the time it sent a representative to China to pursue the offer, China had cast in veto, and the decision was overtaken by events. The official was unable to make any worthwhile contact in China. (Discussions with Foreign Secretaty S.A.M.S. Kibria, op.cit.)
Success was minimal on all three counts. Kaiser failed
to make a breakthrough and his attempts to get Hanoi to
intercede on Dacca's behalf also failed. Kamal Hussain's
trip to Vietnam achieved little beyond bilateral relations,
and direct appeals to China seemed to fall on deaf ears.
The Chinese position, as expressed by Vice Foreign Minister
Chiao Kua Hua remained firm:

The Chinese Government holds that the
question of admitting Bangladesh into
the U.N. can be considered once the
relevant resolutions of the General
Assembly and the Security Council are
implemented without qualification.
But this can be done only after the
thorough implementation of the U.N.
Resolution and definitely not before.

In other words, the return of the POWs was the principal hurdle.
There was, therefore, a modicum of desperation implied in
Mujib's statement on the subject in Tokyo the same month
when he said that 'independent Bangladesh' had consistently
reaffirmed the desire to develop friendly relations with
"our great neighbour" China, and it was now China who should
make the positive move now since to date she had churned
Dacca's overtures: "We have our self respect" he said,
"we are not going to beg". However, it was obvious that
unless the Gordian knot of the subcontinental impasse was
cut, the Chinese position would remain unaltered.

38 Interview with Professor Sisir Gupta, former Indian Ambassador to
Hanoi, New Delhi, 30 April 1978.
The softening of Peking's position began with the mutual recognition of Pakistan and Bangladesh in February 1974, and on 7 June when the Bangladesh application to the U.N. was unanimously approved by the Security Council, the Chinese delegate Chung-Yen expressed gratification at the settlement of Bangladesh's dispute with Pakistan and on the tripartite agreement between the two countries and India.\footnote{Keesing's Contemporary Archives (July 8-14, 1974), p.26610.}

The changing Chinese attitude was also evidenced by Peking's announcement of a donation of relief goods worth $4 million to Bangladesh following the 1974 floods. Also, China did not oppose Bangladesh's U.N. admission. To thank the Chinese on both these scores, Dr Kamal Hossain met the Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Chou Kuang Hua in New York on 30 September 1974 in what was a most significant political meeting.\footnote{Details of this meeting were obtained in interviews with Dr Kamal Hossain, op.cit., and Ambassador F.A. Chowdhury (who was also present), Abu Dhabi, 29 July 1978.}

In that meeting Chou Kuang Hua stressed that as far as personal relations were concerned there was no gap between the Bangladesh and the Chinese leaders (Kamal Hossain had conveyed to him Mujib's concern about Chou En-lai's health). Chou Kuang Hua added that China had nothing but goodwill for the people, and leadership of Bangladesh though she had reservations about India and the Soviet Union, particularly the latter. A large part of the meeting was taken up by discussions on the state of Bangladesh-Pakistan relationship.
China was obviously disappointed by the result of Bhutto's visit to Dacca. Though Chou Kuang Hua indicated a more flexible Chinese position by his statement that China was telling Pakistan to improve relations with Bangladesh, the meeting brought out two things into relief. First, though the theoretical barrier to China's acceptance of Bangladesh no longer existed, the actual recognition and diplomatic links were linked to the solution of outstanding issues with Pakistan. Secondly, though China was far too committed to Islamabad to establish links with Dacca without the latter's approval, it was likely that to an extent Peking could be used by Dacca to apply some pressure on Pakistan for the solution of such outstanding issues as the settlement of assets.

The stage was set for links, even economic, without formal diplomatic relations. In May 1975 a three member trade delegation was sent to China by the Bangladesh Commerce Ministry. 43 K.M. Kaiser visited Peking and met Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Han Nien-lung. 44

The Chinese saw Mujib's overthrow in August 1975 as having 'embarrassed India and the Soviet Union'. 45 Though there had already been considerable contacts between Dacca and Peking, the new impetus of Dacca towards improved

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43 The delegation comprised the Director-General of Dacca's Expert Promotion Bureau, Mr E.A. Chowdhury, a retired Civil Servant, Mr A.K.M. Moosa and a private businessman M.L. Rahman. The visit was kept a secret till their return. Apart from initiating initial trade contacts, the visit had significant political implications. Interviews with Mr E.A. Chowdhury, London, 15 October 1978 and discussions with Mr A.K.M. Moosa, Dacca, 3 November 1978.

44 Pakistan Times, 6 June 1975.

45 Li Hsien-nien, Chinese Vice Premier, quoted in The Japan Times, 10 September 1975.
relations with Pakistan and the Middle East and the simultaneous deterioration in Dacca-Delhi relations seemed to have a positive impact on the links between China and Bangladesh. On 6 October 1975 *Hsinhua New Agency* announced the decision for establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, which were implemented in January 1976.

B. Resumption of China's balancing role in South Asia:

With the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and China, the Chinese traditional role of according support to smaller South Asian powers *vis-à-vis* India was resumed. While attempts to mend fences with India were in progress, China's strategy was to continue to humour the smaller subcontinental actors like Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and now Bangladesh.

(i) Bilateral Political Relations:

Bangladesh's primary interest in China is as a source of support in case of potential threat from India, for this would mean a significant accretion of power for Bangladesh. Though strictly speaking the two countries do not possess a common border, the gap is small enough to be insignificant should the situation call for a linkage. When the relations with India were at their nadir Dacca obtained such support

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46 China's formal recognition came on 31 August.

at a diplomatic level. Ziaur Rahman visited Peking on January 1977 and at a banquet in his honour, Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien stated that 'China firmly supports the Government and people of Bangladesh in their just struggle to safeguard national independence and state sovereignty and resist foreign interference'.

More directly, on Farakka, China's support for Bangladesh was evident, for instance, in a speech by the Chinese Chargé d'Affaires, in Dacca, Mau Ping, who declared in March 1977 that 'we firmly support the reasonable stand taken by Bangladesh on the question of sharing the waters of the Ganges River'. From the Chinese side Zia's visit was reciprocated by Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien in March 1978.

Domestically, Bangladesh Government gains by the Chinese connection by injecting a 'progressive' view into their external policy. The support of pro-Peking elements in the foreign policy area is sometimes likely to spill over into other areas as well.

In return for China's support vis-à-vis potential threats from India, the most Bangladesh can offer Peking is a veiled support in the latter's struggle against 'hegemonism'. In other words, support to Peking on 'hegemonism' is traded with support from Peking on 'expansionism'. But this of course is not an exact quid pro quo. While it is

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48 Bangladesh, Vol.2, No.4 (Dacca, m/Information and Broadcasting, 15 January 1977), p.5. Though Zia was No.2 in the Bangladesh Government when he went to Peking in January 1977, Chairman Hua Kuo-feng broke protocol and personally received him at the Airport.

49 ibid., Vol.2, No.9, p.2.
not difficult for China to continue to be critical of India's 'expansionism,' Bangladesh support for 'anti- hegemonism', for fear of alienating Moscow, can be only very subtle.\(^{50}\)

It appears, however, that China is able to appreciate Bangladesh's dilemma in this regard. Bangladesh support to the Chinese point of view is more outright when there is less fear of the alienation of a superpower. For instance, at the non-aligned conference in Havana in September 1979, Foreign Minister Shamsul Huq stressed the right of the Kampuchean people 'to freely choose a government without any external interference or foreign military presence or intervention' [emphasis mine].\(^{51}\) The reference was obviously to the Vietnamese involvement. This was no doubt designed to please China.

(ii) Bilateral Economic Relations:

Aid: Though the total quantum that China gives as aid to the Third World countries is comparatively smaller than that given by the industrialised West, the amount usually only tells half the story. Chinese assistance, because of its high political component, is usually geared

\(^{50}\) During a visit to Peking in November 1979, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Shamsul Huq, praised Chinese opposition to 'all forms of colonialism, neo-colonialism, hegemonism and domination' as a 'major contribution to world peace, avoiding mention of specific Bangladesh support, though implying it'. [emphasis mine]. Bangladesh Observer, 17 November 1979.

\(^{51}\) Bangladesh Observer, 3 September 1979, Dacca recognised the Pol Pot regime and not the Samarine Government. See statement of Bangladesh Foreign Secretary S.A.M.S. Kibria, Bangladesh Observer, 31 August 1979.
to the benefit of the recipients. The terms of the repayment are extremely favourable and Chinese expatriate experts claim no higher emoluments than their local counterparts.\textsuperscript{52}

The first formal bilateral contact on economic assistance was established in April 1976 through a discussion between the Bangladesh Secretary for External Resources Division and the Chinese Charge d'affaires which was followed by Memos to the Chinese Ambassador in Dacca and Bangladesh Ambassador to China in June. Eventually when Zia visited Peking in January 1977 an Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation was signed.\textsuperscript{53}

During Li Hsien-nien's visit to Dacca in March 1978 two Agreements were signed: the first, an economic and technical agreement under which China provided approximately 850 million taka interest free loan, repayable in ten years with a twelve year grace period for the purpose of a Urea Factory, a Water Conservancy Plant, and some commodity procurements. The second was a Scientific and Technological Agreement valid for five years providing for the exchange of experts and expertise on these fields. Future Chinese assistance was promised in the fields of road building, agriculture and rural electrification.\textsuperscript{54} In November 1978 a Shipping Agreement was also signed.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{53} Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Bangladesh in International Affairs}, Vol.1, No.3 (Dacca: Institute of Law and International Affairs, March 1978), p.4.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Dainik Bangla}, 1 December 1978.
The total quantum of Chinese aid commitment as on 31 March 1978 was $US1 million as grant and $US58.3 million in the form of loans. The grant was entirely utilised. Of the loan only $1.3 million had been utilised till then, but the large balance was partly because the loan agreements had just been signed and partly because even for the ones signed before, the gestation period of selected projects were long.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Trade:} As in the case of aid relations the qualitative features of trade relations are more significant than actual quantums, as the experience of Bangladesh shows. This was evidenced by the following. The Chinese bought up products of poorer quality (e.g. sugar and newsprint) than they would like to use thus helping Bangladesh diversify her exports; secondly, they displayed increased interest in non-traditional items, thereby assisting Bangladesh's goal of diversification of exportable goods; finally, all Chinese goods were available for export under barter trade at prevailing market prices, a sharp difference from other Centrally Planned Economies.\textsuperscript{57} Because of these factors the Chinese have been, and still are, attractive trade partners for Bangladesh.

Trade was through barter Agreements as well as in free foreign exchange. The first annual barter Agreement signed on 4 January 1977 provided for a trade of $US20 million.

\textsuperscript{56}See Table 9.3 Chapter 9.

\textsuperscript{57}Ministry of Commerce, Dacca.
each way, a marked 44% higher than the last one. Apart from traditional Bangladeshi export items like jute and jute goods such non-traditional items as shelled cashew nuts, particle board and hard board were included. In the free foreign exchange trade in 1976-77 Bangladesh exported goods worth Taka 120.81 million and imported goods worth Taka 110.54 million, thereby maintaining a small favourable balance of trade.⁵⁸

It was agreed in July 1979 during the visit to China of the Bangladesh Commerce Minister Saifur Rahman who held talks with his Chinese counterpart Li Chiang, that the two countries would conclude a long-term trade Agreement covering five years from 1980 and envisaging exchange of goods worth $US400 to $500 million.⁵⁹ This was confirmed during a visit to Dacca in February 1980 by China’s Deputy Foreign Trade Minister, Wang Rung-shen.⁶⁰

IV. Conclusions

Bangladesh's principal interest in China is as an ally to bolster her sense of security vis-à-vis a perceived historical sense of threat from a powerful neighbour. In Bangladeshi calculations, despite the recent thawing of

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⁵⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca.
⁶⁰ Bangladesh Observer, 29 February 1980.
Delhi-Peking relations, India and China, being Third World protagonist powers of comparable size but divergent values and systems, are likely to have an essentially adversary relationship, though the degree of competition and antagonism may vary from time to time.

Dacca's China-policy is facilitated by certain factors. Firstly, at the political level, there is a broad consensus of attitude towards China among major political parties, whether they are the conservative Muslim League, the moderate Awami League or pro-Peking Leftists. Pro-Moscow left wing parties may be an exception but their effectiveness in any case is minimal.

Secondly, at bureaucratic levels, senior officials in Dacca have had long experience of association with China dating back to Pakistan days and they found no difficulty in reverting back (after the initial period) to a policy they had always been used to. Even the Armed Forces have had experience of Chinese hardware and China once more became quite easily, as she traditionally had been for Pakistan, a source of procurement.

Thirdly, Chinese Aid and Trade policies were such that they won easy approval of the Bangladeshis, both official and private. This was markedly different from aid and trade relations with other Centrally Planned Countries.

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61 Indian Foreign Minister, Vajpayee paid a visit to Peking in January 1979.

62 For a sympathetic view of China by a senior Civil Servant see A.Z.M. Obaidullah, Yellow Sand Hills (Dacca, 1978), passim.
Fourthly, China's refusal to be drawn into Bangladesh's domestic political issues, even intra-Left squabbles, creates favourable impressions on incumbent governments who feel encouraged to maintain close links with Peking without the fear that China would get involved with political dissidents.

There is, however, one issue on which Bangladesh must tread a sticky wicket. China would expect, as indeed she does, Bangladesh's political support for 'struggle against [superpower] 'hegemonism' in lieu of China's support against [Indian] 'expansionsism'. But Bangladesh's commitment on this score can only be vague for there is the risk of gravely alienating Moscow, while on 'expansionsim' Chinese and Bangladeshi policies have always converged. But there are reasons to believe that China does not apply much pressure on this score as the issue of 'struggle against hegemonism' does not find place in the Communique issued following Li Hsien-nien's visit to Dacca in March 1978.63

Because of the reasons enumerated above, all governments in Dacca are likely to place premium on good relations with Peking. A pointer is the fact that while the Mujib government launched the China initiative, the Mushtaq government gave it further impetus and the government of Ziaur Rahman carried it to fruition.

63 Though Shamsul Huq made praise of China's opposition to 'hegemonism' during his visit to Peking in November 1979, the effect was diluted by mentioning 'hegemonism' alongside 'colonialism', 'neo-colonialism' and 'domination'.
EXTRA-REGIONAL RELATIONS: THE MIDDLE EAST

I. Introduction

There are several reasons why the Middle East engaged Dacca's early attention. First, the Arabs, traditionally, have held a fascination for the Muslims of the Subcontinent. As one analyst has written

there is a romantic view [in Pakistan] of the Arabs as the original Muslims, whose language is the language of the Quran, and whom many [Pakistanis] tend to associate with the 'Golden Age of Islam'.

Many Bangladeshis feel the same way.

Secondly, Bangladesh was in dire need of resources, both petroleum and otherwise, and the Middle East was an obvious source. The requirement for oil was ever increasing. Estimates showed an increase in monetary terms, from $35 million in 1973 to $95 million in 1974, a jump of $60m. Besides Arabs were seen as possible donors, helping meet Bangladesh's massive aid requirements.

Finally, the increased economic and political clout of the Middle Eastern countries in the 1970s enhanced their


prestige. Their support was therefore likely to facilitate the acceptance of Bangladesh by countries who had not yet done so. The Muslim states were institutionalising their links through such bodies as the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference and the Islamic Secretariat. For Bangladesh, it would obviously pay dividends to belong.

She did not, however, find ready acceptance by the Muslim Middle East. Firstly, the latter did not endorse the dismemberment of a fellow-Muslim State Pakistan. Some made no effort to conceal their early hostility towards Bangladesh. During the 1971 war Jordan actively aided the Pakistani military by making third country transfers of ten American F-104 aircraft. Even after the emergence of Bangladesh as a formal state entity, at the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference held in Jeddah in February 1972, Libya called upon Muslim States not to recognize Bangladesh except within the 'framework' of Pakistan.

Secondly, the emphasis placed on secularism, as opposed to Islam, by the Dacca Government (in its effort to encourage a communalism-free nationalism, with the sympathy of its principal external source of support, India) was displeasing to the Arabs. Pakistan also maintained a sustained effort

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3 Jack Anderson with George Clifford, op.cit., p.9.
4 Pakistan Times, 2 March 1972.
5 See Article 8(a) of The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (Dacca, Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh), p.5.
to prevent any reversal of this negative Arab attitude, kept up through visits to the Middle East by Bhutto's special emissaries.  

Thirdly, the Bangladesh Movement had attracted Israeli support and Yigal Allon had voiced sympathy for the new Republic over state radio. This was sufficient to arouse considerable Arab ire.

Soon, however, it became evident that the Arabs were not all agreed on their attitude towards Bangladesh. There were firstly, the 'rejectionists', mainly fundamentalist states with close links with Pakistan, such as Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Libya; secondly, there were the 'moderates', Algeria, South Yemen, and Egypt; thirdly, there were the 'sympathisers', mainly Iraq, which, largely due to close connections with the Soviet Union, tended to look upon Dacca with more favour than other Arabs; and finally, there was Iran, a non-Arab Middle East state whose attitudes vis-à-vis Bangladesh were conditioned more by geo-political factors than by religious.

II. Bangladesh's Strategy and Arab Recognition

Bangladesh attempted to break the back of Arab resistance through the following strategems: first, by direct appeals

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6 In August 1972, the Pakistani Food and Agriculture Minister Ghaus Baksh Raisani was sent to the area. On his return he declared that Qatar, Bahrain and North Yemen had assured him that they would never recognize Bangladesh. The following month Islamabad's Foreign Secretary Iftekhar Ali carried special messages from Bhutto to Libya's Gaddafi and the Egyptian Foreign Minister Zayyat with a request for stalling the recognition of Bangladesh. *Times of India*, 11 September 1972.

7 ibid.
to the Arabs themselves; secondly, by using the South East Asian Muslim states as intermediaries; thirdly, by projecting a posture of unswerving support to the Arabs on the Palestine issue; and, finally, (and this was to come last of all) by proposing arbitration by the Arab states in Bangladesh's dispute with Pakistan regarding division of assets.

A. Direct Appeals:

These were initiated at a very early stage, even prior to the actual emergence of Bangladesh. In May 1971, when the struggle for Bangladesh was still in progress, a representative of the Provisional Government, Abdus Samad Azad, at the Budapest World Peace Council Conference, pointed out to the Muslim delegations in a passionate appeal, that Pakistan was using religion as a means of 'perpetrating inhuman suppression'.

Immediately after independence, a Bangaldeshi politician, Mollah Jalaluddin, was sent as a roving envoy to the Middle East. He emphasized Bangladesh's unwillingness to have any relations whatsoever with Israel. Later official level delegations, such as the one headed by a senior diplomat, Iqbal Athar, were also sent to various Arab capitals to lobby Bangladesh's case.

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9 Times of India, 27 December 1971.

10 Interview with Mr R. Amin, a member of the Athar delegation, Canberra, 5 February 1979.
Mujib, who attended the Non-Aligned Summit Conference at Algiers in September 1973 made personal calls on such participating Arab leaders as Saudi Arabia, Faisal, Egypt's Sadat and Libya's Gaddafy. Mujib's efforts met with some result as shortly afterwards two Arab states, Egypt and Syria, announced their recognition of Bangladesh.\(^\text{11}\)

B. Use of South East Asian Muslim States as Intermediaries:
Bangladesh was more easily acceptable to the Muslim countries of South East Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia. Malaysia had bitter memories of Bhutto.\(^\text{12}\) Indonesia's Suharto did not share his predecessor Sukarno's foreign policy orientations, including the strong bias for Pakistan.\(^\text{13}\) On 26 February 1972 both Malaysia and Indonesia recognized Bangladesh.\(^\text{14}\) This was significant for Bangladesh as Indonesia was the largest Muslim state in terms of population, and Malaysia, whose former Prime Minister Tunku Abdur Rahman was the Secretary General of the Islamic Secretariat, had close links with the Arab countries.

The fact that they served as conduit between Dacca and the Arab capitals was evident in a speech by the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad at a banquet in honour of his Indonesian counterpart Adam Malik: he said

\(^{11}\) Times of India, 17 September 1973.

\(^{12}\) Bhutto, as Pakistan's Foreign Minister, was responsible for breaking off Pakistan's diplomatic relations with Malaysia following a speech by a Malayan diplomat at the U.N. which was critical of Pakistan's role in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965.

\(^{13}\) Sukarno had actively supported Pakistan during her 1965 war with India.

\(^{14}\) Times of India, 27 February 1972.
We welcome you in our midst not only as a Foreign Minister but as the representative of the largest Muslim populated country in the world ... it [Indonesia] was the first Muslim country to accord recognition to our new state ... We are aware that you personally projected the cause of Bangladesh in the Middle East and thereby paved the way for the development of better understanding between Bangladesh and the countries of that region.15

C. Support to the Arabs on the Palestine issue:

Bangladesh projected a posture of total support to the Arabs *vis-à-vis* Israel on the Palestine issue. The earlier Israeli support to Bangladesh was pointedly ignored by Dacca. Mujib declared (as reported in the Middle East Press)

> Israel sent us her recognition and we did not respond. She wanted to send us weapons but we declined to accept.16

At the Non-Aligned Summit in Algiers, Mujib in his speech regretted the fact that Arab territories still remained under the 'illegal occupation of Israel' and that the people of Palestine continued to be denied their 'fundamental rights'.17 At the Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore in February 1974 he said: 'We must regain our right over Jerusalem'.18 By using the first person plural he was totally identifying himself with the Arab cause.

