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FOREIGN POLICY MAKING IN BANGLADESH : INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

A nation's foreign policy is governed by a number of factors, some constant, some variable. While the constants can be said to be the factors of geography and history, the variable ones which must be taken into account by any nation in the making of foreign policy are its internal conditions—the values and needs of the domestic system, quality of leadership, strength of national institutions, the nature of people's participation in political life—and the realities of global and regional environment. There is also a subjective factor which when one decides can play an important role. All these factors have rendered the task of making and implementation of foreign policy of a country a complex and continuous process.

The post-independence era offered Bangladesh a challenge and an opportunity to undertake a meaningful exercise in foreign policy. But because of her power handicaps in military and economic spheres, most foreign policy actions of Bangladesh had to be reactive¹ in nature confined basically to the process of response-formulation and seeking to balance and harmonise the interests and priorities of domestic and external environments. In spite of her limitations in power potentials, the positive aspect of Bangladesh's foreign policy and diplomacy could

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1. Literature on the reactive nature of foreign policy of a small power is fairly extensive ; see for example, David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A study of Small Power in International Relations* (Oxford, 1967) ; Marshall R. Singer, *Weak States in a World of Powers : The Dynamics of International Relationships* (New York, 1972).

be observed particularly in the multilateral context where Bangladesh took some successful initiatives towards influencing the external environment. It is also noteworthy that despite abrupt domestic political changes, continuity in Bangladesh's foreign policy has been generally maintained. However, Bangladesh's efforts to evolve national institutions to conduct her foreign policy have been reflective of a society in a state of flux, and systematic and continuous measures to improve foreign policy planning² and coordination have not been very marked. Notwithstanding, the formal institutions of policy making have undergone through a structural, procedural as well as qualitative changes over the years. An attempt has been made in this paper to gain an understanding of Bangladesh's foreign policy making process by examining both formal and informal institutions that are associated with it.

President, Council of Ministers and Parliament

Bangladesh, like other states, conducts her external relations through individuals acting within the framework of fairly well-structured national institutions. Most of these institutions are formal in the sense that they legally act for and represent the government of Bangladesh. Some institutions involved in the process of policy making are informal as they do not enjoy the same authority, prestige or influence as formal institutions. At the apex of all national institutions dealing with formal process of external relations is the office of the President of the Republic. Excepting a brief period of titular presidency, Bangladesh has experienced an executive presidency. In the matter of foreign relations, titular President, according to the very nature of power structure enjoyed only formal and ceremonial power. His formal functions included authorizing and signing of international contracts and deeds on behalf of the Republic. The President was obliged under the constitutional provision "to cause all

2. In the post-war era, for example, the United States to assure a global role and to meet new challenges considered it necessary to establish an institution, namely, the Policy Planning Council. Andrew H. Berding, *The Making of Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C, 1966).

treaties with foreign countries to be laid before the Parliament". The President formally appointed and recalled diplomatic agents, signed the Letter of Credence, Warrant of Commission and Letter of Recall. The constitution of Bangladesh also vested the executive authority to the President, even if he performed a titular role, to send envoys to foreign countries. As and when the constitution was suspended, suitable Martial Law Regulations were made to provide legal basis for some of these functions of the President. Ceremonial functions of the President also included formally receiving the Letter of Credence of foreign Ambassadors and High Commissioners, exchanging greetings and messages with friendly Heads of States on appropriate occasions.

The Head of State or President in Bangladesh excepting in early few years was also the Chief Executive or Head of Government who was the main decision maker in foreign policy issues. As and when the operation of the constitution was suspended, the nomenclature of the Head of State or the Chief Executive was changed to Chief Martial Law Administrator, and suitable Martial Law regulations provided the legal basis of his executive functions. Irrespective of the forms of governments, it can be said that in Bangladesh, it has been almost the sole prerogative of the Chief Executive or Chief Martial Law Administrator to make and implement foreign policy. The Council of Ministers generally serves as an advisory body appointed by and subordinate to him. The Council of Ministers is generally believed to discuss certain aspects of foreign policy, but it is unlikely that they can have any substantive influence on important foreign policy issues.

