Chapter III

BANGLADESH AND THE MAJOR POWERS
The emergence of a bipolar world after World War II created an intense cold war\(^1\) between the then superpowers USA and the USSR. The main centre of this cold war was the third world. The rivalry among the great powers for influence and military strategic parity or superiority was so intense that each one was compelled to seek the support of smaller nations which would help them in spreading their own influence further.\(^2\) Both superpowers put forward multi-dimensional policies like the delivery of conventional arms, the inclusion of small nations in an alliances system, the stationing of military force, the supply of military-biased foreign economic aid and the signing of bilateral treaties with militancy connotation for the protection and advancement of their respective ideologies — "capitalism" and "communism".\(^3\)

The cold war had witnessed an attempt on the part of the two superpowers to establish penetrative dominance over the Indian subcontinent too. It is, of course, not correct to say, as interpreted by


\(^3\) Capitalism: An Economic Theory and System based on the principles of laissez-faire free enterprise. It calls for private ownership of a property and the means of production, a competitive, profit-incentive system, individual initiative an absence of governmental restraints on ownership, production and trade and a market economy that provides order to the system as a result of the interplay of the forces of supply and demand whereas communism as an ideology fostered by a revolutionary movement that calls for the elimination of capitalist institutions and the establishment of a collective society in which land and capital are socially owned and in which class conflict and the coercive power of the state no longer exist. For details see, Jack, C. Plano and Roy, Olton, *The International Relations Dictionary* (New York: 1969), pp. 81-88.
a foreign scholar that the South Asian region had become a "subordinate state system" vis-à-vis the "dominate state system" consisting of the United States, Western Europe and the Soviet Union, since the pressure from one power emanate from the pressure created by the other.\(^4\)

The United States policy of involving Pakistan in a western-oriented treaty system\(^5\) and to use Pakistan's strategic location as an easy access to the Middle East and South East Asia, served United States's policy requirement for containing communism in Asia. Further, United States provided an amount of $3.8 billion military aid to Pakistan that was directed against communism.\(^6\) As an alternative policy, Soviet Union selected India as the fulcrum of a general effort to counter western, US and Chinese influence in the South Asian region\(^7\) and considered India as a bridge and spokesman for Soviet power and influence in the third world.

---


\(^5\) For example, CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) a regional alliance established on American initiative in 1956 to provide security in the Middle East against communist aggression and to foster economic and social cooperation among its members. CENTO was known as Baghdad Pact until Iraq withdrew in 1959 . . . Membership since 1959 has included Britain, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The United States, although never a formal member, functioned as an associate and considered bilateral agreements with Iran, Pakistan and Turkey that commit it to take action to aid the signatories to resist a communist attack. For details see, Jack C. Plano and Ray, Alton, n. 3, p. 274.

\(^6\) Selic S. Harrison, "The United States and South Asia: Trapped by the Past?" *Current History*, vol. 96, no. 614, December 1997, p. 401.

A brief resume of the super powers involvement in the late 70s shows that a short period of cordial relationship between the Soviet Union and Pakistan was over by 1969, due to Pakistan’s refusal to accept Brezhnev’s Asian collective security plan which aimed at encircling China. The US, which had kept a low profile in South Asia since the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, became reactivated and sought the help of former ally Pakistan, with whom relationships had somewhat cooled off, in an effort to establish links with China. China’s support was vital in the success of American Indo-China policy which was aimed at allowing Washington to have an honourable withdrawal from Vietnam and ending the war. China on the other hand, in the background of an acute Sino-Soviet conflicts which culminated in a series of border clashes . . . was eager to have an opening with the West. 8 Thus, Soviet strategy in South Asia was guided by its attempts to inhibit Chinese as well as American influence in the subcontinent. 9 Behind all this, there was a power struggle between China and Soviet Union and strategic struggle between Moscow and Washington. 10 A pattern of alignment of superpowers which emerged in 70s in the region was Soviet Union-India versus US-China and Pakistan.

Consequently, the analysis of major powers and their response to the Bangladesh Liberation was shaped by cold war calculations. It was determined more by the need to maintain a favourable power

8 Dilara Chowdury, n.2, pp. 4-5.
configuration advantageous to their own interests. The pattern of their involvement in the Bangladesh crisis was related to mutual strategic relations and conditioned by perception of their respective national interests. The discussion further moves on two lines: one, the attitude of the major powers towards the Bangladesh liberation movement and the impact of this. Two, a detailed survey of the transformed relations with major powers has been made.

Here, a changed pattern of Bangladesh’s relations (political, economic, military, socio-cultural) with Soviet Union, USA, China and Japan is discussed. In this section a whole gamut of Bangladesh’s relations in regard to Soviet Union (Russia) and its successor states has been analyzed.

**BANGLADESH AND SOVIET UNION: MOTION TO COMMOTION**

Among the major powers, it was only the former Soviet Union (Russia) which came forward to support the Liberation of Bangladesh through its political, diplomatic and military help to India. This acted as a catalyst in Bangladesh’s pursuit of independence. It was first among the great powers that criticized Pakistan for its military repression and killings in East Pakistan. This was evident from an official letter of President Podgorny addressed to the Pakistan President Yahya Khan dated 2 April 1971. In the letter, the Soviet Union appealed for the adoption of urgent measures to stop the bloodshed and repression against the population in East Pakistan. He expressed hope for the adoption of “methods of peaceful political settlement”. Podgorny’s appeal was significant as it was not merely an appeal made on humanitarian grounds, but was a clear indictment
by one of the world powers of the repressive measures adopted by a military regime to suppress a national upsurge.\textsuperscript{11} As a corollary to this, Soviet Union concluded a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with India on 9 August 1971, which helped in winning Bangladesh Liberation against the pro-Pakistan forces. It also fought for Bangladesh’s cause in United Nations Security Council and twice vetoed the UN Security Council resolution on an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of Indian troops from East Pakistan. The Soviet Union openly championed Bangladesh’s cause in UN and not only withdrew its veto on 16 December 1971, in order to give India the necessary time to carry on its military operations till Pakistani forces surrendered in Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{12} Soviet Union was also the first major power which officially extended recognition to Bangladesh. Immediately after the Independence of Bangladesh, President Mujib-ur-Rahman visited Soviet Union in March 1972 and expressed profound gratitude to the people and government of the Soviet Union for the active support in the emergence of Bangladesh.

As a result of Soviet Union’s assistance to Bangladesh during the liberation movement, a firm foundation for a friendly relationship between the two countries was laid down. During Mujib’s period

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., pp. 124-25.

(1971-75), both countries demonstrated not only a convergence of views on international issues but also on the principles underlying the conduct of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and Bangladesh. Soviet Union appreciated the peace loving, non-aligned foreign policy of Bangladesh and reiterated its support for Bangladesh’s struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism.\(^\text{13}\) On 31 December 1971, the ban on the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), which had been in effect since 1954, was lifted. New branches of the CPB as well as associations like Soviet-Bangladesh Friendship society sprang up.\(^\text{14}\) A series of friendship societies and other social and cultural organizations were formed to foster and promote friendship and cooperation between the two countries.\(^\text{15}\) Frequent bilateral visits at various levels became a common phenomenon. In 1973, an Asian Peace Conference was held at Dhaka under the auspices of the Soviet leaders, in which Bangladesh was assigned an important role in the propagation of the Soviet security plan for Asia. There were numerous exchanges of cultural delegates. Therefore, contacts between the two countries were extensive and broad based, that went beyond government to government dealings.\(^\text{16}\) During this period, a number of students from Bangladesh went to the Soviet Union for higher studies.

---

\(^\text{13}\) Joint Declaration by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 5 March 1972, see Bangladesh Observer, 6-10 March, 1972.

\(^\text{14}\) See Dilara Chowdury, n.2, p. 50.


Soviet Union’s presence in Bangladesh’s economy steadily increased. A border trade agreement between the two countries was signed, facilitating the exchange of Soviet goods and equipment in exchange for Bangladesh’s traditional export (jute, tea, etc.). The first consignment of Soviet relief supplies arrived in Dhaka on 20 January 1972. According to the Emergency Aid Programme, the Soviet Union agreed to provide helicopters to rebuild the war torn communication system, assistance for rebuilding fisheries and shipping, bridges to restore the nation’s railways system, to help train skilled personnel for technical and economic needs, and to provide consultations on the restoration of industries.\(^{17}\) But this pattern of relations was disrupted by subsequent periods of political fluctuation in Bangladesh.

Events of 1975 brought about major changes, which reversed the political and economic orientation of Bangladesh and changed the nature of her relationship with the Soviet Union.\(^{18}\) It has been observed that the coup of 6 November 1975 which brought pro-western and pro-Chinese conservative forces into power by defeating pro-Moscow and pro-Indian forces. The authoritarian regime of Ziaur Rahman saw a complete reversal of the earlier policies adopted by Mujib government. As a result pro-Moscow Communist parties were banned and the leaders of the left extremist and the right-extremist parties were released.\(^{19}\) It repeatedly accused the Soviet Union of

\(^{17}\) Dilara Chowdury, n.2, p. 50.


interfering in the domestic affairs of Bangladesh which seriously affected and undermined relations between the two countries.\footnote{Charles Peterson, \textit{Third World Military Elites in Soviet Perspectives}, (New York, 1979), p. 221.}

President Ziaur Rahman wanted the Soviet Union to reduce its diplomatic personnels in Dhaka. The presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan (1979) did not pose a direct threat to Bangladesh’s national security, but Bangladesh viewed it as a serious challenge to peace and security in the region, as well as a clear violation of the principle of UN Charter and the Non-aligned Movement. On principles, it denounced the act and demanded immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan.

One of the most contentious issues of Bangladesh-Soviet relations was Bangladesh’s strong critical stand on the presence of Soviet forces in Afghanistan in 1979. Bangladesh took a strong stand on the Afghanistan issue both at regional and international levels. As early as January 1980, Bangladesh took the initiative of summoning a special conference of the Islamic countries foreign ministers in Islamabad in January 1980. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Muhammad Shamsul Haq while addressing the session said, “the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan is a matter of anxiety and pain for us. Bangladesh upholds the sovereign and inalienable right of the people of Afghanistan to determine freely their own form of government and choose their own political, economic and social system without any external interference or military intervention”.\footnote{Address of Foreign Minister Muhammad Shamsul Haq at the Eleventh Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference at Islamabad from 26-28 January 1980, \textit{Bangladesh in International Affairs}, vol.3, no.6, p. 8.} Bangladesh was also
an active supporter of the UN resolution condemning Soviet action in Afghanistan.

