CHAPTER IV

BANGLADESH AND ISLAMIC COUNTRIES
For a country like Bangladesh, which is the second largest Muslim country of the world, a substantial part of whose population (about 87 per cent) is Muslim; there is little option but to take Islam into consideration when formulating its policies, whether internal or external.\(^1\) The foreign policy of Bangladesh is significantly known for its close linkages with the Islamic countries, which is characterized as an emerging political and economic force to reckon with. This aspect of Bangladesh's foreign policy is unique for several reasons. The geopolitical reality of Bangladesh does not necessitate her closeness with the Islamic countries including Pakistan. Nonetheless, Bangladesh is having closer ties with the Islamic countries. Particularly during the period 1975-96, its relations with these Islamic countries acquired a new dimension and significance within the general frame of Bangladesh's objective of diversifying and balancing her external relations. It has also been considered that consolidation and promotion of cooperation with them could be potential source of enormous strength to Bangladesh. This may also and open up new possibilities of mutually beneficial economic cooperation through a well-planned mix of the surplus funds of oil-rich Muslim countries with the abundant labour force available in Bangladesh.

The evolution of Bangladesh's foreign policy with regard to the Muslim countries is divided into two phases. The first phase began with the emergence of Bangladesh in December 1971 and ended in August 1975. The second phase began in the post-August 1975 and

it still continues. Bangladesh’s relations with Pakistan have been taken up in this chapter.

**A Reactionary Overview of Islamic Countries Toward Bangladesh**

Bangladesh’s liberation movement was product of the ethno-lingual nationalism, the basis of which was language and culture. Islamic countries perceived it as negation of Islamic ideology or disowning of Muslim identity\(^2\), despite the fact that Bangladesh had a majority of Muslim population. Most of the Muslim countries raised deep suspicion about the legitimacy of Bangladesh’s Liberation Movement. They perceived the creation of Bangladesh as a dismemberment of Pakistan and an attempt to divide the Islamic world. During the liberation war of Bangladesh, Iran, the Arab states of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and the Persian Gulf, gave their diplomatic and political support to Pakistan while other Arab states such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Algeria remained neutral and indifferent.\(^3\) The total support by the then Soviet Union and an early recognition of Bangladesh by Israel also created wide misperceptions in these countries. Furthermore, the role of India, its involvement in the war of independence and the presence of Indian troops in Bangladesh also made many of them suspicious.\(^4\) After the emergence of Bangladesh, no special place was given to Islamic ideology in the formulation of state policy. Constitutionally emphasis

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 306-7.


was placed on secularism by declaring it as a state principle, which displeased many Islamic countries.

Not all the Islamic states did, however, hold similar views in regard to the independence of Bangladesh. There were the Arab countries who expressed sympathy and supported the movement in various direct and indirect ways, while countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Libya categorically refused to establish any relation with Bangladesh at the initial stage, others including Iraq, Algeria, South Yemen and Egypt sympathized with the people of Bangladesh and extended support in multiple ways. However, the formal recognition of Bangladesh was delayed even by the supporting Arab countries due to prevailing misperception.

Bangladesh desperately needed Middle Eastern petrodollars as much as the Arab states wanted support from the second largest Muslim nation, the ice thawed only by mutual understanding of needs. Bangladesh began sincere efforts to project herself adequately in the Arab world. Special envoys were sent and many leaders from Arab countries were invited to visit Bangladesh. On January 4, 1972, a four-member delegation headed by Mollah Jalaluddin visited Cairo to attend the Afro-Asian solidarity conference. On the occasion of Algiers NAM Summit of 1973, Mujibur-Rahman mustered all strength to get support from Muslim countries. Therefore, the efforts made by Bangladesh soon began to

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bring dividends and by the end of 1973, Bangladesh got recognition from as many as 15 Arab countries.\footnote{Kamal Hossain, "Bangladesh's Sovereignty and Independent Non-Aligned Foreign Policy", \textit{Man and Development}, vol. 7, no. 4, Dec. 1985, p. 1972. For more details also see, Nurul Momen, Bangladesh: The First Four Years (From 16 December 1971 to 15 December 1975), (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, 1975), pp. 181-84.}

In immediate post-independence era, Bangladesh had to face formidable political and economic challenges both internally and externally. In order to consolidate the national independence, and rehabilitate and reconstruct the war ravaged economy and to set up the pace of economic and social development, the country needed national cohesion, political stability and undisrupted flow of external aid. Thus, Bangladesh had to take initiative to broaden its external support base by developing relations with all Islamic countries. A number of reasons are given below for placing high priority to the Islamic countries.

First, the unprecedented price hike of oil in 1973 followed by the worldwide recession made the international aid scenario bleak. Almost during the same period the oil rich Arab countries, emerged as potential donors to provide aid to the least developed countries, particularly to the fellow Muslim countries like Bangladesh, it was felt that the development of relations with the Arab countries might ease the economic hardships of the new state and therefore looked towards the Arab world as possible donors who could meet a significant part of its massive aid requirements. Secondly, Bangladesh wanted to enhance her international prestige and position by getting recognition from a significant number of countries
and becoming members of various international organizations, bodies, including the organization of the Islamic conference for which strong Arab support was required. Thirdly, Bangladesh had a number of unresolved problems with Pakistan, including repatriation and division of assets. Considering the Islamic countries influence over Pakistan, Bangladesh wanted to seek Arab assistance in resolving those issues.Fourthly, the oil boom in early 1970s accelerated economic activities in many Arab countries and the region turned as one of the lucrative markets for labour, both skilled and unskilled. Many Third World countries started exporting their manpower to this part of the world and Bangladesh with her huge unused labour force looked to the Middle East as a potential, market for employment of its citizens and for earning urgently needed foreign exchange. Lastly, on the domestic front, there was a growing demand on the part of the traditional Muslims for developing good relations with Arab countries stemming from shared religious and cultural values which the government could not ignore.\(^8\)

As a result Islamic countries emerged as an important factor in Bangladesh foreign policy and became a major preoccupation for Bangladesh policy makers.