It is generally believed that an inner cabinet which obviously includes the Foreign Minister or Foreign Adviser serves as the principal deliberating organ that assists the Chief Executive on foreign policy matters. The formation of this inner cabinet, however, varied in successive regimes. During President Zia's regime, the Vice-President, Economic Adviser and the Foreign Minister, and at times the Prime Minister were believed to have comprised this inner cabinet on foreign affairs. Concerned ministers were often consulted on

issues involving respective areas of speciality. Only on rare occasions, important foreign policy decisions were taken by the Chief Executive or President through elaborate and meaningful discussion in the cabinet. At the time of Bangladesh's joining the Organisation of Islamic Conference in Lahore in 1974, some of the delicate issues were debated in the cabinet almost all throughout the night before the Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib could leave for Lahore. Similarly, President Zia's participation at the funeral services of Late Prime Minister Ohira of Japan, which constituted a landmark in Bangladesh-Japan relations, was decided at the insistence of a Minister who was not in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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The Parliament during successive regimes in Bangladesh, either directly or indirectly through Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, could not assert itself in the foreign policy decision-making process. Although Parliament has a clear constitutional role, the nature of power structure in Bangladesh, however, could not allow it to grow and develop as an involved institution, particularly in foreign policy making. Parliamentary control over the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not been generally used as a leverage by the Parliament to assert itself in foreign policy affairs.

The authoritarian nature of Executive Head in Bangladesh did not afford the Parliament an opportunity to exercise any meaningful role in the general conduct of foreign policy. The Parliament neither could effectively examine proposed legislation on foreign relations, nor examine or debate any vital document or agreement with foreign countries. Although members of the Parliament could raise foreign policy issues through parliamentary questions, calling attention notices

and adjournment motions, they could not really extract relevant information from the Minister or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They often had to deal with *fait accompli* situations which left not scope or initiative in assisting the government in the formulations of policy. Although usually Parliament even in India, for example, plays less role in the shaping of foreign policy,³ a vigilant and well-informed Parliament, however, can certainly compel the Executive to operate within the policy limits that it lays down.⁴ In the United States where President as the Chief Executive dominates the foreign policy process, the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate and Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, nonetheless serve as powerful organs to control the executive.⁵ In Bangladesh, however, foreign policy has become almost the exclusive preserve of the executive, and the real work on practically all aspects of foreign policy is done by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Foreign Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs acts as the formal institutional focal point of Bangladesh's foreign policy. Subject to the approval of the Chief Executive on important policy matters, the Ministry is headed by a Foreign Minister or Foreign Adviser who is responsible for making and implementing policies. He is also generally responsible for conducting the business of the Ministry in the Parliament. Depending on the style, personality and above all, personal equation with the President or the Chief Executive, the office of the Foreign Minister signified varying degrees of importance, influence and effectiveness in the formulation and implementation of external policies. President Zia, for example took special interest in foreign policy. But while personally conducting major issues of foreign policy, he left large areas of activity to his Foreign Minister.

3. Joseph Frankel, *The Making of Foreign Policy : Analysis of Decision-Making*, (London, 1963).

4. This was particularly true in Post-Nehru period and with the Congress.

5. Douglas J. Bennet Jr. "Congress in Foreign Policy : Who Needs It ?" *Foreign Affairs*, Fall, 1978,

Bangladesh has mostly been under Presidential or military system of government, as such the Foreign Ministers did not have to worry a great deal about parliamentary sensitivities in the conduct of foreign relations. The very nature of his job made the Foreign Minister one of the closest confidants of the President. But on the other hand non-parliamentary nature of his power-base made the Foreign Minister considerably subservient to the will of the President. Most Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh, however, served their respective Presidents with high degree of competence and loyalty as the principal foreign policy advisers. Instances of Foreign Ministers being changed in routine cabinet reshuffles have not been very common. Durability of Foreign Ministers has given over the years a much needed sense of continuity, stability and above all, maturity in the conduct of Bangladesh's external relations. Since most of the Foreign Ministers did not come from the ranks of 'career politicians', they seemed to have worked in an environment of partial isolation from the domestic politics. This led to a kind of 'technocratic' view about them which is often detrimental to public knowledge and understanding of the role of Foreign Ministry and Foreign Minister.