Other issues which affected Bangladesh-Soviet relations during the 1980s were: Bangladesh’s total denunciation of the presence of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea. Bangladesh’s boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980, Bangladesh’s criticism of the Soviet role in Poland; and its condemnation of the shooting down of a Korean airliner by the Soviet airforce over Sakhalin island in 1983. Bangladesh later described the incident as "a manifestation of brinkmanship", and considered it "a direct and serious threat to global peace and security" and called for "ways and means to avoid a recurrence of such unfortunate incidents". These steps of Zia-ur-Rahman led to grievous results and the relations were so strained that Bangladesh’s Information Minister Habibullah Khan explicitly charged the Soviet Union “with having thrown diplomatic norms to the wind by opening a Soviet consulate at Chittagong without prior permission”.

Despite political and diplomatic tensions both countries maintained modest economic and cultural relations during the Zia regime. The volumes of Bangladesh’s trade with the Soviet Union during 1976-81 increased from $50 million to $73 (with the highest turnover in 1980, $ 104 million), but the ratio of the Soviet trade in

---


Bangladesh’s overall trade did not increase, rather it decreased from 3% to 2% for the same period.24

Trade between the two countries was conducted under the Barter Protocols signed every year. In the midst of severe political mistrust, Soviet Foreign Trade Minister, I.T. Grishin visited Bangladesh in February 1981, to sign the 10th Barter Protocol between the two countries. According to the new protocol the two sides not only agreed to increase the volume of trade, but the Soviet side agreed to import non-traditional goods, like cables, cosmetics, cultures, packet tea, soap, detergents and so on from Bangladesh. The Soviet Union also agreed to accept goods worth 4.4 million pound sterling during the following year in repayment of Soviet credits.25

Despite political tensions, the Soviet Union continued to fund on-going projects in Bangladesh. It continued to disburse earlier committed aid. This aid was used in a variety of projects and enterprises in Bangladesh, but the major share was used in the Ghorasal power project. In the 1980s, three subsequent agreements were signed between the two countries for further expansions of the Ghorasal power plant. Another major Soviet funded project in Bangladesh was the General Electric Manufacturing (GEM) plant in Chittagong. The Soviet Union provided 12.9 million rouble in 1972 and 5.023 million rouble in 1978 to complete this project.26

Soviet aid commitment to Bangladesh increased to $151.1 million during 1976-82 from $105.4 million during 1972-75 when the Bangladesh Government was on its best terms with the USSR. But the priority had definitely shifted. During 1972-75, a major share of Soviet aid (more than 80%) came as food and commodity aid, but in the later period almost the entire aid was in the form of project aid.\(^{27}\)

Under the provisions of the Joint Declaration, the two sides also signed cultural agreements for the education and training of Bangladeshi students in Soviet educational institution. Even after political changes in 1975, Bangladesh government continued to send students to the Soviet Union but as compared to the early 1970s, the number had drastically reduced. The number of Soviet scholarships had also declined. A five-year protocol was signed in Dhaka between Bangladesh and the Soviet Union in April 1981 on the education and training of Bangladeshi students in the Soviet Union at graduate and undergraduate levels in the fields of engineering, medicine, agriculture, pedagogy and cultural specialties.\(^{28}\) But the Bangladeshi Government headed by Zia-ur-Rahman became reluctant to enter new cultural exchange agreements with the USSR once the existing ones expired.\(^{29}\)

With the advent of H.M. Ershad (1982-91), a new phase of authoritarian rule began in Bangladesh. Some improvement in Bangladesh-Soviet relations appeared evident in early 1983.

\(^{27}\) Flow of External Resources in Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh, Economic Relation Division (Dhaka: 1986).

\(^{28}\) The Bangladesh Observer, 21 February 1981.

\(^{29}\) The Bangladesh Observer, 23 April 1981.
Bangladesh apparently became more conciliatory and softened its positions on the Afghanistan and Kampuchea issues. An agreement on cultural and academic exchanges was signed in Bangladesh on 26 April 1983 and an Islamic delegation from Bangladesh visited the Soviet Union in August 1983.

But Bangladesh’s relations with the Soviet Union suffered badly following the Ershad Government’s decision to expel 14 Soviet diplomats accused of involvement in “prejudicial activities” in Bangladesh in November 1983. In addition, the government also closed the Soviet Cultural Centre in Dhaka and the Soviet Consulate General’s Office in Chittagong. By January 1984, 14 Soviet diplomats were expelled from Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi ambassador to Moscow Rashid Ahmad was called back by the government. The fall down in political relationship was evident from the speech made by the Bangladesh Foreign Minister at the 40th regular session of the UN General Assembly expressing “grave concern over these situations, describing the withdrawal of all foreign troops as the essential prerequisite for a just and lasting settlement of the problems in these two countries”.

The year 1985 witnessed the initiation of a process of rapprochement in Bangladesh-Soviet relations. The Rear Admiral and Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator, Sultan Ahmed, went to Russia

---

31 Ibid.
in March 1985 to attend the funeral of President Chernenko and had fruitful discussions with the Soviet leaders.

In addition to this, Gorbachev outlined a number of important foreign policy measures calling for an Asian Pacific system involving all countries in the region. As a follow up, Gorbachev’s special envoy, Bastonia, visited Bangladesh to explain Gorbachev’s peace proposal and held discussions with President Ershad and the Foreign Minister. Bangladesh appreciated and welcomed the help and assistance offered by the Soviet Union in repatriating Bangladeshi workers who were stranded in Jordan during Gulf crisis in 1990.

With the improvement of political understanding between both the countries, Bangladesh sought more help and assistance particularly in the energy, oil, and gas sectors. Soon afterwards, a new Soviet loan of $82 million was announced for electric power development. The new trend was demonstrated when both countries signed the fourteenth barter agreement, first since the expulsion of the Soviet diplomats, which allowed Bangladesh to trade jute and other primary products in return for Russian machinery, tractors and other primary equipment. In August 1985, a Soviet Foreign Ministry delegation arrived in Dhaka for talks with its Bangladesh counterpart. The completion of the fifth unit of the Ghorsal Power Station enabled Bangladesh to meet nearly forty percent of its power need. Further, in October 1987, both countries signed an agreement for construction of the 6th unit of the power station (Ghorashal Power Project). Subsequently, Soviet Union also

33 Dilara, Chowdury, n.2, p. 62.
34 Ibid., pp. 62, 232.
assisted Bangladesh in the oil and gas sectors by sending its experts in the field of geology and geo-physics for the discovery of important gas fields at Begumganj, Feni and Kampta gas fields.

During 1982-83 and 1988-89, Bangladesh received more than $300 million aid from the Soviet Union. Bangladesh also took some initiatives to expand its market share in the Soviet Union. An extensive research programme for exporting Bangladeshi goods to the Soviet Union was undertaken, and the Bangladesh embassy in Moscow was assigned the task of advertising Bangladeshi goods and products in the Soviet Union. Bangladesh was not only interested in increasing the volume of trade with the Soviet Union, but also in diversifying it, and in exporting more non-traditional goods like ready-made garments, finished leather goods and paint, creams, cosmetics, toothpastes, electric wires and other goods to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union further expressed interest in the construction of roads and highways in Bangladesh. In August 1989, the Soviet Union offered technical and economic assistance to set up a cement factory in Chattak. It also showed its interest in joint ventures in various agricultural projects and processing industries in Bangladesh, and as of 1990, a number of projects, including the development of fisheries in the Bay of Bengal, production of water pumps, telephone sets, plastic and food processing industries came under serious considerations.

35 Briefing paper on Bangladesh-Soviet Economic Relations (External Resources Division, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh, December 1990).
In fact, during the Ershad period, there was no major international issue or event where Bangladesh and the Soviet Union had totally different views and interests. However, the mutual trust and confidence shared by them in post liberation period could not be restored in the subsequent regimes. The two countries had identical views on the Middle East conflict, the Gulf War (1990-1991) and the issues of arms control, disarmament and the maintenance of international peace and security. Bangladesh, along with other LDCs, supported Gorbachev’s proposal for restructuring the international economic order in favour of the developing countries. Bangladesh and the Soviet Union were also on the same side in criticizing US policies in Egypt and Libya.

The new government, headed by Begum Khalida Zia (1991-1996), took immediate measures to improve relations with the Soviet Union. Therefore, there were some positive trends and developments in the evolution of Bangladesh-Soviet relations. The dramatic shifts and changes in the Soviet Foreign policy under the principles of "estroika" and "glasnost" along with other issues as Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, improvement of East-West and Sino-Soviet relations also helped Bangladesh in revitalizing its relations with Soviet Union. In July 1991, Foreign Minister Mustafizur Rahman

37 *estroika*: Stands for a socio-economic transformation, a constitutional revolution in favour of widespread reforms and changes aimed at making the welfare society.

38 *glasnost*: Stands for openness in discussion, debates and decision-makings. It aimed at encourage the people to actively and freely participate in the process of social-economic, political transformation. (In former Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev advocated, adopted, developed and used there terms for giving a new direction to politics and policies within the erstwhile USSR and to the contemporary international relations).
visited Moscow. This was the first political high level visit to Russia in the last sixteen years since 1975. Its significance as being 'historic' and the "beginning of a new phase in bilateral relations was acknowledged". Bangladesh emphasized the need to consolidate and promote further progress in important sectors as trade, power generation, exploration of oil and gas potentials, livestock, hard-rock cement, industrial and infrastructure developments. In a joint statement signed following the visit, the two sides shared common approaches "on disarmament issues, greater cooperation amongst the world community for environmental protection and environmental emergency situations".39

The visit, no doubt, helped the confidence-building measures between the two countries and opened new avenues for cooperation. Though no significant progress was made mainly because of turbulent changes and political uncertainties in the Soviet Union in the later part of 1991.

When the USSR (Russia) ceased to exist in December 1991 and new states emerged in its place, Bangladesh immediately recognized all of the Soviet successor states and established diplomatic relations with them. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mastafizur Rahman again visited Russia in January 1992 and reviewed the bilateral relations and emphasized on expansion and diversification of trade between the two countries. Technical assistance provided by Soviet Union in the field of power generation and transmission by sending its experts in the fields

of geology and geo-physics for the discovery of important gas fields at Begumganj, Feni and Kampta was also appreciated.\textsuperscript{40} Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Kunadze visited Bangladesh in early 1992 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. On 14 November 1992, Bangladesh and the Russian Federation signed a protocol providing for annual consultation between senior officials from the Foreign Ministers of both the countries.\textsuperscript{41}

Bangladesh was one of the first Muslim countries to undertake initiatives to invite the new Muslim Soviet successor states into the OIC. The formation of independent successor states and their economic liberalization programmes, opened new opportunities for Bangladesh for expanding and promoting economic relations with them. In June 1992 the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)\textsuperscript{42} agreed to buy 60,000 tons of jute goods from Bangladesh at a cost of 1,350 million taka. It was the biggest single deal ever made with the CIS. The former Soviet Union used to buy 5,000 tons of jute goods on an average every year.\textsuperscript{43} Bangladesh’s trade with the Soviet successor states did not change very much in terms of volume, but it changed dramatically in terms of structure. In the earlier period,


\textsuperscript{41} The Bangladesh Observer, 15 November 1992.