**Evolution of Diplomatic Ties: The Gradual Rise**

Although from the very beginning of its emergence, Bangladesh drew attention of the international community and within one year of Independence got recognition from about one hundred countries. But the support from the Muslim countries was

\(^8\) G. Mustafa, n. 6, p. 40.
discouraging. Up to the end of 1972 among the Arab countries, only Iraq and Yemen recognized Bangladesh.⁹

Communication was also made with Iraq, South Yemen and Algeria. In December 1972, Bangladesh signed a Barter Agreement of Taka 18 crore with Egypt, [although Egypt had not yet formally recognized Bangladesh]. The visit of Hassanein Heikal, Chairman, Board of Editors of Al Akram, Hassan al-Zyyat, the Egyptian Foreign Minister and Mohamed Yazid, Special Envoy of the Algerian President to Bangladesh in early 1973 were an important event in initiating new avenues for Bangladesh in the Arab world.¹⁰

The participation of Mujib-ur-Rahman at the Fourth Summit Conference of NAM held in Algiers in September 1973 was, in fact, a landmark in enunciating Bangladesh’s relation with Islamic countries. Sheikh Mujib made personal calls on King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, President Sadat of Egypt, Col. Gaddafi of Libya and the Lebanese Prime Minister which resulted in what might be called the melting of the ice. These diplomatic attempts helped in removing many earlier misgivings about Bangladesh. Soon after the Algiers Summit, two important Arab countries, Egypt and Syria, recognized Bangladesh.¹¹

The outbreak of the fourth Arab-Israeli war in October 1973 created an opportunity for Bangladesh to express its solidarity with the Arab people. Bangladesh strongly condemned the Israeli aggression and sent 100,000 pounds of tea to Egypt and Syria as ‘a

⁹ Nurul Momen, n.7, p. 183.
token of love" to "the Arab brethren", followed by a medical team sent to Syria to aid the war victims. The support of Bangladesh in Arab-Israel war and its strong stand for the Arab cause received wider Arab recognition and subsequently Jordan, Kuwait and North Yemen recognized Bangladesh. In fact, by the end of 1973, Bangladesh was able to earn Arab confidence and to improve her relations with the Arab world significantly. In his address to the nation on the Victory Day [16 December] of 1973, Sheikh Mujib mentioned, "during the recent Arab-Israeli war, Bangladesh extended a helping hand as comrades-in arms to the Arabs, following which the people of the Arab world have accepted Bangladesh as a true friend."

The main development of this phase was Bangladesh’s inclusion into the World Islamic Body, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its participation at the Second Islamic Summit Conference at Lahore in 1974. Bangladesh expressed her solidarity with the Islamic world and unequivocally supported the Arab and Palestinian cause. Bangladesh became a founder member of the Islamic Development Bank. These efforts resulted in the visit of high-powered economic delegations from Kuwait and UAE (United Arab Emirates). In the homeland Bangladesh received assurances of economic assistance from these countries.

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14 The Bangladesh Observer, August 18 and November 4, 1974.
On the eve of the Islamic Summit in Lahore, Bangladesh was recognized by Pakistan, Iran and Turkey and later on, by Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman. In fact, after the Lahore Conference, Bangladesh maintained wider connections with the Arab countries. Since 1974, the Arab countries even those who had not yet recognized Bangladesh, displayed considerable softer attitude toward it and were inclined to develop economic relations too. During the devastating floods in 1974, Saudi Arabia donated $10 million as disaster relief to Bangladesh, although it was not yet recognized by the former.\(^\text{15}\)

**Intensification of Political and Economic Relations**

The abrupt change of Mujib government in August 1975 started the beginning of the second phase in Bangladesh’s relations with the Islamic countries. The replacement of the Awami League government by a military junta headed Zia-ur-Rahman had a major impact on Bangladesh’s foreign policy towards Islamic countries.

After assuming power in early November 1975, Zia-ur-Rahman made sincere efforts to establish and maintain more meaningful relations with Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia. Recognition by Muslim countries was thought to be necessary and essential for the military regime, for reasons of both domestic and external legitimacy. Under Zia’s directions, Bangladesh in a slow and

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\(^\text{15}\) *Times of India*, 20 August 1974.
steady pace was able to establish her position as a prestigious member of the Islamic community.\textsuperscript{16}

For improving political relations with Muslim countries, under the regime of Zia-ur-Rahman, necessary legal and administrative changes were brought in the constitution,\textsuperscript{17} to give it an Islamic orientation. A new clause was added to Article 25 of the 1972 Constitution related to external relations, expressing solidarity with fraternal Muslim countries. The clause read:

"The State shall endeavor to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity."\textsuperscript{18}

In 1976 and July 1977, President Zia-ur-Rahman visited various countries in the region, beginning with Saudi Arabia. The talks held indicated an identity of views on many of the issues bearing the political and economic interests not only of the Islamic countries but also of the world community in general.

Thereafter, visits at different levels became common phenomenon in Bangladesh's relations with the Islamic countries. Bangladesh also received crucial support from the Arab and Islamic world during crucial times. For example, when Bangladesh contested for the Security Council seat her candidature was supported and

\textsuperscript{17} Zillur Rahman Khan, "Leadership, Political Parties and Politics in Bangladesh", \textit{Western Political Quarterly}, vol.29, no.1, (March 1976), pp.100-115.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
endorsed by the 9th Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference held in Dakar in 1978. Especially, Saudi Arabia not only lent her full support to Bangladesh, the Saudi permanent representative to the United Nations also actively lobbied for Bangladesh.

Syria too fully backed Bangladesh in winning the election to the UN Security Council in 1978. Subsequently, in the quadrangular contest for the presidency of the UN General Assembly in 1981, Syria, one of the four candidates, [namely Bangladesh, Iraq, Syria and Singapore] finally withdrew in favour of Bangladesh [though Bangladesh lost the election to Iraq].

Among the other Muslim countries with whom close relations were built up through high level visits and contacts were Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, UAE, Morocco, Libya, Senegal, Guinea, Gambia and Mali. They were generous towards Bangladesh in assistance after the serious devastation caused by floods in 1979.

The strengthening of political relations with Egypt was also given due priority, which proved to be source of significant strength to Bangladesh politically in view of the esteem enjoyed by her in the Non-Aligned Movement [of which Egypt was a founder-member] and in other internal forums.

The efforts were also made to improve relations with Algeria. It was in Algeria that concept of the NIEO was first mooted at the Non-Aligned Summit in 1973. Algeria was also elected Chairman of the Group of 77 in 1981. It was thought that the cooperation of

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19 Iftekhar A. Chowdury, n.12, p. 249.
Islamic countries could enhance the path of mutual beneficial cooperation with its favorable impact on “South-South cooperation”.

Bangladesh also showed grave concern over the hostilities that broke out between Iran and Iraq in September 1980 because of her close relations with both the countries. At the Third Islamic Summit in Taif in January 1981, Bangladesh proposed concrete measures to bring about an immediate cessation of hostilities and an amicable and honourable settlement of the dispute in accordance with the international law.\(^{20}\) As a member of the Islamic Peace Committee to end the Iran-Iraq war and in her individual capacity Bangladesh continued her efforts to end the hostilities that had been continuing for more than five years.