Earlier, the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 had provided Bangladesh with an opportunity to vigorously project her pro-

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16 *Al-Gomhouria* (Cairo), 6 April 1972.


Arab stance. She despatched 100,000 pounds of tea to Egyptian and Syrian soldiers as 'a token of love' for the 'Arab brethren', followed by a decision to send an Army medical mission to Syria. The support the Arab cause had received from diverse political quarters in Bangladesh was noted with satisfaction by the Arab world, and, within a week of the War, 'in gratitude for Dacca's support to the Arab War effort and opposition to Israeli aggression', Jordan, Kuwait and North Yemen decided to establish diplomatic relations with Bangladesh.  

Indeed by December, Mujib was able to report to his people that among the Arab states Iraq, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Kuwait, South Yemen, North Yemen, Syria, Sudan and Jordan had accorded Bangladesh formal recognition.

D. The Suggestion for Arab Arbitration Between Bangladesh and Pakistan

Some Arab States, particularly Saudi Arabia, however, continued to withhold recognition. Eventually, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Dr Kamal Hossain was able to mellow the Saudis down considerably at the Sixth Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference in Jeddah in 1975, when he suggested that the Saudis by themselves, or together with the U.A.E. and Kuwait arbitrate between Bangladesh and Pakistan on the issue of the division of assets. Thus by indicating that Bangladesh

21 Interview with Dr Kamal Hossain, op.cit.
was willing to repose complete confidence on these countries, even though they had adopted a pro-Pakistan posture, Kamal Hossain was able to neutralise their hostility to a very large extent.

III. Some Selected Case Studies

This section will examine Bangladesh's relations with five selected Middle Eastern Muslim countries, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), Egypt, Iraq and Iran. Saudi Arabia has been selected, not only because of her economic resources but also because of the special status she enjoys among the Muslims as the guardian of Islam's holy shrines; the U.A.E. as being representative of the conservative states, as well as for being an original 'rejectionist' \( \textit{vis-à-vis} \) Bangladesh; Egypt, because of her international political importance; Iraq, as an Arab socialist state which was sympathetic from the beginning, and Iran, as a non-Arab Muslim state from the region.

A. **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia was initially opposed to the creation of Bangladesh, and sustained this opposition over a period longer than that from any other Arab state. This was because, firstly, Pakistan had many friends in the Saudi ruling circles and was able to ensure that Bangladesh was excluded from Saudi favour; secondly, the Saudis, who perceive themselves in many ways the leaders of the Muslim world, could not condone the acceptance of 'secularism' as a principle of state by the government of a Muslim country; thirdly, Bangla-
desh was suspect in Saudi eyes because of the support the Israeli leadership originally accorded her, and finally being politically conservative, Saudi Arabia had no sympathy for a state whose very emergence was so unconventional.

King Faisal made no secret of his feelings when while inaugurating the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference in Jeddah in March 1972, he prayed for the early 'reunification' of 'both wings of Pakistan'. There was no change in the Saudi attitude throughout 1972 and a visiting Pakistani Cabinet Minister, Ghaus Baksh Raisani, was assured that Saudi Arabia would never recognize Bangladesh unless Pakistan did so. At the Algiers Non-Aligned Conference in September 1973 Mujib was granted an audience by King Faisal. Though the Saudis continued their opposition to Bangladesh by raising objection to a political declaration of the Conference supporting Bangladesh's entry into the United Nations, some link between the two leaders was now established.

The major breakthrough in Bangladesh's relations with the Arab states came following Bangladesh's support to the latter in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Though Saudi recognition of Bangladesh did not follow, her attitude was moderated. After Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh in February 1974,

22 Pakistan Times, 2 March 1972.
23 ibid., 19 August 1972.
24 See Section IIA ante.
26 Footnote 19 ante.
Dacca hoped that the Saudi recognition was only a matter of time. In fact Saudi Arabia displayed a considerable softening of attitude when King Faisal announced the donation of $10 million to Dacca on 19 April 1974 as disaster relief. But the Saudis continued to stall according to Dacca formal recognition, obviously under Pakistani influence, as a sudden hiatus in Dacca-Islamabad relations came about following their failure to cut the gordian knot of the issue of division of assets. The Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Kamal Hossain, however, was able to mellow down Faisal by suggesting Saudi arbitration of the issue. It now only took the emphasis on Islamic features, which was laid by the post-Mujib government, to bring about Saudi recognition. The new President of Bangladesh Mushtaq, received messages of felicitations from Faisal.

Bangladesh took the initiative in establishing diplomatic links by opening a Mission in Saudi Arabia on 18 January 1976. The first Bangladesh Ambassador, Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, presented his credentials on 20 October of the same year, and was assured of Faisal's support against 'external threat'.

General Ziaur Rahman made a brief stop-over in Saudi Arabia in 1976 and then paid a formal official visit as President in July 1977. In December 1978, in course of a

---

27 *Times of India*, 20 August 1974.

28 Footnote 21 ante.

29 *Pakistan Times*, 17 August 1975. It seemed that Saudi action was synchronised with that of Pakistan, which also accorded Mushtaq Government immediate recognition.

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28 Footnote 21 ante.
29 Pakistan Times, 17 August 1975. It seemed that Saudi action was synchronised with that of Pakistan, which also accorded Mushtaq Government immediate recognition.
visit to Bangladesh by the Saudi Minister for Finance and National Economy, Sheikh Aba al-Khail, a joint commission for 'promoting bilateral relations and strengthening cooperation' was set up.\textsuperscript{31}

As of 31 March 1978, Saudi Arabia was the largest donor among the Arab countries. Till then she had committed \$88 million as grant and \$50 million as loan, out of which \$73.375 million of the grant component has already been utilised.\textsuperscript{32} Saudi Arabia has so far pledged a total amount of \$300 million to assist Bangladesh's economic development, half of which is to be in grant and the other half, interest-free loan.\textsuperscript{33} Saudi assurances of help towards the funding of the Bangladesh Second Five Year Plan (1980-85) was reiterated by King Khalid to the visiting Bangladesh Minister for Rails and Highways, Abdul Alim, when the latter led a delegation of pilgrims in November 1979.\textsuperscript{34}

Saudi Arabia also employs a large number of surplus semi-skilled and skilled labour as well as many Bangladeshi professionals such as engineers, doctors and teachers. In the month of January 1978 out of a total number of 1661 persons who left Bangladesh for foreign employment, 256 went to Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{35} Considerable amounts, \$1,431,265 in the first

\textsuperscript{31} Bangladesh Observer, 23 September 1979.

\textsuperscript{32} See Table 6.5 below.

\textsuperscript{33} Same as footnote 31 ante.

\textsuperscript{34} Bangladesh Observer, 17 November 1979.

\textsuperscript{35} See Table 6.6 below.
three months of 1978 were remitted home by these persons, thus contributing to Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves.\textsuperscript{36}

B. The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)

The U.A.E. represented the typical Arab initial attitude to Bangladesh. For very much the same reasons as Saudi Arabia, she was unsympathetic to Bangladesh at the outset. In fact, her resistance did not wear out till after Pakistan had recognized Bangladesh. Then on 10 March 1974, the U.A.E. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs sent a telegram to the Bangladesh Foreign Minister announcing Abu Dhabi's recognition of Dacca.\textsuperscript{37}

Almost immediately afterwards, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Kamal Hossain, was in Abu Dhabi. In course of his discussions with his hosts, the decision was taken to exchange Ambassadors. It was also agreed that delegations would be exchanged periodically 'with a view to expanding areas of cooperation in education, cultural, scientific, economic and other fields'.\textsuperscript{38} Mujib paid a formal visit to Abu Dhabi in December 1974.

The Zia government kept up the attempts to maintain political relations at the highest level. To that end Zia visited Abu Dhabi in March 1978, in course of which he reiterated Dacca's adherence to Islamic principles.\textsuperscript{39} It was

\textsuperscript{36} Ex Source: Exchange Control Department, Bangladesh Bank, Dacca.

\textsuperscript{37} Pakistan Times, 11 March 1974.

\textsuperscript{38} Joint Communiqué, Bangladesh Documents, Vol.2, No.3 (January–March, 1974), p.23.

\textsuperscript{39} Emirates News (Abu Dhabi), 9 March 1978.
decided that the two countries would initiate immediate action for exchanging delegations to identify projects in Bangladesh for possible U.A.E. support and that a joint commission would be set up to review, periodically, the progress of bilateral cooperation in all fields. A Zia made a brief stop-over at Dubai in October 1978 when he held talks with the U.A.E. Communications Minister, Saeed al-Mullah.

High level visits from the U.A.E. to Bangladesh, on the other hand, have not been frequent. The most significant one was by a non-political person, the Chief Justice of the Sharia Court, Sheikh Ahmed Abdul Aziz al-Mubarak in March 1977. This, together with the fact that Bangladesh appointed a full-fledged Ambassador to Abu Dhabi as early as November 1974, while the latter reciprocated belatedly only in January 1978, that too with a comparatively junior official as Chargé d'affaires, point to a greater eagerness of Dacca to maintain close links, than that of Abu Dhabi.

Major economic interactions began simultaneously with political relations, though there was some minor trading even earlier. In September 1974 Bangladesh sent a seven-member economic delegation to Abu Dhabi, led by Professor Nurul Islam, the Chief of the Planning Commission. The delegation met

40 Joint Communiqué issued at the Conclusion of the State Visit of President Ziaur Rahman to the U.A.E. from March 6 to March 8, 1978 (Dacca: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 March 1978), pp.2-3.
41 Khaleej Times (Dubai), 7 October 1978.
42 Bangladesh, Fortnightly, Vol.1, No.9 (Dacca: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1 April 1977), p.2.
43 See Table 6.1.
and discussed with the U.A.E. Planning Minister, Khalifa Al-Kindi. Professor Islam's visit was returned in November by the Managing Director of the Abu Dhabi Fund, Dr Hassan Abbas Zaki, and the following month during Mujib's official trip to the U.A.E., a sum of approximately $50 million was made available to Bangladesh.

The U.A.E. eventually emerged as the second largest Middle Eastern aid donor for Bangladesh. Till 31 March 1978, she had given a total of $85.400 million in loans and grants. Of these, $10 million offered on 26 June 1976 is being used for a Machine Tool Factory and $15 million for an electrical works, which indicate that the assistance is being used to fund sophisticated and modern projects. During 1977 the U.A.E. committed herself to supplying Bangladesh with 600,000 tons of urban oil on short term credit, thus helping satisfy an urgent requirement.

The following table gives a picture of bilateral trade:

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44 *Pakistan Times*, 16 September 1974.


46 See Table 6.5.

47 Same as footnote 45 ante.


49 Ministry of Commerce, Trade 1 Section, Dacca.
Table 6.1

![Table 6.1](image)

The table shows a steady increase in exports over the last three years. Though the sole item of import was petroleum, the exports covered a wide variety of items such as tea, vegetable, incense, cables and wires, films, handicraft, fish, fresh fruits, live animals, and confectionary, which was in conformity with Bangladesh's aim of encouraging a wide diversification of exportable goods. In spite of her small population, given the much higher purchasing power, the U.A.E. has the potential for developing into a good market for Bangladeshi products.\(^{50}\)

The U.A.E. is also an important source of employment for Bangladeshi surplus labour. Out of the 1,661 persons who left Bangladesh for overseas employment in January 1976, 276 went to the U.A.E., 20 more than the number to Saudi Arabia in that particular month.\(^{51}\) A large sum of money continued to be remitted home by the Bangladeshis. The amounts in the

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\(^{50}\) Interview with Mr Helaluddin Akbar, Commercial Secretary, Bangladesh Embassy, Abu Dhabi, 30 July 1978.

\(^{51}\) See Table 6.6.
first three months in 1978 totalled $2,301,556, a considerably larger quantum than that remitted by Bangladeshis from Saudi Arabia [Source: same as footnote 36].

C. Egypt

There are two broad reasons why Egypt was important to Bangladesh: first, she was politically a very significant entity not only regionally, but globally as well, and secondly, not being a fundamentalist or a conservative state, she was likely to accept Bangladesh early, which was again likely to provide the latter with a foothold in the region from which to attempt the cultivation of other Arab states.

Even in 1971 there were moves from Cairo which could be deemed as being sympathetic to Bangladesh. Some newspapers such as Al-Ahram had pleaded for moderation by Pakistani troops in Dacca and President Anwar Sadat had written a letter to General Yahya Khan urging restraint.52

Egypt, however, was unwilling to risk the alienation of Pakistan to any significant extent, which a formal recognition of Dacca by Cairo at an early stage would have certainly brought about. At the same time, she saw no reason for not being pragmatic enough to accept the *fait accompli* in South Asia. Ideally, Egypt would have welcomed an early *rapprochement* between Dacca and Islamabad, but since it seemed unlikely to happen in the near future, she tried to devise a working relationship with Dacca *sans* formal recognition.

52 Interview with Ambassador Abdus Sultan of Bangladesh, Cairo, 1 August 1978.
To that end in 1972 Sadat sent a verbal message to Mujib through Dr Tewfiq Oweida, the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Cairo that Egypt acknowledged [not recognized] the emergence of Bangladesh as a reality and was in the process of consulting with other Arab states regarding formal recognition.53

Bangladesh built up a gradual pressure on Egypt to secure her recognition. She despatched Iqbal Athar to Cairo in August 1972,54 followed by a visit there by the Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, indicating Bangladesh's eagerness for early links.55 A further proof of such eagerness was that Dacca quite willingly signed a Trade Agreement with Cairo in December 1972, while earlier, the same year it had declined a barter protocol with Rumania, because Bucharest was yet to recognize Bangladesh. Egypt also provided positive gestures by sending important personalities to Dacca, such as Hassan el-Heikel, the Editor of Al-Ahram in January 1973 and Dr Zayyat, the Foreign Minister in March that year.

By the time the Indo-Pakistan Agreement of August 1973 had been signed, Pakistan had already learnt to live with the increasing international acceptance of Bangladesh. With this hurdle to recognition now removed, Egypt recognized Bangladesh after the Sadat-Mujib meetings during the Algiers

54 Same as footnote 10 ante.
55 There was some suggestion made to Iqbal Athar by the Cairo leadership that Mujib visit Egypt but the Foreign Office in Dacca discouraged a Prime Ministerial visit without formal recognition of the host. Same as footnote 53.
Non-Aligned Conference. The growing rapport was aided by Bangladeshi support to Egypt during the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. There were further meetings between Mujib and Sadat at the Islamic Summit in Lahore in February 1974, when Sadat made a goodwill stop-over in Dacca the same month and Mujib visited Cairo in November, the same year.

Given the close personal links between Sadat and Mujib, Dacca had reasons to fear Egyptian hostility following Mujib's overthrow. Therefore, the Special Presidential Assistant Justice Abdus Saltar was sent to talk to the Egyptian leadership in January 1976. Sattar was received by Foreign Minister Fahmy as well as by Sadat. Once again Egypt found it necessary to accept a fait accompli. Sadat may have drawn some consolation from the fact that Bangladesh appeared to be veering away from the Soviet Union with whom his relations had also soured.

The government of Ziaur Rahman continued striving to retain high level links. Zia visited Cairo in September 1977 and stressed Bangladeshi support to Egypt vis-à-vis Israel. The visit was seen by the Egyptian press as not a mere confirmation of the close relations between the two countries but [as coinciding] with the historical circumstances through which the Middle

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56 Same as footnote 11 ante.
57 *Al-Akhbar* (Cairo), 30 January 1976.
58 *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), 1 February 1976.
East area is passing and with the Islamic peoples' drive to further their solidarity and cohesion.\textsuperscript{60}

Bangladesh has had to tread her ground very carefully following Sadat's peace venture with Israel. She has avoided taking any sides in the intra-mural Arab disputes that had arisen as a result. Bangladesh has not publicly either criticised or condoned Sadat's initiatives. What has enabled her to succeed in this delicate policy of non-reaction is an overall Arab appreciation of her position, and the lack of pressure for support from the involved parties.

Economic relations with Egypt preceded formal political links. But this was in the area of trade rather than aid. Egypt was not a major source of aid, mainly due to her own resource constraints.\textsuperscript{61} Some technical assistance was rendered through scholarships; 25 such offers were received in 1977-78 for studies in the fields of medicine, engineering, agriculture, and Arabic language and literature.\textsuperscript{62}

There were significant trade interactions, however. Even prior to the establishment of embassies, Egypt maintained a Trade Office in Dacca. Trade is conducted through barter agreements as well as in free foreign exchange.\textsuperscript{63} The first

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Al-Ahram} (Cairo), 25 September 1977. In course of this visit Ziaur Rahman was decorated by Sadat with the 'Collar of the Nile'. \textit{Al-Gomhouria} (Cairo), 25 September 1977.

\textsuperscript{61} However there have been some arms transfers over the years, including some tanks and military hardware.

\textsuperscript{62} Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca.

\textsuperscript{63} Following details obtained from Mohammed Rizk Mohammed Heiza, Representative Egyptian Trade Centre in Dacca: 'Bangladesh-Egypt Trade Relations at a Glance', \textit{Bangladesh Times Special Supplement}, 27 July 1978. Also interview with Mr M.A. Chowdhury, Embassy of Bangladesh, Cairo, 2 August 1978.
barter agreement was signed on 15 December 1972 and provided for an exchange of £9.5 million worth of commodities each way. However, the utilization fell short of the maximum and the amount was reduced to £6.07 million when the second barter agreement was signed on 27 December 1975. Though a third barter was signed in 1977, by then it was obvious that this was not the best form of trading. Of much greater success was the commercial intercourse in free foreign exchange. In 1977-78 the volume of business transaction amounted to $20 million. For Bangladesh traders Egypt is an important source for certain essential commodities like raw cotton, cotton yarn and rock phosphate. Egypt, in turn, is the largest buyer of Bangladeshi tea.

D. Iraq

Iraq's initial assessment of Bangladesh was coloured more by political than religious motives. The ruling Baath Socialist Party was sympathetic to the Awami League which had similar socialist overtones. Iraq had also close links with the Soviet Union, a major source of external support for Bangladesh. These factors prompted the early acceptance of Bangladesh by Iraq, which on 8 June 1972 became the first Arab country to accord Bangladesh recognition.64

Dacca obviously hoped that Iraq would be the conduit linking Bangladesh to other Arab countries. The Iraquis were, therefore, assiduously cultivated.

64 Times of India, 9 June 1972.
Prior to the Islamic Summit in Labore, Dacca sent Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain to Iraq with a message from Mujib to President Hassan al Bakr. While seeking Iraqui assistance for obtaining Pakistani recognition, Kamal Hossain also used the visit to focus sharply on Bangladesh’s general pro-Arab stance for the Arab world to see. The Joint Communiqué issued after his meeting with his counterpart said:

The two Ministers reiterated their Governments' absolute support for the right of self-determination of the Arab people and for regaining full rights as well as exercising full sovereignty over their territory ... the two sides reviewed the situation in the Arabian Gulf [emphasis mine] and the Indian Ocean and agreed that security and peace of the two areas are interlinked.65

The use of 'Arabian Gulf' in place of 'Persian Gulf' as is commonly used in the Subcontinent denoted a clear desire of the Bangladeshi side to placate the Arabs. The bilateral links were strengthened by Mujib's visit to Iraq in October 1974. Agreements for cultural and economic cooperation were signed in course of that visit.66

However, Iraq had certain strong misgivings after the Coup of August 1975 in Dacca. The Iraqi reaction was once again as in 1971-72, in line with that of the Soviet Union. Just as in 1971-72 Iraq had stood apart from most Arab states by sympathising with Bangladesh, yet once more she projected a different attitude from those of most other Arab states who


66 Interview with Mr Ruhul Amin, then an official of the Bangladesh Embassy in Baghdad, Canberra, 26 February 1979.
were pleased with the Islamic overtones of the newly installed government of Mushtaq. Iraq's misgivings must have been fed by the resignation, in reaction to his recall, of the Bangladeshi Ambassador to Baghdad, K.G. Mustafa, a close confidant of Mujib's who had powerful friends in the upper reaches of the Baath Party.

There was consequently a brake on further developments in bilateral relations. Time and a further change of government in Dacca acted as healers, and in April 1977 a Bangladeshi Cabinet Minister, Kazi Anwarul Huq, visited Baghdad. The old links were restored and in July 1978 the Iraqui Vice President Taaha Mohiyuddin Maarouf came to Dacca at the invitation of Ziaur Rahman in February 1979, immediately after the election victory of his Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Iraq is the third largest Arab donor for Bangladesh, coming after Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. Till 31 March 1978 she provided a total sum of $51 million, $44.737 million on credit and $6.263 million as grant. On the Trade side, a General Trade Agreement between the two countries was signed on 18 February 1974. The following table indicates the volume of transactions.