\textsuperscript{42} CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States: The States Emerged after the disintegration of Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{43} The Bangladesh Observer, 23 June 1992.
trade was mainly controlled by and directed through government channels. Now it came to be exclusively within the private sector.

It is clear that during post-Mujib regimes Bangladesh — Soviet relations underwent major ups and downs. One important factor which was noticeable was that even when the political relationship was strained, the economic relationship remained unhampered. Political uncertainty moulded by frequent leadership changes in both Bangladesh and Soviet Union in the 1990s reinforced Bangladesh's disinterest in improving Bangladesh-Soviet relations.

BANGLADESH-USA RELATIONS: PROGRESSIVE PARADOX

In the immediate independence period, Bangladesh-United States relation could not grow due to insensitive and unfavourable attitude of US towards the nationalist and democratic aspirations of the peoples of East Pakistan (Bangladesh). US decision to side with Pakistan led the people of Bangladesh to harp a disdain about the US as they had "... traditionally looked towards the United States as the world's leading spokesman of liberty, freedom and truth ..."44 US refrained from condemning Pakistan for its military atrocities on the people of East Pakistan and regarded it as an internal problem of Pakistan. It was stated by the then US Assistant Secretary of State, Joseph J. Sisco, "no issue is regarded as more intimately internal than the kind which confronts the Pakistanis. It is the kind of issue which

can be settled only by the people of that country.\textsuperscript{45} Despite the pleas of US Consul General in Dhaka with regard to East Pakistan that United States should side with East Pakistan, the US government chose West Pakistan.\textsuperscript{46} The rationale behind this policy was not merely the suitability of Pakistan as a Sino-US communication link but also the fact that Pakistan was an old ally of the US.\textsuperscript{47} As it has been stated that soon after the military crackdown, the US concluded that "psychologically, the concept of a United Pakistan is dead in Bengal", even then the US supported Pakistan's integrity which went against the interest of East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{48} During the Indo-Pak war of 1971, fought for Bangladesh cause, US openly supported Pakistan and sent nuclear powered aircraft carrier (US Task Force) "Enterprise" into Bay of Bengal which appeared to the supporters of Bangladesh as a sort of gunboat diplomacy on the part of the USA.\textsuperscript{49}

In the immediate post-independence period, two issues dominated Bangladesh's relations with United States. The first was the question of recognition of Bangladesh by the US and the second was the question of acceptance of direct American aid by Bangladesh, what was perceived to be an anti-Bangladesh policies of the United


\textsuperscript{46} A.M.A. Muhith, \textit{American Response to Bangladesh Liberation War} (Dhaka, 1996), p. 201.


\textsuperscript{49} Jayshree, Biswas, n. 47, p. 20.
States during the war of liberation in 1971. The delay in the US recognition had not only caused Bangladesh to move towards Soviet Union, but had also intensified its anti-US attitude even further. The delay in recognition was also due to the direct orders of the then US President Nixon that American recognition was contingent upon the withdrawal of Indian troops from Bangladesh which, to US mind, symbolized negation of the new country’s independence and sovereignty and the country did not therefore merit US recognition.

By March 12, 1972, Indian troops were totally withdrawn from Bangladesh and thus a stumbling block was removed from the way of recognition of Bangladesh as an independent identity by the United States. The economist had rightly commented that “the withdrawal would bring some quick benefits to Bangladesh in the form of American recognition”. And soon after, on 4 April 1972, the US announced its “desire to establish diplomatic relations at the embassy level” with Bangladesh. Rogers made two commitments: first, the US was keen to develop friendly bilateral relations; and secondly, the US would be helpful as “Bangladesh faces its immense task of relief and rehabilitation”. In a letter to Mujib on April 4, 1972, Nixon referred to the ‘warm ties’ which the US had with the Bengali people

---

50 Ishtiaq Hossain, n.44, p. 70.
52 The Economist, 18 March 1972.
since 1949 and also committed himself to work side by side with the Bengali people.  

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman welcomed the US recognition expressing the hope that this US move would lead to friendly cooperation between the two countries. Attainment of recognition was seen as a bonanza for Bangladesh for three reasons: firstly, US recognition consolidated Bangladesh’s status as an independent and sovereign state as by that time Bangladesh earned the recognition of both the super powers; secondly, it removed a stumbling block from the way of American aid flow to Bangladesh; and thirdly, American recognition enabled Bangladesh to follow a safe policy of balanced relationships with all major powers. It secured for Bangladesh not only economic assistance but also an assurance for US political support for the membership in the UN and its specialized agencies like IMF, ILO, WHO as the issue of Bangladesh’s membership in these organizations was strongly backed by the US. Thereafter, Bangladesh-US relations during the Mujib years had never broken down completely and apostles of harmony between the two countries periodically discovered grounds of hope.

In May 1972 a bilateral agreement was signed under which the US government made available $90 million. This agreement marked a watershed in Bangladesh-US relations. A report published in August

---


1972 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on the first six months of US relief assistance to Bangladesh indicated that the total of American contribution was $267.5 million, which was one-third of the combined contribution of all donor countries.\textsuperscript{57} By March, 1973, the US had turned into Bangladesh's largest source of foreign economic assistance and American aid program totalled over $318 million.\textsuperscript{58} Bangladesh's dire need for food was also met through the US Food Aid Program PL 480. Thus, the Americans had succeeded in regaining some of their lost influence in Bangladesh by virtue of being the largest aid donor.\textsuperscript{59}

Bangladesh-US relations also faced severe criticism during Mujib period. In 1973, anti-American demonstrations were staged in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and other cities as a protest against the resumption of US bombing in North Vietnam. The demonstrators set ablaze the United States Information Service Library at Rajshahi. Further, the decision of the US government during the 1974 famine to suspend its food aid to Bangladesh because the latter started exporting jute to Cuba, brought pressure upon Mujib government. Rahman Sobhan, member of Bangladesh Planning Commission during this period, subsequently wrote in an article that "there was evidence of a major effort by the US to use its food aid as a direct instrument for political pressure."\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{New York Times} (March 10, 1973), quoted in J. Biswas, n. 44, p.4.
\textsuperscript{59} Ehsanul Haque, n.55, p. 232.
The economic conditions that also hamstrung domestic politics compelled Bangladesh to move towards the US. The year 1974 witnessed famine in which according to official estimate 27,500 and unofficial estimate 100,000 people were starved to death\textsuperscript{61} and the chronic paucity of food impelled the government to make a reappraisal of its policies and priorities. In fact, the USA was the only country which was in a position to meet Bangladesh’s requirements adequately and it may be recalled that the economic channel between USA and Bangladesh had always remained alive despite their mutual hostility. Even during the liberation war, the US had provided large economic relief to Bangladesh through the UN, although diplomatically it tried to prevent the breakup of Pakistan. It has also been observed that apart from the economic factor in other three major developments which affected the politics of Bangladesh during the Mujib period provided a positive rationale for the US to legitimize its relations with Bangladesh. There was a steady decline of India and the Soviet popularity and growth of anti-Indian feeling, influence and pressures from the pro-Chinese elements within the country, and rise of pro-Islamic and pro-Pakistani sentiments.\textsuperscript{62}

Consequently, US emerged as a leading diplomatic partner of Bangladesh. When Mujib was in New York to address the UN General Assembly Session in September 1974, a meeting between Mujib and the US President Gerald Ford took place, which marked a milestone in the US-Bangladesh friendship. Bangladesh received the much needed


\textsuperscript{62} J. Biswas, n. 47, p. 37.
assurance from the US President Ford who expressed, "great understanding of the magnitude of the problems faced by Bangladesh" and Bangladesh appreciated his assurances that the US "will do everything possible to help" within the framework of the prevailing aid situation. 63

Following this breakthrough in Bangladesh-US relations, the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger visited Bangladesh in October-November 1974. At a press conference, he remarked that there were no hindrances in Bangladesh-US relations and he pledged to help Bangladesh solve its problems of food and the problems of development as well as to cooperate in controlling flood. 64

The year 1975 witnessed important political changes and new directions in domestic and foreign policies of Bangladesh which in reality broadened the scope for significant improvements in Bangladesh-US relations. The assumption of power by Lt. General Ziaur Rahman on November 7, 1975, steered several policies that were more pro-American and that endeared it to the US. Firstly, the policy of denationalization was introduced and the private sector of the economy was encouraged which was in line with American policy and secondly, Zia made some fundamental amendments to the 1972 constitution, including replacing socialism as a state policy ideal. All these were the embodiment of Zia regime's willingness to introduce fundamental change in Bangladesh's domestic and foreign policy that did not appear to go against US policy calculations.

64 Ibid., Document No. 119, p. 151.
Bangladesh’s interests in developing closer relations with the US was signified in the appointment of its foreign secretary, Tabarak Hossain, who was considered to be the chief architect of the country’s foreign policy during the Ziaur period, as ambassador to Washington.\(^{65}\) This appointment evoked much speculation as to whether the US had now become the chief focus of interest for Bangladesh.\(^{66}\) Bangladesh indicated its tilt towards Washington by signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), on September 27, 1979. As the two more powerful nations of the sub-continent, India and Pakistan were not signatories, the US attached special significance to Bangladesh accession.\(^{67}\) The NPT, therefore, became a strong bond in US-Bangladesh friendship. President Ziaur Rahman’s visit to US in August 1980 further strengthened bilateral relations. In a Bangladesh-US joint communique of August 27, 1980, both Carter and Zia held identical views by expressing opposition to foreign armed intervention or interference of any kind in the internal affairs of any country and called for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan and Kampuchea. Moreover, the US President “expressed his personal admiration for the economic and political progress Bangladesh has made under Ziaur’s leadership and assured him of all possible cooperation in the successful implementation of the second five year plan”.\(^{68}\)

\(^{65}\) *The Bangladesh Observer*, 19 September 1978.

\(^{66}\) *The Times of India*, 17 August 1978.

\(^{67}\) Department of State Bulletin, November 1979, pp. 49-50, cited in Jayshree Biswas, n. 47, p. 64.

\(^{68}\) R.K. Jain, n. 45, Document No. 147, p. 168.
While the political relations with the US developed under Ziaur's rule, the US continued to remain a major plank in the economic development of the country. Previously, Bangladesh had been a major recipient of the PL-480 food aid under Title I and II programmes. In 1978, Bangladesh became the first country in Asia to benefit from the new PL-480 Title III 'Food for Development' programme and under this programme, the US 8,00,000 tons of wheat to the country covering the period 1978-79, with a projected value of $104 million.

