CHAPTER II
BANGLADESH AND INDIA
India occupies the centre stage in Bangladesh’s foreign policy pursuits by virtue of its geographical location, historical legacy and more importantly, persistence of a number of outstanding bilateral issues vital to its existence. For the foreign policy makers of Bangladesh, nothing features more prominently than the “India-factor”.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to analyse the foreign policy of Bangladesh towards India during the period under study (1975-96). Historically, its relations with India can be traced to a period much before 1971, which was possible due to the common ethno-linguistic and cultural values. The geographical location of Bangladesh is virtually land-locked within India. Strategically Bangladesh’s security concerns are shaped by India being its closest neighbour. The foreign policy of Bangladesh with regard to India has been shaped under the influence of these factors. While some of these warranted close ties, others dictated a distant approach. In addition, some factors while creating a high degree of interdependence between the two countries also generated an almost irreconcilable conflict of interest.

**Changing Relations: Highs and Lows**

The independence of Bangladesh unfolded an environment of cordial relations between — Bangladesh and India. India was the first country to come out in support of the cause of Bangladesh’s liberation.

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movement following the military adventure of the Pakistani army on 25 March 1971. It’s humanitarian, moral, and diplomatic and finally, military assistance played a crucial role in the liberation of Bangladesh.\(^2\) Bangladesh’s adherence to the principles of democracy, socialism, secularism in its domestic policy and her commitment to non-alignment, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-racialism in its foreign policy represented a corroboration of Indian foreign policy.

It was during Mujib-ur-Rahman’s period (1972-75) that bilateral relations with India assumed paramount importance and considered vital for Bangladesh’s political, economic and diplomatic interests. Mujib-ur-Rahman had openly acknowledged, “friendship with India is a cornerstone of Bangladesh foreign policy”.\(^3\) There was a general attitude of friendliness towards India due to the euphoria generated by liberation, intensity of suffering during the war of liberation as well as general gratefulness towards the Indian Government and its people for their help and support. In his inaugural speech on the occasion of the first meeting of the Parliament of Bangladesh, he described the relationship between Bangladesh and India in these words:

"Abiding foundations of friendship were laid with those states and people who stood by us in difficult days of our national liberation struggle. Thus were forged the close bonds of friendship with our great neighbour India. These bonds have been further strengthened by the sacrifices of many valiant sons

\(^2\) J.A. Naik. India, Russia, China and Bangladesh (New Delhi: n.d.).
of India who laid down their lives side by side with our freedom fighters in our war of liberation".4

Both countries made constant efforts and signed a number of agreements, namely, (a) A one-year Trade Agreement [March 1972]; (b) A 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation [March 1972]; (c) An Agreement to establish a permanent Joint River Commission [April 1972]; (d) A five-year Protocol on Inland Water Transport [November 1972]; (e) An Agreement on Economic Cooperation and Land Demarcation [May 1974]; (f) An interim Agreement on the Sharing of Ganges Waters [April 1975]. Besides these agreements India also provided substantial help to reconstruct the shattered economy of Bangladesh. Technical expertise, construction materials, fund and above all, food grains were sent from India to Bangladesh. Till June 1972, India topped the list of donors. 5

Unfortunately, this perceived mutuality of interests was cut short by a military coup in Bangladesh and assassination of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman on August 15, 1975. Mujib's assassination was followed by military rule, first of General Zia-ur-Rahman and after his assassination General Mohammad Ershad. Under the changed circumstances India began to be viewed in unfriendly perspectives. The vision of a deeper friendship and cooperation, shared by the two countries during Mujib's period now gave way to a new reality of escalating tension over border disputes and protracted tussle over flood control and water sharing. The bilateral agreements that were

signed with India during Mujib period, experienced considerable resentment from the authoritarian regimes and became a direct target of criticism.

The free trade zone provided for a ten-mile on either side of the border in the trade pact (1972) was widely looked upon as India’s manoeuvre to smuggle all the valuable goods of Bangladesh back to India. Resentment was also voiced against the twenty-five years Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in early 1972, and was viewed as being “imposed” on Mujib.\(^6\) A substantial role of Indian army in enabling the struggle in Bangladesh to succeed against Pakistan was accused of the ‘removal of equipment, industrial machineries and raw materials out of Bangladesh and into India. (For more details see chapter I, p. 19.) This meant that these regimes followed a policy, which was quite contrary to the policy that had been followed since 1972. They formulated their policy vis-à-vis India in total disregard to the geopolitical reality and described it as “outward orientation”, namely, distancing from India . . . .\(^7\)

The changes made in the constitution by Zia-ur-Rahman reflected important shifts that marked the displacement of India from the central position which it had been accorded in Mujib period. The secular spirit of language movement that culminated in the emergence


\(^7\) The ‘outward orientation of the post-1975 foreign policy of Bangladesh, of course, meant a basic position shift in Bangladesh Foreign policy, namely, distancing from India . . . .’ As quoted in Jayadeva Uyangoda, “Indo-Bangladesh Relations in the 1970s: Bangladesh Perspectives” cited in Kodikara, Shelton, U. (ed.), *South Asian Strategic Issues: Sri Lankan Perspective* (New Delhi: 1990), pp.67-81.
of Bangladesh enshrined ‘secularism’ as one of the four principles in the Bangladesh constitution. There was no place for religion in politics under the 1972 constitution. The Mujib government banned all the political parties that had played an anti-Bangladesh role in 1971. This emphasis on secularism, democracy, nationalism and socialism provided an additional bond to its relationship with India. Simultaneously an attempt was made to strengthen relationships with the rest of the Muslim countries.

The post Mujib regimes identified the principle of secularism as manifestation of Indian influence over Bangladesh. The constitution was amended accordingly; in the Ziaur Rahman’s regime, when the principle of secularism was replaced by the words “Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions.”8 Moreover, the 8th amendment in 1988 declared Islam as the State religion.