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67 Bangladesh High Commission, Canberra.
68 See Table 6.5.
69 Ministry of Commerce, Dacca.
Table 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Import from Iraq</td>
<td>139,496</td>
<td>40,695</td>
<td>149,001</td>
<td>10,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export to Iraq</td>
<td>15,886</td>
<td>152,563</td>
<td>121,546</td>
<td>14,071</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the above shows a steep decline after 1975-76, which conforms to the low in political relations. So far, import from Iraq has remained confined to crude and partly refined petroleum, sulphur, and dates. Exports have comprised traditional items like jute and jute goods, hides and skins and spices. Endeavours in Dacca are being made to expand the range of goods to include a variety of non-traditional items as well. Being an oil-rich state, Iraq is seen as a good market, potentially.

Iraq has currently approximately 6,000 Bangladeshi expatriates employed there and plans to recruit a further 8,000 semi-skilled workers shortly. The amount of foreign exchange they remitted home during the first three months of 1978 totalled $844,170. The amount is expected to rise following the proposed recruitment of the additional work force, increasing Iraq's significance to Dacca on this count.

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70 *Bangladesh Observer*, 20 October 1979.
71 On this score, Iraq, among the Middle Eastern countries came after the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Iran. Source: *Bangladesh Bank, Dacca.*
E. Iran

Iran had been too much of a traditional ally of Pakistan for Bangladesh to consider any close relations with her till the climate of Dacca-Islamabad relations showed some signs of improvement. But even though Iran's sympathies lay with Pakistan, with her burgeoning wealth and power, she had begun to develop in the early 1970s a broader perspective in the assessment of her interests in her eastern flank. This included improved relations with India.

However, the territorial integrity of what was left of Pakistan in 1971 continued to be of primary interest to Teheran for any further balkanization of the former would spell problems for the latter, for instance vis-à-vis the Baluchis of Iran. It was, therefore, only logical for the Shah to hope for better Indo-Pakistan relations.

The Indians were at pains to put across to the Shah that they did not wish for the disintegration of residual Pakistan. There were visits to Teheran by Mrs Gandhi's envoy, P.N. Haksar, in early 1973, followed a few months later by that of Swan Singh to explain this viewpoint. Convinced of this, the Shah was now in a better position to prod a subcontinental detente, particularly as the region promised to be a sizeable market for Iran.

Therefore, though Iran's formal recognition of Bangladesh had to await Pakistan's, Iran was never unfavourably disposed.

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towards Bangladesh. Dr Kamal Hossain visited Iran in June 1974. He was given an audience by the Shah and he held discussions with Prime Minister Hoveida and Foreign Minister Khalatbary. Since Kamal Hossain had taken along with him Bangladesh's planning chief, Professor Nurul Islam, the discussions had a strong bias towards economic matters.\(^73\)

Successive Bangladesh Governments continued the policy of close links with Iran. When the Farakka dispute portended to become a major issue between Bangladesh and India, an influential Iranian newspaper *Kayhan* supported Bangladesh by arguing that things had come to such a pass over Farakka that Bangladesh could no longer remain silent.\(^74\)

Ziaur Rahman visited Iran in March 1977 and in October that year the Iranian Labour Minister Abdul Qasim Moini signed in Dacca a Memorandum of Understanding that would take to Iran a large surplus of Bangladeshi manpower, envisaging a transfer of over 24,000 workers.\(^75\)

Following the advent of Ayatollah Khomeini to power in February 1979, the Bangladesh-Iran relations did not undergo change in any major way. The Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Shamsul Huq welcomed Iran as a new member of the Non-Aligned Movement at the Conference in Havana in September 1979, and stated that Bangladesh-Iran ties were rooted in history and culture.\(^76\)


\(^75\) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca.

\(^76\) *Bangladesh Observer*, 2 September 1979.
The fact that one of those taken hostage at the American Embassy in Teheran in November 1979 was a Bangladeshi also did not affect bilateral relations adversely. His release was soon effected and as the U.S.-Iranian relations reached their nadir, Bangladeshi approach to the crisis, as reflected in deliberations at the U.N. Security Council, was of utmost circumspection.

For instance, Bangladesh abstained from voting on the draft resolution tabled by the U.S. on 31 December 1979 calling for economic sanctions against Iran if the hostages were not released immediately. While supporting the UN resolution for the release of the American diplomatic personnel held in Teheran according to the principles of immunity as assured to such personnel under international law and convention and appreciating 'the desire of the U.S. Government for action within the framework of international law and under the auspices of the United Nations', the Bangladesh delegate argued that the decisions to use sanctions on a specified date would only result in dividing the international community and may be prejudicial to the Secretary-General's [forthcoming] mission.77

Bangladesh was toeing a very cautious and low-key line, unwilling to offend either Iran or the U.S. Though she has close links with both Washington and Teheran, she does not seem to have

77 Statement by Bangladesh at the Security Council Meeting on 31 December 1979, Bangladesh High Commission, Canberra.
seriously considered mediating between the two parties on the issue of hostages.

This disinclination for involvement was also evident in the fact that when Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, a former President of Bangladesh, was selected a member of the U.N. commission of inquiry into Iran's grievances, he turned it down on the ground of 'illness'.

In spite of the fact that Bangladesh's interests in Iran were largely motivated by the compulsions of economic needs, Iran has not been a major donor. Till March 31, 1978 Dacca obtained only $12.5 million as loan, less than from any other Middle Eastern OPEC state except Libya.

Trading predated diplomatic relations between the two countries. Two tables are placed below indicating the year-wise breakdown in the volume of transactions:

Table 6.3
EXPORTS FROM BANGLADESH TO IRAN
[Figure in 000 Taka]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jute goods</td>
<td>31,344</td>
<td>55,029</td>
<td>118,493</td>
<td>90,635</td>
<td>189,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw jute</td>
<td>4,892</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,822</td>
<td>2,935</td>
<td>17,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,266</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jute screen cloth</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamarind</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsprint</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turmeric</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>36,236</td>
<td>57,295</td>
<td>123,515</td>
<td>93,934</td>
<td>207,936</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

79 See Table 6.5.
80 Ministry of Commerce, Dacca.
### Table 6.4
**IMPORTS FROM IRAN TO BANGLADESH**

[Figure in 000 Taka]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petroleum products</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>47,675</td>
<td>16,832</td>
<td>253,966</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil seeds, nuts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee, Cocoa, spices</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy products</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit &amp; Vegetables</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil, fats &amp; wax</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals &amp; compounds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>17,058</td>
<td>254,428</td>
<td>733,137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables indicate the importance of Iran as an important source of petroleum products, whose import into Bangladesh show a steady increase as of 1975-76. Despite recent cutbacks in their oil production, Iran continues to remain an important source of this item for Bangladesh.

### IV. A General Survey

Broadly, all governments in Dacca have endeavoured to establish and retain close links with the Muslim States in the Middle East. Even when 'secularism' was considered a major principle of state policy, as during the Mujib era, sustained efforts were being made by Dacca to cultivate the Middle East. When the Islamic features of Bangladesh
were outlined in broader relief by the Mushtaq Government, 81 reactions from this area in general became even more favourable. The Zia government continued to value close relations with the Middle East, whose assistance could be invoked whenever there were threat perceptions from Bangladesh's neighbours, all of whom are non-Muslim state actors.

The policy of creating rapport by personal contacts through high level visits by the Bangladeshi leadership continues. From time to time public pronouncements of close relations with the Middle East are made. In May 1976 at a public meeting Zia declared that 'we have religious, historical, cultural relations with all the Muslim countries of the world and we want to further strengthen our relations with them'. 82 Solidarity with the Arab cause on the Palestine issue is frequently reiterated by the leadership. 83 The decision to set up an Islamic University was given ample publicity by the government. 84

Certain amendments to the Bangladesh Constitution were effected in 1977, which were likely to find favour with the

81 The Mushtaq Government also set up an Islamic Foundation in Dacca with a view to consolidating friendship with Muslim countries. *Impact International*, Fortnightly (London), 22 August-11 September 1975.

82 Address at Suhrawardy Uddyan by Major General Ziaur Rahman, Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator, 1 May 1976 (Dacca: Department of Publications, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1 May, 1976), p.3.


84 *ibid.*, 1 September 1979.
Middle Eastern Countries. Secularism was replaced as a fundamental principle of state by Absolute Trust and Faith in the Almighty Allah. Also, the following clause was added to the Article in the Constitution relevant to external relations:

> The State shall endeavour to consolidate, preserve, and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity.  

In return, these countries have often given their support to Bangladesh when the latter has required it. For example, they expressly backed Bangladesh’s candidature to the Security Council in November 1978 on the basis of an endorsement at the Islamic Foreign Minister’s Conference held in Dakar in April 1978.

The region is viewed as a good source of material support. A 1978 publication of the Bangladesh Planning Commission said

> A new group of donors has emerged in the recent past in the Middle East. Assistance from OPEC sources has been increasing substantially. A large part has been on grant terms and the remainder has been on soft to medium terms.

The following table indicates the actual amounts received from the Middle East till 31 March 1978.

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85 Bangladesh, Vol.1, No.11, 1 May 1977.
86 Discussion with Mr Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca, 27 November 1978.
87 Seven Years of External Assistance to Bangladesh, op.cit., p.3.
88 ibid., p.35. Apart from these a sum of $17.400 million was received as loan multilaterally from OPEC.
Table 6.5
FUNDS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST
[in $ million]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Commitments</th>
<th>Disbursement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grant Loan Total</td>
<td>Grant Loan Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>- 12.500 12.500</td>
<td>- 2.200 2.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>6.263 44.737 51.000</td>
<td>6.263 24.737 31.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>- 29.350 29.350</td>
<td>- 13.139 13.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>1.000 - 1.000</td>
<td>1.000 - 1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>88.000 50.000 138.000</td>
<td>73.375 - 73.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>10.000 75.400 85.400</td>
<td>10.000 55.613 65.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>105.263 211.987 317.250</strong></td>
<td><strong>90.638 95.689 186.327</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of aid from various other sources reveals that the grant component of $105.263 million is far in excess of that of $36.872 million received from the Centrally Planned countries, though the loan component of $229.380 million falls short of the figure of $467.593 million obtained from the socialist states. The primary Arab donor, Saudi Arabia, comes ninth as a source of bilateral assistance. However, Saudi Arabia is expected to go up a few positions higher with her fresh commitments for the Second Five Year Plan. It must also be remembered that the Middle East is a comparatively late comer as aid donors since political relations with the

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89 See Table 9.3 in Chapter 9.

90 After the U.S. ($1045.142m.), Japan ($528.312m.), West Germany ($412.258m.), Canada ($358.771m.), the U.K. ($283.200m.), the U.S.S.R. ($228.580m.), Sweden ($150m.) and the Netherlands ($148.782m.). *Seven Years of External Assistance*, op.cit., pp.30-35.
region were established much later than with other major donor groups.

Because of the tightening of immigration control by such traditional sources of employment of surplus Bangladeshi manpower such as the U.K., and the U.S.A., the importance of the Middle East in this respect has sharply increased. Dacca does not discourage it for mainly two reasons: one, domestically it relieves the pressure of unemployment, and the other, it adds to foreign exchange earnings; the Bangladeshi workers, because of the nature of the basic social fabric that places special responsibilities on earning individuals to their dependents whose number in joint families may be large, tend to remit home sizeable segments of their earnings.

The increasing primacy of the Middle East as a source of employment is evidenced by the fact that in January 1978, out of 1,681 persons that left Bangladesh for overseas employment all went to the Middle East. 91 The countrywise breakdown is given below: 92

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.A.E.</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

91 Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
92 ibid.
Bangladesh is dependent on the Middle East for her total crude oil requirements. In 1977 the necessary import requirement of 1,200,000 tons was purported to be met by short-term credits from three sources, the U.A.E., Iran and Saudi Arabia, enabling the procurement of 600,000 tons from the U.A.E., 400,000 tons from Iran and 200,000 tons from Saudi Arabia.\(^{93}\)

V. Conclusion

The Middle East has been, and is likely to remain, a major preoccupation with Bangladeshi policy-makers. There are several reasons for it. Firstly, the Middle East connection enhances Bangladesh's sense of security against her powerful neighbour; to that end, it fills the role in the Subcontinental balance that was played by the North Indian Muslims or Pakistan. Secondly, it assures for Bangladesh firm support from a group of countries in her various diplomatic manoeuvres such as the bid for the Security Council seat in 1978.\(^{94}\) Thirdly, close links with the Middle East satisfies a powerful domestic constituency that takes pride in identity with Islam and its current resurgence. Finally the linkage has strong economic imperatives as a source of aid, employment of surplus labour, and oil.

\(^{93}\) Bangladesh, Vol.1, No.3, 1 January 1977.

\(^{94}\) Middle Eastern support was also invoked during the refugee dispute with Burma. See Chapter 7.
I. Introduction

Apart from India and Pakistan there are two other states in the region that engage the attention of Dacca's foreign policy makers: Burma and Nepal. True, they do not form the immediate hub of the subsystem that comprise India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But they come easily into the picture as the smallest power of the hub attempts to broaden its range of interactions beyond it. Burma is the only other neighbour of Bangladesh apart from India. Though Nepal is not a contiguous neighbour, this very fact of her not being one is of central significance, as it brings into play a complex situation, that is, the necessity of India's assent for Bangla-Nepal interactions through land. Bangladesh shares with both these countries the fact that China and India are central to the foreign policies of all three states.

Having dwelt at length on Bangladesh's relations with the two other states of the core of the subsystem, i.e. India and Pakistan, it should be interesting to examine how she relates to fellow-smaller states of peripheral South Asia and in what ways this is dissimilar to her behaviour pattern vis-à-vis the more powerful neighbour, India.
II. Burma

The significance of Burma to Bangladesh lies in the fact that apart from India, Burma is the only country with which Bangladesh shares common borders. Secondly, Burma is located to the South-East of Bangladesh, linking the latter with that region. This is important for Bangladesh sees herself as the 'bridge' that connects South and South East Asia. Thirdly, Burma is a traditional supplier of rice to Dacca during periods of grain shortage in Bangladesh. Fourthly, Burma is a fellow small-power in the region, a partner whose support or at least neutrality is required in any situation of confrontation between Bangladesh and her powerful neighbour, India. Last but not least, there is a large ethnically Bengali-Muslim population in the Arakan region of Burma.

For the same reasons perhaps Bangladesh is also of considerable importance to Burma, except that Burma had another powerful neighbour to worry about, China. Burma's attitude during the 1971 war was therefore one of caution. Initially her support for the independence movement was sharper. Immediately after the Army crackdown in Dacca on 23 March 1971, Burma stopped the supply of fuel to Pakistani aircraft.

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1 See Chapter 1, f.n.16.

2 China has been a central issue in Burma's external policy. See Ralph Pettman, Small Power Politics and International Relations in South East Asia (Sydney: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976), p.77.

3 Times of India, 14 January 1972.
Secondly, Burma provided refuge to many Bengalis who fled to escape from Pakistani military action. Later however possibly under Chinese influence, Burma also became a sanctuary for Pakistani civil and military refugees. The Pakistan International Airlines took out their aircraft via Rangoon when the fall of Dacca was imminent in December 1971.

On 13 January 1972 Burma accorded recognition to Bangladesh, being the seventh country to do so. This was significant as Burma was likely to, as indeed she did, provide a link for Dacca with Peking. An official delegation from Dacca led by Foreign Secretary S.A. Karim visited Rangoon in February 1972. The mission had a threefold purpose: first, to establish contact with Burmese leadership; second, to gauge the possibility of recovering some of the aircraft flown out to Rangoon by the PIA; and third, to purchase rice. Karim met the Burmese Foreign Minister Hla Han and Deputy Foreign Minister Hla Phone, but was told that none of the aircraft remained on Burmese soil. However a Memorandum of Understanding for Dacca's purchase of 65,000 tons of wheat under a barter agreement was initialled.

There was a high level contact in April 1974 when the Burmese President Ne Win visited Bangladesh between April 26 and 29, 1974. The Joint Communiqué issued at the end of

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4 This group included some Bengali Members of Parliament from the Subdivision of Cox's Bazar as well as some senior Bengali military officers.

5 *Times of India*, 14 February 1972. The other countries to accord recognition so far were India, Bhutan, GDR, Bulgaria, Mongolia and Poland.

6 Discussions with officials of Foreign and Commerce Ministries, 7 and 8 November 1978.
the visit was not unusual of two 'friendly neighbours' who till then had no conflicting interests. For instance there were broad agreements on political stability in the Subcontinent, support for Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, expression of hope for a lasting peace in Cambodia and Vietnam, reduction of tension in the Middle East and welcoming the Special U.N. Session on raw materials and development.\(^7\)

An analysis of the Communique reveals that neither Bangladesh nor Burma considered the latter a part of the South Asian Subcontinent which assisted the Burmese cautious and neutral line in the complex intra-Subcontinental relations.\(^8\)

After the relaxation of tension between Bangladesh and Pakistan following the exchange of diplomatic recognition in February 1974, Dacca began to focus on the outstanding issues with the more immediate neighbours. The question of boundaries with Burma was yet unresolved. Moreover, Bangladesh was hoping for some oil finds in her territorial waters. This needed demarcation of water frontier with Burma. With that end in view a four member delegation from Dacca visited Rangoon in September 1974. The specific matters for discussion were (a) territorial waters and (b) the economic zone and continental shelf.

The negotiations were smooth and the demarcation of territorial waters posed no problem. On the question of

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\(^8\) For instance in the communique there were references to the 'three countries' of the Subcontinent meaning India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. *ibid.*, p.8.
economic zone both sides agreed on the definition and characteristics of the legal regime of economic zone and continental shelf, but the details were deferred for solution at a later date. The Bangladesh delegation came away with the impression that there is no likelihood of a potential dispute on this score.\(^9\) In July 1977 Maj. General Ziaur Rahman visited Rangoon.

It was not on water but on land that a problem was brewing, though just before the issue blew up, the visiting Foreign Minister of Burma Myint Maung had described the border between the two countries as 'a border of peace'.\(^10\)

On the Burmese side of the border in the Arakan province, there was, and is, a sizeable Bengali-speaking Muslim population known as the 'Rohingas' who had lived there for periods ranging from three generations to three centuries. The Rohingas were mostly small traders and businessmen, and though only a few were rich, they dominated the economic life of Arakan to the chagrin of the original Burmese in the region.\(^11\) Secondly, these Burmese Muslims were allegedly thick with the local communists and a linkage was suspected.\(^12\) Both these factors contributed to their alienation from both the indigenous population and the authorities. Around this time the Burmese government introduced an immigration

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\(^9\) Interview with Mr F.A. Chowdhury, a member of the delegation, Abu Dhabi, 5 October 1978.

\(^10\) FEER, 19 May 1978, p.5.

\(^11\) ibid.

\(^12\) FEER, 26 May 1978, p.7.
check code-named 'Dragon-King' purported to update its demographic information, to classify the residents as Burmese citizens or foreigners, and issue them with registration certificates. There was a consequent influx of Burmese Muslims into Bangladesh, numbering nearly 200,000 who arrived with complaints of atrocities perpetrated by the Burmese authorities.\(^\text{13}\)

Bilateral relations rapidly deteriorated. Bangladesh accused the Burmese with firing on refugees.\(^\text{14}\) She also gave wide publicity to the influx, especially among Muslim countries. A four member delegation from the Islamic Nations Secretariat visited the refugee camps.\(^\text{15}\) However negotiations at bilateral levels were held and the government in Dacca was careful to avoid high level criticism of the Burmese Government. Heading a nine member delegation for talks in Rangoon, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Tabarek Hussain said:

> We have taken a very reasonable and logical stand to solve the problem through bilateral negotiations and we hope the other side will respond for an amicable and speedy solution.\(^\text{16}\)

It is interesting to note that while Dacca avoided 'bilateralism' in disputes with the more powerful neighbour, India, it was eager to apply it to the comparable neighbour, Burma. But obviously Bangladesh saw it in her interest to resolve the dispute as quickly as possible.

\(^{13}\) Asiamweek, 19 May 1978, pp.21-22.

\(^{14}\) The Times (London), 1 June 1978.

\(^{15}\) Daily Telegraph, 1 June 1978.

\(^{16}\) Herald Tribune, 7 June 1978, p.7.
The fact is attested by the unwillingness of the Dacca government to take a very hard line attitude by encouraging any secession movement by the Burmese Muslims in Arakan. There could have been a temptation to do so with material support from other Muslim countries. Such ideas were indeed floating about at lower levels in the decision-making machinery.\textsuperscript{17} The principal reason was perhaps that having to contend with such a powerful neighbour as India in any case, Dacca saw it more worthwhile to resolve disputes with other neighbours amicably and quickly, so as not to have to take on too many regional antagonists at the same time. Finally with an eye to the elections for the Security Council scheduled for October/November that year, Bangladesh wanted to project the image of a peaceful state ready to solve issues with neighbours through negotiations.