The inclusion of Bangladesh in the Title III programme signified US interests in playing a more influential role in its development efforts. Moreover, with the liberalization of private investment ceiling and the government encouragement to foreign and domestic private enterprises, several US firms engaged themselves in off-shore oil exploration in Bangladesh. Previously to an extent, USA's entry into the economic field of Bangladesh was obstructed by the Bangladesh's emphasis upon socialism and the consequent decline in the role of the private sector. Foodgrains and edible products became the major imports from the USA. In 1979-80, supplies from the USA amounted to TK 203.3 crores, of which Tk 157.3 crores was spent on food items like cereals and cereal preparations, vegetable oils and fats. Other items imported from the USA were machinery (other than electric)

---

69 Jayshree Biswas, n. 47, p. 65.
70 For details of the agreement, see Bangladesh Observer, 3 August 1978.
71 Annual Import Payments, 1979-80 (Statistics Department, Bangladesh Bank, Dhaka), cited in J. Biswas, n. 47, p. 91.
and clothing. In 1980-81, imports from the US was valued at Tk. 180.2 crores, 53.7% of which was spent on food imports.\textsuperscript{72}

Clothing was another major and almost constant import item from the USA. The government imported large quantities of cheap second hand garments under the wage earner’s scheme to meet the requirements of its poor masses, such imports have been so useful that it developed into a lucrative trade and there are exclusive markets (locally called ‘Nixon-market’ and ‘Carter-market’) in Bangladesh which deal with these supplies.\textsuperscript{73} The US also remained the number one supplier of loans and grants to Bangladesh. Between 1975 and 1981, Bangladesh received more than $500 millions from the US for various development projects.\textsuperscript{74}

Apart from beneficial economic relations, both countries forged a common bond through political orientation. There was a convergence of the views of both countries on a number of international issues. On two major international crises, Bangladesh took bold steps to denounce the Soviet and the Vietnamese actions. While voting on both the issues in the UN, Bangladesh took active part in the drafting of the resolutions and supported the UN General Assembly’s call for withdrawal of troops from Kampuchea (resolution 34/22), and from Afghanistan (resolution ES-6/2). Bangladesh’s stand on these two issues went clearly in favour of USA.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Annual Import Payments, 1980-81 (Statistics Department, Bangladesh Bank, Dhaka), cited ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Dilara Chowdhury, n. 2, p. 110.
\item \textsuperscript{74} The Times of India, 6 March 1979.
\item \textsuperscript{75} UN Chronicle, vol. XVII, January 1980, p. 6.
\end{itemize}
The pragmatic and moderate foreign policy of Zia helped Bangladesh to develop closer defence relations with the US. Bangladesh signed a peace corps agreement with the US on July 1978, which allowed American voluntary activities in Bangladesh. But the agreement never came to be implemented as it drew severe criticism in Bangladesh. During 1977-78, Washington provided $200,000 for the training of Bangladesh military officers. This aid was provided under International Military Education and Training Scheme (IMETS). Under this scheme, defence services personnel of Bangladesh received free of cost training in the various military institutions of United States. Thus, during the Zia-ur-Rahman period, Bangladesh developed a close relationship with the US through a two pronged cooperation - political and economic and initiatives were taken to broaden the scope of relations even in untouched areas of defence.

During the Ershad period (1982-90), the bilateral relation between the two countries had been elevated to a different plane. General Ershad visited Washington in November 1983. Prior to his visit Ershad aptly announced a number of economic measures to make them attuned to the capitalist system. These included: liberalization of trade and promotion of private investment, denationalization and privatization of many government corporations and improvement of domestic financial resource mobilization. Reagan tabled Ershad as a "man of private enterprise". During his meeting with President

77 Dilara Chowdury, n.2, p. 117.
Reagan in Washington, General Ershad discussed a wide range of bilateral, regional, international issues. The pragmatic and constructive foreign policy of Bangladesh and its moderate approach to international issues such as Afghanistan and Kampuchea, as an active member of the Non-aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic conference, were highly commended by President Reagan. US was highly pleased when Bangladesh, as a third world country abstained from voting on the UN General Assembly’s resolution condemning the American invasion of Grenada. Similarly, when in 1986 the US mounted an air attack on Libya, the Bangladesh government considered it discreet to remain tight-lipped. These two significant incidents suggest that Bangladesh had openly chosen side apparently to appease the US from among the Islamic countries. There hardly existed a perceptual gap between Bangladesh and the US on regional and global issues.

The closer relationship evolving between the two countries were indicated by the agreement signed on 26 October 1982, which corrected the Title III of the 1982 PL-480 programme. Under the new agreement, US agreed to supply $60 million worth of extra food to Bangladesh as well as short and long term loans totalling $200 million for the augmentation of foodgrain production and food distribution in the following three years. The improved trends in US-Bangladesh relations were also reflected by the exchange of visits between the

78 Daily Ittefaq, Dhaka, 29 October 1983.
79 Ibid.
high dignitaries of both countries after 1983. Senator Larry Presslar, who visited Bangladesh in January 1985, and John C. Whitehead, Deputy Secretary of State in October 1985 were the highest ranking US official visitors to Bangladesh since Henry Kissinger (1974) and Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick in 1982. They were followed by US permanent representative to the UN Vernon Walters, State Department officials Edward P. Dherejian, Peter Galbraith and Robert Peck. This indicated that the US government placed much emphasis on its long standing relationships with Bangladesh.

In March 1986, an investment treaty (Reciprocal Encouragement and Protection of Investment) was signed between the two countries\textsuperscript{81}, which encouraged and protected US investment in Bangladesh and in return for its commitment to adopt economic policies to promote growth in Bangladesh.

The United States satisfaction with Bangladesh’s economic and foreign policies were manifested in a Congressional Report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on South Asia in May 1985. According to the report, Bangladesh had made important strides in encouraging private enterprise as the principal engine of economic growth and development. “The US State Department, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) should further structure their assistance programmes and advice in this effort and the goal of general deregulation”. The report also recommended priorities to the peace corps and the US Food for Peace Programme

\textsuperscript{81} Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Documents: December, 1990-June 1991, p. 41.
that would be both help Bangladesh and influence the attitude of the people toward the US.82

The close and warm relationship between Bangladesh and the United States was demonstrated during Bangladesh’s worst flood which hit the country in October 1988. President Reagan sent a special envoy, the Deputy Administrator of USAID, with large quantities of relief materials. The US Senate unanimously passed a bill on disaster assistance to Bangladesh, which received Presidential assent and it came to be known as 'Public Law 100-516: Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988. In the 1988 floods, according to a USAID Report circulated on October 4, 1988, total US government emergency assistance amounted to $151,487,301. The US private voluntary organization also provided assistance totalling $4,570,000. The American response to the disaster caused by the floods was highly commendable. The US ambassador to Bangladesh Willard A. de Pree, by exercising his disaster assistance authority in a situation of “calamity” produced by the flood, donated $25,000 to Ershad’s Emergency Relief and Welfare Fund on September 1, 1988.83 The versatile programmes undertaken by the US disaster assistance teams, such as supplying food, water purification, temporary shelter and communications proved to be of immense use. Subsequently, Ershad’s official visit to US in November 1988 brought both countries

82 Dilara Chowdhury, n. 2, p. 120.
closer as never before and talks resulted in far greater understanding of Bangladesh's problems.

A devastating cyclone struck the southern coast of Bangladesh in April 1991 causing widespread destruction and miseries of the people. The then Finance Minister of Bangladesh estimated property damage at $2.5 billion when he reported to the Paris meeting of the Bangladesh Consortium, international relief efforts were mounted quickly from many countries. The most dramatic and largest assistance came from US Marines and other forces who were returning to home bases from 'Operation Desert Storm' and were diverted to Bangladesh with the objective of assisting the cyclone hit people. This American relief effort—'Operation Sea Angel' (during the Gulf War, 1991) earned great appreciation in Bangladesh for the efforts undertaken specially in areas where only the specialized equipment used by the Marines could be effective. The assistance of the US naval task force is credited with having saved as many as 200,000 lives. On the other hand, for the cyclone, USAID provided $4,662,000 for disaster grants to non-governmental organizations.84

There is no denying that during Ershad's long era, US-Bangladesh relationship improved in many areas. In promoting military cooperation between both countries, Bangladesh requested for a grant of $2,500,000 for the fiscal year 1983-84 under the International Military Education and Training Programme, which was fulfilled by the US Government.85 Bangladesh continued to receive

84 Ehsanul Haque, n.sS, p. 245.
85 Dilara, Chowdury, n. 2, p. 126.
grants under this programme. More important, Admiral Ronald J. Hays, Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Command (US PACOM) paid a visit to Bangladesh in January 1986, and American ship USS Capandanno arrived in Chittagong port in December 1986 as part of a good will.86

The question of a democratic representative government in Bangladesh also drew the attention of the US Congress. The US administration made it clear that Bangladesh's political progress was important for Bangladesh-US relations and it took into account the development of Bangladesh's democratic institutions while considering American assistance levels. In October, 1990 when the fresh anti-government protest movement began, US hardened its policy towards Bangladesh. It put pressure on Ershad to hold demonstrably free and fair elections that would have to be contested by at least one of the major opposition parties.

However, Bangladesh's domestic politics did not affect converging perceptions of both the countries on international issues. Rather both the countries continued to share important interests in regional peace and stability. In the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Bangladesh's countenance for UN Security Council's sanctions against Iraq, with whom Bangladesh had excellent rapport, is an example of convergence of Bangladesh and US interests. Bangladesh and US were also partners in a common enterprise in trying to reverse the effects of Iraq's aggression in the Gulf. Bangladesh contributed to the 'Operation Desert Storm' and it

86 Ehsanul Haque, n.55, p. 240.
sent 2,300 troops to Saudi Arabia for defensive purposes, condemned Iraq despite the presence of nearly 100,000 Bangladeshi citizens in Iraq and Kuwait who faced expulsion by the Iraqi regime and participated in the US-led Multinational Force (MNF) that conducted war against Iraq in January-February 1991. The 1991 parliamentary election in Bangladesh was judged by the US as the first truly free and fair election since Bangladesh’s independence and the American government recognized the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. In the context of the changed global scenario in early 1990s and disintegration of Soviet Union, Khaleda Zia gave greater importance to improve economic relations with US without undermining the political and security aspects.