Foreign Secretary occupies an important and sensitive position in the Foreign Ministry. Relationships between Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister, and Foreign Secretary with the President depend on a whole range of sensitive factors including the personality and efficiency of the individuals concerned. There had been Foreign Secretaries who dealt with the President or Chief Executive directly on many issues while others were reduced to the level of routine-functionaries by the Foreign Minister. The choice of a Foreign Secretary is, therefore, generally made by the President and Foreign Minister with care so that personal trust and confidence could be reposed.

Operational structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs converges at the level of Directorates—and Embassies. The Foreign Ministry is functionally divided into various territorial Desks (Wings)—each headed by a Director-General. All Director Generals either directly or in some cases through Additional Secretaries report to the Foreign

Secretary. Embassies of Bangladesh are either headed by Ambassador/High Commissioner or CDA. Normally about one-third of the foreign service personnel remain at the Ministry while the rest remain posted abroad in various Embassies and Missions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Embassies/High Commissioners and Missions abroad constitute the focal point of policy making and implementation process of foreign relations. Although other Ministries and Government Bodies like External Resources Division (ERD), Ministry of Trade & Commerce etc., as we would discuss later are also, expanding their activities and involvement, the crucial role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in over-all foreign policy process is firmly established. The Foreign Service Officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Embassies in fact, provide the essential supporting services that constitute the basic institutional inputs for Bangladesh's foreign policy making. The process of policy implementation is also substantially dependent on the dedication, skill and competence of the foreign service officers.

The Embassies/Missions of Bangladesh contribute to the process of foreign policy making and implementation through a complex range of activities that includes: representation, protection and projection of defined values and interests of Bangladesh, negotiations, reporting-advicing, consular activities and self-administration.

Embassy-level handling of inter-govenmental relations involve routine meetings and contacts with the functionaries of the host government. Representational activities are carried out through both formal and informal interactions with the system of the host country.

Collection of information, its selection, collation, interpretation and reporting constitute the major areas of activities of the Embassies. In keeping with the general practice of modern diplomacy, most of the information collected by Bangladeshi diplomats is gathered through overt means. In fact more than ninety percent of all information included in their reports is collected from newspapers, radio, TV, periodicals and other published sources. Some of these are also collected through conversation with host government functionaries, members of press, media and academic and research institutions.

Colleagues of other diplomatic missions are also at times quite helpful. Very little information is collected through swapping classified information. Bangladesh diplomats in multilateral forums find themselves generally at the cross-juction of communication net-work between friendly countries as they have earned the reputation of being able to respect others' secrets. This unique trust and confidence enjoyed by

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Bangladeshi diplomats also gives them some special access to wide range of information.

However, most Bangladeshi missions do not have the benefit of well managed and well-staffed archive. In this respect the Foreign Ministry itself does not seem to be in any better position. Therefore, the information collected cannot always be satisfactorily collated, analysed and interpreted. Bangladesh missions use normal diplomatic pouch along with telephonic, telex and wireless communication for transmission of reports and messages. Bangladesh, for reasons of economy, does not maintain any regular diplomatic courier service. While sending report missions are at times also expected to offer views, suggestions and advice on the possible course of action to be taken by the government.

Language and area specialisation of Bangladesh diplomats give them a degree of special competence in the process of collection, analysis and interpretation of information of the host country which are very relevant to the foreign policy formulation and implementation process. Professional training and experience help the Bangladeshi diplomats to acquire and use adequate skills in the collection and interpretation of information. Members of Bangladesh missions, particularly in multilateral forums, have displayed notable competence

as skilled negotiators both on-stage and off-stage. It is an open secret that most thorny problems in multilateral diplomacy are often resolved through quiet diplomacy, i.e., behind the scenes. Bangladesh has consistently proved herself as an useful and active member in quiet and low-profile positive-diplomacy.