Burma, too, tended to lose by the perpetuation of the dispute. Firstly, as it is the control over the Arakan region of the Rangoon government was not such that it could withstand a local armed uprising actively espoused by Bangladesh and possibly some Arab states, some of whom like Libya have been known to get rapidly involved in comparable situations as in the Philippines; secondly, adverse international publicity could hurt Burmese credit line \textit{vis-à-vis} the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other major financial institutions, just when Burma had opened herself to the world economy;\textsuperscript{18} thirdly, it was not unlikely that

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Asia\textit{week}, op.cit., p.21.}

\textsuperscript{18} Discussions with Mr S.A. Karim, former Bangladesh Ambassador to Burma, New York, 10 September 1978.
China was encouraging a speedy agreement between two of her 'friendly' countries on the fringes of India.

As a result of these factors an agreement on the refugee issue was reached between the two countries in July 1978. By the end of December 1979 all the Rohingya refugees were repatriated to Burma. Bangladesh Home Minister Mustafizur Rahman called it 'a success of bilateralism between two friendly countries'.

There was considerable warmth that proceeded from the amicable settlement of July 1978. In May 1979 President Ne Win of Burma returned Zia's 1977 visit. An Agreement on border demarcation was signed, and in the joint communiqué that followed, the repatriation agreement was described as one of 'utmost significance for regional stability and peace'. That very month in an agreement signed in Rangoon Bangladesh purchased 100,000 tons of rice from Burma. Burma continued in her role as a supplier of rice for Bangladesh. A Burmese Trade delegation visited Dacca in December 1979 and signed an 'Agreed Minutes on Discussions' with Bangladesh Authorities.

20 ibid.
24 Bangladesh Observer, 7 December 1979.
Bangladesh continued to attach high priority to her relations with Burma. Dacca's Ambassadors to Rangoon have been very senior diplomats\(^{25}\), which illustrates that fact.

An analysis of Bangladesh-Burma relations brings out Dacca's concern in not alienating any of the regional small powers, for this would certainly erode her capability of marshalling counterpoise against bigger neighbours. Apart from that, speedy solutions of differences with neighbours redounds to Bangladesh's benefit in giving her the image of a peace-loving international actor necessary for attaining such political goals as election to the Security Council (in 1978) and economic aspirations as enhancing credibility with major donors who tend to frown upon belligerence, especially in regions where in the past it has led to significant economic reverses.

III. Nepal

Nepal's position during the Bangladesh War was one of studied neutrality. There may have been some sympathy for the Bangladeshi cause, but traditionally Nepal has always avoided taking a stance on an issue in which China and India were deeply involved on opposite sides.\(^{26}\) However Nepal

\(^{25}\) The first two, K.M. Kaiser and S.A. Karim, were very senior career officials and the current envoy Zahiruddin (who was Ambassador to Pakistan till mid-1978) is a very renowned political figure.

\(^{26}\) The evolution of Nepal's foreign policy is interesting in that it has always endeavoured and managed to steer herself carefully between China and India.
had no reason to crow over India's triumph because it did indeed adversely affect her policy of using Pakistan to fend off Indian influence. The break up of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh signalled Indian pre-eminence in the region for sometime to come.

So long as Bangladesh and India remained on euphoric terms Bangladesh and Nepal did not have much to do with each other. Neither bothered to raise its diplomatic representation to Ambassador level.\textsuperscript{27} There were Cabinet level visits either way but nothing of any substance emerged from these. Nepal was traditionally interested in getting a second outlet to the sea through Bangladesh (the first was through Calcutta) but if Dacca and Delhi pursued identical policies there was precious little to gain from such a second outlet.

When King Birendra floated his 'Zone of Peace' proposal for Nepal at the Algiers Summit Conference of 1973 stating that Nepal, situated between two of the most populous countries in the world, wishes to be declared a 'zone of peace', this had support from such countries as Pakistan and China and was opposed by India, whose traditional military cooperation with Nepal would be hurt by such a policy.\textsuperscript{28} Bangladesh, perhaps not to give India offence at that point in time, maintained a studied silence.

\textsuperscript{27} Both Dacca and Kathmandu maintained Charge d'Affaires in each other's capitals.

\textsuperscript{28} See Rishikesh Shaha, 'Nepal as a Zone of Peace', \textit{Pacific Community}, Vol.8, No.1 (October 1976), p.171.
Bangladesh's interest in Nepal grew just as her relations with India were deteriorating. Also when the Farakka issue came to the fore, Bangladeshis were arguing for Nepalese participation in that reservoirs of water would be needed to be erected on Nepalese territory. On March 31, 1976 Dr M.N. Huda, Adviser to the Bangladesh President on Planning arrived in Kathmandu, and on 2 April four protocols, on trade, transit, technical cooperation and air agreement, were signed.\textsuperscript{29}

When the Indo-Bangla Agreement on Farakka was finalised in October 1977 following a change of government in New Delhi, the Nepalese Press welcomed it hoping that the new India government would display a similar spirit of cooperation and understanding in concluding trade and transit treaties with Nepal.\textsuperscript{30}

Both Prime Minister Desai of India and President Ziaur Röhman of Bangladesh visited Nepal soon afterwards. Desai's visit went off less favourably than Zia's. Desai was unenthusiastic about the concept of a Himalayan 'zone of peace' and at the same time was anxious to elicit Nepalese support on the issue of Hindu refugees spilling into India from Bangladesh, which Nepal failed to render.\textsuperscript{31} On the other hand Zia welcomed the Nepalese 'Zone of Peace' proposal as a 'laudable move' towards peace and stability in the

\textsuperscript{29} ibid., p.178.

\textsuperscript{30} Himali Bole (Kathmandu), 3 October 1977.

\textsuperscript{31} Asiaweek (Hong Kong), 13 June 1978.
region. Zia also hinted at the possibility of a Bangladeshi-Nepal-India accord on harnessing water resources and facilitating overland transport of goods to and from Nepal, a perennial source of headache for the Nepalese. These pleased the Nepalese no end.

King Birendra and the Queen of Nepal reciprocated Zia's visit in January 1978. In the joint communique Nepal and Bangladesh agreed that the question of the development of water resources was one in which all the countries of the region could cooperate closely, in other words indicating Nepal's approval to being a party to the water-sharing issues. Bangladesh reiterated its support for the 'Zone of Peace' proposal. So the visit, in the words of King Birendra

opened up new horizons for greater cooperation to be worked out at several levels for the benefit of the people of Nepal, Bangladesh and the region as a whole.

Later that year, in order to facilitate Nepal's overland trade with Bangladesh, India and Bangladesh signed a Memorandum of Understanding to open the Biral (Bangladesh) - Radhikapur (India) railway route for traffic in transit for Nepalese export and import cargoes through Bangladesh and Indian territories to come into force from September

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32 Times of India, 30 December 1977.
33 Asiaweek, 13 June 1978.
34 The Rising Nepal (Editorial), 17 June 1978.
35 ibid.
that year. This would facilitate both way traffic between Bangladesh and Nepal under the separate agreements that were signed in April 1976.

In a continuing bid to maintain friendly links with Nepal, Professor Shamsul Huq, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, went to Nepal in January 1979 and reiterated support for the Nepalese 'Zone of Peace' proposal. For the second time within a space of two years, King Birendra paid a formal visit to Bangladesh in March 1980, when at a Civic Reception he cited Bangladesh as a good example of a small power that has been able to resist domination by more powerful states.

It seems that Bangladesh will always attempt to be on the right side of Nepal. The former's complex relations with India dictates a policy of tacking close to the other neighbours, especially those with whom the likelihood of any conflictual issue developing is minimal. Bangladesh has little to lose by providing Nepal an outlet to the sea (which will in fact favourably improve her own trade with Nepal) and voicing support for Nepal as 'Zone of Peace' (which will please the Chinese, which is to Dacca's benefit). In return, she can count on Nepalese assistance in helping to harness water resources and hope for Nepalese support, both tacit and overt, specifically in case of any future conflict situation with India, or more generally, in her other external initiatives. Perhaps the primary

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36 Bangladesh (Fortnightly) (M/Information and Broadcasting in collaboration with M/Foreign Affairs, Dacca), Vol.11, No.3, 15 August 1978, p.1.


38 Azad (Dacca), 6 March 1980.
reason why Nepal and Bangladesh will continue their friendly links is the absence of any contrary interest as indicated by the Nepalese Foreign Minister Krishna Raj Aryal when he said: 'There is hardly any issue of international importance on which Nepal and Bangladesh hold differing or opposing views'.

IV. Conclusions

The model that Bangladesh conforms to in her links with the peripheral South Asian small states, Burma and Nepal, is dissimilar to that of Dacca-Delhi relations.

While vis-à-vis India, Bangladesh attempts to ensure her security by building extra-regional linkages, with Burma and Nepal this is not so. Even though disputes occur, as with Burma over the Rohingya refugees and border demarcation, Dacca is anxious to either settle them bilaterally (as distinct from issues with Delhi) or confine the dispute to narrower limits. For instance, on the issue of Burmese refugees, only the Muslim states were involved to any significant extent. Dacca's theme seems to be that small states in the region should club together,

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not necessarily with a view to a conflictual relationship with India, but certainly with an eye to the regional pre-eminent power. 40

40 It was in a further projection of this theme that Bangladesh despatched an envoy to the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan in January 1980 to be permanently stationed at Thimpu. Up until then, Dacca's High Commissioner to New Delhi was jointly accredited to Bhutan. Bangladesh thus seems keen on delinking her bilateral relations with Thimpu from those with New Delhi, even though Bhutan traditionally orchestrates her foreign policy with India's, largely in conformity with the Indo-Bhutan Agreement of 1949.
CHAPTER 8

THE RELEVANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

I. Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the relevance of the United Nations to Bangladesh's external policy. It attempts to study the role the latter plays in that forum, the various attitudes she adopts in this relationship, and the linkages these attitudes have to the broader aspects of the total gamut of her foreign relations.

II. Efforts at Seeking Entry

Being a breakaway state endeavouring to confirm her sovereign status, for Bangladesh membership of this world body implied a final seal of international recognition. The task was rendered difficult because it was precisely this recognition that some states, in particular Pakistan and China, were anxious to deny her. Entry into the United Nations was therefore a matter of signal importance and was accorded high priority by the policy-makers. This is attested by Bangladesh's insistence on early application for membership despite advice to the contrary from several close quarters.

On 9 August 1972 when Mujib was convalescing in London, the Belgian Ambassador called on him to discuss the matter. Belgium was then the President of the Security Council.
The Ambassador suggested deferment of application. The British Prime Minister Edward Heath tendered similar advice on 12 August, mentioning the possibility of a Chinese veto, and pointing out that once that occurs, it would be more difficult to get a second application through in the absence of a significant change in the situation in South Asia.

Even some Bangladeshi diplomats in Washington, entrusted with the responsibility of lobbying for the application for membership in New York, expressed fears that one reason why the Soviets encouraged early application was that they would in fact like a Chinese veto, if only to 'expose' China to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh now sought legal counsel. The Ministry of Law in Dacca consulted a leading authority on international law relating to State succession, Professor D.P. O'Connell of Australia. Based on these consultations, the advice the Law Ministry tendered the Foreign Office in August was that in the event of such obstruction by Pakistan, Bangladesh should contend that upon dissolution of Pakistan, West Pakistan, though it continued to call itself Pakistan, was no longer the same country and therefore ceased to exist as a member of the U.N. It was pointed out that even though the opinion rendered by the Assistant Secretary General for

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1 Bangladesh High Commission, London.
2 ibid.
3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dacca.
Legal Affairs of the U.N. on 8 August 1947 held that post-partition India had retained the international personality of pre-partition India, he had still advised that in view of the change of sovereignty new credentials were to be submitted by the Indian representative in the U.N. On 12 August Mujib wrote to Indira Gandhi seeking her advice if Bangladesh should spread the word that Dacca intended to take such action. But judging from future events it must have been dropped as unfeasible.

Bangladesh went ahead with the application for membership, which met with Chinese veto. It was nearly two years later, after the Pakistani recognition and Tripartite Agreement in the Subcontinent in 1974 that the Chinese were to withdraw their objections. On 17 September 1974, a draft resolution (Resolution 3202 (XXIX)) for Bangladesh's membership, co-sponsored by 68 countries, was unanimously adopted. Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Hossain expressed his gratitude to the General Assembly, saying:

this marks the fulfilment of the aspiration to take our place in the organization as a sovereign independent state indicating the right of self-determination for which millions of our people laid down their lives in the struggle for liberation.

4 ibid.

5 Letter from the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to the Prime Minister of India, 12 August 1972.

III. Benefits Derived from U.N. Membership

A. Enhancement of the sense of security

Bangladesh's perception of the U.N. as a guarantor of security was evidenced in the comment made by a government spokesman after the Indian annexation of Sikkim in 1974 to the effect that there was no reason to be afraid, as Bangladesh, besides being larger than Sikkim, was a member of the U.N.  

When Bangladesh felt her security, economic and political, threatened, she did indeed make use of the world body, as during the Farakka dispute in 1976. The chief of the Bangladesh delegation that year, Admiral Khan, explained that

> We have raised this issue in this Assembly also because of our belief that no state should be denied the right of a fair and impartial hearing by this world forum which constitutes for smaller states not only the most objective but in fact the only forum to air their grievances.  

Bangladesh, therefore, supported both the strengthening of the U.N. as well as her increased role as an arbitrator in international disputes. At the 1975 session of the General Assembly the then Foreign Minister Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, speaking on the relevance of the U.N. to weaker states said

> For small developing countries such as Bangladesh the U.N. provides not only the best but the only forum for making

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7 See Chapter 3, footnote 112.

8 Statement by the Chairman of the Bangladesh delegation in the Special Political Committee, Thirty-first General Assembly Session on item 121, Press Release by the Bangladesh Mission to the U.N., 15 November 1976, pp.22-23.
their voices heard. Therefore Bangladesh has from its very inception as a sovereign independent nation pledged its total allegiance to the purposes and principles of the U.N. charter. We support all measures which strengthen the U.N.9

Besides the general strengthening of the U.N. Bangladesh sought the expansion of its role as an arbitrator, viewing it as a guardian of international morality among the nations. To that end, Dacca emphasized the potential of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). She advocated the increase of ICJ's role in rendering advisory opinion.10 A Bangladesh delegate to the Sixth Committee in 1975 asserted

The effectiveness of the International Court of Justice should be increased and it should be made to play a more active role in the process of peacemaking.11

B. Forum for stance on international issues

The U.N. provided Bangladesh with a convenient forum for airing her views on major international issues. On one hand it enabled her to publicly identify herself with weaker Least Developing Countries (LDCs), on the other prevented her from giving direct annoyance to big powers which could have occurred if she were to present her views bilaterally on these issues. In other words views that would be unpalatable to countries that Bangladesh sorely needed to cultivate could be aired under the umbrella of a

9 United Nations General Assembly, A/PV 2371, 2 October 1975, p.3.
grand forum, where these opinions would blend with those of many others and would not stand out annoyingly in sharp relief. These major issues are the non-aligned movement, Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, Disarmament and the New International Economic Order.

(i) The Non-Aligned Movement

In the post Cold War era the Non-aligned Movement may have lost much of its meaning, but for Bangladesh the otherwise rather vacuous term was useful to project that though one of the Superpowers (the USSR) might have supported her emergence and the other (the US) opposed it, she was not keen on being bracketed with one against the other. Her espousal of the non-aligned movement was therefore a signal of the will to conduct an independent foreign policy despite the heavy debt to the Soviet Union. Mujib, in his first speech on the floor of the General Assembly, made a public commitment to the pursuit of a non-aligned foreign policy.13

Bangladesh used her 'non-alignment' to further her own foreign policy interests. For instance, during her bid for the Security Council seat in October 1978 she argued that 'the ideal objective would be to increase the overall number

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12 It can well be argued that 'non-alignment', like 'neutralism', is not necessarily relevant only to cold war situations and could mean different things at different times. See Peter Lyon, Neutralism (Leicester University Press, 1963), pp.15-21.
of non-aligned representatives', and on that score sought the support of other non-aligned countries against Japan.14

(ii) Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean

Mujib outlined Bangladesh's position on the issue during his 1974 speech in the General Assembly. He said that his country welcomed every effort aimed at advancing the process of détente, relaxation of tension, limitation of armaments and promotion of peaceful coexistence in every part of the world, whether in Asia, Africa, Europe or Latin America. In pursuance of this policy we have consistently supported the concept of the Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean area.15

Mujib was putting across the view that a détente between the Soviet Union and the USA, while welcome was not sufficient to achieve global peace. It could even have the adverse effect of inflating tension in the more peripheral areas of the globe if the superpower conflict continued by proxy. It was therefore necessary to set up regional zones of peace in such peripheral areas, i.e. in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A follow up of this line of thinking was Bangladesh's support to the Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean.

Initially, the Bangladesh position on this was more in line with India's rather Pakistan's, as evidenced in the deliberations of the 29th session of the General Assembly. On Pakistan's request, the item entitled 'Declaration and Establishment of a Nuclear Free Zone in South Asia' was included in the draft agenda of that session.

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When the item was considered in the First Committee, two draft resolutions were introduced: one by India stressing that the initiative of creating a nuclear free zone in Asia should come from the states of the region, and the second introduced by Pakistan which took note of the affirmation by the states not to acquire nuclear weapons (with the Indian explosion of May 1974 in mind) and inviting the states of South Asia to initiate consultations under the U.N. Secretary General's auspices with a view to establishing a nuclear free zone. Bangladesh voted for the Indian resolution and abstained when the Pakistani one was put to vote, arguing that the Pakistani proposals contain elements which should be discussed during consultations first among the South Asian countries, or else the Secretary General's task would be rendered extremely difficult.  

As with the salience of Farakka issue, and with the increasing border conflicts, threat perceptions from India increased, Bangladesh began to worry more about conventional naval build-up in the region than Great Power presence. Her delegate to the First Committee in 1976 pointed out that the disappearance of great powers does not automatically secure tranquillity in the area. While it would complement such a process, it cannot substitute for the obligations to be contracted by the countries of this region themselves to ensure their security. We therefore subscribe to the view that states in this region cannot in all earnestness advocate such a peace zone without themselves practising what they preach.


Clearly, he had India in mind. In order that the Declaration may be effective, Bangladesh advocated commitment of the regional states to a yet higher ideal, i.e. to the principles of a Universal Collective Security without military alliances under the umbrella of the U.N. Charter, including the renunciation of the threat to use force against each other, 'whether nuclear or conventional'.\[emphasis mine.\]

(iii) Disarmament

Closely linked to the above attitude was the Bangladesh posture on disarmament.

On the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the Superpowers, the general Bangladesh line was that 'it was a step in the right direction', though a far cry from the ideal of disarmament. Commenting on these terms, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abu Sayeed Chowdhury asked in the General Assembly in October 1975:

> Of what use is limitation, or to be hopeful, even reduction of the number of weapons when those which remain are made more sophisticated in their variety, accuracy and striking power, with the result that the aggregate destructive capacity becomes far greater than it would have been without limitation or reduction?\[19\]

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was regarded as a positive measure, though initially Bangladesh had certain


\[19\] United Nations General Assembly - Provisional A/PV 2371, 2 October 1975, pp.6-7.
reservations. Her observations on the NPT centred on three connected issues. First, it was the fear that the Treaty could be a discriminatory mechanism dividing nuclear 'haves' and 'have nots'. It was argued that the primary reason for the weakness of the treaty was that the nuclear weapon parties failed to fulfil their main obligations to take effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. Secondly, a major incentive to the adherence to the Treaty would be the assurance of the security of non-nuclear states against any actual or threatened aggression. The third issue (and this with an eye to the Indian explosion) was the need to clarify the problem of 'peaceful nuclear explosions' (PNE), i.e. finding some suitable safeguards with regard to this. 20

The above statement implied certain reservations about the NPT nurtured at that point in time. But a change of attitude, encouraged by the nuclear 'haves', was brought about in four years' time. Having no possibilities of nuclearization, unlike India or Pakistan, it was probably considered unfeasible to demur for long, and finally, on 23 August 1979 Bangladesh finally signed the NPT 'in the interest of global peace and in larger national interest'. 21

Dacca, understandably, continued to emphasize the need to focus attention on limitation of conventional weaponry. After all, as the Bangladesh Foreign Minister stated at the U.N. in October 1977, all armed conflicts since 1945 have

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been fought with conventional weapons.\textsuperscript{22} This was important as conventional conflicts in the Third World could escalate dangerously. In Dacca's view,

In a world where the most pronounced phenomenon is the unequal relations among states, local wars arising from fear of domination, exploitation and interference in internal affairs constitute a continuing danger, particularly since they can and do draw into their vortex the bigger nations of the world.\textsuperscript{23}

In order to reduce local wars, therefore, a halt to the conventional arms race was essential. This is typical of the fear of a weak state where potential sources of threat are more likely to be conventionally armed than with nuclear weaponry.