Even the transition to the democratic polity in 1990 did not bring about any change in this trend. Khalida Zia's government straightened out its power-base in collusion and cooperation with the religious political elements who had a clear anti-people role in 1971 and who up to up to 1977 had been banned from politics.9 Therefore, the shared vision based on the ideals of secularism and democracy between the two countries faded away. To an extent the Islamisation of Bangladesh affected the relations between the two countries. The

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8 The parties banned were: Council Muslim League, Convention Muslim League, Jamaat-i-Islam. For more details, Barun De and R. Samander (ed.), State Development and Political Culture: Bangladesh and India, (New Delhi: 1997), pp. 82-83.
9 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
allegations of persecution of the Muslims in India and Hindus in Bangladesh have contributed to the deterioration of relations.

Subsequently, these trends towards the Islamisation of Bangladesh society left its relations with India non-cordial because of their potential effects on the communal harmony within both the countries. Therefore, the framework of cooperation, which had been strategically built up between both the countries during Mujib period, was altered drastically which left negative impact on the existing bilateral issues between the two countries. Here, a broader analysis of bilateral issues has been made in order to study the parallel existence of two opposite trends, as the differences between Bangladesh and India continue to persist over almost all bilateral issues. At the same time, efforts were being made by both the countries to bridge the gap. An in-depth study is being made under separate heads:

**Ganga Water sharing: Festering Wounds**

This issue was a major bone of contention during the period under study. The reason being that India is an upper riparian and Bangladesh is a lower riparian country. Origin of fifty-two rivers of Bangladesh is outside the country and some of them pass through India before they flow into Bangladesh. This peculiar geographical feature has resulted in disputes in the distribution of Ganga water:

The Ganga River has highly seasonal flow. The monsoon flow is enough to meet the requirements of both the countries. An acute problem is faced during the dry season when the flow is insufficient to meet the needs of both the countries. The construction of Farakka Barrage by India on the Ganga River to augment the Calcutta and
Haldia port\textsuperscript{10} has been a subject of controversy between India and Pakistan before the emergence of Bangladesh. Ever since the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country, this dispute continued till 1996. A protracted series of correspondence and bilateral talks took place at different levels and at regular intervals to work out a solution.

However, it remained a matter of friction in bilateral relations till the Awami League Government came to power in June 1996. This government once again gave top priority to cementing relations with India by signing a long term [30 years] agreement on the long-standing Farakka Barrage problem. It was considered as one of the vital concerns and key to sound mutual relations during the period under study.

In the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country, Indian Government and its people rendered a whole-hearted support. Soon after this due attention was given to the problem of Farakka and other unsettled issues and efforts were made to meet the ends. A major step toward this goal was the establishment of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint River Commission in 1972. The Commission was set up in accordance with the article VI of the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty, 1972.\textsuperscript{11} Also, an interim agreement on the water sharing issue was signed in April 1975 for the provisional operation of the Farakka Barrage. Under this agreement, the continuous operation of the barrage was made conditional till their arriving at a mutually

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\item \textsuperscript{10} \textit{Lok Sabha Debates}, vol. II, no. 37 (21 April 1975), col. 235.
\item \textsuperscript{11} \textit{Indian Journal of International Law}, vol. 12 (1972), p. 131.
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acceptable solution. The agreement was considered as a 'breakthrough' and set an outstanding example of mutual understanding and accommodation.\textsuperscript{12}

As per this agreement, Bangladesh’s share of the Ganges water during the dry months ranged between 40,500 to 44,500 cusec while India’s share ranged between 11,000 to 16,000 cusec. There was also a ‘guarantee clause’ favouring Bangladesh in case the flow of Ganges at Farakka went below the historical minimum.\textsuperscript{13} It was ad hoc agreement and needed to be negotiated further and to be given a permanent basis, but assassination of Sheikh Mujib in August 1975 and subsequent installation of authoritarian regime disturbed the favourable political climate, that arose between the two countries. The bilateral approach adopted by Mujib was dumped by Zia’s regime and an attempt was made to internationalise the water sharing issue. Zia-ur-Rahman took the issue to the OIC Foreign Ministers Conference in Istanbul in May 1976.\textsuperscript{14} This issue was raised again a few months later in August 1976 and in November 1976 at the Colombo Summit of Non-aligned Nations\textsuperscript{15} and the 31st session of UN General Assembly.

\textsuperscript{12} Foreign Affairs Record, vol. 12, no. 14, May 1975, p. 11. Also see, ad-hoc on Farakka (editorial), \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, vol. XI, no. 14, 13 April 1976.


respectively. Thus, it was clear that under Zia-ur-Rahman government there was a definite change from the earlier policy, based on bilateral solution of the problem. This move of Zia was in contrast to the practice of non-aligned countries and was a big blow to India's stand that all bilateral issues should be settled peacefully through negotiations. However, a bilateral solution of this issue was also suggested by UNGA. Later, both countries agreed to resume negotiations but not much progress was made till the change of government in India in March 1977. The accommodative attitude adopted by Janata Government towards neighbours showed a discernible sign of improvement in overall Bangladesh-India relations. In this new congenial atmosphere fresh talks were started on the sharing of Ganges water. This resulted in an agreement signed on 5 November 1977, valid for a period of five years.