The US remained one of the most vital trading partners of Bangladesh and continued to constitute Bangladesh’s biggest export market during Khaleda Zia period (1991-96) also. The balance of trade in 1993 was $641 million in Bangladesh’s favour with Bangladesh exports to the US totalling $886 million and imports of US goods totalling $245 million. The 1992 trade balance was almost similar with $832 million in Bangladesh exports and $ 188 million in imports from the US. The noteworthy feature of this relationship was that garments and knitwear exports fetched $756 million in 1993, over 85% of all Bangladeshi exports to the US. Besides garments, seafood and fish exports to the US totalled $80 million and jute goods exports were $17.7 million in 1993. From January-September 1994, Bangladesh exports to the US totalled $807 million. Wheat exports

87 Ehsanul Haque, n.SS, pp. 242-43.
jumped to $56 million and cotton exports increased to $20 million. In order to further strengthen the trade relations, the first ever US trade show was held in Dhaka in 1992, the second in 1993, the third in 1994 and the fourth in 1995, which has been conceived as an excellent illustration of sustained US business interest in the market potentials of Bangladesh. In 1994, the trade show attracted over 25,000 visitors and resulted in over $1 million in direct floor sales.\textsuperscript{89}

Bangladesh very often urged the US businessmen and entrepreneurs to utilize the new opportunities that had created an atmosphere for unfettered trade and investment in Bangladesh. Bangladesh argued that restructured and liberalized economy and deregulation in Bangladesh provide the US opportunities to establish mutually beneficial commercial and trade relations. An agreement eliminating child labour from Bangladesh's garments industry was signed on July 4, 1995.\textsuperscript{90}

The Khaleda Zia period characterized cooperation between the two countries with the potentiality of expanding the scope and content. In September 1994, Bangladesh shared American strategic perceptions by agreeing to participate in the UN-sponsored MNF formed under the UN Security Council resolution concerning military intervention in Haiti under the 'Operation Uphold Democracy' designed to force Haiti's military dictator General Raul Cedras to step down and to restore democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to his office. The Foreign Ministry announcement said that the principled

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} *Bangladesh Foreign Policy Survey*, vol. 1, no. 3, (BIISS, Dhaka: September 1995), p. 12.
decision of Bangladesh was based on its abiding commitment to fully support the UN and to uphold the cause of democracy and peace around the world.\(^{91}\) Bangladesh and the US carried out joint exercises as a symbol of their collaboration, ‘Operation Seafat’ — an exercise between US Navy and Bangladesh Navy and Air Force was held in August 1995 in the Bay of Bengal.

In mid-1996, Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, came into power new areas of energy sector were added in Bangladesh-US relations. On 21 December, 1996, Bangladesh signed the first Gas Purchase Sales Agreement (GPSA) with the US hydrocarbon exploitation company, Occidental\(^ {92}\). This created attractive environment for foreign investors to explore the potential of oil and gas. Bangladesh-US cooperation in energy sector has experienced a greater progress with the signing of three accords on to exchange information on energy and conduct studies on strategic utilization of natural gas resources.\(^ {93}\) Further, on 2 February, 1997, Bangladesh Prime Minister visited US and opened the first ever World Micro-Credit Summit in Washington. The summit announced a fund of US$ 21.6 billion to provide to Bangladesh by the year 2005.\(^ {94}\) Till now, Sheikh Hasina Wajed has visited the US twice.

\(^{91}\) The Daily Star, September 13, 1994.

\(^{92}\) Daily Star, 21 December 1996.


\(^{94}\) Daily Star, 2 February 1997.
The explanation for the strength and durability of Bangladesh-US relationship is that the US has proven to be responsive to Bangladesh's economic needs and security concerns.

**BANGLADESH AND CHINA: TURMOIL TUNED**

Here, before a detailed survey of Bangladesh's foreign policy towards China during the period of study, a brief historical review of the attitude of China adopted during the Bangladesh liberation war is given in order to bring into picture the repercussions of Chinese attitude on Bangladesh-China relations. China's action and policies during the Bangladesh Liberation Struggle indicate that China did not regard the liberation movement under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Awami League Party as a genuine liberation movement. It rather considered it a bourgeois revolution carried out with the aid of "reactionary" India and "expansionist" Russia. The Peoples Republic of China in the beginning was quite reserve about the happenings in Bangladesh and no press comments were made available. The Chinese treated this issue as an internal affair and did not believe in interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. China did not even consider it a real guerrilla war fought by peasants and workers, but a separatist movement launched not by the masses but by a handful of persons who wanted to sabotage the unity of Pakistan.

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 was brought before the UN Security Council by the United States which introduced a resolution asking for immediate cease-fire to fighting and withdrawal of troops to

---

95 Dilara Choudhury, n.2, p. 152.
the borders of India and Pakistan by their respective governments. Such resolution was brought thrice before the Security Council and the Chinese delegation voted for it on all occasions on 4 December 1971, the Hsinshua News Agency released a polemical dispatch which charged that the “Indian government’s aggression” against Pakistan was “approved and supported by the Soviet government”. On 5 December 1971 in the Security Council, the Chinese representative Huang Hua, while opposing the Soviet proposal of allowing the representative of Bangladesh to present its case, sternly pointed that “this is stark interference in Pakistan’s internal affairs and attempts on the UN Charter with which all countries upholding justice cannot agree.

When the Indo-Pak war was moving towards its end, China termed the problem as a Soviet bid to fish in troubled waters and described Bangladesh as the brainchild of the Soviet Union which had been created to harm China, weaken China’s trusted friend, Pakistan and strengthen China’s hostile neighbour, India. China’s intransigent attitude towards Bangladesh was further seen when China on 25 August 1972, exercised its first veto, preventing the entry of Bangladesh to the UN body.

Huang Hua put forth the following


99 The issue of the proposal for the admission of the Bangladesh’s membership came before the Security Council through a joint draft resolution sponsored by India, the Soviet Union, Britain and Yugoslavia.
argument while justifying China’s veto against Bangladesh. He stated:

"Taking into consideration the specific conditions and situation in which Bangladesh came into being, it is quite obvious that the question of Bangladesh's application for membership in the UN can in no way be examined in deviation from the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council concerning last years [1971] war of aggression on the South Asian subcontinent".\(^{100}\)

Naturally, the Chinese action caused much disappointment among the Bangladeshis. In reaction to the Chinese exercise of veto of Bangladesh admission in the Security Council, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Abdus Samad said in August 1972, "China was playing the role of a big power in blocking the entry of Bangladesh into the United Nations."\(^{101}\) Despite China's strong opposition to Bangladesh's entry into the United Nations, the latter had maintained a flexible policy towards it. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, stated: "we do not want to maintain hostility with our neighbour China, we have nothing against the biggest country in the world. But China refused to positively respond this initiative."\(^{102}\)

Chinese reservations towards Bangladesh started to soften in 1974 following the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan on 22 February 1974 and the agreement to repatriate the Pakistani Prisoners

\(^{100}\) *Beijing Review*, 1 September 1975, p. 6.

\(^{101}\) *Statesman*, 28 August 1972.

\(^{102}\) J. N. Mohanty, n. 97, p. 150. Also see Virendra Narainh, Bangladesh-China Relations cited in Ramakant (ed.), *China and South Asia: South Asia Studies Series 18* (New Delhi, 1988), p. 148
of War (POWs) from India. Subsequently, when the issue of Bangladesh membership of the United Nations was again brought before the Security Council on 10 June 1974, China refrained from using veto and Bangladesh became a member of the United Nations. After that China supported Bangladesh’s entry into World Health Organization. In August 1974, China sent relief goods to the flood victims in Bangladesh. China also invited Bangladesh to participate in Canton Trade Fair in April-May 1975, where four contracts were signed between the government agencies of the two countries. In the economic field, the two countries came close and China offered to purchase Bangladesh’s jute and jute-goods.103

In the initial stages Bangladesh’s relations with China were far from cordial. The countries which had not assisted Bangladesh in her liberation movement were naturally looked upon by Bangladesh as being hostile to her. China’s attitude towards Bangladesh did not change until the fall of the Mujib government. China not only accorded immediate recognition to the military regime that seized power in Dhaka in 1975, but also expressed readiness to provide it with political and military help and support. China’s support was crucial to the new regime for three reasons104 —

1. Recognition from a major power like China would help the regime to establish credibility and legitimacy both at home and abroad.

---

103 Bhumitra Chakma Bangladesh-China Relations: Determinants and Interlinkages cited in Abdul Kalam, n.55, p. 266.
104 Golam Mostafa, n. 15, pp.110-11.
2. It helped to neutralize radical extremist pro-Chinese groups and parties (which were powerful and influential) in the country.

3. It helped to balance the counter growing threats from India, and served as an insurance chip against the Soviet Union.

According to the then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Muhammad Shams-ul-Haq, common perceptions about India’s role in South Asia led to the development of China-Bangladesh relation. Elaborating on the compulsions behind this development, he explains, "the geostrategic position of Bangladesh lends special importance to friendly relations with China, located only 90 kilometers from the Bangladesh border.105

During Zia-ur-Rahman’s period, China became an important partner of Bangladesh in terms of its political, economic and security interests. Sino-Bangladesh relations were described as a “cardinal feature of Bangladesh’s foreign policy,”106 and the government firmly advocated the need to forge permanent and intimate relations with China. Following the recognition by the Chinese, the two countries moved rapidly to strengthen their ties,107 and high level official visits between the two countries became a regular phenomena. The two

107 Bangladesh Observer, 2 September 1975.
countries consented to establish diplomatic relations at the earliest and to exchange ambassadors, on the basis of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs and equality and mutual benefit. The beginning of Ziaur Rahman’s rule witnessed a marked growth and depth in Bangladesh-China relations. China gladly contributed to Bangladesh’s need for external economic aid and military supplies for the development of Bangladesh defence system. A number of agreements, cultural, commercial and economic were signed between the two countries. In May 1976, two goodwill delegations from Dhaka visited Beijing. In November 1976, both countries signed a two-year trade and payment agreement. A steady and closer relationship was established during the Ziaur Rahman regime.

With the mending of forces, China’s influence in Bangladesh increased and it supported her in various bilateral as well as multilateral issues of concern to Bangladesh. China stood behind Bangladesh on the latter’s Farakka dispute. A commentary in the People’s Daily illuminated the Chinese stand on this issue. It stated that the Ganga was an international river, the water resources of which should be rationally distributed and utilized by countries in both the upper and lower reaches. It added “the water issue is one of the many instances in which Bangladesh is bullied by India”.

---


China's foreign minister Qiao Guanhua declared unequivocal support to Bangladesh when the latter took the issue to the United Nations General Assembly to internationalize it and pressurizing India into agreeing to what Bangladesh considered as its rightful share of water during the season. On 5 October 1976, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Qiao Guanhua, in a firm and forthright statement before the UN General Assembly said: "we firmly support the reasonable position taken by Bangladesh on the question of sharing in the water of the Ganges river".  