(iv) \textbf{New International Economic Order (NIEO)}

If the U.N. had such a significant role to play in the prevention of international anarchy and providing for the security of the weak, Bangladesh also saw for it a positive task in reshaping the world economic order in such a way as to benefit the underprivileged. To that end Bangladesh took a line in the U.N. than was congruous to that normally espoused by the 'South', in what is known as the 'North-South Debate' between the world's developed and developing countries.

The Sixth Special Session of the General Assembly, called in 1974 to discuss the international economic situation

\textsuperscript{22} Statement by the Chairman of the Bangladesh delegation to the 32nd Session of the U.N. General Assembly on 5 October 1977 (Press Release of the Bangladesh Mission to the U.N.), p.5.

\textsuperscript{23} Statement by the Bangladesh delegate to the First Committee, 29 November 1976, United Nations General Assembly (UN/SA Collection), pp.7-8.
was described by Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain as 'historic'.

The Head of the Bangladesh delegation in 1976 reiterated that

real progress can be achieved only if the rich are prepared to concede that economic justice is not a slogan only for the poor but the only means by which a real and stable world order can be achieved.

In 1979 the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Professor Shamsul Huq made an elaborate set of suggestions, a 15 point programme, in his address to the General Assembly on 11 October, so that the NIEO could be achieved the third U.N. decade of development, the 1980s. These were, broadly, as follows: (1) a firm political and moral commitment on the part of the industrial nations to reanchor international relations to values and principles enshrined in the U.N. Charter; (2) the recognition by the international community of human rights, particularly with regard to food, clothing, shelter, health, education and employment; (3) transfer of adequate resources to the developing countries; (4) massive supply of inputs for increase in agricultural production; (5) development of a food security system with an adequate food reserve built up through contribution from surplus countries; (6) transformation of the socioeconomic structures through decentralization to ensure widest possible popular

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participation in development activities; (7) increasing assistance to projects and programmes with quick returns; (8) gearing of the plan strategy to the productive utilisation of women in socio-economic development; (9) redefinition of international policies to ensure transfer of resources; (10) increasing economic co-operation among developing countries with special stress on investment of surplus income of oil rich countries in joint ventures in the developing world; (11) removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers by industrial countries and the extension of General Scheme of Preference (GSP) beyond 1981 on non-reciprocal and non-discriminatory basis; (12) diversion of resources now wasted on arms build-up to the Third World for development purposes; (13) increasing application of science and development to the productive development efforts in the Third World countries including pre-disaster planning; (14) united determination by the international community to deal with the energy crisis with a view to developing alternative energy sources; and, finally (15) ensuring full, equitable and effective participation of the developing countries in the formulation and implementation of decisions in all fields of international co-operation.  

A good deal of the above sounds rhetorical but confirms an unmistakable empathy with the demands of the developing countries that industrial nations undertake major initiatives

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in ensuring a more equitable sharing of the world's resources.
At the same time, because the stand was taken in such a wide forum there was no fear of giving direct offence to any one or several major powers.

C. Source of Economic Assistance

The United Nations was, and continues to remain for Bangladesh, a major source of economic assistance. Different U.N. agencies are involved in the process, the most prominent being: (1) Food and Agriculture Association (FAO); (2) United Nations Relief Operations in Bangladesh (UNROB); (3) United Nations Emergency Operations (UNEO); (4) United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF); (5) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and (6) United Nations Family Planning Association (UNFPA).

These agencies committed large sums as grants for development purposes. A detailed account of such commitments, till March 31, 1978, are as follows:27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Amount Committed</th>
<th>Amount Disbursed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) FAO</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td>14.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) UNROB</td>
<td>182.050</td>
<td>182.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) UNEO</td>
<td>46.995</td>
<td>46.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) UNICEF</td>
<td>88.731</td>
<td>72.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) UNDP</td>
<td>37.500</td>
<td>23.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) UNFPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This aid is still continuing and the rapid disbursement, as shown above in the table, indicates satisfactory utilization.

27 Seven Years of External Assistance to Bangladesh, op.cit., p.32.
U.N. involvement in Bangladesh's economy began early, long before the country became a member of the International Organization. The former United Nations Relief Organization for Dacca (UNROD) subtly changed its name to UNROB ('B' now standing for Bangladesh), and continued to operate in Dacca after independence to participate in the massive post-war relief work. In February 1972, the U.N. Secretary General, gave a tentative list of Bangladesh's immediate requirements and made an appeal for international assistance. He said: 'Never in the history of the UN has international assistance been needed so urgently and in such great amounts'. The U.N. made requests to the U.S. for help, and though the U.S. had not till then recognised Bangladesh, obtained from the Deputy Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Maurice J. Williams, assurance that the matter would be sympathetically considered. The U.N. request seemed to be effective, for only three days later Maurice Williams announced the despatch of 175,000 tonnes of wheat and rice valued at $21m. from the U.S. The U.N. authorities continued to make such efforts in obtaining U.S. assistance, though not always successfully. In April, the UNROD Administrator, Tony Hagen, contacted Ellsworth Bunker, the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, for some surplus cranes and other American

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29 See *Pakistan Times*, 18 February 1972.


31 *Times of India*, 27 February 1972.
equipment lying idle in Vietnam. Bunker referred the matter to Washington which refused.\textsuperscript{32} The UNROB officially declared its relief operations closed on 31 December 1973 having fulfilled the task entrusted to it by the Secretary General.

With the UNROB operations closed, the U.N.'s economic programmes now centred around the UNDP which set up office in Dacca in April 1973. According to the agency, the UNDP programme 'is intended to ensure the smooth transition from relief activities, launched and supported by the United Nations Relief Operations, to project activities having a longer term development impact'.\textsuperscript{33} The UNDP was joined by other U.N. agencies listed above.

The U.N. also provided assistance in the undertaking of a review of the state of the economy. In April a United Nations mission to Bangladesh headed by the Austrian Ambassador to New Delhi, Erna Sailer, prepared a detailed report, submitted both to the U.N. and to the Bangladesh Government.\textsuperscript{34}

The Report stressed the need for Bangladesh's access to the World Bank and emphasized that the relationship with India would be crucial for the success of the rehabilitation programme, whose principal goals were the restoration of the economy at least to the standard attained in 1970. Though the general level of administration in Bangladesh compared well with that of other developing countries, trained

\textsuperscript{32} New York Times, 30 April 1972.

\textsuperscript{33} United Nations Development Programme, DP/GC/BGD/12.1, 11 February 1974, p.6.

\textsuperscript{34} Popularly known as the Sailer Report. Features of the Report that follow were obtained from Times of India, 29 April 1972. Also see Chapter 9.
foreign experts were required in certain specialised fields such as agriculture, transport and communication. So as not to appear to be suggesting any erosion of sovereignty, the Report was careful to point out that the aid should be forthcoming 'without impinging on the right of the Bengalis to make their own decisions'. It set the figure of required grain imports over the next twelve months to 2.3 million tons at a total cost of $230m.

The Sailer Report also made certain long term suggestions such as emphasis on the need for the following priorities: (1) establishment of a viable machinery of government; (2) reabsorption of the returning refugees (from India); (3) rehabilitation of the transportation and communication system, the building of food stocks and the feeding of the population; and (4) the revitalization of the economy and the creation of employment opportunities. The Report pointed to the direction that its authors thought Bangladesh ought to take in her future economic planning.

The U.N. was also involved in another major enterprise, the salvage operations of sunken ships at the Chalna port, a major nerve centre of jute trade. The other major port, Chittagong, was being cleared by the Soviets, whose offer was accepted by the Bangladesh authorities after appeals made by them to the U.N. were unsuccessful for want of funds. For Chalna, the U.N. decided to fund the project from available resources, rather than trying to raise the sums. The

35 ibid.
result was a speedy award of a $8m. U.N. contract, announced on 24 October 1972, to a consortium of six private firms which completed the task ahead of the target date, May 1973.

The primary advantage of the U.N. as a source of economic assistance is its perception in the eyes of the recipient as being apolitical. Objectively speaking, it may not always be so that U.N.'s economic co-operation is totally devoid of political content. The Sailer Report for instance, mentioned India as being crucial, for the success of Bangladesh's relief programme, thus advocating a particular mode of international interaction. The Chalna Salvage operations under U.N. auspices seemed to be in a competitive relation with the Soviets in Chittagong. But Mujib's anxiety to secure U.N. assistance in clearing the Ports rather than that of any Superpower protagonist, indicates a definite preference for the former.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Bangladesh was born in a breach of international convention, being the product of a War of secession (even if it be of the majority from the minority) brought to fruition with external assistance. Her emergence required a breakdown of 'international order'. Yet, soon after her birth she seemed anxious to preserve 'international order'. This was exemplified by her eagerness to get into the U.N.

36 See Peterson in McGwire et.al., op.cit., p.334.
37 See Chapter 3.
She saw her interests, and those of many like her, linked to an orderly structure of harmonious state to state relationship sustained by such institutions as the U.N. Born of Hobbesian circumstances, she needed a Lockeian international environment to sustain herself. There is indeed a modicum of irony in it.

The explanation lies in four things that she saw the U.N. offering her.

First, the seal of legitimacy. As a break-away state she appeared to have contravened the 'Club Rules' governing the relationships within the Global States-System. Eager for acceptance within the System, she 'lived down' the radical nature of her emergence and signalled willingness to conform to the 'Club Rules'. In fact she was arguing that since her population constituted a majority within former Pakistan, she was not a 'secessionist' state for the break-away of a majority could not be described in those terms. Bangladesh was eager not to seem to support the theoretical preposition that the States-System was breaking down or that the ex-colonial Third World countries were on the threshold of redrawing their political maps. On the contrary, she was emphasizing her uniqueness, and putting across the view that there was much to say for the well-ordered, conventional state-system. She was not, in any way, justifying Biafra. She was too weak to challenge the prevalent norms. Her seeking of entry into the U.N. was in reality a request for approval by the Global States-System and a commitment on her part to obey its 'rules'. This ruled out very radical or flashy behaviour-pattern as an international actor.
Secondly, a sense of security. There were neighbours, one of them very powerful, who, however friendly at times, remained potential sources of threat. Bangladesh needed peace badly to rebuild her society after the shattering economic, psychological and emotional experience of the struggle for independence. Her tolerance limit for any further damage from external stimuli was very limited. She needed a peaceful region for her proposed reconstruction, and better still, a peaceful world. If the U.N. was designed to ensure it, and Bangladesh's invoking the forum on the Farakka issue showed that she believed it was, Bangladesh would render the world body her total support.

Thirdly, as providing a forum for her to outline the sum-total of her external attitudes to global problems. Whenever her principles, commitments, or even narrow interests required her to take a stand, on international issues at variance with that taken by any major power with whom she had good bilateral relations, the General Assembly was a convenient forum to do so. There she would be seen to be acting as 'one of many' without being singled out.

Finally, as a good source of aid. The multilateral nature of the U.N. embracing the widest spectrum of ideologies, makes it a non-controversial source, most welcome to a community historically suspicious of 'attached strings'. The U.N. as a donor is acceptable to sections of opinion domestically, including the different ideological constituencies within her.
Bangladesh, therefore, is likely to continue working in close co-operation with the U.N. and her agencies in the future, as in the past.
CHAPTER 9
THE POLITICS OF EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

I. Introduction

Of the declared aspirations of Bangladesh's foreign policy, apart from the 'consolidation of hard earned independence by safe-guarding sovereignty and territorial integrity', the other is 'securing international cooperation for accelerating the pace of economic and social development of the country'.\(^1\) It is only to be expected, therefore, that much of Dacca's energies are expended in obtaining such international cooperation, a euphemism for 'foreign aid', thus largely shaping the nature and the course of the country's external interactions.

II. The Need for External Assistance

The economy of Bangladesh had suffered severe damage in the 1971 war. In material terms it was computed to be in the vicinity of $1200m.\(^2\) There was an immediate need to repair some of this damage and provide short term relief in the form of food and medical supplies. The Secretary General of the U.N., in an appeal to governments and voluntary agencies all over the world, stated that $620m.

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\(^1\) Statement by the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Professor Shamsul Huq, *Bangladesh Times*, 11 September 1979.

would be needed in 1972 alone, along with, among other things, the requirement to bridge the domestic food gap, which amounted to 200,000 tons of food grains every month.³

In his first press conference as Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman appealed to all countries and international humanitarian organizations for assistance.⁴ It was obvious that Bangladesh considered the obtaining of resources for post-war relief an apolitical and humanitarian matter. She was prepared to accept such assistance from any source. But once the immediate need for relief was satisfied and Dacca began to concentrate on development plans on a long-term basis, the matter demanded more serious considerations. The philosophical and ideological framework that the leadership had in mind for Bangladesh became an important relevant factor.

The leaders had, in their rhetorics, announced their intention to build a 'socialist society'.⁵ The nature of sources of aid was, therefore, important as there was an obvious contradiction in building a socialist system with non-socialist assistance. This was a dilemma that the economic planners of the country confronted while formulating the First Five Years Plan (1973-78).

Earlier, during the Pakistan era, the strategy followed was influenced by the Harrod Domar model, i.e. one of promoting rapid industrialization under the ownership and control of the rising capitalist class with assistance from

³ See Pakistan Times, 18 February 1972.
⁴ Times of India, 15 January 1972.
the government. It was presumed that the benefits of growth would 'trickle down' to the more depressed sections of the community. The Pakistani planners believed, in the words of Mahub ul Haq, that

> it is well to recognise that economic growth is a brutal, sordid process. There are no short-cuts to it. The essence of it lies in making the labourer produce more than he is allowed to consume for his immediate needs, and to invest and re-invest the surplus thus obtained ...  

The Bangladeshi planners did not succeed in producing anything that showed a very different frame of mind at work. The Harrod-Domar model continued to influence the Bangladeshi planners. Rigour was added to this model by complementing it with a multi-sectoral input-output table and linear programming techniques. The planners stated that

> [The Five Year Plan] is thus based on realities and capabilities of Bangladesh today. It does not assume that within five years we can approximate to the social structures prevailing in the other socialist countries, nor does it assume that the experience of the post-liberation period disqualifies us from all attempts to organise production forces more efficiently and with a view to realising socialist objectives.  

In fact, in a memorandum presented before aid donors in 1974, the Planning Commission admitted that 'the Plan does not envisage a sharp structural change'. The realisation of socialist objectives promised to be a very gradual process.

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The mode of development that the Plan proposed required high saving and investment, nearly 15-20% of the gross domestic product (GDP). In Bangladesh, where domestic savings were below 5% of the GDP, it was essential that at least 10% of the investible funds had to be attracted from abroad. The Plan therefore was structurally geared towards the requirement of foreign aid. In fact, the Plan estimated that a net capital inflow of $2.4 billion would be required, during the five-year period, derived from import payments of $5.4 billion less export-receipts of $2.84 billion.

Direct appeals for international assistance were made and Bangladesh made it known that she expected the international community to take up the challenge of treating her as a 'test case for development'.

Thus, if there was any doubt in the minds of the Bangladeshi policy-makers whether foreign aid should or should not be accepted, it was now dispelled by the planners. It is not that, as this chapter will show, it did not generate any debate within the community. In the context of foreign aid, the relevant questions are: What are the

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sources of this massive aid? What are the effects of such aid on Bangladesh's economic sovereignty? What sort of debate does foreign aid generate within the community? And finally, in conclusion, what are its implications for the total gamut of Bangladesh's external relations?

III. Sources of Aid

With Socialism as a declared policy-goal, it was to be expected that there would be a high level of interaction in the economic field with the socialist countries. But the requirements of Bangladesh were too massive for the countries of the socialist bloc to be able to satisfy them. Neither the Soviet Union nor the East European countries could sustain for long the level of assistance that Bangladesh needed. Also, one major socialist country (though not quite of this bloc) with significant potential as a donor, China, did not have any political relations with Bangladesh and was unlikely to figure prominently as a source of aid in the immediate future. Moreover, the socialist countries traditionally funded project assistance rather than commodity aid programmes, and for Bangladesh the need for the latter was more urgent.

The alternative, thus, was to turn to the West. Even within this narrow group, Bangladesh would have, ideally, liked to diversify her sources of aid to bring the level of control that could be exerted by any donor to minimal. But the chances of this materializing were growing slim as the donors were making known their preference for the
setting up of a Consortium of aid-giving countries. 12 The donors had, broadly, three reasons to favour such an arrangement: firstly, this would enable a more coordinate approach to aid giving by different donors with regard to their individual specialization; secondly, it would simplify the review process as this would then be undertaken by the World Bank, rather than by the recipient or any single donor, which might have been neither possible nor desirable; thirdly and finally, since it was a Consortium that had initiated the funding of many of the projects, started in the Pakistan period, and now located in Bangladesh, and it was natural for such a Consortium to continue to fund them, given of course, as seemed likely, the Consortium was composed of, more or less, the same members.

The principal fears of the Bangladesh authorities were three-fold, mainly political in nature. Firstly, would such a body reduce her maneuverability in policy making and consequently erode her economic sovereignty? Secondly, would the setting up of such a Consortium adversely affect her relations with the socialist countries and India? Thirdly, would the deepening of her dependence, as the formation of the Aid Group implied, be in consonance with her socialist goals?

12 For example, the World Bank suggested that many of Bangladesh's problems 'could be more easily tackled if it were possible to organize a Consortium of donor countries', Bangladesh: Development in a Rural Economy, Vol.1, op.cit., p.287.
Vis-à-vis the first, contacts with such liberal donors as Australia and the Scandinavian countries generated the feeling that donors would eschew outright attempts to dominate policy-making and even raised hopes that the generous terms of these donors would help to liberalise those of other less generous ones. As to relations with the socialist bloc and India, as it gradually became apparent that these countries would be unable to meet Bangladesh's requirements, it came to be expected that they, in all fairness, should not object. As to the third fear, the Planning Commission hoped for a 'rapid reduction of dependence on foreign aid by the end of the Plan Period' as domestic resources were, by then, expected to be built up appreciably.13

In spite of some suggestions from Dacca that Bangladesh chair the Consortium or that it be headed by a smaller Western donor (just as Holland chairs the Consortium for Indonesia), the World Bank was reluctant to deviate from the normal14 and the Consortium, or Aid Group, was finally organized under the Bank's auspices in September 1974. The meetings were to take place in Paris, the Bank's European headquarters. Bangladesh's linkage with Western donors was thus institutionalized.

As of 31 March 1978, a large proportion of the total aid received was from Western sources. From the members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD

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14 Discussions with Professor Mosharaf Hussain, former Member of the Bangladesh Planning Commission, Oxford, 28 October 1978.
### Table 9.1

**FUNDS RECEIVED FROM D.A.C. COUNTRIES**  
(As of March 31, 1978)  
(Figures in US-Dollar Million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aid Giving Country</th>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Loans</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Loans</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Undisbursed balance on April 1, 1978</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Australia</td>
<td>95.887</td>
<td></td>
<td>95.887</td>
<td>67.943</td>
<td></td>
<td>67.943</td>
<td>27.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Canada</td>
<td>358.771</td>
<td></td>
<td>358.771</td>
<td>299.542</td>
<td></td>
<td>299.542</td>
<td>59.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Finland</td>
<td>0.925</td>
<td>2.325</td>
<td>3.250</td>
<td>0.925</td>
<td>2.325</td>
<td>3.250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. France</td>
<td>34.216</td>
<td>43.352</td>
<td>77.568</td>
<td>28.438</td>
<td>23.911</td>
<td>52.349</td>
<td>25.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Italy</td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Netherlands</td>
<td>106.782</td>
<td>42.000</td>
<td>148.782</td>
<td>43.722</td>
<td>29.522</td>
<td>73.244</td>
<td>75.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Norway</td>
<td>61.677</td>
<td></td>
<td>61.677</td>
<td>41.517</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.517</td>
<td>20.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. New Zealand</td>
<td>3.165</td>
<td>2.807</td>
<td>5.972</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.807</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Sweden</td>
<td>150.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>150.000</td>
<td>127.758</td>
<td></td>
<td>127.758</td>
<td>22.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Switzerland</td>
<td>15.090</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.090</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.152</td>
<td>5.152</td>
<td>9.938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. U.S.A.</td>
<td>299.795</td>
<td>745.347</td>
<td>1,045.142</td>
<td>255.919</td>
<td>661.170</td>
<td>886.089</td>
<td>159.053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**  
1,516.228*  
1,735.385*  
3,251.613  
1,030.722  
1,320.830*  
2,351.552*  
900.061

* Figures include the disbursement made before liberation and for which liability has been accepted.

# Figures do not include Swiss aid channelled through international agencies and assistance to Holy Family Hospital and Bangladesh Redcross.