It was agreed that of the total availability of 55,000 cusecs of water at Farakka, Bangladesh would get 34,500 cusecs and India 20,500 cusecs during the leanest period (last ten days of April). The significance of the agreement was the 'guarantee clause' inserted by Bangladesh. According to this clause, if during a particular ten days period the flow of Farakka came down to a level that the share of

17 The Hindu, 16 August 1976.
19 A Government led by Janata Party came into power in March, 1977, after three decades of Congress Party rule in India.
Bangladesh was lower than the eighty per cent of the stipulated share, then the release of water to Bangladesh during those ten days shall not be below eighty per cent of the quantum shown in the agreement.\textsuperscript{21} 

The agreement was described as unique in the history of the riparian states. It guaranteed a security to meet the essential requirements of Calcutta port and at the same time protected the interests of Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{22} Admiral Khan, who signed the agreement on behalf of Bangladesh describes the agreement as “historic”.\textsuperscript{23} The agreement had a mixed reaction from public and press in India. J.K. Ray, an Indian scholar was of the view that the agreement India entered into meant its conceding to demands of Bangladesh at the cost of damaging the vital interests of West Bengal in general and India’s important commercial port at Calcutta in particular.\textsuperscript{24} India had nothing to gain out of this agreement except that it ceased to be an international issue which Bangladesh had made it by raising it in the UN and other forums.\textsuperscript{25} 


\textsuperscript{22} Mizanur, Rahman Shelly, \textit{Emergence of A New Nation in A Multipolar World: Bangladesh} (Dacca, 1974), p. 75.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Asian Recorder}, vol. 23, no. 50 (3-9 December 1977), p. 14065.


\textsuperscript{25} S.D. Muni, “India’s Beneficial Bilateralism in South Asia”, \textit{India Quarterly}, vol. 35, no. 4 (October-December, 1979), p. 419.
However, this agreement did not solve the larger and more important question of how the dry season flows of the Ganges could be increased. Although, this issue was set aside for Joint River Commission Settlement, which made no substantive progress due to the stubborn attitude in favour of the specific proposals brought by two countries.

India proposed a plan to build a long link canal across Bangladesh connecting the Brahmaputra River with the Ganges at a point above the Farakka Barrage to make up for the shortage of the Ganges water in the dry months created by the Farakka withdrawal. As opposed to the Indian proposal, Bangladesh had proposed an alternative plan, maintaining that the augmentation of the Ganges dry season flow should take place from the Ganges system itself. Its alternative plan was to construct a series of storage dams along the higher reaches of the Ganges in the Indo-Nepalese border region, in order to store water during the monsoon and release it in the dry months for the benefits of both countries. 26

Bangladesh considered India's scheme as "unpractical" as excavation of a link canal would uproot thousands of its people from their homes and would also result in the loss of precious cultivable land. Whereas India regarded Bangladesh's proposal as technically non-feasible because construction of high dams in the Brahmaputra basin was not possible as this basin comes under the seismic zone. 27 Thus, no concrete solution could be reached. On the date of expiry of

the agreement in 1982, new governments had come into power in both countries. In Bangladesh it was the authoritarian regime of Ershad was in power, and in India the democratic government headed by Indira Gandhi came back to power. Subsequently, a satisfactory and durable solution of water sharing was delayed.

During the military regime headed by General Ershad, water sharing issue continued to dominate Bangladesh-India relations. A clause which had guaranteed Bangladesh a substantial concession (i.e., Bangladesh would receive 80 per cent of the expected flow irrespective of the actual flow) was removed from the Memorandum of Understanding signed twice in 1982 and 1985. The short term allocation schedules of both MOUs were identical.  

No doubt, new initiatives emerged from Bangladesh in Ershad's period, which came to be considered as a favourable solution to its seminal foreign policy dilemma towards India. These initiatives were based on a fundamental re-evaluation of the diplomatic and technical possibilities concerning development of the Brahmaputra and Ganga rivers. This approach had also opened discussion on other rivers, common to Bangladesh and India and also focused on the sharing of water. But due to the failure of Ershad to gain support for these new proposals within the Bangladesh cabinet, no progress could be

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achieved in its bilateral relation with India. This water sharing issue continued to effect Bangladesh's overall relations with India.

Following the expiry of the 1985 MOUs in May 1988, a vacuum followed. A meaningful dialogue on this issue ceased altogether for the next five years until the end of 1990, when the government of President Ershad was forced to step down, following a mass movement led by an alliance of all the opposition parties.

The visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, to India in May 1992 resulted in a detailed discussion on the question of sharing of waters. It was agreed to evolve a comprehensive and permanent plan for the sharing of water resources within a stipulated time frame. Further, bilateral talks on sharing of water were held in March and November 1992 under the auspices of the Joint Committee of Experts of both countries to devise a long-term settlement of the flows of Ganga during the dry season. Inspite of the changed democratic setup after roughly one and a half decade Bangladesh was still walking on the footsteps of the authoritarian regime evident from their desperate attempts to mobilize international attention at various forums. It was stated by Begum Khaleda Zia in her speech at the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in October 1993 that unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water was in complete

disregard of the interests of the people of Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{32} India reacted sharply and advised Bangladesh to "overcome temptation to play politics with the important river water issue."\textsuperscript{33} Again Bangladesh raised the water sharing issue in Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held in Limasol in October 1993 and discussed the problem with Nepal during Begum Khaleda's visit to Kathmandu on 24 November, with China in February 1994 and with Japan in April 1994. The serious discussion for arriving at a solution to the problem began only after the change of government in both countries. It resulted in signing of a historic treaty on the sharing of the Ganges water on 12 December 1996 for a period of 30-years.

The Treaty has endorsed a formula that takes into account the forty years (1949-88) average availability of water at Farakka. The sharing arrangement is basically to begin from January to May every year. The average availability of water has been approximately 70,000 cusecs. If the average availability remains the same, sharing of water will be on a 50:50 ratio. If the availability increases to 75,000 cusecs, Bangladesh will continue to get 35,000 cusecs with the excess remaining with India. If the availability increases to more than 75,000 cusecs, India will get 40,000 cusecs and the remaining amount will be given to Bangladesh.