The first important political contact between the two countries took place when General Ziaur Rahman, as Chief Martial Law Administrator, paid a state visit to China on 2 January 1977. The visit was regarded by either side as a major contribution to further strengthen the "friendship between the two countries. The donation received by Bangladesh from China in aid of the flood victims in 1974 when the two countries had no formal relations" was also recalled. The exchange of views between the two countries covered bilateral issues as well as the international situation including that of South Asia besides issues of mutual interest. According to the joint communique, China reiterated her "firm support for the just struggle Bangladesh in..., defending national independence and state sovereignty and developing national economy". Bangladesh also "expressed firm support to the Chinese people in their sacred cause of

\[\text{110} \quad \text{The Bangladesh Observer, 6 October 1976.}\]

\[\text{111} \quad \text{Press Release on Bangladesh-China Relation, File No. 327. 04, vol. 1, National Archives of Bangladesh, Dhaka, p. 1.}\]
liberating Taiwan and reunifying their motherland". Common and identical views on major international and regional issues were shared between the two countries. As discussed earlier, China's support to Bangladesh in its bilateral dispute on the Farakka issue with India was recalled and welcomed Bangladesh's strong anti-Soviet stand, while Bangladesh supported China's position on Afghanistan, Kampuchea and other regional and international issues. President Ziaur Rahman's visit to China was reciprocated by similar visit of Chinese Vice-Premier, Li Hsien mien in March 1978. It gave impetus to new vistas of mutual cooperation and helped in widening the scope of further development in economic, political and military relations.

Although the Sino-Bangladesh relationship was essentially developing well, there were some minor but significant negative features in the relationship. Bangladesh's attitude during Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea and the subsequent Chinese retaliatory attack against Vietnam in 1978-79 caused some uncertainties in China over a visit made to Dhaka by Vietnamese Vice-Premier in December 1978 at the height of Sino-Vietnamese tension. But the demand for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea was reiterated during President Ziaur Rahman's visit to China in August 1980 and they agreed to jointly work on important

115 Dilara Choudhury, n. 2, pp. 172-73.
116 Golam Mostafa, n. 15, p.111.
international issues while Bangladesh became a member of the Security Council during 1978-80. On Sino-Bangladesh relations various comments were made by high level Bangladeshi governmental officials. For example, in 1981, Mirza Golam Hafiz, the then speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament described China "as a tested friend of Bangladesh and claimed that "she will stand like a rock behind us in times of our need".\footnote{The Bangladesh Observer, 5 September 1981.} Once the political foundation of bilateral relations took root very firmly, it soon spilled around in other aspects also, like economic, military and cultural. During Zia's 1977 visit, a first trade protocol and agreement of economic technical cooperation was signed which provided for exchange of goods worth $14 million either way and outside the trade protocol, goods valued at eight million each way in cash purchase.\footnote{The Bangladesh Times, 21 November 1978.} It was regarded that "these visits opened up the expansive vistas of economic cooperation between China and Bangladesh henceforth while in the process friendly ties between the two countries would inevitably be strengthened to help advance further the mutual interests of both countries".\footnote{Press Release, Bangladesh China Relations, n. 113, p. 3.} The Chinese Vice-Premier's visit added further expansion of economic relation while second trade protocol was signed between the two countries envisaging trade of $20 million worth of goods each way that marked an increase of about 43 per cent in the volume of trade over the first one.\footnote{The Bangladesh Observer, 18 March 1978.} Under this agreement $59 million interest free loan was granted to Bangladesh in order to invigorate the network of Sino-Bangladesh Cooperation. Under
Scientific and technical agreement an exchange of experts and expertise between the two countries was assured.\textsuperscript{121} The two separate contracts were also concluded during the visit of Chinese trade delegation in August 1978. China agreed to purchase jute goods worth Taka 5.96 crore from Bangladesh which was then double of the last year worth of Taka 2.91.\textsuperscript{122} A big volume of Bangladesh’s trade with China was conducted under barter by state trading concerns on the two sides. Further opportunities were also sought, for expanding trade outside a broad-spectrum protocol on scientific and technical cooperation signed in March 1978 laid the foundation for sustained and increasing bilateral relations between both countries. Both countries agreed to provide first hand knowledge to each other in manufacture of agriculture machinery, sericulture, extensive tea cultivation, jute wearing and spinning technology, jute production and processing.\textsuperscript{123} The visit provided an opportunity for the new Chinese leadership to establish personal rapport with the Bangladesh government at the highest level. President Ziaur Rahman’s visit to China was reciprocated by similar visits by Li Hsienmien in 1978 and by the Chinese Primier Zhao Ziang in 1981. There was a wide range of discussion on economic, political and military matters between leaders of the two countries.

During Zia period, Bangladesh’s trade volume with China had increased significantly. The proportion of import in relation to Bangladesh’s total global import increased to 5.7% in 1980-81 over

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{The Bangladesh Times}, 22 March 1978.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{Morning Post}, 29 August, 1978.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} \textit{The Bangladesh Times}, 1 April 1979.
\end{itemize}
1975-76's 0.85% and the proportion of export increased to a maximum of 4.56% in 1978-79, with a slight decrease to 3.74%, in 1980-81 over 1975-76's 1.15%.\textsuperscript{124} China also helped Bangladesh in diversifying her export by buying non-traditional items like sugar, newsprint etc.

The most important discernible manifestation of the euphoric relationship was in the field of military cooperation. During Zia's 1977 visit, the Chinese were reported to have offered military supplies to help Bangladesh in its quest for national security and defence.\textsuperscript{125} China provided arms to Bangladesh free of charge either as direct grant or interest free loan till 1979-80.\textsuperscript{126} Between 1975 and 1979, China supplied 78% of Bangladesh's arms imports.\textsuperscript{127} Not only providing with weapons, China also helped in advisory forms. China also built up Bangladesh's arms and ammunition factory in Joydevpur.

China and Bangladesh also developed an excellent cultural relationship during the period of Ziaur Rahman. A cultural cooperation agreement was signed between two countries on 17 November 17, 1979.\textsuperscript{128} On the basis of this agreement cultural and educational programmes were initiated. Moreover, a number of


\textsuperscript{125} Dilara Chowdury, n. 2, p. 170.

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{The Bangladesh Observer}, December 1, 1978.


educationists, scientists and technocrats of both countries got opportunities for exchange of experience and knowledge through scholarships offered by both countries.

The deep understanding in Bangladesh-China relations that began during the Ziaur Rahman's regime, indeed continued to flourish after H.M. Ershad took over power (1982-90). To Ershad, the importance of Chinese friendship is well discernible from his six trips to China during his tenure as President and after coming to power he undertook his first foreign visit to Beijing in November 1982. These visits at different levels helped to further strengthen mutual understanding and to explore new areas of cooperation between the two countries.

General H.M. Ershad's continuation of late Ziaur Rahman's policy of maintaining close relations with China, his diplomatic recognition of the exile coalition Kampuchean government, led by Noradin Sinhanouk and above all the new government's decision to expel two members of the Russian Embassy in Dhaka were a testimony of their close relationships.129

Ershad not only regarded China as a friend of the small states against the "hegemonism" and "expansionism" of the big states, but also attempted to influence other states to buy the absurd logic. For instance, Foreign Minister, Shansud Doha, assuming the role of the Chinese propaganda minister, told the Bhutanese officials that it was "absolutely essential for the small nations in the subcontinent to

129 Dilara Chowdury, n.2, p. 175.
maintain a merely formal relationship with India and simultaneously cultivate warmer relations with China.\textsuperscript{130}

The two countries cooperated with each other in various international organizations and forums and expressed identical or similar views on a number of major regional and global issues, including Afghanistan, Kampuchea, the Middle-East, including the Palestinians right of self-determination, Namibia, South Africa, North-South dialogue, South-South Cooperation, a new international economic order and fair dealings with the Third World. During Ershad’s visit to China in November 1982, he referred to the violation of the principles of non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of Kampuchea and Afghanistan and said, “such violation threatens the very fabric of international conduct and interstate relations. He said both China and Bangladesh were committed to the comprehensive just and desirable solution of the West Asian crises based on complete withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied territories including Jerusalem and the restoration of the inalienable rights to the Palestinian people under the leadership of the PLO, their sole and legitimate representative including the right to a sovereign independent state of their own”.\textsuperscript{131} During the Ershad period, a number of visits and exchange visits of various missions\textsuperscript{132} and trade delegation further contributed in all areas of cooperation.


\textsuperscript{131} \textit{The Bangladesh Observer}, 28 November 1982.

\textsuperscript{132} Dilara Chowdury, n. 2, p. 175.
During Ershad’s second visit to China in July 1986, he said Bangladesh and China have set ‘a unique example’ of the South-South Cooperation between themselves . . . while giving his tour details, he said, “Chinese evinced keen interest in further strengthening and consolidating the friendship, understanding and cooperation which so happily characterize the relations between our two countries.”\textsuperscript{133} The reciprocal visit paid by President Li Xian nian in May 1986 was first by a Chinese President to Bangladesh. It was regarded as a “milestone” in Bangladesh-China relationship.\textsuperscript{134} Foreign Minister Humayun Rasheed Chowdury termed President Ershad’s third visit to China in January 1987, as a “complete success and he observed that Dhaka-Beijing relations have now reached a ‘historical peak’.\textsuperscript{135} On bilateral plane China expressed its deep interest for participating in the construction of the proposed Jamuna bridge and signed a protocol on the construction of Shambhuganj bridge in Mymensingh district.\textsuperscript{136}

Economic ties between Bangladesh and China during the Ershad regime flourished practically on the foundation laid during the Zia regime. The establishment of Joint Economic Commission (JEC) between Bangladesh and China on November 2, 1983 in order to coordinate cooperation between the two countries in the sectors of economic trade, scientific and technical was an important landmark that opened up the avenues to hold meetings in each other’s capital in

\textsuperscript{133} *The New Nation*, 12 July 1985.

\textsuperscript{134} *The Bangladesh Observer*, 8 May 1986.

\textsuperscript{135} *The Bangladesh Observer*, 9 January 1987.

\textsuperscript{136} *The Bangladesh Observer*, 4 January 1987.
alternate years.\textsuperscript{137} Chinese food aid to Bangladesh, the smallest component, was in the form of grant, while commodity and project aid came in the form of loan. The total disbursement ratio as compared to the total commitment was 82.93 per cent during the Ershad period, the ratio of total disbursement of commodity and project aid was 42.53 per cent and 84.86 per cent respectively. In terms of soft loan, China provided Bangladesh worth 25 million Yuan (about 12.5 million US dollar) in December 1982.\textsuperscript{138}

Both the countries signed a five-year long term trade agreement in 1984 which aimed at $400 to $500 million barter trade during the period 1985-89. In order to realize this goal, both countries signed a series of barter protocols. In December 1985, Bangladesh concluded the biggest ever barter protocol with China, a total trade deal of $87 million (equivalent to Taka 300 crore in one year with each way export of $43.5 million).\textsuperscript{139} In November 1986, both countries signed another barter protocol and agreed to exchange goods worth $44 million (about Taka 1,300 million) each way.\textsuperscript{140} Trade volume between Bangladesh and China increased from Taka 428 million in 1976-77 to Taka 2565 million in 1984-85. China occupied seventh position in Bangladesh’s export in 1978-79. But due to trade imbalance both countries could not maintain consistency in their economic relation. The cumulative trade imbalance against Bangladesh upto 1984-85 amounted to Taka 10,357 million, the

\textsuperscript{137} Bhumitra, Chakma, Bangladesh-China Relations: Determinants and Interlinkages, cited in Abul Kalam (ed.), n.55, p. 270.