[Source: Planning Commission, Dacca.]
### Table 9.2

**FUNDS RECEIVED FROM INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES**

(As of March 31, 1978)

(Figures in US-Dollar Million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aid Giving Agency</th>
<th>Grants (Figures in million)</th>
<th>Loans (Figures in million)</th>
<th>Total (Figures in million)</th>
<th>Disbursements</th>
<th>Undisbursed balance on April 1, 1978</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. E.E.C. (Multilateral)</td>
<td>137.160</td>
<td>137.160</td>
<td>128.832</td>
<td>138.832</td>
<td>8.328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ford/Asia Foundation</td>
<td>6.450</td>
<td>6.450</td>
<td>5.642</td>
<td>5.642</td>
<td>0.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. F.A.O.</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. U.N.E.O.</td>
<td>46.995</td>
<td>46.995</td>
<td>46.995</td>
<td>46.995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. UNICEF</td>
<td>88.731</td>
<td>88.731</td>
<td>72.671</td>
<td>72.671</td>
<td>16.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. W.F.P.</td>
<td>75.248</td>
<td>75.248</td>
<td>73.252</td>
<td>73.252</td>
<td>1.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. International Voluntary Agencies</td>
<td>105.600</td>
<td>105.600</td>
<td>105.600</td>
<td>105.600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A.D.B.</td>
<td>275.030</td>
<td>275.030</td>
<td>41.805</td>
<td>41.050</td>
<td>233.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I.D.B.</td>
<td>7.000</td>
<td>7.000</td>
<td>7.000</td>
<td>7.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**: 693.734 1,251.270 1,945.004 652.540 636/64* 1,288.707 656.297

* Figures include the disbursements made before liberation of the Loans for which liability has been accepted.

(Cont'd)
Table 9.2 (cont'd)

Abbreviations:

1. E.E.C. = European Economic Community.
2. F.A.O. = Food and Agricultural Organisation.

[Source: Planning Commission, Dacca.]
Table 9.3
FUNDS RECEIVED FROM CENTRALLY PLANNED COUNTRIES
(As of March 31, 1978)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aid Giving Country</th>
<th>Commitments</th>
<th></th>
<th>Disbursements</th>
<th></th>
<th>Undisbursed balance on April 1, 1978</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>Loans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Bulgaria</td>
<td>1.910</td>
<td>7.600</td>
<td>9.510</td>
<td>1.910</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. China</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>58.300</td>
<td>59.300</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>40.312</td>
<td>40.312</td>
<td>80.624</td>
<td>16.357</td>
<td>16.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hungary</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>10.004</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Poland</td>
<td>1.175</td>
<td>2.196</td>
<td>3.371</td>
<td>1.175</td>
<td>1.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Romania</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>60.469</td>
<td>60.509</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>13.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. USSR</td>
<td>30.000</td>
<td>198.580</td>
<td>228.580</td>
<td>30.000</td>
<td>128.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Yugoslavia</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>71.136</td>
<td>72.011</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>42.502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36.872</td>
<td>467.593*</td>
<td>504.465</td>
<td>36.872</td>
<td>207.342*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures include disbursements of the Loans made before liberation and for which liability has been accepted.

[Source: Planning Commission, Dacca.]
the total funds received amounted to $3,251.613m. out of which $1,516.228m. came as grant and $1,735.385 as credit.\textsuperscript{15} The undisbursed balance was only $900, which indicates speedy utilization.

The second largest source was international multilateral agencies, most of whom were Western in origin. As of 31 March 1978, $1,945.004m. was received from them, $693.734m. as grant and $1,251.270 as loans. Of the non-Western agencies the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) gave $17.400m., the Islamic Development Bank $7m., and the Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), $6.5m., all in loans.\textsuperscript{16}

A third source was the 'Centrally Planned Countries' (a euphemism for the Socialist bloc) which provided $504.465m., $36.872 as grant and $467.593m. as loan. The amount undisbursed was $260.251m.\textsuperscript{17}

A new source was the Middle Eastern Muslim Countries who gave $317.250m., out of which $105.26m. were as grant and $211.987 were loans. The undisbursed balance was $130.923m.\textsuperscript{18}

An analysis of the above aid quantum will show that the amounts received from Western sources outweigh by far those from others. There is no evidence to show that this trend is likely to undergo change in the near future.

\textsuperscript{15} See Table 9.1.

\textsuperscript{16} See Table 9.2.

\textsuperscript{17} See Table 9.3.

\textsuperscript{18} See Table 6.5 in Chapter 6.
Moreover, the terms of assistance were favourable. In March 1978 the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Ministerial Board endorsed the easing of terms under which assistance is given to the least developed countries (LDCs). Consequently, it is likely that future Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the DAC countries will mostly be in the form of grants, and that past debt liabilities of Bangladesh would be written off. From among the multilateral sources, assistance from the UNDP is entirely in the form of grant, while other loans are on very soft terms.

A comparison between the third and the fourth sources reveal that the terms of conditions from the centrally planned countries are somewhat tougher than those from the Muslim states of the Middle East. Assistance from the former range from interest-free loans (not grants) to interest-charge of 3%, with a repayment period of nine to twenty-five years, while, proportionately, a far larger portion of aid from the fourth source is in grant form, with service charges ranging from zero to 4^{1/2}%, while the repayment period is between twelve and thirty years.

Another advantage to the recipient of the fourth source over the third is that funds from the Middle East can be used world-wide for procurements, facilitating cheaper purchases, whereas the third source is 'tied' to the socialist countries

19 Seven Years of External Assistance to Bangladesh, op.cit., p.3.
20 ibid.
21 ibid.
only. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the Middle Eastern countries as a source of aid are of recent origin, as they had no political links with Bangladesh till as late as 1974. Aid quantums received from this quarter are therefore, currently smaller than those from other sources with whom aid relations date back further into the past. 

Bangladeshi recipient agencies tend to favour Western sources of aid over others for several reasons.

Firstly, most of the recipient agencies have historical links with these sources dating back to the Pakistan era when the Western countries were primary aid givers. These agencies are familiar with Western products as their projects have been using Western assistance for years.

Secondly, Western donors give a large proportion of their aid as grants, requiring no amortization. Even if some of the aid from the Socialist countries is in the form of interest-free loans, the principal has to be repaid.

Thirdly, Western countries remain the main source for the badly required commodity aid. A good example is food-grains, which can only be obtained from the U.S., Australia.

22 Discussions with Dr F. Ahmed, Joint Secretary ERD Dacca, 27 May 1978.

23 It is noteworthy that though trade relations between Bangladesh and some other countries have preceded the political, aid relations largely because they are usually on a government to government basis, have usually been linked to the establishment of political connections. There are exceptions, however. The U.S., for instance, was an indirect donor prior to according Bangladesh diplomatic recognition.

24 The recipient agencies are the actual aid users, as distinct from the governmental department which negotiates the receipt of aid but does not itself utilise the aid received. The interests of the two may, though not necessarily, be different. See John White, The Politics of Foreign Aid (London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1974), pp.78-88.
and Canada. On one occasion Australian food aid included freight charges being paid by the donor.25

Fourthly, while aid from the socialist countries is mostly 'tied', that from the West usually involves a wider region of procurement, enabling the recipient to 'shop around' in different countries for lower prices. Even if sometimes aid from a Western source is tied, because export trade there is not under State control, the recipient can take advantage of the market mechanism in making procurements from that country.

Fifthly, as regards technical assistance, i.e., training of the managerial cadres, offers from the West - in particular from the English-speaking countries, such as the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Australia and New Zealand - find greater favour. This is largely due to cultural linkages with the English-speaking world.

These agencies, therefore, tend to exert pressure on the principal government department or ministry negotiating for foreign aid to gravitate more towards Western sources, a pressure that inevitably leads to greater interaction with the latter.

IV. Aid and Economic 'Sovereignty'

All aid donors are usually interested in the optimal utilization of the assistance they render. They also

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25 In 1974, Australia pays freight when food-aid is granted from her 'Bilateral Reserve for Emergencies', but usually not otherwise. (Source: Australian Development Assistance Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra.)
entertain their own notions as to how to maximise benefits from the aid they provide. As a result they are sometimes prone to indicate their preferences, or to go even further and exert pressure on the recipient to conform to their wishes.

Such pressures from multilateral sources tend to be more intense than those from bilateral. There are, broadly, two main reasons for it: firstly, the quantum of aid they provide are larger; secondly, since the major multilateral sources such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are bureaucratic and apolitical agencies, they are less sensitive to political approaches of the recipient.

Several areas can be identified where such pressures have been exerted. The first such area is the organizational structure of projects, and more important, of the governmental department controlling the projects in question. For example, when Bangladesh government accepted credit from the Asian Development Bank for rehabilitation of the Dacca-Chittagong rail links, it undertook to set up an autonomous enterprise. Again, with regard to a Fisheries project that the ADB partly funded, the Bank took very keen interest in the appointment of the Finance Director of the Bangladesh

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26 While Bangladesh has dealings with all the three agencies that comprise the World Bank - the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the International Development Association (DA) - most of her activities involve the IDA whose loans are on highly concessional terms and advanced to the poorest countries.

Fisheries Development Corporation (BFDC), the government agency that controlled the project. The ADB insisted that the BFDC administrative machinery required total overhauling. While that might have indeed been so, it was entirely an internal subject matter for the government. But the pressure was such that a Ministerial ranking Civil Servant, A.K.M. Ahsan, was sent to the ADB headquarters in Manila to explain the government's position on both the projects.²⁸ Therefore, we see that foreign funding agencies did not confine their interest to the narrow limits of the projects they funded, but extended it to the relevant government departments. Such pressures did indeed undermine the latter's manoeuvrability.

The World Bank went several steps further and made comments on the total administrative structure of the government, suggesting means of improving it. Describing the system as 'inappropriate to economic management', a Bank Report purported to advise the political authority on the directions it ought to follow. The Report said:

If Bangladesh is to grow it will have to decentralize decision making and permit farmers, small traders, small industrialists, local government representatives and public managers to respond to those signals through some combination of monetary rewards, social status and national sentiment.²⁹

The World Bank has also proferred advice which was in direct contradiction with a policy that the government was politically committed to. The Awami League Government had chosen to give a tangible expression to their socialist aims


by limiting the income of individuals in the public sector. For the government there seemed some value in curtailing monetary rewards of the bureaucracy whose burgeoning power had been a traditional subject of public criticism. The World Bank however, had these comments to make on the subject:

The application of ceilings to incomes earned by the top echelon of government managers, especially in periods of rapidly declining real incomes, constitutes a drag on efficiency and blunts initiative.30

Even though direct pressure might not have been brought to bear on a subject such as this, the distribution of the Report among other donors, and the correlation between opinions of donors and the quantum of aid, tantamounted to the application of indirect pressure on the Dacca Government.

A second such area is the all-important food sector, particularly the food rationing system and the distribution of fertilizer.

The Urban Rationing System has been a fact of life in Bengal for decades. Food, procured externally, is distributed through a government rationing system in four large urban centres called 'statutory rationing areas' where every individual is entitled to a subsidized quota of food. The public rationing system distributes the balance only after the urban requirements are met.

The principal beneficiaries of the rationing system are the urban middle classes - government officials, clerks, soldiers, merchants, traders and industrial workers - the

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more politically articulate and potentially volatile sections within the community. The main consideration of the government in operating this system (inherited from the British Colonial period) seems political rather than economic.

Many donors, in particular the World Bank, have always been critical of this form of rationing. The Bank held that action is necessary to contain the ration program to those most in need. If the less needy were progressively diverted to the market for their foodgrain requirements, it would decrease the amount of food the Government would need to distribute, ease the impact of the subsidy on the budget and make the entire ration program more meaningful.  

The Bank opposed the system on two counts; firstly, the distribution of subsidized foodgrains tended to depress farmgate prices and therefore required additional countervailing action to maintain incentive prices; and secondly, the industrial workers and the urban middle classes tended to benefit at the expense of the rural poor. In 1978 the Government responded to the pressure by raising the price of rationed rice from Taka 90 to Taka 100 per maund (40 kilos) and that of wheat from Taka 70 to Taka 80. Also, the Government announced its intention that those enjoying a monthly income of over Taka 1,600 a month would be shifted from the ration shops to the 'Essential Supply Shops' where the price would be between the ration and market prices.

The Bank Report commented that 'these are welcome steps and the Government is to be commended for having made them'.

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31 ibid., p.9.

The Government also quite willingly signed the new Title III Food Aid agreement under Public Law 480 with the U.S. whose conditions required that the grain imported be used, not in the rationing system, but in free market operations.33

Pressure was also exerted by donors for the reduction of subsidies on fertilizer, which was also, in due course, complied with. The Bank had argued that the problem with fertilizer usage was supply rather than price, for two of Bangladesh's fertilizer plants, one at Ghorashal and the other at Fenchuganj, were subject to intermittent breakdowns. The users, who turned out to be the better-off farmers, would be able to sustain a price hike reasonably, as fertilizer was 'said to command a high premium on the black market'.34

The Government relented, as the following table will show:35

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of subsidy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the above table indicates a decline in subsidy as of 1976-77. There was a rise in 1978-79, explicably so

33 Interview with Mr Abidur Rahman, Economic Minister, Bangladesh Embassy, Washington, 13 September 1978.
34 Bangladesh: The Current Economic Situation and Short-Term Outlook op.cit., p.4.
35 Source: Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation.
because two severe floods in 1978 resulted in extensive crop rehabilitation programmes demanding such increase. However, reduction of subsidy on fertilizer is now an expressed policy of government.

A third area where donor pressure can be identified in the economy is the one concerning monetary and fiscal policy. The relevant donor agency here is the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of which Bangladesh had become a member in June 1972, and on which there was considerably reliance for balance of payment support. The Fund (IMF) insisted that devaluation of the Taka was essential if exports of jute and jute goods had to be gainfully made, if more non-traditional items had to be profitably sold abroad, and if taka price of imports, had to be raised as a measure of control.

The Government was hesitant for mainly three reasons: firstly, because it thought that the importance of fiscal policy as a means of removing problems was exaggerated; secondly because of the fear of the reaction of the politically conscious middle class to the inevitable inflationary consequences; and thirdly, because it had hoped rising oil prices would discourage synthetic substitute of jute which would not require devaluation to increase its exports. 36

In the first Aid Group meeting held in Paris in October 1974 almost every donor emphasized the need for readjustment of the exchange rate. With Bangladesh hurtling

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36 Interview with Professor M. Hussain, op.cit.
towards a general economic crisis in 1974, there was a general fear that the good will of donors would be lost if the currency was not devalued. There was need for further balance of payment support from the IMF which would certainly be chary of granting it if its advice with regard to the exchange rate was ignored. The devaluation was finally announced in May 1975, which, in the words of donor officials, 'was a tardy recognition of the damage that was being done by an overvalued exchange rate'.

It may be argued that sometimes these pressures, especially in the cases of the rationing system and subsidy on fertilizer, did indeed lead to socially desirable changes of policy, supported by a wide section within the community, but the fact remained that the Government was forced to undertake measures as a result of pressure from external donors which undermined her autonomy of decision-making in these spheres, or in other words, eroded her economic 'sovereignty'.

V. The Internal Debate

The aid linkages with the Western donors provoked considerable debate within the policy-making circles. However,


38 Geoffrey Goodwin argues that 'sovereignty cannot be eroded, it can only be extinguished'. 'The Erosion of Sovereignty?' in James Barker and Michael Smith (eds), The Nature of Foreign Policy (Edinburgh: Holmes McDougall, The Open University Press,1974), p.56. That is, however, taking a very juridical and legalistic view of the expression 'sovereignty'. Here it is used in a wider sense to imply the flexibility of a country to make its own decisions.
as in the tradition of the Subcontinental bureaucracy, Bangladeshi officials are reluctant to publicize their views, it is often difficult to discern what form these internal discussions assume.

Some indication is provided in academic seminars where public officials participate. The number of such seminars is, however, small. A significant one on the subject 'Is Foreign Aid Essential for our Economic Development' was organized at the Department of Economics, Dacca University, in November 1978.

Critics of foreign aid were mainly drawn from the academic circles and argued on a more theoretical plane. Their fears centred more on the 'exploitative dynamics of economic dependence'. They argued that 'underdevelopment' was a part of the capitalist system and could not be cured with foreign aid, however, massive in quantum; the obvious solution was, therefore, to opt out of the 'capitalist system'. In Professor Abu Mahmood's opinion:

If you don't have a theory of development foreign aid may be necessary for the purpose of enriching the oligarchies, regime rotation and their counter-insurgency programmes. There will be a tidal flow of foreign aid, loan investments and even outright grants in future for the perpetuation of external constraints and internal class-structure. That is the basic law of modern imperialism.39

A.R. Bhuiyan of the Department of Economics at Dacca University, argued that

39 'Are Foreign Aid and Loans Indispensable for the Socio-Economic Development of Bangladesh?; Seminar Paper at the Department of Economics, University of Dacca, 10 November 1978, p.32.
it can be said that the LDCs [least developing countries] do have very little to justify their dependence on foreign aid. They would do better by exploiting alternative sources of investible funds; adopt appropriate policies to attract private foreign capital and/or obtain commercial loans from abroad. Also, whether the presence of the trade gap is because of structural impediments or are simply the result of inappropriate domestic economic policies (e.g. over-valuation of the currency, uneconomic import substitution etc.) has to be carefully examined. Adoption of appropriate domestic monetary, fiscal and commercial policies and seeking to obtain better terms in trading relationship with the developed and other developing countries as envisaged in various UNCTAD meetings and LDC forums might bring greater and more tangible benefits than foreign aid.40

Bhuiyan stressed that in addition to the purely economic arguments against foreign aid, the latter tends to strengthen the hands of the small ruling oligarchy, 'thwarts efficient growth, creates undesirable inequity in society and blocks progress towards an acceptable and viable social and economic order'.41

These arguments are in sympathy with those in the prevalent neo-Marxist and 'dependencia' literature which generally see the dependence of the underdeveloped countries (satellites/periphery) on the developed countries (metropolis/centre) as a chronic condition in the World Economy.42

Such conditions result in the exclusive benefit of the metropolis/centre. Whatever economic growth does take place satellites/periphery is influenced by the need of the

41 ibid.
42 See Chapter 1, footnote 18.
metropolis/centre. Moreover, development in the underdeveloped countries is usually uneven, resulting in the creation of pockets of development at the expense of pockets of underdevelopment with their differences being progressively sharpened. 43 Any attempt of the developing countries to 'catch up' with the developed, would be at the expense of continuing dependence on external technology and taste-creation. 44

To these theoreticians, the remedy lies in either opting out of the capitalist system, if needs be by revolution, 45 or by adopting such reforms as stimulating demand among more indigent groups for low grade consumer goods capable of being manufactured domestically. Such actions could help to stave off external penetration. 46

Radical solutions tended to be avoided by the middle-class based government. Though the 'First Five Year Plan' does call for 'the removal of the capitalist system of income distribution of the private ownership of means of production and of the precapitalist mercantile of feudal forms of production relations', it also stresses that the 'transformation' needs to be gradual, 'since too abrupt a

43 It is necessary to note the distinction between 'economic growth' and 'development'. While the former may be seen as a 'quantitative process' involving the extension of an already established structure of production, the latter suggests 'qualitative changes', and the creation of new economic and non-economic structures. See D.F. Dowd, 'Some Issue of Economic Development and Development Economics', Journal of Economic Issues, Vol.2, No.3 (1967), p.153.


46 C. Furtado, op.cit., passim.
dislocation at one time may seriously disturb the production system'.

Such a philosophy would also entertain the notion of foreign aid, to which civil servants, currently involved in policy making, are not averse. The Secretary of the External Resources Division, A.M.A. Muhith has argued:

It is true that foreign aid promotes dependency relationship and perhaps stands in the way of hard decisions which warrant austerity. For Bangladesh hard decisions are indeed extremely hard. Economic egalitarianism at this stage means distribution of endemic poverty. With the current trade regime that prevails in the globe it will not be possible to make both ends meet in a resource poor country like Bangladesh during the next ten or twenty years.

The dilemma of the policy-makers, and their final choice of action, have been succinctly put by a former chief of the Planning Commission, Professor Nurul Islam. To him

The most politically delicate choice was the relative dependency on the Plan or foreign aid; with the oft repeated emphasis on self reliance and socialism, heavy dependence on foreign aid, particularly from the non-socialist countries, especially the big powers, created a political dilemma for Bangladesh. There was the choice, on one hand, of severe austerity; the brunt of such austerity would have fallen on the already

47 The First Five Year Plan 1973-78, op.cit., p.2. At the end of the first plan period, 1973-78, the government, aware of the weak data base for the formulation of a realistic Second Five Year Plan, as well as the inability to achieve some of the First Plan's objectives, decided to launch a Two Year Plan (1978-80) as a logical extension of the first plan to bridge the period before the Second Plan period commences in July 1980. The Two Year Plan does not contain any new development philosophy.