An alternating three 10-day period formula was adopted for sharing the waters during the lean season. Both the countries recognized the critical lean period between March 1 to May 10. According to the provisions in Annexure II of the Treaty, the actual

\textsuperscript{32} POT (Bangladesh Series), vol.18, no.102, 3 October 1993, p.335.
\textsuperscript{33} The Hindu (October 1993).
availability at Farakka often falls below 70,000 cusecs from March 11 to May 10. In such situations, the Treaty ensures that each side still gets 35,000 cusecs at least once in three 10-day cycles. The Treaty does not, however, contain any minimum guarantee clause for sharing the water. But in times of differences between the two governments, Bangladesh shall get 90% of its share always.

The Treaty clearly points out that the quantum of water to be released to Bangladesh will be from Farakka point. But the quantum of water so released to Bangladesh shall not be reduced by India except for reasonable uses of water not exceeding 200 cusecs between Farakka and the point on the Ganga where both its banks fall within Bangladesh.

The two governments also recognized the need to cooperate with each other on the problem of augmentation of the flow of the Ganga. Both the states agreed to conclude water-sharing treaties on other common rivers as well.

The Treaty provided for setting up a Joint River Committee with equal number of representatives from India and Bangladesh. The Committee will form an experts' team to observe and record the daily flow at the Farakka Barrage, in the Feeder Canal and also at the Navigation Lock as well as in the Hardinge Bridge. The Committee shall submit the data collected by it to the two governments. Alongwith this, the Committee shall prepare annual report and submit it to the respective governments.
The Treaty provided a review clause that stipulates review conference every five years. Any of the parties may also seek a first review after two years if the situation so require.

The Treaty also contains provision for dispute settlement between the two parties. Accordingly, if any difference arises in the functioning of Joint Committee, it shall be referred to the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission. In case the problem is not resolved, the two governments then shall meet urgently to resolve them. The Treaty emphasises on the principles of equity, fairness and mutual benefit in the sharing of Ganga Waters. The Treaty is being implemented from January 1, 1997.

This Treaty has made the sharing of water totally unconditional. India will not withdraw waters from the Farakka point unilaterally any more. If the Treaty provisions get suspended from implementation, periodic reviews shall help the countries to iron out their differences. When the total flow at Farakka will be at 70,000 cusecs, India will get water on a 50: 50 ratio and not 62.7: 37.7 as provided in the 1977 agreement. Moreover, the minimum guarantee clause in the strictest sense of the term is absent in the Treaty. There is also no provision for the parties' commitment for the augmentation on the waters. It is clear that the earlier proposals of India and Bangladesh were not pursued. But reports in the media hint at another proposal for augmentation. Construction of a dam on the river Sankosh in Bhutan for diverting waters through Teesta and Mahananda finally joining the Ganga at Farakka. Such a proposal should be reviewed objectively since the area to be covered within the proposed project may have
serious environmental consequences that India might find it difficult to overcome.

The Treaty, as a whole, is an expression of cooperative efforts by South Asian States. It has also shown that economic and ecological considerations are two important determinants of any political decision.\(^\text{34}\)

**Chakma Refugee Issue: Identity Dilemmas**

The second most crucial issue, which remained a cause of tension in Bangladesh's relations with India, was the *Chakma Refugees issue*. Chakmas and other tribals occupy the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), which is surrounded by the Indian States of the Tripura on the north and Mizoram on the east. The insurgency in CHT is primarily an integral problem of Bangladesh. Due to its geographical proximity to the Indian border, this problem had an influence on the Bangladesh' relation with India.

During Mujib period Bangladesh cooperated with India in putting down tribal insurgencies on both the sides of border. It has been reported that Mujib had allowed the Indian army to operate in the jungles of the CHT to fight the Mizo rebels, and the Razakars (members of the pro-Pakistani para military force) who received

support from the Chakmas. Mujib agreed that the CHT region was backward and needed development to bring it up to the level of other areas of Bangladesh. But he refused to recognise the distinct ethnic identity of the CHT people and ruled out any form of provincial autonomy demanded by them. However in 1972, the Parbottya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), the Hill Tracts People Solidarity Association was organized which by 1975 had a militant wing called Shanti Bahini with a reported strength of 15,000 members. Bangladesh relied on military means to suppress insurgency; at the same time took some measures for the economic development of the region. During Zia-ur-Rahman period, a vigorous policy of resettlement was pursued for settling Bangladeshi people from the plains, in the CHT. A large number of Muslim peasants and landless labourer were resettled in the CHT, largely to change the demographic composition there. It affected the tribals in two ways. First, the rapid increase in the non-tribal population posed a threat to the cultural identity of the indigenous population. Secondly, the distribution of agricultural land among the non-tribals from the plains jeopardised the livelihood of the local population by increasing the pressure on land that was available for cultivation. Consequently,

disputes over agricultural land led to tension in relations between the tribals and the non-tribal settlers. Ziaur Rahman and Ershad regimes too were apathetic to the cause of the tribals. The policies adopted by these regimes gave the feeling to the tribals that the government was deliberately inclined to marginalise them in their own land.

The repressive measures used by the Bangladesh resulted in a large-scale migration of tribals into India, particularly in the state of Tripura. There were allegations by Bangladesh that Shanti Bahini had the support of India... The adverse effects of this issue on its bilateral relations with India has three aspects, (i) Bangladesh, accusation of Indian encouragement to the insurgents (ii) the 'spill-over' effects of insurgency on the Indian states, and (iii) the repatriation of Chakma refugees who fled to India to escape torture and repression and their rehabilitation in the CHT.