\textsuperscript{138} The Bangladesh Observer, 5 December 1982.

\textsuperscript{139} The New Nation, 18 December, 1985.

\textsuperscript{140} Bangladesh Observer, 8 November 1986.
yearly trade gap with China which recorded 2,100 million in 1984-85. Soon, China lost its earlier position as a big exporter to Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{141}

Subsequently, various kind of steps were taken by both countries for the expansion and diversification of the two-way trade. China began taking part in development projects through government loans, supplier's credit, joint ventures, investment and transfer of technology to Bangladesh. In July 1985, China agreed to invest $65 million for joint ventures at the private sector in setting up fertilizer factories and 15 textile mills in Bangladesh. Ninety per cent of the joint venture was carried out by China and even provided cement and rod for the industrial plants.\textsuperscript{142} Barter exchange accounted for more than 99 per cent of Bangladesh export to China while cash transaction dominated the import trade.\textsuperscript{143} China also provided interest free loans and assisted Bangladesh in development efforts. It was amounted at 325 million yuan (over 100 million US dollars).\textsuperscript{144} China offered Bangladesh supplier credit to the tune of $70 million for industrialization programmes and agreed to import more non-traditional items like jute carpets, sugar, tea and tobacco, for reducing the trade gap with Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{145} A Long Term Trade Agreement (LTTA) came into existence for a period of five years (1990-1995) which provided Most Favoured Nations (MFNs) treatment to each other in some specified areas (shippings, tariffs etc.). Trade volume

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{The New Nation}, 4 September 1986.
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{The New Nation}, 12 July 1985.
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{The Bangladesh Observer}, 18 November 1986.
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{The Bangladesh Observer}, 10 May 1986
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{The New Nation}, 3 July 1986.
increased significantly during the Ershad period. From 1983-84 to 1990-91, Bangladesh imported from China goods worth Tk 20,552 million, while the value of export was Tk 4,961 million.\(^\text{146}\) Though trade balance was against Bangladesh, a significant portion of this trade was in barter terms.

In the military front, Bangladesh-China relations continued on the basis of the foundations laid during the period of Ziaur Rahman. By 1987, the Bangladesh army possessed 20 Chinese made T-59 tanks, the Air Force has 18 Shenyang T-6 training aircrafts and the Navy is equipped with 14 Chinese built FACP (Fast Attack Craft Patrol), 6 Hainon and 8 Shanghai ii; and 4 Chinese made FACG (Fast Attack Craft Gun), 0-24 Hefie with 2HY-2SSM.\(^\text{147}\) From 1987-91, Bangladesh received $335 million worth of arms from China\(^\text{148}\), which was 68% of the total arms procurement of Bangladesh in that period.

Though Ershad could manage to foster very close relationship with China, manifestly evident in their defense ties, subtle shift in political priorities from Chinese side took place in the later years of this period. Since the mid-eighties, after Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union, international relations in general and Sino-Soviet relations in particular, and the Sino-Indian relations, experienced steady transformations. This led to readjustment of political priorities in China’s Foreign Policy pursuits. After that China abandoned the strategy of supporting Bangladesh in her dispute with India. The

---

\(^\text{146}\) Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmed, n.124, p. 289.

\(^\text{147}\) *Asia Yearbook*, 1987, quoted in Chintamani Mahapatra, no. 158, p. 1422.

Chinese gave signal of this changed posture during Ershad’s March 1989 visit that they would no more support Bangladesh in the dispute of river water sharing with India, as the Chinese also changed their stand with regard to Kashmir issue.

During Ershad’s last visit to China on 29 June 1990, both countries signed three agreements and two exchanges of letters that covered new areas of cooperation, building of a bridge by China on the river Mohananda in northern Dinajpur District and institutionalizing of periodic cooperations between officials of foreign ministers of the two countries. In technical cooperation to exchange experts in scientific cooperation, data and personnel.149

After the fall of the Ershad regime in the wake of mass popular upheaval, the democratically elected BNP government of Begum Khaleda Zia came to power in early 1991. The new government in one of its first foreign policy moves reaffirmed Bangladesh’s commitment to further strengthen its ties with China. Begum Zia paid an official visit to Beijing in June 1991. During the visit, Chinese Premier Li Peng said: “China attaches great importance to the developments of its relations with Bangladesh and added that such relations will not be affected by any change in the international relations”.150 At the political level both countries continued to share identical views on matters related to international, regional and disarmament issues.

The Khaleda Zia government stressed the need for exploring newer avenues for economic cooperation with China in the light of changed circumstances. It granted more importance to liberalization and signed a trade protocol with China on 20 June 1991, which authorised the state trading corporations of both countries to import and export of fixed items from each other's territory. Bangladesh upheld another agreement in Economic and Technical fields and received interest free loans from China to develop its economy.\textsuperscript{151}

The liberalized policy followed by Bangladesh and China helped in further expansion of economic relations. Begum Khaleda accorded great importance to establish collaborative ventures and sought avenues in the Bangladeshi goods into Chinese market on bigger scale. In 1995, understanding reached between the two countries for China to import more commodities from Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{152} Though Bangladesh took serious measures to offset trade imbalance with China, but it failed to achieve its target and the trade imbalance which had reached at US $500 million, remained the same. Chinese export to Bangladesh whereas Bangladesh export to China remained only US $40 million.\textsuperscript{153} In order to promote economic relations with China, Bangladesh signed an agreement to avoid double taxation. Provisions were made in the agreement to avoid complexities relating to income

\textsuperscript{151} Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, \textit{Bangladesh Documents}, December 1990, June 91, pp. 35-38.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{The Daily}, 12 September 1996.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{The Morning Sun}, 16 September 1996.
tax and other allied taxes in income and investment of the nationals of both the countries.154

The military relations were further expanded with China and it remained major arms supplier to Bangladesh. The assurance was ensured during the visit of commander of Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to Bangladesh in May 1993 to continue all out cooperation of China to Bangladesh for building its defence sector in particular air force.155 Bangladesh also sought assistance from China in training facilities for its army officers.156

The Sasina Wajed government also made persistent efforts to expand its relations with China. In less than four weeks of her assumption of office of Prime Minister, Hasina sent Foreign Secretary, Farooq Sobhan to China. She chosed China as the first country for her official visit, which to a great extent, opened up a new horizon in political and economic cooperation between the two countries. To generate greater economic cooperation, both countries signed four agreements and a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU).157 The problems existing between the two countries were identical. Like Bangladesh and China suffered from over-population. Bangladesh stressed the need for increasing production, industrialization and commerce by utilizing the vast human resources.158 The Chinese government gave favourable response to Bangladesh and also

154 The Financial Express, 2 March 1996.
155 The Bangladesh Observer, 19 May 1993.
156 The Bangladesh Observer, 30 November 1993.
157 The Daily Star, 12 September 1996.
158 The Daily Star, 14 September 1996.
assured it of its continued support to Bangladesh to help beef up her economic development as well as defence.\textsuperscript{159} China continued to cooperate with Bangladesh in its development activities. On 18 October 1996, both countries signed two MOUs on setting up of phosphate and paper plants.\textsuperscript{160} Both countries signed accord for 5th friendship bridge over Gabkhan river.\textsuperscript{161} China also provided interest subsidized preferential loan of Yuan 200 million equivalent to US $24.15 million (Tk. 105.20 crores) and commodity grant of yuan 2 million (tk. 1.05 crore) to Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{162} China became the biggest buyer of Jute from Bangladesh in 1997. Upto 15 October 1997, China imported 2,21,000 bales of raw jute from Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{163} The Bangladesh Foreign Minister visited China in January 1999 and China signed an interest free US $24 million loan for the construction of an international convention hall for the holding of NAM Summit to be held in Bangladesh in March 2001.\textsuperscript{164} Bangladesh reiterated its ‘one China policy’ and considers Taiwan as an integral part of China.\textsuperscript{165}

Thus relations between Bangladesh and China are placed in firm foundations and committed to promote their ties further for their mutual benefit. Both countries’ relations have a dynamics of its own

\textsuperscript{159} The Morning Sun, 7 August 1996.

\textsuperscript{160} The Daily Star, 18 October 1996.

\textsuperscript{161} The Daily Star, 24 October 1997.

\textsuperscript{162} The Daily Star, 2 January 1998.

\textsuperscript{163} The Bangladesh Observer, 2 November 1997.

\textsuperscript{164} Bangladesh Foreign Policy Survey, vol. 5, no. 1, January-March 1999, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{165} The Bangladesh Observer, 22 July 1999.
and are likely to combine their efforts in developing it further adjusting it to the changing international and regional situation.

**Bangladesh-Japan Relations: Healthy and Harmonious**

Despite asymmetry in status and economic power, Japan-Bangladesh relations illustrated a successful and harmonious relations between a developed and a developing country. Relations between the two countries have to a great extent been aid and development oriented; nevertheless, their bilateral relations have developed over the years in other spheres and now encompass not only economic aspects but also cultural, political and diplomatic fields as well.

Bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Japan may be viewed to be based on historical roots. Bangladesh as a part of the region that credited Buddha has drawn Japanese attentions and visits for ages. As countries of Asia both may be viewed to be under the same broad cultural umbrella. Other similarities include high population density, frequent natural disasters, poor resource base and hence, historically proven resilience of both and survival capacity in adverse circumstances, dependence on foreign economic cooperation and, therefore, high external vulnerability.\(^\text{166}\) Both being resource-poor in terms of natural endowment, have to struggle against odds to sustain their economies and are vulnerable to the world economic fluctuations. There is a seeming commonality of their ideals as

---

reflected in the common portrayal of the 'rising sun' as an emblem in their respective national stage.\textsuperscript{167}

Japan was one of the first few countries that gave recognition to independent Bangladesh on 10 February 1972. The Japanese Embassy in Dhaka was opened on March 3, 1972 while Japan had its Consulate since 1953 in Dhaka, the then provincial capital of East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{168} The quick recognition followed by a grant of US $3 million for the relief and rehabilitation. Japan also contributed US $ 1 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to assist the repatriation of Bangladesh's trapped in Pakistan and vice versa. When Bangladesh was facing a severe shortage of cloth soon after independence, Japan sent 9,96,00,000 yards of cloth. Bangladesh also procured buses from Japan to tide over her transportation problem. Bangladesh imported rice from Japan under the food aid convention and on a long-term credit basis, which went a long way in meeting her food shortages.\textsuperscript{169} In fact, a solid foundation of lasting friendly relations between Bangladesh and Japan was laid down in the very first visit of the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1973. Japan agreed to provide Bangladesh with a commodity loan amounting to 900 crore Japanese Yen (31 million US dollars) on the softest terms ever accorded to any developing country.

The visit prepared grounds for discussions between the two countries to explore new avenues of cooperation in the fields of


\textsuperscript{168} \textit{The Bangladesh Observer}, 4 October 1992.