48 'Is Foreign Aid Essential for Development in Bangladesh?' Seminar Paper, Department of Economics, Dacca University, 10 November 1978.
impoverished masses and this would have been partially politically palatable by a universally accepted regime of egalitarian consumption standards; this in turn would have required a degree of ideological motivation, not discernible in post-independence Bangladesh. On the other hand there was the option of seeking a large inflow of foreign aid from the rich, powerful nations which brought with it certain restrictions in political and economic decision-making. Bangladesh opted for larger foreign aid.49

At yet another seminar held in Dacca in December 1979, the Finance Minister, Professor M.N. Huda signalled a continuing dependence on foreign aid, which he justified with the argument that

short term need for external economic assistance and long term national objective of self reliance and neither inconsistent nor mutually exclusive.50

The debate seems to have been resolved in favour of the acceptance of foreign aid for two main reasons: one, the immediate massive needs for the country required 'a breathing space in the process of the structural transformation' of the economy that only large scale foreign assistance could provide, and secondly, the middle class-based leading elite tended to avoid the more radical solutions in favour of the more moderate ones.


50 Bangladesh Observer, 29 December 1979.

VI: Concluding Remarks: Implications for Foreign Relations

The policy of accepting external aid had several important implications for the total gamut of Bangladesh's external relations.

Firstly, it led to greater interactions with the Western world. Multilaterally and bilaterally, the West was the major donor. The concentration on the West in Bangladesh's foreign relations was therefore inevitable. As the volume of aid depended on the goodwill of the donors, such goodwill had to be preserved through good relations with the latter.

Secondly, there was undermining of her sovereign status in the economic sphere due to pressures of external origin. Some, such as the pressure to reform the rationing system or reduce the subsidy on fertilizers, might have led to results that might generally be regarded as beneficial, but the fact remained that these outside pressures imposed constraints on the government's freedom of action in the determination of policies.

Thirdly, there was a modicum of security hazard in exposing the country's entire economy to outside view and analysis, which as a recipient Bangladesh found impossible to avoid. The input-output tables which forms the basis of the First Five Year Plan and of the forthcoming Second Five Year Plan gives the donor countries, who are also associated with the formulation of the Plans, vital knowledge about the most sensitive spots in the production
relations in the country.\textsuperscript{52} Disproportionate damage can therefore be inflicted should a donor turn hostile, by discreetly withholding aid to a critical sector in the economy, while at the same time not appearing to have committed hostile act of a magnitude that would attract wide attention.

Fourthly, and finally, and this implication is relevant to foreign policy-making, the central significance of aid relations to the national life accords a preponderance in all policy-making (including those in the area of external relations) to that segment of the bureaucracy that controls foreign aid negotiations.

\textsuperscript{52} This point was stressed by Dr Sheikh Maqsood Ali, a former Director of the Project Implementation Bureau of the Planning Commission in his seminar paper, op.cit., pp.1-2.
CHAPTER 10

THE ELITES AND FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

I. Introduction

If we believe that 'nations do not act, it is their leaders who do, and in any given situation the decision-makers involved are for all practical purposes, the nation', it is essential that we study the governing elite for a proper understanding of their actions, including those with regard to foreign affairs. This is particularly true of societies where the dominant value of government is administrative. It is first necessary, however, to define and identify such elite.

A useful framework in this connection has been provided by Gabriel Almond. Defining the elite as those who are 'influential', he has suggested a four-fold functional classification: (a) the political elite, which includes public representatives and party leaders; (b) the bureaucratic elite, which means the professional corps of the executive establishment; (c) the interest elites, i.e. the representatives of the vast number [in the U.S.] of private policy oriented associations, ranging from nationwide aggregations to local formation; and finally (d) the communications elite, the leaders of the media.¹


What is relevant to the developed, powerful and prosperous United States is more likely than not to be so to the underdeveloped, weak and indigent Bangladesh. In the latter case, private policy oriented associations have not yet developed, and their role as active interest groups are therefore limited. However, such bodies as the Chambers of Commerce, the Trade Unions, and the various religious formations channel their pulls and pressures through the medium of various political parties. A limited influence is exercised by a number of bilateral 'Friendship Societies'. For instance, the Soviet-Bangladesh Friendship Society engaged in some public relations activity on behalf of Moscow in 1972 when it organised an exhibition in Dacca on 'Fifty Years of the Soviet Union'.\(^3\) But very often leaders of these societies are those who are also otherwise significant members of the political elite. To cite an example, the President of the China-Bangladesh Friendship Society, Mirza Ghulam Hafiz, was an influential Cabinet Minister in the Zia Government till he became a Speaker of the Parliament in 1979.

The same is true of the fourth category, the communications elite. Since most communications outlets (such as the radio, the television networks, national newspapers) are not in private hands, the concerned elite does not exercise influence as in developed politics. However, individual members of the communications elite have been powerful agents of policy at times. But in most cases they have acted, not in their capacity as media persons, but through other political

\(^3\) *Asian Analysis* (February, 1972), p.2.
linkages. An illustration is Enayetullah Khan, a newspaper editor, who was a key member of President Ziaur Rahman's Cabinet till October 1978.

This, therefore, leaves the first two categories, the political and bureaucratic elites, as most relevant. These will be presently examined.

II. The Political Elite

An apparent feature of Bangladesh politics, as in many other new developing nations, has been leadership given by a single personality at any given point in time, who fits Kissinger's cognomen of a 'prophet', possessing charisma—'a quality of extraordinary spiritual power attributed to a person ... capable of eliciting human support in the direction of human affairs'. Theoretically then his will should have shaped the country's external behaviour. But given the importance of foreign policy in terms of the country's security and obtaining external resources for development his will is, of necessity, conditioned by professional advice.

Political colleagues of the leader, i.e. individual politicians tend to be disinclined towards foreign policy

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4 See Chapter 1, op.cit., p.47.


6 This phenomenon is not true of developing states where the relevant professionals may have lower influence and calibre, unable to provide similar support to the leader, as in Uganda. See Maurice East, 'Foreign Policy-Making in Small States: Some Theoretic Observations Based on a Study of the Ugandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs', Policy Sciences, Vol.4, No.4 (1973), pp.491-2.
matters for three broad reasons: firstly, the problems of their territorial constituencies are so numerous, given the low state of over-all development, that they have no time for interest in external affairs. Secondly, even if they had the time, and interest, they lack the information base and staff support to formulate informed opinions. Finally, the politicians are indeed aware of a vast governmental machinery trained to handle such intricacies to which they are content to leave the entire subject.

The political parties are similarly less interested. The Awami League, the party that led the movement for independence, did indeed have the basis of its foreign policy laid down in the 1970 election Manifesto. It was to be 'independent and non-aligned, based on the principle of friendship to all and malice towards none'. The terms were general enough to permit considerable latitude by implementors.

The other major parties were somewhat more specific, but not much. While NAP (Bhashani) wanted 'peaceful settlement of Kashmir dispute; rights of self-determination to the people of Kashmir; withdrawal from CENTO and SEATO; abolition of colonialism and neo-colonialism', NAP (Muzaffar) sought 'an independent and non-aligned foreign policy and

7 For the politician, interest in foreign policy questions does not usually help secure votes at the constituency level.

8 'The Manifestos of Different Political Parties in Outline', Bangladesh: Contemporary Events and Documents (Dacca: External Publicity Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, u.d.), p.69.

9 ibid., p.71.
friendly relations with Afro-Asian countries in general and neighbours in particular'. The Jamaat-i-Islami wished for 'withdrawal from CENTO and SEATO' and 'effective steps for the solution of the Kashmir problem'. Other parties like the Muslim League (Convention), the Muslim League (Council) and the Pakistan Democratic Party had nothing to say in their manifestos with regard to foreign policy.

The attitude of these parties with some backing in what was then East Pakistan, contrasted sharply with the West Pakistan based Pakistan People's Party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The PPP spelt out its foreign policy aims in more detail:

To pursue independent non-aligned Foreign Policy and meaningful bilateral relations with Big Powers and closer relations with Socialist Countries, particularly People's Republic of China. To follow a strong policy against India till all basic disputes between her and Pakistan in Kashmir and Farakka are settled in a just manner.

One can conclude, therefore, that most Bangladesh based political parties of any importance, even in contrast to those in Pakistan, have had no strong bias vis-à-vis foreign

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10 ibid., p.74.

11 ibid.

12 ibid., p.75. PPP's more detailed interest in foreign affairs was largely due to the personal experience and predilections of its Chairman, Bhutto, a former Foreign Minister, and leaders such as J.A. Rahim, a former Ambassador. A leader's interest in foreign affairs is related to his repertoire of experience in that field. See Margaret G. Hermann, 'Effects of Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders on Foreign Policy' in Maurice A. East, Stephen A. Salmore and Charles E. Hermann (eds), Why Nations Act: Theoretical Perspectives for Comparative Foreign Policy Studies (London: Sage Publications, 1978), p.67.
affairs. The repertoire of the experience of their leaders in foreign policy matters was limited, unlike some of their Pakistani counterparts. All the Parties were basically agreed on 'non-alignment', a populist theme of the period, but apart from that interest in the foreign-policy area was minimal.

III. The Bureaucratic Elites

It has been held that bureaucrats usually have more confidence in their ability to make sound judgements in the foreign affairs arena than do most citizens, and they are likely to feel they are more qualified to do so than either politicians or scholars. This section will, among other things, demonstrate that Bangladeshi bureaucrats are no exception. In the latter case these feelings are strengthened by the fact that politicians are content to leave this area as a bureaucratic preserve, as discussed in the last section.

13 This is less surprising when considered against the fact that even in developed polities there have been occasions, in the not too distant past, when foreign affairs engaged minimal attention in electioneering by political parties, e.g. in Post-War Britain. See H.G. Nicholas, The British General Election of 1950 (London: Macmillan, 1951), pp.304-5.

14 The various Communist Parties are exceptions in the sense that they espouse close links with their ideological allies abroad, whether Peking or Moscow, but their power is not enough to be a significant input in the determination of policy.


16 In fact, traditionally, bureaucrats have been significant in all areas of policy making in Bangladesh's predecessor state, Pakistan, a phenomenon that has been one of the former's political inheritance. For a recent study of Pakistan's bureaucratic elite in a historic perspective, see Asaf Hussain, Elite Politics in an Ideological State: The Case of Pakistan (Kent: Dawson & Sons Ltd., 1979). pp.61-78.
In this area, the leader, or the head of government has tended to rely heavily on bureaucratic advice. But the source of this advice is not any particular sector in the bureaucracy. Several are involved, all of whom deserve attention. We shall commence our analysis with the sector theoretically responsible for the conduct of foreign relations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Foreign Office): The formal structure of the Foreign Office is as follows: below the Minister, who is the political head, there is the Foreign Secretary (FS), the permanent head of the Ministry. He is normally assisted by an Additional Foreign Secretary (AFS). There is usually a division of functions between the FS and the AFS, with the former confining himself to political matters, and the latter looking after general administration of the Ministry as well as of the missions abroad.

Within the Ministry, there are divisions, of two broad categories, territorial and functional. Each of the territorial divisions is headed by a Director General (DG). The divisions advise the Minister through the Secretary as to the policy to be followed in relations between Bangladesh and the countries which come within the division's jurisdiction; it analyses reports from missions abroad, issues them instructions on behalf of the Ministry, and maintains
liaison with foreign missions in Dacca. The division or Directorate-General is subdivided into Directorates, each headed by a Director, which are again subdivided into Sections, each headed by a Section Officer. There is for instance, one Section Officer for Australia and the Pacific. The Section Officer is the 'contact-point' where information is collected, collated and with recommended actions sent up along the chain of command, through the Director and Director-General (with their comments) to the Secretary. Decisions on minor matters may be taken at any level depending on its importance, though more important matters are left to the Secretary or the Minister.

The Functional divisions are created on the basis of particular functions such as Protocol, Administration, Legal Advice etc. Their heads may be variously described (such as Chief of Protocol, or Legal Adviser) but they perform functions similar to those of the Director General.  

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18 The territorial divisions are (i) Americas, Western Europe and Pacific; (ii) South and South-East Asia, Legal, Consular, Research and Library; (iii) Eastern Europe and China; and (iv) Middle East and Africa. The main functional divisions are (i) Administration; (ii) External Publicity division; and (iii) Protocol. Normally Legal Affairs and Treaties would constitute another functional division, but at the time of writing it was combined with South and South East Asia Territorial division under one Director-General. Information collected from: 'List of Officers Working at Headquarters as on 1.2.1978' (Dacca Ministry of Foreign Affairs).
The structure is elaborately discussed to make the theoretical point that there is not a 'lack of even the rudiments of effective bureaucracy' as has been generalised by Kissinger as being true of the foreign policies of newer political states.19

Within a brief spell of independence, Bangladesh inherited almost the entire Bengali component of the Pakistan Foreign Service. There was therefore no dearth of trained personnel in this area, particularly as Pakistan, like India, favoured a much longer period of training for diplomatic officials than is considered necessary by many Western governments.20

However while the personnel are trained and well equipped to handle politico-diplomatic matters, the nature of their profession precludes their access to experience in the economic sphere. This is because while they do not handle economic matters while posted at home (Foreign Office personnel are unique among higher civil servants in as much as they remain confined to their particular Ministry), they are also denied the experience overseas as functional Ministries place their own personnel in missions abroad for this purpose.

The High Commission for Bangladesh in London can be taken to illustrate this last point. Apart from the High Commissioner, a political appointee, there were in October 1978, nine senior

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19 'Domestic Structure & Foreign Policy', in Handreider, op.cit., pp.32-33.
officials in the Mission; the Deputy High Commissioner, the Economic Minister, Counsellor (Press), First Secretary (Labour), First Secretary (Administration), the Military Attaché, Second Secretary (Press), Postal Attaché and Third Secretary (Consular Affairs). Of the nine, only three i.e. 33% were Foreign Office personnel: the Deputy High Commissioner, the First Secretary (Administration) and the Third Secretary (Consular Affairs). None of them had any direct responsibility for economic interactions with the U.K. which constitute the most significant component of the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and the U.K. 21

This lack of experience in the technical sphere of economic foreign relations reduces the indispensability of this type of bureaucrat to the political hierarchs. While Kissinger's 'prophet' will rely more on his bureaucracy on technical matters such as economic, he will be less dependent on purely political matters, where he is likely to see himself as an expert. One indicator of the reduced significance (at least to the political hierarchs) of the Ministry was, when in 1975 Mujib introduced the one party system in the form of BAKSAL, the Central Committee included several permanent Secretaries but not the Foreign Secretary. 22

Another reason for the reduced domestic clout of the Foreign Office is that it lacks a powerful clientele at home whose interest it serves and which has political influence.

21 High Commission for Bangladesh, London.
22 Out of 115 members of the BAKSAL Central Committee, 15 were Permanent Secretaries including those of Planning (ERD) and Foreign Trade. The Foreign Secretary was, however, excluded from this list. Bangladesh Gazette (in Bengali), Special Edition, Saturday, 7 June 1975, pp.1205-1209.
This is unlike the Commerce Ministry, which has a constituency in the numerous trading interests within the country, or the Planning Ministry, which serves a vast segment of the public and private sectors in the economy. While Commerce and Planning Ministries can have their parochial interests served by the clients who may 'speak for them' to the political authorities, and to whom in turn they may grant special favours, the Foreign Office, by the very nature of its functions lacks such a domestic clientele of any significant influence.

However eroded may be the role of the Foreign Office in the total gamut of external relations, it remains an institutional focus, as does its counterpart in London, for the formulation of foreign policy in the broadest sense.  

B. The External Resources Division (ERD): While the Foreign Office is formally in charge of the country's external interactions, the responsibility for economic relations has been assigned to other agencies/Ministries. The principal among them is the ERD, which was located in the Ministry of Planning between 1971 and 1979, and then moved to the Ministry of Finance. The functions of the ERD have been described as follows by a former chief of the Planning Commission:  

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24 These agencies may be described as the other 'Foreign Ministries' as has been done in a case study of the Norwegian foreign policy system. Nils Ørvik, *Departmental Decision-Making* (Oslo: Universitets forlaget, 1972), p.42.
The External Resources Division, as its name implies, was concerned with mobilising resources from abroad for the implementation of the [Five Year] Plan ... it was not involved merely in making recommendations but [in] also actually carrying out detailed aid negotiations for projects and commodities as well as for supervising the process of utilisation of foreign economic and technical assistance.25

The ERD was therefore formally empowered by the Government to negotiate directly with foreign countries for the purpose of obtaining aid and for maintaining continued liaison with the donors during the process of the utilization of such aid. It is the ERD that signs all the Agreements on behalf of the Government with other countries. Theoretically, these agreements are subject to clearance by the Foreign Office, but the need for such aid is so overwhelming that it is highly unlikely that a proposed potential source would meet with Foreign Office disapproval. Since the ERD identifies such potential sources, it leads the way in establishing connections with them. Obviously, therefore, apart from handling economic foreign relations, (which in any case is the major segment of the total foreign interactions of an indigent actor like Bangladesh), the ERD has a significant contribution to make in the total foreign policy sphere.

The last point is borne out by the fact that when in 1978, the Bangladeshi delegation to the United Nations was saddled with the task of fighting Japan for the Security Council seat, the ERD viewpoints were represented by the presence in that delegation of its permanent Secretary.

The ERD has structured itself in a fashion not unlike the Foreign Office with territorial and functional subdivision of responsibilities. Below the Secretary, there are six Joint Secretaries (JS) with the rank of DGs in the Foreign Office, who are in charge of territories or functional areas. Their divisions are in turn subdivided into desks headed by Deputy Secretaries (as Directors in the Foreign Office) and again into Sections headed by Section Officers. The organisation is, therefore, adequately geared to perform the role.

It is noteworthy that those who have been permanent Secretaries of the ERD have had considerable linkages with international finance organizations and have thus been members of the horizontal international elite. Of the three Secretaries since the First Five year Plan was launched in 1973, the first M. Syeduzzaman is currently an Alternate Executive Director of the World Bank in Washington. The second, K. Mahmood, is an Alternate Executive Director of the Asian Development Bank in Manila. The third, and current Secretary, A.M.A. Muhith was associated with the World Bank and was also an Executive Director of the Asian Development Bank. There is therefore the obvious tendency for empathy with Western aid_donors and their economic system. When seen thus, the Government policy-decision to accept the formation of an Aid Consortium under World Bank

26 Their functions are as under: JSI: Western Europe and Americas; JSII: Coordination and Aid Consortium matters; JSIII: World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Scandinavia, Australia/New Zealand; JSIV: Japan and South-East Asia; JSV: Middle East & OPEC; JSVI: India, Socialist Countries and Administration. Discussions in the External Resources Division, Dacca, November 1979.
auspices in 1974, despite the heavy socialist overtones of political rhetoric, becomes more explicable.

C. Ministry of Commerce: Though to date foreign aid remains a more important aspect of the economic foreign policy than foreign trade, this is not to minimize the importance of the agency responsible for trade, the Ministry of Commerce, in the foreign policy sphere.

Several illustrations for this may be cited. Trade played a significant role in relations with the core areas of foreign relations such as India. It has often initiated shifts in the course of political relations: for instance, this Ministry was the first governmental agency to articulate publicly its dissatisfaction with India.

Secondly, though the Commerce Ministry cannot dictate political relations on the positive side in the same way as the ERD can, it can be an invaluable asset in maintaining political relations, once established. For instance, it signed a large number of General Trade Agreements with socialist countries. Since these Agreements contain only broad principles and not the details of actual trade as do specific Trade Protocols, their significance is more political than economic. These were important in underlining Bangladesh's political sovereignty at a time when the country

27 See Chapter 3.
28 ibid.
was desperately endeavouring to obtain recognition by other international State Actors.

Thirdly, the Commerce Ministry can, and did, act as a conduit for links with other countries when for some reason or other political and diplomatic linkages are unavailable. For instance trade contracts with China and Egypt preceded political links and in many ways helped set the stage for the latter.

Organizationally, it is a much smaller agency with one Secretary, one Additional Secretary, and three Joint Secretaries. However Commerce retains some 'power' over economic external relations by the fact that it acts as the parent administrative Ministry for a number of senior positions in the Missions abroad. In 1978 Bangladesh Government had Economic Ministers posted in Washington, London, Brussels, Bonn, Moscow, Tehran, Riyadh, New Delhi, Islamabad, Tokyo and Peking, all of whom reported to the Ministry of Commerce. Apart from them there are a host of junior officials in the various Trade Offices in Karachi, Singapore, Calcutta, Sydney and Hong Kong.