The millions of Bangladeshis, who took refuge in India during the liberation war. This refers particularly to the refugees who had come to Assam. During the Mujib period, provision was made to check the unauthorized immigration and smuggling. But later on, the authoritarian regimes did not take it seriously. The attitude of Zia-ur-Rahman government was of no consequence. His government invariably, countered India's allegations regarding illegal Bangladeshi migrants to India by taking recourse to the argument that actually it is a case of Indians returning to their own country. On the other hand,

the presence of a large number of Bangladeshi nationals in India tended to destabilize the politics of the North-Eastern region of India which resulted in the emergence of ‘anti-foreigners’ agitation in Assam in 1978 particularly on the issue of unabated infiltration of Bangladeshis.40

When Indian government decided to fence the Bangladesh-India border to stop the flow of infiltration, the Ershad government reacted sharply to it and dubbed it as a unilateral step and denied the out migration of its national to India. This allegation and defiance, resulted in an exchange of fire between India and Bangladesh border security forces. Even the democratically elected government of Begum Khaleda Zia did not take any concrete step against the illegal movement of people across the border. The “Operation Pushback” begun by Indian government was branded by Bangladesh as “Operation Push-in”.41 The Bangladeshi government refused to accept the identity of the deported migrants as Bangladeshis and preferred to call them West Bengal’s Muslims rather than Bangladeshis. This was a fresh blow to the already deteriorating relations between the two nations.

The question of repatriation of the Chakma refugees to Bangladesh remained an irritant in Bangladesh-India relations till 1998. During Zia-ur Rahman’s period Bangladesh described the whole issue as “incorrect and exaggerated” when India complained about the influx of refugees . . . . It was further alleged that the Indian Border

40 Avtar Singh Bhasin, n.30, pp. 1063-1066.
Security Force (BSF) was instigating the Chittagong tribals to flee to India. The authoritarian regime perception about India's role in the CHT remained under suspicion.\(^{42}\)

The deadlock over the question of repatriation was also partly due to the inability to arrive at a mutually acceptable number. In April 1987 India put the figure at 48,000 while Bangladesh refused to concede to more than 27,000.\(^{43}\)

The 'spill-over' effects of Chakma problem on India were much more diverse. On the one hand, the intermittent influx of refugees to Tripura had not only strained the state's limited resources but also led to social tensions. On the other, the disturbed atmosphere on the border encouraged the state's own extremist elements, particularly the TNV (Tripura National Volunteers) to carry on their activities with impunity from their hideouts across the border.

Although Ershad started negotiations with the PCJSS but not much came out of this initiative. It was under Khaleda Zia, that this issue gained some momentum and various rounds of talks were held. To allow the talks to progress, the Shanti Bahini declared a unilateral ceasefire on August 10, 1992 to create a conducive atmosphere. It further extended the cease-fire till December 31, 1992 and then till March 31, 1993.\(^{44}\) Bangladesh Government refused to accept demands made by PJCSS. It also refused to accept Indian estimates about the number of refugees.


\(^{43}\) Times of India, 26 April 1987; Hindu, 28 April 1987.

\(^{44}\) POT (Bangladesh Series), vol. 21, no. 107, May 13, 1996, p. 445.
After assuming power in 1996, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took fresh initiatives to open dialogue on Chakma issue and achieved success after seven rounds of talks and finally signed a historic agreement on December 2, 1997 (see Appendix II). With the political wing of the Shanti Bahini, ending the insurgency in the CHT. The treaty offered the rebels a general amnesty in return for the surrender of their arms and gave the tribal people greater powers of self governance through the establishment of three new elected district councils and regional council.

**Land and Maritime Boundary Issue: Inconclusive Endeavours**

Another crucial issue which thwarted Bangladesh’s bilateral relations with India was *Land and Maritime Boundary including Border Fencing and New Moore/South Talpatty Island*. In Mujib’s period Bangladesh took this issue seriously and signed an agreement (in 1974). As per the agreement, India was to receive the whole of Berubari whereas Bangladesh was to retain the possession of Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves. In addition, India was to lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh Tin Bigha Corridor to connect Dahagram with Ambari Mouza in Bangladesh. India got control of Berubari enclave but did not hand over Tin Bigha Corridor to Bangladesh. The non-implementation of the agreement was a source of discord in its relations. This issue was held up as Indian Government did not ratify the agreement. Thus, Indian attitude gave Bangladesh a cause to suspect Indian intentions.

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During Zia-ur-Rahman and Ershad’s period, Bangladesh took serious turns regarding the Tin Bigha issue, when the Parliament called upon the government to invoke UN authority to resolve the crisis.\(^{46}\) The unsettled enclaves were seen as a security hazard and bases for smuggling and infiltration. In the absence of clear boundary demarcation, cross border clashes between the border security forces (Bangladesh Rangers and the Indian Border Security) became a regular trend till the democratic government of Begum Khaleda Zia signed an agreement on 25 March 1992\(^{47}\) under the provisions of an accord signed between the two countries in 1974. Under this, Tin Bigha corridor formally was leased to Bangladesh for 999 years. India maintains sovereignty over the corridor but the lease gives Bangladesh access to its enclaves of Dahagram and Angarpota.

The dispute over *maritime boundary* arose in 1974 when Bangladesh entered into an agreement with six foreign oil companies granting them oil and natural gas exploration rights in the coastal area of the Bay of Bengal.\(^{48}\) Both countries held divergent views on defining exclusive economic zones and postulated equidistance and equitable principles related to delimitation. Mujib-ur-Rahman’s government took the issue seriously and held many rounds of talks, finally agreeing to a three point formula for the settlement of maritime boundary. But the trust, which had been built up consciously between the two countries was broken down due to abrupt change in

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leadership in Bangladesh in mid 70's. Zia-ur-Rahman did not show any serious concern regarding the issue. In March 1978, after an interval of three years, various rounds of talks were held but nothing concrete came up.49 This unresolved dispute gave rise to a number of discrepancies in the bilateral relations. Foremost among them being the conflicting claim over the ownership of a new born Island in the estuary of the Haribhanga river on the border. It still awaits joint survey report and settlement. This island is known as South Talpatty in Bangladesh whereas it is called New Moore in India. During the Ershad and Begum Khaleda’s period, the island came to be the focal point of tension between the two countries.50 It emerged as a potential threat to Bangladesh’s deteriorating relations with India. To a certain extent, the prospect of gas finds and the alignment of the maritime border drawn from the disputed island has delayed a solution to the problem.