While widening and deepening bilateral cooperation with the Arab countries and expanding bilateral cooperation with them in all fields, Bangladesh also laid special emphasis on strengthening of the OIC and enlarging its scope of functions so as to include cooperation not only in the cultural and economic fields but also in the political arena and initiated the proposal for setting up a political committee.\(^{21}\) It played a constructive role in building up many of the OIC institutions. The establishment in Dhaka of the Islamic Centre for Vocational Training and Research\(^{22}\) was the outcome of


Bangladesh initiative. Just as in the case of Pakistan, Islam was then also reiterated in Bangladesh to offer "new opportunities as much as it satisfied old desires."\textsuperscript{23} It reinforced the requirements of national interest in terms of ideological bonds of security insurance, providing perhaps a cultural umbrella or the safety of a value valve.\textsuperscript{24}

During General Ershad period [1982-91], Bangladesh continued to consolidate its political relations with the countries of the Islamic world. 'Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim' (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the merciful) was added under the Article 8 of Constitution.\textsuperscript{25} Islam was declared as state religion of Bangladesh. Ershad made his first visit abroad to Saudi Arabia in May 1982. Bangladesh's efforts to project its Islamic identity were reflected in the hosting of the Fourteenth Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference in Dhaka from December 6-10, 1983. This was the first international conference of such stature held in Bangladesh. A number of state dignitaries from Muslim countries visited Bangladesh during 1986. The Khalida Zia government also accorded great importance to maintaining relations with Islamic countries particularly in the economic field. The emphasis was laid on strengthening of the relationship with the Muslim World on the basis of 'Ummah' in order to accelerate the pace of peace, progress and development.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} Shirin Tahir Kheli, "In Search of An Identity: Islam and Pakistan's Foreign Policy" cited in Abdul Kalam (ed.), n.1, p. 308.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
Economic Relations: Pivot of Progress

While developing political relations, Bangladesh gave more emphasis to intensify its economic relations with all Muslim countries, particularly with the oil-rich countries. In fact, with the development of political relations more economic aid came from them. During Mujib-ur-Rahman period, economic relations with these Muslim countries remained far from satisfactory. Till 1974-75, there was absence of food aid, project and non-project aid from any Muslim country. It was only with the change of regime in 1975 that economic relations were improved.

Zia-ur-Rahman gave top priority to develop-economic relations with these Muslim countries, particularly with oil-rich Arab countries, which emerged as a major source of external assistance to Bangladesh. As the Ministry of Planning acknowledged in 1978, that a new group of donors had emerged in the recent past in the Middle East, assistance from the OPEC sources has also been increasing substantially.\textsuperscript{27} According to external resources division during 1971-78, the OPEC countries [Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates] disbursed a total aid of $186.3 million to Bangladesh [grants plus loans].\textsuperscript{28} In June 1980 aid from the OPEC sources totalled $38.6 million, while in Ershad era, till June 1984 the amount-increased up to $745.9 million. The important

\textsuperscript{27} Seven Years of External Assistance to Bangladesh, External Resources Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh (Dhaka: June 1978), p. 3. Cited in Md. G. Mostafa, n.6, p.44.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 35.
characteristic of aid received from OPEC countries is that major share of the aid comes as grants.

The improvement in economic relations with these countries played a crucial role in the creation of employment opportunities for the Bangladeshis abroad. These countries have emerged as the most potential importers of Bangladeshi manpower. In fact, the some countries provided a wide market for Bangladeshi Labourers both skilled and unskilled. With the increasing outflow of manpower, remittances also increased significantly. In 1976, the total remittance was only 36 crore taka, while for 1983, the amount was about 1,581 crore taka, i.e., an increase of about 44 times. At the end of 1984, the total remittances amounted to taka 5826.6 crore and turned as the second largest contributor to foreign exchange earnings next to Jute. 29

By 1982-83, the remittance almost equalled the value of total merchandise export of Bangladesh and came closer to half the total of foreign aid received. 30 These countries have also gradually become important outlets for Bangladeshi exports and major sources of its imports, as well as development activities. The most important importers of Bangladeshi goods are Iraq, Kuwait, KSA and the UAE. These four countries together accounted for about 90 per cent of the country's export to the region in 1987-1988. The exports to these countries include non-traditional items such as fish, and fish

29 Bangladesh Observer, December 5, 1985.
preparations, fruits and vegetables, cigarettes, feature films and newspapers and periodicals.

More than 800,000 Bangladeshis migrated to these countries till December 1990. Of the total remittances of over Tk. 25 billion, equivalent to more than US $120 million, received by Bangladesh in 1990, about 69 per cent came from the Middle Eastern countries alone. Bangladesh meets 98 per cent of its cash imports from remittances.\(^{31}\)

The remittances also afford considerable support to the balance of payments of Bangladesh. For the financial year 1981-82, about 20 per cent of total import of the country came under Wage Earner's Scheme.\(^{32}\) As the overwhelming majority of the Bangladeshi workers are employed in various Arab countries, Middle East plays an important role in getting remittances. More than 75 per cent of total remittances that the country receives comes from the Middle East countries.

As Bangladesh's prime preoccupation in her foreign policy towards Islamic countries was to ensure the inflow of more aid and to increase the remittances by seeking more jobs for her nationals, the trade sector was either neglected or did not get adequate attention. Bangladesh's trade with the high income oil exporting countries [Oman, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the UAE] is very negligible.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 50.
In 1982, the merchandise exports from Bangladesh to these countries constituted only one per cent of the total export.\(^{33}\)

However, initiatives at different levels were taken to increase the volume of trade with different Arab countries. And as a consequence economic ties have been expanded. Upto 1975, Bangladesh had joint economic commissions only with Iraq, but now Bangladesh has such commissions with a number of important Middle East countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, Bangladesh has signed general technical or economic and technical cooperation agreements with Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran.\(^{34}\)

During the Gulf War (1990–1991), when Iraq occupied Kuwait, Bangladesh supported Kuwait and sent its troops to fight against Iraq. Inspite of the later being the first Arab country to recognize the independent Bangladesh on 8 July 1972.\(^{35}\) A brief retrospect of Bangladesh-Iraq relationship shows that Iraq remained the frontrunner in the economic and political agenda of the Bangladesh.

Among the Middle East countries, Iraq remained the most important trading partner of Bangladesh, in terms of exports. Of the total exports to the Middle East countries as of 1987-88, some 45 per cent went to Iraq. In the case of tea, while the Middle East as a whole imported about 5 per cent of the country’s total export, about

\(^{34}\) *Bangladesh Observer*, 11 December 1984.

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88 per cent of this was due to Iraq alone. Iraq, until the Gulf War of 1990-91 was also the most important importer of jute and jute products from Bangladesh. Almost all the jute items such as woven jute fabric sackings, carpet backing, cloth, and Hessian bags going to the Middle East were also imported by Iraq. Bangladesh tilted towards Iraq during the last couple of years of the Iran-Iraq war [1980-88]. A major shift in this policy became visible when Bangladesh took a stand against Iraq by sending its 5000 troops to Saudi Arabia in support of the international alliance under the banner of the United Nations [UN] and the leadership of the United States in the wake of Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. This move in the foreign policy of Bangladesh demonstrated some leanings towards Kuwait. To an extent the increased economic assistance from Saudi Arabia and the United States influenced the stand taken by Bangladesh during the Gulf crisis. Therefore the principles of peaceful settlement of disputes and renunciation of force were compromised when Bangladesh sent its troops.\textsuperscript{36} This was the first ever instance when Bangladesh played a very active role in an international crisis. Bangladesh’s foreign policy made it clear that open aggression made by Iraq was totally unacceptable both in principle and practice. Annexation of Kuwait by Iraq was an open violation of the important principles of Bangladesh’s foreign policy.