The process of formulation of policy options and policy decision making is basically initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the basis of reports received from Bangladesh missions abroad and other sources. The Ministry also analyses and interprets all the reports received from various sources. It is in this process that the Ministry does not have the full benefit of a well-equipped archive. The system of institutionalised memory including the system of storage and retrieval of information is rather rudimentary. The Legal Department and the Research Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are yet to develop and be relevant to the total process of Ministry's activities. The practitioners in the Ministry tend to formulate policy papers at times on the basis of inadequate information, or inadequate analysis of information. The result is impressionistic approach to the formulation of policy options which may deny the decision makers a more complete analytical policy paper on which they could base sound decisions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the principal channel of communication between Bangladesh and other countries. For all foreign missions located in Dhaka, Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the primary point of contact. Bangladesh Government communicates either through the foreign missions (59 resident missions) in Dhaka or Bangladesh missions (44 resident missions) abroad or through both at the same time. Visiting dignitaries and officials, and travels of Bangladesh dignitaries and officials abroad also provide yet another direct channel of communication. But the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially remains at the hub of all significant two-way communication between domestic system and the external system.⁶

6. In many countries including India foreign policy research and planning units for structures play an important role in foreign policy making. For reference please see, Max Belaff, *New Dimensions in Foreign Policy* (London, 1961), & Donald G. Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations*, (New York, N.Y. 1961)

Important Bangladesh delegations include representatives of the Foreign Ministry, and in all significant negotiations Foreign Ministry's representation is ensured. These participation create considerable strains on the limited resources of the Foreign Ministry, but puts the Ministry at the centre of all external relations activities. This coordinating and harmonising role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also various manifestations and ramifications for the domestic system of Bangladesh.

Projection of Bangladesh abroad is one of the basic functions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But due to resource constraints, the Ministry is not fully equipped for this important role. The wide range of specialised information material that is essential for disseminating objective facts about Bangladesh cannot be produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs both for lack of funds and organisational limitations. The External Publicity Division of the Ministry is the organ charged with this responsibility but it has neither the material nor the manpower resources to perform its role effectively. This is one of the obvious weak areas in the organisational set-up of the Foreign Ministry.

In the process of analysis and policy paper formulation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have the benefit of academic research material and independent opinion. There is practically no link between the academic world and the Foreign Ministry. A cross-fertilisation of ideas, and institutionalised exchange of information could not only advance the cause of social pluralism but also materially benefit both the practitioners and theoreticians.

Other Ministries

Other ministries of the government of Bangladesh in varying degrees also contribute to the inputs for external policy making and participate in its implementation. The External Resources Division of the Ministry of Finance is the second most involved organ of the government in the process of external relations. It deals mostly with policy as well as functional aspects of external economic relations. In

fact, the ERD over the years has become the focal point of overall external economic relations i.e, trade, aid and finance. Structurally the ERD is somewhat organized like the Foreign Ministry into various functional country-desks and organization-desks. The ERD also plays a central role in financial relations through the Bangladesh Bank. This has been possible because of interchangeability of officials and structural unity within the Ministry of Finance. The processes of

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external financial and aid relations are structurally coordinated at the level of the Finance Minister.

The process of external trade relations is conducted by the Ministry of Commerce and industries. Most of the policy issues relating to Bangladesh foreign trade are initiated by the Ministry of Commerce. Both Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Commerce have their representatives in the Embassies as Economic Ministers/Counsellors to conduct external economic relations on their behalf. The fragmented and compartmentalized approach of different ministries towards the conduct of external relations sometimes create difficulties in making a coherent and integrated approach. The process of external economic relations cannot be viewed separately from the process of political relations. On the other hand, skill and competence of the personnel of ERD or Ministry of trade and commerce are also valuable for external economic policies. No country can afford to run parallel structural and functional activities which lead to administrative dysfunctions, inter-service and inter-ministerial jealousy, and lack of communication and coordination among the Ministries. However, it is expected that as the involved Ministries begin to develop greater mutuality and reciprocity in terms of recognition of each other's importance and

specialities, some of these difficulties may gradually disappear. The government should take an unified and coherent personnel policy, and effective measures for functional level inter-ministerial coordination in the conduct of external relations.

The Armed Forces and Intelligence Agencies

The armed forces of Bangladesh constitute a very important formal institution of external relations both in peace and otherwise. The very size and competence of the military force of a country basically determine its ability to conduct external relations. When a country finds it difficult or impossible to conduct its external relations through peaceful means, the armed forces are obliged to pursue the national interests and obligations through other means. In recognition of the positive foreign policy of Bangladesh and the abiding commitment of Bangladesh to the just cause of the brave people of Namibia, the UN Security Council decided to invite a contingent of Bangladesh Army to form a part of the UN Peace Keeping Force in Namibia as and when it was formed. A new dimension in the role of the armed forces of Bangladesh in the conduct of external relations began with the induction and lateral entries of military officers in various important positions in the Bangladesh Foreign Service particularly as Ambassadors, Ministers and Counsellors. Besides, Bangladesh Armed Forces are able to provide training assistance to friendly countries by way of either offering training facilities in Bangladesh or sending trainers over to the country where such training would be required.