**Economic Relations: Multiple Manipulations**

The economic aspect is of an extensive nature, including trade relations, credit arrangements, joint ventures and transport. The politics and economy of any nation go hand in hand and this is evident

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49 Avtar Singh Bhasin, n.30, p. 192. Also see A.K. M. Abdus Sabur, “Some Reflections on the Dynamics of Bangladesh-India Relations”, in Iftekharuzzaman and Imtiaze Ahmed (ed.), *Bangladesh and SAARC* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 140-45. The boundary drawn by *equidistance* principle is the baselines from which the territorial sea is drawn whereas the boundary drawn by equitable principle does not mean like equidistant boundary. In effect, this boundary is consider as the line other than the equidistance boundary. India wants the issue should be solved by the equidistance principle where Bangladesh favours the later one.

both in case of India and Bangladesh. The economic relation between the two countries assume equal importance in the foreign policy concerns. In the historical framework, economic relations between the two countries continued even after partition (1947). During 1948-66, East Pakistan had been a more important trade partner for India than West Pakistan (Pakistan of present day). On an average the share of East Pakistan in Pakistan’s total trade with India during this period was 74.57 per cent per annum. East Pakistan’s share in Pakistan’s total exports to India was 84.83 per cent per annum.\(^5\) Thus, during the above period, the major part of India’s trade with Pakistan was with the then East Pakistan which later on became Bangladesh. The Indo-Pak War of 1965 and 1971 resulted in suspension of trade between India and East Pakistan. It was only after the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country, that the ban on its trade with India was lifted. It opened a new era of economic cooperation between Bangladesh and India. Even before the formal trade agreements between them, there were economic interactions in the forms of grants, loans, and credit. Immediately after the liberation, India gave a grant of Rs. 250 million for purchasing essentials including relief materials and food grains; a loan of Rs. 100 million for the repair of the badly damaged railway network; and it made available $ 0.5 million credit in foreign exchange to meet the requirements of Bangladesh.\(^6\)

\(^{5}\) Navin Chandra Johsi, “Economic Cooperation between India and Bangladesh”, *Swarajya*, vol. 17, no.45, 5 May 1973, p. 20.

Even later, India was the major trading partner of Bangladesh. A number of agreements in consonance to this were signed during Mujib period. Between May 1972 and 1976, Bangladesh signed eight credit and loan agreements with India. Under the first trade agreement signed on 28 May 1972, the 'Most Favoured Nation Treatment' was accorded to each other. The trade was proposed to be conducted in a three-tier framework. A free flow of goods and commodities was envisaged by the new trade agreement signed on 5 July 1973. It constituted a total volume of trade of Rs. 61 crores for the first year of agreement. On December 29, 1973, Bangladesh agreed on the long-term cooperation with India with regard to the production of raw jute and the export of jute goods. In order to reduce to imbalance in its trade relations with India, Bangladesh signed a protocol, which abolished rupee trade from January 1, 1975 and decided to conduct trade in free convertible currency and also devaluated its currency (taka) by 50 per cent.

However, the performance of bilateral trade did not either flourish or stand up to its expectation. No doubt there were, some genuine problems, which led not only to a slump in bilateral trade, but economic relation from the unrealistic approach from both sides. Another factor was that the expectations of both sides were exaggerated. However, trade talks between the two countries held in December 1974 suggested measures to overcome the hurdles and the

adoption of a realistic approach. But before those measures were given a fair trial, the Mujib government was overthrown.\textsuperscript{55} An impact of the disturbed political scenario was visible in the economic relations between the two countries.

During Zia-ur-Rahman period, on 12 January 1976, Bangladesh signed a protocol, which visualised higher volume of exchange and long-term arrangements for trade of coal and newsprint in order to balance the trade with India. On August 14, 1976, Bangladesh and India agreed to provide transit facilities through Indian territory, in order to facilitate Nepal’s trade with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh extended BTPA with India for three years till September 27, 1979. The emphasis was laid on increasing the volume of their mutual trade. It was noted that exports from India to Bangladesh had increased from Tk. 54.93 crore in 1973-74 to Tk. 64.58 crore in 1975-76, exports from Bangladesh to India decline from Tk. 14.52 crore in 1973-74 to Tk. 5.99 crore in 1975-76. A need for special effort to increase exports from Bangladesh to India was realised. India agreed to purchase 10,000 tonnes of newsprint, 20,000 tonnes of naphtha, 60,000 tonnes of furnace oil, 15,000 tonnes of chloroquin phosphate from Bangladesh. Bangladesh in turn agreed to buy 3,00,000 tonnes of steam coal from India, and also considered purchasing 75,000 tonnes of Assam coal.\textsuperscript{56} Besides trade carrying on normal, commodity and other credits were also extended to Bangladesh. During 1979-80, India’s exports to Bangladesh

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Foreign Affairs Record}, vol. XXIV, no. 2, February 1978, p. 59.
amounted to US $115 million, which was a record during 1974-94. The formation of the new 'Janata' Government in India, helped in strengthening even the economic relations with Bangladesh. On October 4, 1980, Bangladesh signed another three years trade agreement and reiterated the 'Most Favoured Nation’s Treatment' to India. It was similar to BTPA 1973 agreement. It made clear that all payments were to be given in freely convertible currencies. The protocol on Inland water transit and trade with India was also signed for three years. It provided transit facilities for Indian vessels carrying specified goods from Calcutta to Dhubri and Karimganj in Assam and back. India agreed to give Tk. 25 lakhs as annual conservancy charges for this purpose.\(^57\)

During the Zia-ur-Rahman period (1975-1982), as Bangladesh became increasingly dependent on aid from other countries (see chapter second and third) Indian exports to Bangladesh stagnated and declined drastically.