30 See Chapter 5.
31 See Chapter 6.
32 The work load of the Joint Secretaries is divided as under: JSI: Administration, Insurance & International Trade Organisations; JSII: Important and JSIII: Export, Barter and Bilateral Trade: 'Distribution of Works', Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Commerce'.
33 Source: High Commission for Bangladesh, Canberra.
D. Other Functional Ministries: When a specific issue-area attains salience in foreign relations, the relevant functional Ministry often tends to assume the role of the guardian of the country's interests. An important instance is the role of the Ministry of Flood Control and Water Resources during the Farakka dispute with India. It was the head of this Ministry, Admiral M.H. Khan, who led the Bangladesh delegation to the U.N. in 1976 when Farakka assumed the character of a crisis, and made statements, which while centering on Farakka, also had bearing on the total gamut of Indo-Bangladesh relations. The Ministry of Defence is yet another significant agency, emphasising close links with sources of defence procurements. The Home Ministry also became relevant especially when its personnel interact with the Indians and the Burmese on issues arising out of border conflicts. It needs to be pointed out, however, that the influence of any such Ministry is not usually as sustained in foreign relations in general as those of the Foreign Office, the ERD, or the Ministry of Commerce.

What Joseph Nye states to be a growing phenomenon in advanced countries also appears to be true of many developing countries, specially those with a pronounced administration-oriented governmental culture, such as with many ex-British Colonies. Nye holds that

today there is an overshadowing of foreign offices as societies interact with each other at many points that cannot be easily controlled. There are direct contacts among what was once

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34 For instance see Admiral Khan's statement in Chapter 3
considered domestic bureaucracies of different governments. Foreign offices cannot hope fully to monitor the range of direct contacts among governments of advanced countries.  

In fact, with regard to Bangladesh, as indeed might be the case with many developing countries, the proposition may be advanced that not only do agencies other than the Foreign Office participate significantly in the various activities within the sphere of foreign relations, but also that in this sphere the influence of the economic bureaucracy preponderates with the necessary consequence of a higher priority of economic interests over political, except perhaps in such extreme cases as of a threat to security and sovereignty.  

Two factors moderate departmental 'parochialism'. First the system of administration provides for transfer of higher civil servants between Ministries, except in the case of the Foreign Office which is manned mostly though not exclusively by Foreign Service Officials. For instance, a Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, may, on promotion, 

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36 Though policy outcome is seen here in terms of organizational output, this is distinct from analysis based on Graham T. Allison's Organizational Process conceptual model which sees governmental behaviour relevant to any important problem as reflecting independent output of several organizations (Graham T. Allison, 'Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis' in Handreider (ed), op.cit., pp.341-2). In other words, pulls and pushes of competing agencies determine policy on any given issue. In this particular study the general assertion is being made that there is a constant 'tilt' of influence in favour of economic Ministries.
become a Joint Secretary in the ERD. Therefore, while there is a broad general bias for economic interest to preponderate, the scope for 'departmentalism' that is 'the tendency for departments to pursue particularistic goals in the policy process' is narrowed.

Secondly, while their allegiance may not be to any particular department, all these officials, the entire bureaucratic elite, tend to have as their constituency the broad social category they represent. Whether these officials are former Pakistan Foreign Service (PFS) diplomats or members of the former Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) cadre, as most senior bureaucrats are, they share a commonality of background. They were trained in Western institutions: all senior Foreign Service officials were trained in the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and CSP officials at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard or other prestigious Western institutions. They form a part of the 'new bhadralok' of Dacca, a successor to the old Calcutta bhadralok in a sociological sense, bred in Western intellectual ethos, despite all intra-elite differences, heir to the same traditions.

This critical segment of the community, the new bhadralok comprise small landholders (the larger ones, the Zamindars, being Hindus, had gone away to India following the East Bengal Land Acquisition Act of 1951), middling tradesmen (the bigger ones, who were non-locals, were patronised by Pakistani Central authorities, and they too left after Bangladesh's independence

in 1971) and middle-class professionals such as bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, engineers and contractors i.e. those who have 'positions and status apart from traditional land based sources and represent the small but developing urban bourgeoisie'.

Within this category the bureaucrats, civil and military, emerged as being in greater control because the development of the other component representing the bourgeoisie were uneven. For instance just as in case of the Calcutta bhadralok, because of the dictates of the Colonial situation, the metropolitan bourgeoisie, of which the peripheral bourgeoisie is an appendage, lay in Britain, the new bhadralok may also be said to have their industrial counterpart in the West. In neo-Marxian terms this category could indeed be viewed as the comprador class whom Ralph Pettman describes as the 'privileged elites' who 'tend to detach themselves in important ways from the peripheral sector of their own population'. The predilections of this class are crucial in all spheres as policy making, though to see foreign policy-making exclusively in these terms would be to raise a variable, however important, to the level of explanation.

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IV. Concluding Remarks

The group-character of the bureaucratic leaders has significant impact in the shaping of their images thereby determining their behaviour. This has several implications affecting the external expression of their State.

Firstly, they are for obvious reasons, culturally structurally linked to the West. Their minds and intellects have been conditioned by Western institutions. Even those among them who entertain socialist ideas do so largely because they have been 'greatly attracted by the socialist solutions of social and economic problems preferred by the intellectuals of the metropolis'. They therefore tend to display more sympathy for regions and sources from where they draw their intellectual and cultural nourishment. In this connection, the following quote, from a case study of Kenya by two analysts, is apt:

We would predict that elites in the smaller penetrated heterogeneous and violence-prone underdog states who accept the capitalist-organized international economic system and whose key reference groups are not domestic, but rather the Western organizers of international trade and finance, will practice economically dependent acquiescence.

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Secondly, although they are small in number, because of their high professional skill they see a wider role for themselves in the affairs of the world than is objectively dictated by the size and strength of their country. This often encourages challenging and ambitious goals, such as the determination to take on Japan in a bid for the Security Council seat in 1978, in which they were successful. Also, because of individual merit, some contrive to obtain for themselves positions of importance in international organizations. In this they are often assisted by their colleagues in government. A pointer is the massive diplomatic initiative launched in 1977 to obtain the appointment of the former Bangladesh Home Secretary, Salauddin Ahmed, as No.2 in the World Food Council. Such initiatives have the two-fold effect of greater international interactions than would otherwise have been the case and that of somewhat enhanced influence of the country in international forums.

45 Source of information: High Commission for Bangladesh, Canberra.

46 What is favourable in the area of external relations may not be so in the domestic arena, where the impact of such a phenomenon may be quite adverse. As one analyst has observed: 'Because living in small countries is not easy - especially for people whose horizons are not limited by their national boundaries - key people may tend to be more abroad than their peers in larger states. When in common in small LDCs, one person is holding two portfolios in government, which in larger wealthier countries would be held by two Ministers, the effects of his absence on the administration may be very serious'. B.L. Jacobs, 'Administrative Problems of Small Countries' in Percy Selwyn (ed), Development Policy in Small Countries (London: Croom Helm, 1975), pp.140-141. This is very relevant in the case of Bangladesh and extends beyond Ministers to senior bureaucrats, many of whom tend to live abroad, on assignments and training, for long periods of time.
At the same time, their complex international linkages, which make them a part of the horizontal international elite, hinder the development of a sense of 'nationalism', so crucial to state-building. This weakens the 'outer-shell' of the 'State', making it more 'penetrable'. 
CHAPTER 11
THE SUMMING UP

The main argument of the thesis has been, broadly, that Bangladesh has two foreign policy aspirations, the search for security and the quest for external resources for development; both these aspirations lead Bangladesh to develop foreign policy strategies that are co-terminous rather than mutually exclusive, viz. in both cases they involve the building up of a web of extra-regional linkages. Dacca's concentration, in such extra-regional linkages, is focused on three areas - the Superpowers, the Middle East, and China, and on the international organizations.

However, it is worth noting that while the first aspiration, the search for security, is aimed at developing a counterpoise *vis-a-vis* the regional pre-eminent power, India, i.e. while it is 'Indo-centric', the second aspiration has more general and global ramifications. Also, the quest for resources require interactions with some additional international actors, such as some other western donors apart from the United States, but since these reactions are mostly conducted under the umbrella of the Aid Consortium they can be subsumed under the general subject of relations with international organizations. Then again, while the first aspiration leads to what is the political component of Dacca's external relations, the second aspiration relates to the economic.
The following discussion is purported to bring into sharper relief the conclusions reached in the different chapters, and to relate such conclusions to Bangladesh's two major external aspirations.

A. Search for Security

The global importance of the more powerful regional neighbour is usually linked to the establishment, beyond all shadow of doubt, of her position as the regional pre-eminent power. This implies some sort of 'regional-hegemonism', if not domination, and the ability to exercise in that region power as defined by Raymond Aron, i.e. 'the capacity of a political unit to impose its will upon other units'. In other words, the larger/stronger neighbour tends to view herself as being in the pivotal role in the region. India finds herself in such a situation in the subcontinent. The assertion of Hedley Bull's, that 'the deepest fears of the smaller units in the global system are their larger neighbours' thus becomes true of Bangladesh.

Though the threat perception from India is not specifically military (though India is strategically by far the superior) the overwhelming influence that India is capable of exercising itself is sufficient to be perceived as eroding Dacca's sovereignty. In an attempt to stave off or minimise this

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3 See table on 'The Regional Power Balance(?)', p.vi.
Indian influence, to maximise her ability to manoeuvre and to retain a sufficient degree of independence in foreign policy formulation, Bangladesh is engaged in constant endeavours to manipulate her external environment. Hence her emphasis on extra-regional linkages.

There are several options that a weaker/smaller neighbour might have in a comparable milieu, i.e. *vis-a-vis* a stronger/larger neighbour. One is what Erling Bjøl has described as pilot-fish behaviour, i.e. keeping close to the shark to avoid being eaten. Finland's relations with the Soviet Union are an example, based on the early Finnish perception that her national interests do not permit ties nor the pursuit of alignment with an anti-Russian [Soviet] policy. Sweden on the other hand, in addition to behaving as a pilot fish, tried to make herself as troublesome as possible for the potentially more powerful enemy to overcome. There may be a third way, i.e. by seeming to opt out of the international system altogether,

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5 Urho Kekkonen's speech given at the Swedish Agrarian Union in Stockholm, 7 December 1943 in Thomas Vilkuna (ed), *Neutrality: The Finnish Position, Speeches by Dr Urho Kekkonen, President of Finland* (Trans), P. Ojansu and L.E. Keyworth (London: Heinemann, 1970), p.30. Finland's relations with her powerful neighbour, the U.S.S.R., was given a structural basis by the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance between the two countries in 1948. The temptation to compare it with the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation of 1972 would be great if the differences between Finland and Bangladesh on the one hand and the U.S.S.R. and India on the other, were not so obvious. Finland is not a developing, Third World, non-white and non-Christian country and does not, due to these attributes (or rather, the lack of them) find it necessary to involve herself in the world system to the extent that Bangladesh does. The U.S.S.R. on the other hand, sees her neighbour, Finland, as a sovereign buffer state. A sovereign Bangladesh may be of no such value to India.
as Burma attempted to do, though this is a course extremely difficult to maintain over any reasonable length of time.\(^6\)

Dacca has opted for the second option, the essential difference from Sweden being that Bangladesh's deterrence is political rather than military, built by involving herself in a web of international interactions that make the political price of aggression for the potential enemy very heavy indeed. This behaviour pattern is quite the reverse of the hypothesis advanced by Ronald Barston that a small power has a low-level of international involvement.\(^7\)

For Bangladesh, this attempt to seek a balance against the regional pre-eminent actor is rooted in her historical ethos. Within the Subcontinent during the colonial era the Bengali Muslims, who over decades developed a *kulturgemeinschaft*

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6 However, even Burma had to adopt some sort of policy *vis-a-vis* the more powerful neighbour, inasmuch as she 'adjusts and adapts, but no longer kowtows'. Ralph Pettman, *Small Power Politics and International Relations in South East Asia*, op.cit., p.58. Even though a small power might choose to opt out of the international system, she might find it difficult to ignore a powerful neighbour. Then again it is doubtful if any state actor can quite opt out.

7 Ronald P. Barston, 'The External Relations of Small States' in August Schou and Arne Olav (eds), op.cit., p.41. Barston bases this argument on the assumption that the interests of small states are usually regional and economic considerations and will be placed higher on a scale of interests than for the Big Powers. Unlike the Great Power, the actions of a Small State are of a limited consequence to most other members of the international system. Nor does the small state, when it is involved in a conflict situation, have to adopt a multilateral focus, i.e. assess the likely effects of her actions on friends, allies, neutrals and a host of others, to the same extent as a Great Power. Barston, however, overlooks the fact that the essentially regional interests of a small state may have wider international ramifications, and also that the primacy of her economic interests may lead her to greater international interactions in search of further resources or better terms of trade. Bangladesh, for instance, as in July 1978, had diplomatic relations with as many as sixty-eight countries. (*1979 Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh* [Dacca: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, 1979], pp.38-43).
of their own, tended to buttress their sense of security by seeking an alliance with the West Bengali Hindus when threat perceptions were received from North Indian Muslims and with the latter when the former appeared to be the source of such threats. While, the earlier balance within a three-body system was rather simple, in the contemporary international scene it has become a complex manoeuvre within a many-body system as there are now many other actors involved. However, this behavioural inheritance, i.e. the attempt to counteract any potential source of threat by building external linkages was too deeply rooted in the ethos of the Bengali Muslims to be easily shaken. This strategy now finds expression in Dacca's concentration on three sets of international actors (the Superpowers, the Middle Eastern Muslim states and China) and the International Organizations.

As for the Superpowers, global détente precludes the possibility of a superpower protective umbrella through alliances (as was earlier provided to Pakistan) and also eliminates the possibility of any influence that Bangladesh might have with a superpower alliance-partner; this dictates assiduous cultivation of both superpowers sometimes under trying circumstances. However over the years elite linkages

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8 See Chapter I.

9 Keohane has argued that institutionalized bargaining system in the form of formal alliances invests the indigent, smaller powers with disproportionate influence in American policy-making. See Robert O. Keohane, 'The Big Influence of Small Allies', Foreign Policy, No.2 (Spring 1971), pp.161-162. Edward E. Azar has talked of a small-nation power 'the power to give or withhold friendship', Probe for Peace: Small-State Hostilities (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1973), p.33. This phenomenon has lost some of its significance due to superpower détente. However, should détente break down, and events of early 1980 shows it to be more brittle than it was supposed, the influence that Keohane speaks of may become relevant once again.
and the preponderance of Western aid have combined to cause an inevitable drift in the Western direction that have peripheralised the Soviet Union \textit{vis-a-vis} Bangladesh's foreign policy interest without actually alienating Moscow to any great degree.\footnote{See Chapter 4.} Bangladesh's relations with China centre around the latter's systemic adversary relations with India; while this does make for ample reasons for close Dacca-Peking relations, these are propped up by such diplomatic subtleties as Dacca's tacit support for 'anti-hegemonism' (of the Soviet Union) in exchange for Peking's explicit support for 'anti-expansionism' (of India).\footnote{See Chapter 5.} The Middle East, for Dacca, is a source of inspiration and sustenance, both spiritual and material. Linkages with the countries of this region are not only important for obtaining resources, but also are sometimes invoked in minor conflict-situations with other states, as in the case of the refugee dispute with Burma.

Apart from the territorial areas of the Superpowers, the Middle East and China, Bangladesh also concentrates on international agencies in her attempt to build up her linkages. She was eager to join the United Nations, for instance, at a very early stage and was quite willing for that purpose, to live down her radical and unconventional nascence by readily accepting the prevalent mores of the global states system. Dacca attests to the fact that Martin Wight's observation of over a generation ago, that the chief object
of policy of the small powers is the maintenance of international order, largely holds good to this day. The U.N. provided Bangladesh with a seal of legitimacy, a sense of security, a source of material support and a convenient forum to air her view. Amry Vandenbosch has said of small states that the U.N. enables them to play a part in the world politics out of proportion to their population, economic or military strength. They will not easily give this up; they will wish to see the U.N. as a strong going concern for that enhanced their political power immeasurably.

This has indeed been true of Bangladesh, as evidenced in her enthusiastic participation in U.N. activities, including the successful bid for the Security Council seat in 1978, undertaken even at the risk of alienating a powerful rival candidate, Japan, one of her major aid donors.

All this is not to argue that Bangladesh's relations with India are essentially confrontational; indeed at various points in time quite the reverse has been true and a period of regional detente was initiated when the Janata party assumed power in India in 1977. However, Bangladesh, being by far the weaker, finds it necessary to develop a structural

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12 M. Wight, Power Politics (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1946, Reprinted 1949), p.28. To Bangladesh, international order had a high enough premium for her to run the risk of straining the carefully cultivated relations with the U.S.S.R. by criticizing the Soviet action in Afghanistan in 1978-80, which she saw as a clear breach of such order.

13 See Chapter 8.


15 See Chapter 8.
response to Indian pre-eminence and the web of external linkages is the means she adopts for the purpose.

B. Quest for External Resources for Development

If the maintenance of sovereignty in respect of perceived threats from a powerful neighbour was one major foreign policy interest for Bangladesh, the other was obtaining international assistance for massive economic reconstruction and developmental needs. This aspect of Bangladesh's external policy thrust was not 'Indo-centric', for, from the very initial stages, Bangladesh's requirements were much too great for India to be able to satisfy. It was, therefore, necessary for Bangladesh to reach out beyond the subcontinental subsystem, to interact with the developed world, and draw from it as much of her requirements as possible. Because both her search for security and her quest for external resources necessitated connections with basically the same set of international actors, it was not difficult for Dacca to marry her political foreign policy with the economic.  

Bangladesh's developmental aspirations, at least within the parameters of the accepted political and economic philosophy of the policy-makers, were of a level that even the Soviet Union was unable (and after 1975, unwilling) to satisfy. This led to greater interactions on the part of Dacca, with the West, which, both multilaterally and bilaterally, was the largest donor.

A second implication of this policy-aspiration for Bangladesh was that there was a modicum of erosion of her

16 See Chapter 9.
sovereign status in the sphere of economic policy-making. Some of these pressures (such as the ones to reform the rationing system and to reduce the subsidy on fertilizer distribution) might have brought in beneficial results, but the fact remains that these pressures were of external origin rather than of domestic politics.

Thirdly, there was some security hazard involved in exposing the country's economy to close outside view, laying the system bare to damage by a potentially hostile donor that could be inflicted by simply withholding aid to a critical sector in the economy.

Finally, the quest for aid gives preponderant voice to that portion of the bureaucracy that controls the economic ministries/agencies. The Foreign Office finds itself fettered in this issue-area, a phenomenon exacerbated by the absence of a domestic constituency to add to its clout as in the case of either the Planning authorities or Commerce Ministry.¹⁷

Bangladesh's westward orientation is inextricably linked with the predilections of her elite. For Bangladesh, foreign-policy making on the whole, is an elite preserve. This elite is a part of the new bhadralok of Dacca, possessing many characteristics of the old bhadralok of Calcutta. This crucial segment of the community provides linkages with the Western political and economic systems. This group draws its nourishment from the intellectual and cultural pabulum of the West.¹⁸ Being a part of the international

¹⁷ See Chapter 10.
¹⁸ ibid.
elite, this category tends to feel that it has a disproportionately larger role to play in world affairs, than is dictated or justified by the power of the country. This also heightens the country's international involvement. This elite tends to make up for its inferiority in 'power' terms by emphasizing 'respect for [its] dignity'.

On the whole, then, Bangladesh's external behavior is not totally passively reactive. Nor is it simply what Robert C. Good analyzed foreign policies of new states to be - 'domestic policy carried beyond the boundaries of states'. It is shaped by factors which have their origins both externally and internally, or as they have been described by Northeridge as 'systemic' and 'idiosyncratic' forces.

Generally, in her intra-subcontinental relations Bangladesh does not project her Third World image. She would derive very few benefits from doing so, as her potential rivals also belong to this group. This is only done on an extra-subcontinental basis such as on international economic

__19__ As was the case with small power elites in Europe during World War II. See Annette Baker Fox, _The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II_ (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1959), p.182.


__21__ Professor Northeridge has identified two forms of pressures that influence the external behavior of states; those that come from outside, i.e. from the international system itself which he calls "systemic" forces' and those that emerge from within, which he calls "idiosyncratic" forces'. He ascribes the former as being relevant to the developed, industrialized societies - he cites the U.K. as an example - and the latter to the states with lesser experience in foreign affairs, whose 'foreign policy tends to be rather an external projection of internal requirements than a rational reaction to international events'. F.S. Northeridge, _The International Political System_ (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), pp.171-172. It is doubtful if this form of simple internal/external dichotomy can be sustained for long in any comparative analysis. It certainly cannot be, in this particular case.
issues where such identity gives her a group-character that has consequent additional clout. It helps her avoid affronting the major Powers as the latter perceive and accept such behavior as a form of international Trade Unionist activity. There is consequently a lower profile on high risk issues such as the Sino-Soviet dispute, or Superpower rivalry and higher profile on low-risk issues such as expressed in debates on the New International Economic Order, or in condemnation of Neo-Colonialism, Zionism, and Apartheid.

If Bangladesh's external relations are marked by extreme circumspection, that is largely because, in the perception of her policy-makers, how she relates herself to the world is crucial to her survival.
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