Bangladesh had even closer relations, including aid dependency, with Kuwait. More than 70,000 of its citizens were

employed there before the Gulf crisis. It was a major source of remittance amounting to US $94.40 million in the fiscal year 1988-89. About 12% of Bangladesh's foreign exchange earnings in the form of remittance came from the savings of Bangladeshis in Kuwait. Total losses suffered by Bangladesh due to the Gulf crisis, as estimated by the IMF, amounted to US $600 million. The losses, however, were not confined to these areas alone. Bangladesh also suffered severely from the Gulf crisis in the form of the return of a large number of Bangladeshis working in the Gulf, their repatriation costs and sharp reduction in the remittances. Trade relations with Iraq and those with Kuwait remained suspended. Both were major importers of Bangladeshi goods. As a whole the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), accounted for over 45% of the total of remittance sent to Bangladesh by its workers abroad in 1988-89, financial year, Bangladesh earned about 770 million dollars from remittance sent by its workers in the Gulf countries, contributing 3.7% to its GDP.

Evidently, the hardest hit by the Gulf war were the Third World oil importing countries and those, which had the largest number of expatriates in the Middle East. Bangladesh was no exception and had faced economic losses. The adverse impact of the Gulf crisis on

40 Ishtiaq, Hossain, n.38.
remittance had severe consequences for Bangladesh with regard to savings and investment gaps.

Ershad government's stand towards the crisis evoked sharp criticism by opposition parties. They accused the government of violating the constitution in sending troops abroad without approval of the Parliament. They also demanded the pullout of Iraqi troops from Kuwait as well as all foreign troops from the Gulf region including Saudi Arabia. In the sixth summit of the OIC, which was held in December 1991, Bangladesh drew the attention of member states on the developments outside the Islamic world like the collapse of Communism, end of the cold war and the emergence United Europe. It emphasised on consolidating ties among all member states in order to strengthen the OIC. Bangladesh also proposed an action plan on setting up an Islamic market, to continue to assist the National disaster prone Muslim countries, to involve the women in the Islamic countries and security of children. All these proposals were accepted in the summit.

During the Begum Khalida Zia's period (1991-96), Bangladesh's relations with the Islamic countries were given top priority. Khalida Zia visited Kuwait and Saudi Arabia on her very first official foreign tour. Saudi Arabia emerged as the sixth largest bilateral donor to Bangladesh in 1993. The export of manpower from Bangladesh to Saudi Arabia continues to dominate the bilateral programs. By the end of 1993 more than half a million Bangladeshi

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41 Bangladesh Observer, 6 September 1990.
42 Bangladesh Observer, 4 December, 1991, Also see, Bangladesh Observer, 9, 12, 13 December, 1991.
had been working in Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{43} Saudi Arabia had also shown its interest to provide economic assistance in the different projects of sub-regional cooperation in the south Asian region.

Bangladesh has also set up a joint economic commission with a number of Islamic countries. Iran is one of these which was neglected by the earlier regimes. During Khalida Zia’s period Iran, emerged as one of the biggest buyer of Bangladesh’s jute goods. Vegetable exports had grown from 10,000 tons in 1994-95, to 500 tonnes in 1989-90.\textsuperscript{44} During Iranian president Rafsanjani’s visit to Bangladesh in October 1995 eight accords were signed including a tripartite agreement on transit with Turkmenistan in order to cement bilateral relations’ through economic cooperation.\textsuperscript{45} Further during the third joint economic commission held in 1998, Iran agreed to provide Bangladesh the transit facilities for exporting goods through Iran to a third country, particularly the CIS. Other areas of economic cooperation included setting up of a joint business council, a tea industry in Bangladesh and avoidance of double taxation and investment protection. It was also agreed to sign a bilateral shipping agreement.\textsuperscript{46}

Infact, Bangladesh relations with Islamic countries assumed multifaceted character. The emphasis was continued on further collaboration in the field of industry, trade, manpower and technical cooperation in order to optimise benefits from the elements of

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Bangladesh Observer}, 23 September, 1993.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Dialogue}, 5 November, 1993.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Bangladesh Foreign Policy Survey}, Vol.4, No.1, January-March, 1998, p.17.
complementarity with all Islamic countries. Due importance was given to identified projects both in private and public sectors which were to be financed through joint venture or assistance from these countries. The economic diplomacy was introduced in order to strengthen development programmes through aid and manpower imports.

Beside the historical bond between Bangladesh and the Islamic countries based on religion, the efforts made by Bangladesh in its political and economic, relations reflect that a great importance was given to these countries. Therefore, in the backdrop of historical bondage, the period under study witnessed further intensification of the relationship between Bangladesh and the Islamic countries.

**Bangladesh and Pakistan: Islamic Fraternity**

In this section of the chapter a detailed study of Bangladesh Policy with regard Pakistan has been summarized. The historical roots binding the two countries together have been traced. A brief review of factors that led to separation of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), from Pakistan is also given along with study of relations between the two countries in Mujib period. An effort is also made to highlight both the contentious bilateral issues that remained the key areas of dispute and cooperation, which governed the bilateral relations between the two countries, during the period under study (1975-96).

Here, the evolution of Bangladesh’s relation with Pakistan has to be seen against the background of the relationship that existed

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47 *Bangladesh Observer*, 29 October 1993.

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between the East and West Pakistan prior to the Pakistan. A closer look on West Pakistan's policies of economic, social, political towards East Pakistan showed that it was being ill treated.

A Historical Backdrop

With the partition of India in 1947, the Muslim majority areas in the North-East and North-West of India were brought together to form the state of Pakistan, comprising of two geographically incontiguous units, East Pakistan and West Pakistan. These two units were like two islands separated by nearly 4,800 kilometers of sea route of Indian Ocean and by 1,600 kilometers of Indian territory of land route.

Apart from this unique geographic separation of these two wings of Pakistan there was hardly any other thing in common, except religion. Even that had its different shades. The nature of relationship between these two wings were based on the pattern of an imperial power and colony. It was pointed out by Sheikh Mujib Ur Rahman in 1971, "even 200 years ruled by the colonial British could not exploit the people to such an extent, as the unchallenged exploitation of this wing (East Pakistan) of the country, during the last twenty years by the vested interests from West Pakistan".

Instead of evolving a democratic structure and viable socio-economic order, in which the people of both East and West Pakistan

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could live together as equal partners, the highly centralised governments led by West Pakistan, resorted to a systematic exploitation of the eastern wing. Therefore, the eastern wing naturally lost faith in the west Pakistan's central authority.\(^{51}\)

East Pakistan was underrepresented in the parliamentary representation against the provision of equal representation of each wing embedded in the of 1956 constitution. It was also under represented in the civil and military services. The economic policy of Pakistan was unfavourable for East Pakistan, which was biggest source of foreign exchange of Pakistan but the former had only a negligible share in it. The efforts were made even to undo the distinct Bengali culture of East Pakistan. This colonial attitude of West Pakistan greatly strengthened regionalist feeling in East Pakistan, it was out of this feeling that Bangladesh nationalism was born.\(^{52}\)

The emergence of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971, out of a civil war with Pakistan left profound impact on Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy towards Pakistan in the initial years. The attitude of Pakistan was stiff because of which it refused to grant recognition to Bangladesh. Bangladesh also categorically ruled out any possibility to


hold any talks on bilateral issues with Pakistan unless it recognised its sovereign status.