\textsuperscript{169} \textit{The Bangladesh Observer}, 21 February 1975.
agriculture, fertilizers, natural gas, petro-chemicals, bridge constructions etc. Therefore, 'a solid foundation for the lasting friendly relations between the two countries was laid.\textsuperscript{170}

With the opening of the new avenues of bilateral cooperation, Japan government continued to step up economic assistance to Bangladesh. During President Ziaur Rahman’s state visit to Japan in April 1978, both countries identified various areas of cooperation. These included development of gas resources, construction of roads and bridge construction power transmission lines and execution of some development projects. The Joint communiqué also took a note of the trade relations and promised to further extension.\textsuperscript{171}

Subsequently, the exchange of visits by the parliamentary leaders, political missions and policy makers contributed to the friendship and communication between the two countries enabled the leaders of both nations to exchange views on a broad range of subjects of common interests covering international and regional affairs and various matters of bilateral interest. The relations built up in this way were not at all eroded when Bangladesh decided in 1979 to contest the regional seat of the UN Security Council and defeated Japan to win it.\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{170} Morning News, 26 October 1973. Also see Morning News, 23 February 1975.

\textsuperscript{171} Bangladesh Observer, 19 April 1978, Also see Bangladesh Times, 10 April 1978.

\textsuperscript{172} Abdul Kalam, "Bangladesh and Japan: Linkages and Developing Relationships" cited in P.C. Jain, Distant Asian Neighbours: Japan and South Asia (New Delhi: 1996), p. 120.
There was a convergence of the two countries views on peaceful regional cooperation in South Asia. From the late 1970s, when Bangladesh initiated the idea of regional cooperation and promotion of harmony in South Asia, Japan welcomed it as ‘positive contribution’ to the stability of the region and to the welfare of the South Asian people, a development which was perceived as being consistent with Japan’s own regional objectives.\(^{173}\)

President Ershad visited Japan four times during his period and made all efforts to attract increased Japanese aid and investment to Bangladesh. The two countries conversed on a wide range of issues on bilateral regional and international spheres. Both of them tend to have similar outlook on the Cambodian problem, the Afghanistan situation, the Iran-Iraq conflict, the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait and on the Gulf War.\(^{174}\) Through the 1970s and 1980s, there was a convergence of their views on the Palestinian issue, as both sides emphasized, ‘prompt and complete’ implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, the complete withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem.\(^{175}\) The convergence in their views on such vital conflictual issues of international concern has helped the two countries to work in closer harmony.


\(^{174}\) Atur Rahman, Twenty Seven Years of Japan-Bangladesh Relations, Newsletter JSC, no. 1, April 1999, p. 2.

\(^{175}\) Abul Kalam, n. 172, p. 174.
The successful transition of Bangladesh to democratic system of governance in the late 1980s and in the beginning of 1990s respectively after almost two decades of military authoritarian rule was seen by Japan as a positive sign of change. To send an observation team to Bangladesh to monitor the 1991 general election indicated Japan’s concern for democratization. Japan began actively assisting the region to achieve economic reforms through a wide range of programmes from economic and social structure development to basic human needs programmes. It is also unique that during the last two and half decades Japan and Bangladesh consistently maintained friendly and good relations despite regime changes in both countries.

The democratization of Bangladesh gave a new impetus to Japan-Bangladesh relations and Japan became the largest donor to Bangladesh. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia invited the investors especially the foreign investors to seize opportunities offered by Bangladesh. Bangladesh recalled the generous assistance provided by Japan during the century's worst cyclone and tidal force in 1991.\textsuperscript{176} The basic tasks of the foreign policies of the two countries remained similar. Both of them were deeply committed to peace and stability of the Asian region sharing a similar international outlook and vision of a peaceful, non-nuclear world order with economic and environmental goals as the main priority in security considerations.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{176} The Bangladesh Observer, 6 April 1993.

\textsuperscript{177} Ataur Rahman, “Japan-Bangladesh Cooperation: Strategic Political and Economic Perspectives” a paper presented in International Seminar, Japan-South Asia Cooperation during the Post-Cold War Period, IIC, New Delhi, 8-10 March, 1999.
The fundamental determining factor for the development of Bangladesh-Japan relation is the country's need for aid and trade with the developed countries for its own development. Bilateral economic relations between Bangladesh and Japan have expanded, as outlined in the study of Bakht and Bhattacharya over three phases: first, an early stage of relief and rehabilitation for Bangladesh (1972-75); second, a decade of growth and mutual consolidation of the relationship (1975-85); and third, the emergence of Japan as a leading global donor (1986 onwards). The economic aspects of the Japan-Bangladesh relationship are clearly foremost. Here the relationship has taken three forms, Japanese aid for Bangladesh’s economic development; bilateral trade, and Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Bangladesh. Japan has offered tremendous amount of development assistance to Bangladesh in a range of areas. Bakht and Bhattacharya have shown that there have been some remarkable changes over the three stages of this donor-recipient relationship.

In the first phase during the first half of the 1970s, Japanese aid was marginal, largely in the form of food and commodities, representing respectively 4.2 per cent and 4.6 per cent of the total food and commodity aid received by Bangladesh. At that time 84 per cent of Japan’s food aid to Bangladesh was offered through loans. By comparison, a greater share of grant aid was delivered in the form of

commodities. As a percentage of total aid received by Bangladesh at that time, the total (net) flow of resources from Japan was 3.6 per cent, but even this amount of aid was then critical for Bangladesh, given its prevailing acute food shortage and famine cries (especially in 1974) and its highly unfavourable balance of payments position. There was no project assistance during the earliest phase. Japan was neither a major aid donor on a global scale, nor was it a major donor to Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{179} The second phase from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, saw a heavier flow of resources from Japan to Bangladesh, with greater provision of commodity aid and the emergence of project aid, both marginally supplemented by food aid. During the decade, Bangladesh and Japan moved to consolidate the relationships as development partner, although there were peaks and aid in the aid flows.

It is significant that Japan's emergence as a major aid donor to Bangladesh during that decade coincided well with Japan's commitment to provide "strategic aid" to countries considered important to the western alliance. During the second phase, the notion of "comprehensive security" flavoured all Japanese foreign policy concerns and external aid was very much part of that overarching outlook. It was thus to be expected that Bangladesh with its predominantly pro-west foreign policy posture would feature prominently as major recipient of Japanese foreign aid.\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., pp. 20-21.
\textsuperscript{180} P.C. Jain, n.172, p. 118.
The third phase of this relationship as development partners began in 1986-87 when Japan’s aid to Bangladesh was more than double of the previous years, increasing from 10.69 per cent to 20.87 per cent (over one-fifth) of the total amount of Japan’s Foreign aid. From then onward, Japan has consistently emerged as the single largest donor to Bangladesh annually. By this stage Japan had already emerged as the world’s second largest economy. During the third phase, the project component of the aid package became the dominant feature and the share of loans vis-à-vis grants, also registered an increase.

The fourth phase of Japan-Bangladesh economic cooperation began from 1992 when Bangladesh came under democratic rule. The democratization of Bangladesh gave a new impetus to Japan’s economic assistance. In June 1992, the cumulative total of Japanese Official Development Assistance (JODA) committed to Bangladesh had reached about $5 billion earning Japan the position of number one donor to the country.\(^\text{181}\)

Trade and commerce between Japan and Bangladesh have also been on the increase since the relationship began. Though formerly in second position, Japan emerged as the sixth biggest export market for Bangladesh. The main export items to Japan are [i] food and live animals, including shrimps and prawns fish (frozen and dry) and frogs, legs; [ii] manufactured goods, including jute products, particularly

carpet backing, jute yarn and jute bags, leather raw jute and naphtha (under mineral fuels and lubricants).

From the mid-1970s to 1990, the volume of exports from Bangladesh to Japan experienced a threefold increase. As for imports after Singapore, Japan is the second most important source of Bangladesh’s imports. The main import items from Japan are machinery and transport equipment, manufactured goods, chemicals and chemical products. Imports from Japan to Bangladesh have risen at a far greater rate than exports from Bangladesh to Japan. The share of Bangladesh’s import from Japan as a proportion of its total imports has declined from 13.2 per cent in 1990 to 5.9 per cent in 1997. Bangladesh’s export to Japan had never reached a respected figure. It was for example $72 million in 1994 compared to the overall trade of Bangladesh. A comparative context of Bangladesh trade relations shows that Bangladesh continues to suffer from a large negative balance of trade with Japan every year as import from Japan has been consistently four to five times higher than the exports to Japan.¹⁸²

The growth of Bangladesh’s trade imbalance with Japan has been matched by the latter’s rise as the country’s largest source of foreign investment and aid. Japan is ahead of any other country in terms of private foreign investment in Bangladesh followed by UK and US. Bangladesh-Japan trade relation came under the spotlight with the coming of Awami League government headed by Sheikh Hasina Wajed in later quarter of 1996. She called for the relocation of Japanese manufacturing units in Bangladesh with feed back

¹⁸² Ataur Rahman, n. 174, p. 4.
arrangements. During her visit to Japan in July 1997, she called upon the Japanese entrepreneurs to invest in textile and other labour intensive industries and set up a private export processing zone for Japan in Bangladesh.

During the 20 year period of 1976-77 to 1995-96, Japan’s share in the total foreign investment in the engineering sector was as high as 62 per cent, 44 per cent in the chemicals and pharmaceutical sector and 14 per cent of the total foreign investment in the textile sector. The Japanese investors have also showed interest in the harnessing of natural resources like gas in Bangladesh. The meeting between the government of Bangladesh and Japanese investors in February 1999 yielded some fruitful results. They called upon the Japanese investors to set up an industrial park near Bangladesh Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB). Japanese investors have also shown keen interest in agro-based and small and medium scale industries. On the other hand, the Bangladesh Japan Joint Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation (JCCEC), joint forum of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Japan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has been negotiating on the possibility of forming alliances for setting up Small and Marginal Enterprises (SMEs) in Bangladesh. In future, broadening of the industrial base and diversification of products may help Bangladesh

reduce the prevailing trade deficit. Export of developed human resources also may help reduce the trade deficit.

Cooperation between the two countries in the realm of **culture** has been under way officially, however, since the late 1970s. In February 1982, a cultural agreement was signed between the two governments to develop closer cooperation in educational and cultural fields. Japan has over the years provided educational equipment and materials to secondary schools, universities, museums and institutes art. It supported sports and provided equipment for the same as well as conducted cultural activities of various types.

We can conclude that despite asymmetry in status and economic power, Japan-Bangladesh relations illustrate a successful cooperation between a developed and a developing country. The common goals that Japan and Bangladesh share in political, strategic and economic spheres have transcended many inhibiting factors of language, distance and differences in power potentials. In fact, by all indicators, Japan has become a key factor in Bangladesh’s economic, political and social transformations.