During the Ershad period, a Joint Economic Commission was set up in order to promote trade and to identify the areas of joint ventures and to strengthen economic cooperation with India in trade and commerce, science, technology, industry, transport and communication. The first meeting of JEC was held on November 17, 1982\(^58\), which reviewed the existing trade relations and identified areas of joint ventures in Bangladesh of cement, fertilizers and the

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57 Avtar Singh Bhasin, no.30, pp. 1299-1301.
sponge iron, the produce of which could be exported from Bangladesh to India in order to balance their mutual trade. A five-year agreement on scientific and technological cooperation was also signed with India on this occasion.

The second meeting of JEC was held from 19 to 21 August 1983.\(^{59}\) Bangladesh requested the Indian side to grant a relaxation in the import policies for facilitating export of Jamdani sarees from Bangladesh. It decided to renew trade agreement of 1980 for another three years. The trade continued to be governed on MFN terms in freely convertible currency. At this time, India agreed to import large quantity of urea, bitumin and newsprint from Bangladesh.

On November 8, 1983, Bangladesh renewed a protocol with India on Inland water transit and trade of 1980 for another three years. Under the renewed protocol, India at the request of Bangladesh agreed to raise the annual conservancy rate from present Tk. 25 lakhs to Tk. 50 lakhs. In 1986, bilateral trade agreement of 1983 was further extended for three years till October 3, 1989. India agreed to import more urea, leather, newsprint and books from Bangladesh, and export coal and wheat to Bangladesh. A protocol on inland water transit and trade was also extended till October 3, 1989.

During the review talks held in September 1989, the existing trade agreement was renewed for another three years from October 4, 1989 to October 3, 1992. At this time, the two countries agreed to explore the possibility of entering into a long-term agreement for

\(^{59}\) Ibid., pp. 1332-38.
export of newsprint and urea from Bangladesh to India. Subsequently on September 22, 1989, the existing protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade between India and Bangladesh was further extended for two years till October 3, 1991. A credit agreement and Avoidance of Double Taxation agreement was signed on 4 August 1991.60

Inspite of all these measures, there was no perceptible change in existing export-import trade gap between the two countries. Bangladesh’s imports from India in 1991-92 were valued at Rs. 14 crores whereas India’s export to Bangladesh were Rs. 810 crores.61 This trend of increasing imbalance in trade got doubled between 1991-96 and accounted for about 21 per cent (US $ 1.4 billion) of total imports to Bangladesh in 1996 (US $ 6.8 billion).62

During Begum Khaleda’s period (1992-96), the fourth meeting of the Bangladesh-India Joint Economic Commission was held on December 1994. The Commission specifically discussed issues like redressing of the trade imbalance, greater access of Bangladesh’s products into Indian market with zero tariff and low-tariff facilities, investment and joint venture with buy-back arrangement, availability of boulders from India at reasonable market prices to facilitate the construction of the Jamuna Bridge, existing Inland Water Transit Protocol and facilities and importance of infrastructure, transport

60 Ibid., pp. 1405-28.
and communications in facilitating increased economic cooperation and commercial relations between the two countries.  

Subsequently, trade oriented joint ventures assumed considerable significance for addressing the problem of growing trade imbalance between the two countries. The opening of Bangladesh economy to foreign investment in (1990s) led to a rise in investments made by Indian companies in joint ventures and subsidiaries in Bangladesh. Bangladesh became host to about 25 Indian ventures. The value of Indian FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) increased from a nominal value of $0.5 million in 1990-91 to $ 117 million in 1994-95. India’s share in total FDI flow of Bangladesh was 16.04 per cent in 1994-95 which was quite marginal in previous years. In comparison to exports, India’s share in Bangladesh’s FDI has been disproportionately modest. Joint ventures with buy-back arrangement have always been regarded as an important means for redressing the trade imbalance between India and Bangladesh. Some project or the other for joint venture has been under consideration ever since the commencement of economic relations between India and Bangladesh. However, very few joint ventures have so far materialised.

Despite the complementary nature and geographical proximity of two economies, Bangladesh’s economic relation with India remained far from expected. It was the commercial relations between the two

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63 Avtar Singh Bhasin, n.30, p. 1454.  
countries in the immediate post-liberation period, which contributed substantially to anti-India propaganda.

The stability achieved in the economic relations between the two countries during Mujib's regime was disturbed by Zia-ur-Rahman who brought major changes in fundamentals of Bangladesh's economic policy. The socialist pattern of Bangladesh economy was altered radically and new economic policies and priorities were added in order to get more aid from developed countries. Therefore, during Zia's period, Bangladesh remained reluctant to allow Indian investment and the volume of India's economic assistance, which had remained a major part of Bangladesh external assistance, considerably declined. The share of India in Bangladesh's total external trade was 15.28 per cent in 1972, which slipped down to 2.45 per cent in 1981. Among trade partners, India figured second only to USA in 1972, slipped down to seventh position in 1981 and further down to eight position in 1984. The share of India in Bangladeshi overall world trade also declined from 5.38 per cent in 1975 to 5.20 per cent in 1976. Thus, India became marginalised in the national interest of Bangladesh during the authoritarian regimes.

Bangladesh has held India responsible even for its deteriorating economic relations. Bangladesh's main concern was a massive trade imbalance in favour of India. In order to stop trade imbalance, Bangladesh wanted India should import more commodities from Bangladesh and should reduce tariff restriction on Bangladeshi products. On the other hand, India put it differently, that Bangladesh trade imbalance with an individual country (India) is not a matter of concern, what matters is the Bangladesh's global balance of trade.
The insistence of both the countries on their respective stands did not leave any scope or prospects for improvement of economic relations.