**A Formative Phase: Hurdles and Heights**

The recognition came only on 22 February 1974, that was a day before the second summit of OIC. Subsequently, a tripartite agreement between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh was signed on April 9, 1974, which brought to an end the problems of POWs (Prisoners of War) left over by the war of 1971. Bangladesh dropped the trial of the 195 Pakistani POWs, and Pakistan agreed to accept all the four categories of non Bengalis as specified in Indo-Pakistan agreement of August 28, 1973 (the issue of repatriation has been separately dealt on p.220). Though, it resulted in visit of Pakistan’s Prime Minister to Bangladesh on June 27, 1974. The talks on disputed issues, however, did not make any tangible headway.

Thereafter, Pakistan gave up opposition to Bangladesh’s membership of the United Nation, and China did to exercise veto on this case. On June 10, 1974, Bangladesh was admitted to the United Nations.

In fact, until the fall of Mujib regime in 1975, multiple socio-economic and political problems as well as disputes remained to which prevented the establishment of diplomatic relations between them.

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53 A final agreement was signed known as Delhi Agreement. According the agreement all POWs except 195 charged by the government of Bangladesh and 203 Bengalees by Pakistan was kept in (abeyances). A massive three-way repatriation programme started on 19 September 1973 which continued till April 1974 when the repatriation of the POWs and the Bengalees to their respective destination was completed.
In the post Mujib era, Pakistan emerged as the most important neighbouring Islamic country to Bangladesh. Pakistan was the first country to recognise and support the new government after the violent change of regime in August 1975. The new regime under the leadership of Khondakar Mushtaq Ahmed hinted to Bhutto for opening a "new chapter" in relationship with Pakistan. Reciprocating the new move of Mushtaq's government, Bhutto in a statement on 16 August 1975, announced that Pakistan would despatch to Bangladesh 50,000 tons of rice, 10 million yards of long cloths and 5 million yards of bleached mull as a gesture of friendship.\(^{54}\)

Virtually, the decision to establish diplomatic relations came to reality on January 3, 1976 when Bangladesh's Ambassador to Pakistan, Zakiruddin, presented his credentials to the President of Pakistan. As a reciprocal gesture, Pakistan's ambassador to Bangladesh, M. Khurshid, reached Dhaka on January 12, 1976.

A new phase of relations between the two countries ushered in following the 1977 Pakistan visit by President Ziaur Rahman. At a banquet hosted in honour of the visiting President of Bangladesh, Fazl Elahi Chaudhuri, President of Pakistan stated.

"We sincerely welcome any steps taken to settle standing issues between the two countries of the region... Recent high level contacts between us have further strengthened our conviction that, with goodwill on both sides, we can evolve a lasting and mutually beneficial relationship which will

contribute immeasurably toward the strengthening of peace and stability in the region".\textsuperscript{55}

In the similar tone President Zia Ur Rahman reciprocated.

"We, in Bangladesh, feel that the strengthening of relations between our two countries will continue significantly to peace and stability in the South Asian sub-continent and also the cause of Islamic solidarity. We further believe that our shared heritage rooted in faith, culture and history provides an added source of strength to the relations between our two peoples. This together with common concern and effort for improving the quality of the life of our peoples constitutes a firm basis for close cooperation between the two countries.\textsuperscript{56}

In his view, strengthening of relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan became inevitable in order to maintain peace and stability in the South Asian subcontinent and to serve the cause of Islamic solidarity and brotherhood. This was reflected in the congruence of stands taken by the two countries on various international issues. Zia Ur Rahman categorically upheld Pakistan stand with regard to the Palestine issue and condemned apartheid and colonialism in South Africa.\textsuperscript{57} After the Soviet entry into Afghanistan, Zia Ur Rahman defended Pakistan stand and described


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Surendra Nath Kaushik, Pakistan’s Relations with Bangladesh: An overview of the Perception of the leaders of the two countries”, cited in S.R. Chakravarty and V. Narain (ed.) \textit{Bangladesh: Global Politics III} (New Delhi, 1988), p.163.
it as a threat to the stability and security of the entire South Asian region. Pakistan also supported the Bangladeshi stand on Farakka issue when it was taken to the UN in 1976.

Bangladesh-Pakistan bilateral relations began to bloom on different planes. A series of agreements were signed between the two countries which structurally determined the scope of cooperation between them. There had been no direct trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan till 1975, it only took off in April 1976. Telecommunication links through satellite were established in March 1976, air services and shipping between the two countries commenced in July and October 1976 respectively. Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) offered a Boeing to Bangladesh in November 1976. In addition, Pakistan offered 28 railway coaches to Bangladesh. Bangladesh reciprocated through a gift of tea to the flood victims of Pakistan and donation of clothes and rice. Another important element which contributed in promoting cooperation was the introduction of visa system between the two countries. Other notable agreements were: An Air Service Agreement, signed at Rawalpindi on 26 June 1978. This agreement was expanded in favour of Bangladesh when Pakistan agreed to clear the Western ports of Amsterdam and London for Biman (Bangladesh National Air lines). A Merchant Shipping agreement was also signed at Islamabad on 2 August 1978. Further a convention for Avoidance of Double Taxation was signed on 15 October 1981.

There were also a number of exchange visits between the two countries and both recognised the importance of such exchanges. The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh visited Pakistan on a number of
occasions (December 1978, January and May 1980 and February 1983). During all these visits views were exchanged on important global, regional and bilateral issues, including Bangladesh's support to Pakistan's proposal for a nuclear free-zone in South Asia. It was considered as an indispensable condition for the security of the region in the era.\(^\text{58}\) Bangladesh's support for the proposal was a sign of its disapproval of India's nuclear programme, which had been viewed by Mujib as peaceful and not detrimental to the security of the region. Both countries extended support for the UN resolution on the declaration of the Indian Ocean as zone of peace and urged the littoral and hinterland states of Indian Ocean to support the same. Both the countries pledged their adherence to the charter of Islamic conference, shared common urge to uphold and promote Islamic solidarity and worked together in their efforts for peace in Iran-Iraq war. Thus, during Zia-Ur-Rahman's period relations were ameliorated with Pakistan.

After President Zia-Ur-Rahman's assassination, Bangladesh continued to follow a policy of maintaining good relations with the Islamic world, including Pakistan. Reviewing Pakistan-Bangladesh relations, General Zia Ul Haq observed:

"Pakistan has got special regards for Bangladesh, we have lived for 24 years together. Then we were separated. But, whatever love, sympathy and affection we have for each other will never exhaust. None can snatch away our love. If Pakistan can maintain cordial relations with the countries like

Sri Lanka and Nepal, why cannot she not have brotherly relations with Bangladesh. The love of a Muslim country for another Muslim country cannot be snatched away. 69

Under the Ershad regime, Pakistan-Bangladesh relations spurted distinctly, more than in any other preceding periods. It was stated that Bangladesh attached great importance to strengthening relations with Pakistan within the framework of its forward looking policy. 60 The military rule and Islamic trappings were taken advantage of, for the improvement of economic and political relations with Pakistan.

Simultaneously, Pakistan expressed deep interest in strengthening relations with Pakistan. In this context the Pakistani Minister of State Mahmud Ali affirmed that "no power on earth can stand in the way of closer relations between the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh". 61 The then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Sahibzada Yakub Khan called upon Bangladesh during his visit in August 1983, to bury the past and to work closely with Pakistan for a bright future. Subsequently, the two countries concluded a ‘visa accord’ for promoting travel facilities. The visa agreement specified that for 72 hour stop-over (for business etc.) no visa is required. 62

Pakistan’s President General Zia visited Bangladesh in June 1985 following cyclonic calamity. In a press conference held in Banga Bhawan in Dhaka, Zia Ul Haq spoke emotionally that "Bangladesh’s

61 Surendra Nath Kaushik, n.57, p.166.
62 Bangladesh Observer, 13 August 1983.
sorrow is Pakistan sorrow and Bangladesh’s joy is Pakistan’s joy." After his return from Bangladesh, Zia issued an appeal to the citizens of Pakistan to contribute at least a rupee each in aid of the cyclone hit people of Bangladesh. President Ershad appreciated Zia-ul-Haq’s visit and said that Pakistan and Bangladesh were bound together by a shared history, culture and religion.

Bangladesh also stressed on the importance of SAARC, which not only enhanced regional cooperation but also helped in strengthening the friendship between Pakistan and Bangladesh. President Ershad also paid an official visit to Pakistan in connection with his tour of SAARC countries on 26 July, 1986. At a banquet given in his honour by President Zia-UIL-Haq, the Bangladeshi President said that relations between the two countries is historically liked and have a shared perception of many political and economic issues.

As a result of talks between the two Presidents, Bangladesh and Pakistan signed agreements on special trading arrangements and cultural exchanges. A memorandum of understanding on a reciprocal exchange of plots of land in the diplomatic enclaves in Islamabad and Dhaka for the permanent diplomatic building of the two countries was also signed. Bangladesh also defended Pakistan’s stand on Afghan situation and pleaded for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. In August 1988, President Ershad again

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63 New Nation, 6 June 1985.
64 Daily Ittefaq (Dhaka), 6 June 1985.
visited Pakistan to pay tributes on Zia-Ul-Haq’s funeral and the SAARC summit in the same year. These visits were more ceremonial than substantive.

Under the new leader of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan-Bangladesh relations did not undergo any major shift. During her visit to Bangladesh in October 1989, Benazir recalled the visit of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, to Bangladesh in 1974 and asserted,

"Pakistan and Bangladesh were bound together by ties of religion, history and tradition. It was together that we launched a struggle for a separate Muslim identity over the years we have travelled a journey which at times was difficult, at times traumatic. But like two brothers who set up separate homes, we remain as members of the same family, each always caring about the future well-being and security of the other." 67

President H.M. Ershad appreciated bold initiatives taken by Benazir and expressed satisfaction over Pakistan’s entry in the commonwealth after a gap of seventeen years 68 (Pakistan was granted membership of the Commonwealth on October 1, 1989. Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had quitted the commonwealth on January 30, 1972 following recognition of Bangladesh by the United Kingdom).

67 The Pakistan Times, October 2, 1986.
Political events in Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1990, resulted in domestic political instability. The government of Benazir Bhutto was ousted in August and a new government headed by Mian Nawaz Sharif, assumed power in November 1990. Similarly, in Bangladesh nine year old government of H.M. Ershad had to relinquish power in December 1990 and a representative government was installed in March 1991 under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia.

Begum Khaleda Zia, democratically elected Prime Minister of Bangladesh visited Pakistan August 1992, and signed two agreements on scientific and technical cooperation and land exchange for diplomatic missions. Under the land lease agreement, Bangladesh agreed to given sixteen bighas of land in the diplomatic enclave in Islamabad. In exchange, Pakistan provided ten bighas of land on the diplomatic enclave of Baridhara in Dhaka. The agreement signed in the field of science and technology was the third of its kind, the first and second were signed with China and India respectively. It was meant to promote cooperation in all fields of science and technology.69

**Determinants of Dynamics: An Economic Profile**

As in the political relations, effort were being made to strengthen economic relations with Pakistan. Though, there had been no direct trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan till 1975, the two countries had indirect trade links through third countries. According to available figures, indirect trade between the two countries during

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1974-75 amounted to about Rs.17.4 crores. Pakistan exported to Bangladesh goods valued at Rs.13.96 crores. They included boiled rice, raw cotton, cotton cloth and engine parts. Bangladesh exported to Pakistan during the same period goods valued at Rs.3.46 crores. The items included black tea, ginger, raw jute, jute products, iron and steel scrap and chemical preparations.70

On resumption of diplomatic relations, Pakistan and Bangladesh signed their first trade agreement on 30 April 1976, initially for three years, with provisions of automatic renewal for similar periods unless otherwise terminated. It provided for Most Favoured Nations treatment and the establishment of Joint Committee to review and exchange of commodities in freely convertible currency. The agreement further provided that business houses in the public and private sectors could trade in any commodity they liked, within the framework of the import and export policies of their respective governments. The first meeting of the Joint Committee on trade was held in December 1977. This trade agreement is still in effect which has substantially helped in increasing the volume of trade between the two countries. In 1977-78 Pakistan’s export to Bangladesh amounted to Rs.260 million and imports were estimated at Rs.491 million.71 In 1980--81 exports amounted to Rs.646 million and imports to Rs.711 million. In 1982 Bangladesh sold off to Pakistan 2.2 million pounds of tea for Afghan refugees under a bilateral agreement. During the same year 1982, Bangladesh purchased 1,000,000 tons of produced estimated to be

71 Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmed, n.54, p.77.
Rs.2.1 million.\textsuperscript{72} In May 1984 Bangladesh-Pakistan joint committee on trade recommended greater contacts between businessmen to increase the volume of trade between the two countries. Consequently, Pakistan’s exports to Bangladesh amounted to Rs.695 million and imports by Rs.869 million by 1984-85\textsuperscript{73} significantly, on 28 July 1986 both sides signed a special trade agreement which provided for the exchange of goods and commodities worth US$ 40 million through the trading corporations of the two countries. The items of exports from Bangladesh included raw jute goods, tea and newsprint and few other traditional items and imports from Pakistan included raw cotton worth US$ 20 million and cement clinker worth US$ 35 million.\textsuperscript{74}

Within a decade i.e. from 1976 to 1986, the volume of trade between the two countries trebled. The swift turnover in their volume of trade rose to US$ 110 million in 1986 from US$ 33.41 million in 1976, which meant three-fold increase of trade.\textsuperscript{75}