Although there was a partial recovery in trade relation in 1978-79 and in initial years of Ershad government when India’s imports increased and share of India in aggregate export of Bangladesh slightly increased. But this trend did not pick up further and massive trade imbalance remained. The denial of transit facility to each other through their respective territories left negative impact on their economic relations. Bangladesh did not allow India to use the Chittagong port for transit of its goods to the northeastern states simply because it will have a deep impact on the price line of the commodities to be made available to north-eastern India by this route and hence in the process ignored the substantial gains Bangladesh could make for itself. Eversince liberation, Bangladesh has been running into heavy deficit in its trade with India and yet it refused to undertake measures which could not only leave an impression in this regard, but even turn the deficit into surplus.

**Cultural Oscillation**

Bangladesh’s *cultural relations* with India also experienced the same fate as of its Political and Economic relations. Though Bangladesh’s separation from Pakistan politically had brought out another reality of cultural, linguistic and ethnic homogeneity of the two Bengal’s [East and West] which had for centuries before the partition, lived a close knit social life. This fact of shared culture was openly recognized by Mujib government. Cultural ties were strengthened between the two countries. This was exemplified
by an agreement signed on 30 December 1972 for promoting and developing relations between the two countries in the fields of culture, education, science and technology. In order to develop cooperation in these fields a two year protocol was also signed in Dhaka on 27 September 1974.

In the wake of successive coups in 1975, Bangladesh-India cultural relations reached their lowest ebb. They became a subject of criticism. The post-Mujib regimes considered it necessary to insulate the Bangladesh culture from the mainstream Bengali culture by emphasizing its distinctiveness from the culture of Indian Bengal which they described as belonging to the Aryan stream. Media played a major role in emphasizing the distinctive Muslim characteristics of Bangladesh and urged a relentless struggle against the votaries of 'oneness of our culture with that of West Bengal' and warned against its infiltration in Bangladesh society. Therefore, establishing a close cultural relationship with Bangladesh proved to be far more delicate and complex affair than most Indians had expected. It was now being realized that the experience of liberation had not only dissolved previous attitudes: it had also added a new layer of belief and responses to those formed previously.

The authoritarian regime did not take any concrete steps to check the anti-India tirade started by the press and other agencies in Bangladesh. The anti-India feeling was not rampant in the society but it did hamper the fabric of cultural relations established between

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65 Holiday, 21 February 1977.
66 Times of India, 3 November 1972.
the two countries immediately after independence. The post-Mujib government could have checked the anti-India wave, but probably, the ruling elites were busy in strengthening their own position.\textsuperscript{67} In 1990s, new areas of cooperation were envisaged in the cultural and academic exchange Programmes in Bangladesh with India. It was agreed that there would be exchanges in the fields of education, art and culture, tourism, health, sports and mass media. The latest attempt to strengthen cultural ties has been by the 'bus diplomacy'. This was an endeavour on part of both Bangladesh and India to maintain an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship through one to one contact between the people of the two nations. The success achieved through this policy may not be hundred percent but is definitely a positive step forward.

During Mujib period, the parameters for the security and the defence relations of the two countries were laid down under the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace, 1972. Articles 8, 9 and 10 of this treaty mainly described the security concerns of both countries. Article 8 stipulates that neither country shall "enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party" and each party as a signatory is bound to refrain from any aggression against the other party. Each country also pledges not to allow "the use of its territory for committing any act that may cause military damage to or constitute a threat to the security of the high contracting party". This security concern is carried into Article 9 which pledges both parties to "refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an

\textsuperscript{67} "Indo-Bangladesh Relations: Reverse Gear", \textit{Mainstream}, vol. 15, no. 44, 2 July 1977, p. 15.
armed conflict against the other party” and should there be any attack or threat of attack on either party, “they shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure peace and security of their countries. Article 10 seals the security understanding with the declaration that neither party shall undertake any commitment, secret or open, toward one or more states which may be incompatible with the present treaty”.68 But the post-Mujib authoritarian regimes did not give much importance to the growth of Bangladesh’s strategic relations with India on the basis of this treaty. It was considered that this treaty has severely circumscribed Bangladesh’s security options.

The severe blow to the strategic relations may be gauged through the various attempts made by Bangladesh to project the bilateral conflicts as threat to her security and sovereignty. In November 1976 in the United Nations, Bangladesh projected the Farakka issue as not essentially one of economic concern but also related it with the security of the region. In the Memorandum submitted to the UN along with her request to include the issue, of Ganges waters on the UN agenda, Bangladesh in underlining the urgency of the issue had warned that failure to resolve. This issue carries with it the potential threat of conflict that could affect peace and security in the region.

Therefore, the strategic relations remained at low ebb. Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace was considered irrelevant for present security concern as it was only conceived to meet the

challenges that Bangladesh faced in 1972 which ultimately lapsed in 1996.

A fact which surfaces after this discussion is that, Bangladesh’s relations with India cannot be viewed in isolation of its relations with other countries. In post-Mujib period, Bangladesh established close relations with Pakistan, China, Western countries and Islamic countries who were opposed to Bangladesh’s liberation struggle and criticized India for her wholehearted support to Bangladesh’s liberation war by levelling it as “expansionism”. China officially condemned the Indian attitude towards Bangladesh on the Ganges river waters and border disputes since February 1976. Bangladesh during 1975-96 gave top priority to mend its relations with these countries at the cost of its relations with its immediate neighbour India. This left a negative impact on its bilateral relations with India.

Inspite of innumerable external and internal forces at work in shaping the foreign policy, vis-à-vis each other, it cannot be denied that they still provide a good neighbourhood to each other, leaving ample scope for nurturing and creating a cordial atmosphere of peace and harmony.