On 8 April 1987, under the provision of Joint Economic Commission both sides signed an agreement for encouraging and establishing of small and heavy joint industrial ventures for manufacturing surgical instruments, fibre glass, hard-board and sport goods. Under another agreement, Pakistan agreed to export telecommunications cables to Bangladesh. Pakistan also decided to provide 1,00,000 tons of rice to Bangladesh. In return Bangladesh

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{72} \textit{Bangladesh Times}, 7 February, 1982. Also see 9 February, 1982.
\bibitem{73} \textit{New Nation}, 11 May 1984.
\bibitem{74} Ibid.
\bibitem{75} Abu Taher, n.54, p.79.
\end{thebibliography}
agreed to import 60,000 tons of raw cotton from Pakistan.\textsuperscript{76} In 1987 during the meeting of the joint economic commission it was decided that Bangladesh would export to Pakistan 20 million kilos of tea besides raw jute and other commodities during the fiscal year 1987-88.\textsuperscript{77}

Besides, the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) and Bangladesh Trading Corporation (BTC) concluded a special Trading Arrangement (STA) on 27 July 1986 for two years providing for each, exchange of goods worth US$40 million annually. Subsequently the size was enhanced to US$ 50.00 million. However the validity of the STA expired on 30 June 1989. In this regard it is worth mentioning that the TCP and BCP signed an agreement on 5 October 1981 with a view of enhancing impact of tea from Bangladesh to Pakistan from 11 million dollars to 20 million dollars.\textsuperscript{78}

Another significant development in the economic front of the country’s relations took place following the visit of Pakistani Minister for Commerce, Finance, Planning and Development to Bangladesh in July 1988. Pakistan offered a state credit of US$ 50 million to Bangladesh on easy terms for procuring machinery and equipment including railway coaches, buses and road rollers. At the request of Bangladesh, Pakistan agreed to supply 100,000 tons of cement and 30,000 tons of sugar. Pakistan also offered to Bangladesh a facility to pay in local currency (Taka) for their imports from Pakistan upto US $40 million in order to help Bangladesh to overcome the problem of

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Morning News}, 9 April 1987.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Bangladesh Observer}, 5 October, 1987.
foreign exchange shortage.\textsuperscript{79} It helped in increasing the volume of Bangladesh export to Pakistan which amounted to US $36.99 million and imports to US$22 million.\textsuperscript{80}

Since the signings of the agreement a number of trade delegations exchanged visits. In July 1992 a twenty member Karachi based Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FPCCI) delegation paid a five day visit to Bangladesh and signed a five year agreement on economic and commercial cooperation with FPCCI to poster naturally beneficial relations in a private sectors of the two countries.\textsuperscript{81}

During the visit of Begum Khaleda Zia in 1992, the two countries signed an agreement on the reciprocal promotion and protection of investments, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to promote cooperation in field of agriculture between the two countries.\textsuperscript{82} In 1995, the Joint Economic Commission of Bangladesh and Pakistan signed an agreement to undertake a long-term trade arrangement.\textsuperscript{83}

A notable feature of bilateral trade between the two countries was that the balance of payment remained in favour of Bangladesh. This is a remarkable achievement for Bangladesh. At present Pakistan is the second largest trading partner of Bangladesh, after

\textsuperscript{81} The Bangladesh Observer, 23 July, 1992.
the United States.\textsuperscript{84} Pakistan emerged as the dominant export market for Bangladesh.

Thus at global level Bangladesh's trade position vis-a-vis Pakistan was in favour of the former. Viewed from this perspective, trade and commerce relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan were regarded as the key areas of cooperation. Recently the trade balance has gone in favour of Pakistan. Bangladesh is trying to obtain duty free access to markets in Pakistan in order to boost its exports and bridge the trade gap with Pakistan.

Though in the post-Mujib era relationship between Bangladesh-Pakistan have developed satisfactorily in political and economic fields but there is still lack of progress on two outstanding issues of the repatriation of the remaining stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh and the division of assets.

\textbf{Assets and Liabilities: A Contentious Issue}

The issues of the division of assets of former united Pakistan and its external debt is still a matter of dispute between the two successor states. Bangladesh considers that it has a legitimate claim on the assets which were acquired by the combined efforts and labour of the peoples of both wings of former Pakistan. It has proposed that the division of assets can be done on the basis of four principles.\textsuperscript{85} The first principle is based on population. And on the basis of population Bangladesh could demand fifty six percent of the total assets. The second principle is based on equal distribution of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{84} C.M. Shafi Sami, n.80, p.27.
\textsuperscript{85} Syed Serajul, n.55, p.71.
\end{footnotesize}
wealth. On the basis of equal distribution of wealth Bangladesh could demand fifty percent of total assets. The third one is based on foreign currency reserves. On this basis, Bangladesh could demand fifty one percent of the foreign exchange as East Pakistan contributed to the national reserves. The last one is based on proportion. On this basis, Bangladesh could demand forty four percent of the total wealth.

At the Tripartite Conference which was held in New Delhi on 9 April 1974, Bangladesh made clear that the process of normalisation would be expedited if Pakistan also took positive steps to resolve the division of assets. Pakistan continued to be evasive on the issue. It agreed to share assets amounting to an estimated US$ 4 billion, provided that Bangladesh would agree to share the debts, which were estimated by Pakistani officials at US$ 4.6 billion. Bhutto stated that whether at all the question of division of assets was acceptable to Pakistan would be decided by a joint commission. The government of Bangladesh did not agree to the proposal of a Joint Commission as suggested by the Pakistani government. No progress was made, due to the divergence of the views of the two countries on this outstanding issue, till the change of government in Bangladesh.

Even in a new phase which had began in Bangladesh’s relation with Pakistan with the establishment of diplomatic relations, the question of the division of assets was not seriously taken up by Pakistan. Until President Zia-Ur-Rahman’s visit to Pakistan in 1977,

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no formal talks on this issue took place. It was only stated at the end of visit in a Joint communique that Pakistan was ready to discuss the question of division of assets and liabilities. On the basis of this development, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, visited Bangladesh on October 24, 1980 to discuss the issue. It was decided that to set up a Joint Working Group composed of inter-ministerial representatives and experts from both countries to examine the question of appropriation of assets and liabilities. The working group was to meet in Islamabad as soon as possible and submit a report to the Foreign Secretaries with recommendation on all aspects of the matter for further consideration. But, before August 1983 there had been no discussion or meetings on this issue.

The issue did not come up for serious discussion even during the Ershad period when Bangladesh accorded high priority to mending relations with Pakistan. Even former Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto’s three-day visit on October 1989, failed to yield any breakthrough on the issue of division of assets and liabilities. Begum Khaleda’s three day official visit on August 9-11, 1992 could not yield any results on the issue. Although, both sides discussed the issue many times and also prepared a working paper on it, but they failed to come up with positive outcome so far. Recently, Nawaz Sharif’s government agreed to expeditiously examine the matter but chances are bleak due to the military coup in Pakistan.

**Repatriation: A Humane Adjustment**

The issue of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh is an equally major area of dispute between Bangladesh and

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87 S.R. Chakravarty, n.68, p.211.
Pakistan. When Bangladesh became independent on 16 December 1971, there were more than one million Biharis (who had mostly come from the Bihar province of India at the time of the 1947 partition to settle in East Pakistan and who had cooperated with Pakistan during the Bangladesh liberation war). At the end of the war, 107,000 Biharis were exchanged in a vast air-lift for 171,00 Bengalis and some 18,000 managed to flee to Pakistan. Out of the rest 10 lacs, 5 lacs opted for residing in Bangladesh and they were given Bangladeshi citizenship and had been assimilated into the mainstream of Bangladeshi society. In all, 500,000 persons claimed their repatriation to Pakistan. They enlisted their names in the list prepared by International Red Cross Society during 1972-73.\textsuperscript{88}

At the initial stage of repatriation, about 1 lac 70 thousand non-Bengalis returned to Pakistan. After few months of repatriation the Red Cross Society stopped the work temporarily for reasons of financial constraints. Till date about 2.38 lakh stranded Pakistani are living in Bangladesh.

During Mujib period, Bangladesh and India made a joint settlement offer to Pakistan by signing an agreement in April, 1973. It offered a simultaneous repatriation of the Pakistani POWs other than those 195 POWs required for trial, repatriation of Bengalis forcibly detained in Pakistan and the repatriation of Pakistani in Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{89} Accordingly, a massive three-way repatriation programme started on September 19, 1973 which continued till

\textsuperscript{88} Dilara Chowdry, n.58, p.296.
April, 1974. India-Pakistan signed an agreement in August 1973, repatriation of a limited number of the Biharis was agreed upon by Pakistan and the Bengalis in Pakistan were allowed to return home. Although the agreement provided for the limited repatriation of substantial number of non-Bangalis from Bangladesh, Pakistan later further restricted their number by defining four categories of people which it would accept. This categorization included (i) persons of West Pakistani domicile (ii) Central government employees (iii) members of divided families and (iv) hardship cases upto 25,000.

The Pakistan government did not make any commitment for taking back the rest who did not fall within the above four categories. This categorization severely hampered those non-Bengali Biharis who had opted for Pakistan and applied to the Red Cross for repatriation. Initially their number was about 260,000, but by April 1974 it rose to 470,000. So on this issue the Bangladesh government received a raw deal in the light of its earlier stand.

In Pakistan itself, opposition to the settlement of non-Bengali Biharis came strongly from Sindh where they were already an economic and cultural threat to the Sindhi population. At one stage Mr. Bhutto denied responsibility for these Pakistani and proposed their settlement in U.S., Australia or Canada.

Admittedly, this evoked displeasure among the officials of the Awami League government. Consequently, polemics continued on

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91 Mouded Ahmed, n.89, p.203.
92 Ataur R. Khan, n.90, p.75.
the issue, and Bangladesh government raised the issue of stranded Pakistanis in the Third Committee of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 1974. The issue was raised again at the Commonwealth leaders conference in Jamaica in May 1975 by Mujib where he went to the extent of accusing Pakistan for its apparent failure to take back 63,000 Bihari families.\(^93\)

Therefore, the issue remained in cold storage, until the beginning of a new chapter with President Zia’s visit to Pakistan. It was hoped that in an atmosphere of friendly relations the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis would get proper attention of both countries. These hopes were further raised when the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh visited Pakistan and it was agreed upon to take 25,000 hardship cases through international agencies. Out of 25,000 people, 4790 were repatriated by sea but the process was halted due to political change in Pakistan.\(^94\)

In order to get the process reactivated the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh paid a visit to Pakistan in July 1978, but achieved no tangible results, except that Pakistan brought down further the figure from 25,000 to 16,000,\(^95\) as negative reaction which hindered even more the issue of repatriation.

As the issue remained unresolved, after two months again, a three member delegation went to Pakistan to decide the issue of repatriation of no-Bengalis from Bangladesh. But even this visit did not yield any breakthrough. Later Pakistani Foreign Secretary Reaz

\(^{93}\) Dilara Chowdhury, n.58, p.122.
\(^{94}\) Ibid.
Piracha visited Bangladesh on October 25, 1980. But he avoided the discussion by saying, “since we have no dispute there is no question of agreement to be reached in this meeting”. This reflected the non-serious and evasive stand of the Pakistan government.

The issue was again discussed during the visit of Pakistani Foreign Minister Sahibjada Yakub Khan on August 10, 1983. He stated that Pakistan might take 50,000 more Biharis (non-Bengali) on the basis of the criteria proposed by Pakistan in the tripartite conference held in 1974. But no repatriation took place. By January 1985, the government of Pakistan complicated the issue further when the stranded Pakistani in Bangladesh was regarded as “the problem of Bangladesh”. This wavering stand of Pakistan disappointed the Ershad government. For the first time after 1975, again Bangladesh raised the issue in a multinational forum i.e. Islamic Countries Foreign Ministers Conference (ICFM) in Saana urging the Muslim countries to help in pressuring Pakistan to take back its citizens.

Nothing spectacular happened except that Pakistan signed an agreement with Rabita-Al-Alami Islami in July 1988. The agreement provided for the establishment of a joint trust fund which envisaged raising of a sum of 300 million dollars for financing the repatriation project to be completed with three years. In this effort Pakistan contributed Rs.250 million, while Rabita-AL-Alami Rs.50 million.

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96 The Bangladesh Observer, October 26, 1980.
98 The Damik Ittefaq, Dhaka, 2 January, 1985, cited in Abu Taher, n.54, p.78.
towards the fund.\textsuperscript{99} Bangladesh welcomed the agreement as a first step towards repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis.\textsuperscript{100}

But the reactivated process was dashed when the first flight of which was scheduled to take 400 immigrants to Pakistan was cancelled due to protests and demonstrations staged by the Sindhis. The Sindhis think that they will become a minority in their own province unless immigration is stopped. Therefore, the issue assumed more complicated dimensions in the wake of the polarised atmosphere in Sindh.

However, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif who was regarded probably the first Pakistani Prime Minister to have categorically stated that the problem of stranded Pakistan in Bangladesh would be solved.\textsuperscript{101}

Begum Khaleda Zia's visit to Pakistan in 1992 made a breakthrough on this issue as the Nawaz Sharif's government agreed to repatriate the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh to Pakistan. Pakistan government outlined a detailed plan to absorb the stranded Pakistani in forty different places of Punjab. It was decided to construct 42,000 flats in Punjab at a cost of US$ 250 million. The cost was shared by Pakistan government and the Makkah - based Rabetal al-Alam-e-Islami. The repatriation was to take place in phases after the completion of housing facilities in the Punjab province.\textsuperscript{102} Thereafter, no highest level contact between the two

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Dawn}, Pakistan, 11 October, 1988, cited ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Bangladesh Observer}, 11 July 1988.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{The Bangladesh Observer}, 12 August, 1992, p.1.
countries has ever passed off without a reference drawn to these two issues. But no progress has been achieved so far.

Bangladesh was successful in creating bonhomie among all Islamic countries but for Pakistan due to the unresolved pending issues of repatriation and division of assets. Overall Bangladesh has been able to assert its independent identity among the Islamic world.