Various law-enforcing agencies like Police, Customs, Excise and Immigration, Police etc. by the very nature of their responsibilities find themselves involved in the total process of external relations activities. Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and attached Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs is the institution that represents the Government of Bangladesh along the international land borders. The tact, professional skill and mutuality with which the officers and men of all these agencies discharge their responsibilities largely sustain and promote the peace and good-will at the ground level all along the land borders and international entry points.

Espionage and clandestine activities of external elements/agents constitute a significant external relations problem for a country. Bangladesh seeks to protect herself from such illegal activities with the help of intelligence agencies of which National Security Intelligence (NSI) is the principal civilian institution. There have been occasions when on the finding of N.S.I. and other intelligence agencies the Government of Bangladesh had to discretely request foreign states to quietly withdraw their agents. Bangladesh in keeping with her non-aligned and positive foreign policy does not seek to make any political capital out of such detections and expulsions. Taking advantage of the institutional weaknesses and inexperience during the early years of Bangladesh, clandestine activities of foreign agents proliferated. It is generally believed that both governmental and non-governmental agencies of foreign countries might have taken advantage of the situation for their own narrow motives. With the security institutions of Bangladesh becoming more experienced and organised, such activities seem to have been brought within manageable limits.

Institutions of Informal Interaction

Political Parties

In today's world the process of foreign policy formulation and implementation is to an extent influenced by scores of non-governmental institutions as well. The degree of democratic freedom, tradition and consciousness of a society largely determine the nature and extent of these informal interactions and the growth of such institutions. In Bangladesh the opposition political parties constitute the major institutions outside the government which concern themselves with issues relating to external relations. But their structural weaknesses and lack of experience and specialised competence oblige them to confine their role to those external issues having more direct bearing on domestic political climate. Political parties in Bangladesh by and large do not have adequate organisational capability but on major issues of foreign relations, they demonstrate their views often through public protests, organization of public meetings and newspaper statements.

The Press and Media

Vernacular press of Bangladesh does not generally specialise in news and views on external relations as the mass readers do not seem to demand and perhaps not even expect frequent coverage of foreign relations issues. Some English dailies do regularly cover external relations related news and views but their effectiveness is again circumscribed by the demand-level of their readership. Some newspapers and periodicals seem to have discernible ideological preferences while others tend to be neutral. Their respective news coverage and headlines reflect those preferences. Despite these limitations press constitutes an important element of the institutions which strive to informally influence external relations of Bangladesh through the creation of public awareness, understanding and opinion on specific issues.

The degree of co-relationship between the press coverage, comments and analysis etc. and the external relations related activities of the governmental institutions is not easy to discern. It is commonly known that these days in many countries the press at times gives out inspired news and views for helping the government in advancing national interests in the matter of external relations. The degree of such co-operation between the press and the government of Bangladesh seems to be limited. Sensitive news involving foreign countries and foreign missions located in Bangladesh are believed to be at times "killed" at the persuasion of the authorities. As in many other countries press in Bangladesh seems to be fairly conscious of its responsibilities in the sphere of external relations. Press briefings, press conferences and press hand-outs are among the important institutionalised forms of communication between the government and the press. The press also uses non-institutionalised methods for gathering news on issues relating to external relations.

Media in Bangladesh being fully government-owned and controlled does not have much scope of activities that could influence external relations independently of government policies. Its role as educator of public opinion on important foreign policy issues is commendable. A conscious and well-informed public opinion is always an asset for

any government democratic or otherwise. Foreign Policy related media programmes are believed to be quite popular though these are few and far between.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organisations have in recent years developed all over the world as a new factor in international relations. Their true significance and impact on international relations is yet to be clearly perceived particularly in the Third World. Non-governmental organisations of the 'North' are seen to be at times taking advantage of the institutional and legal weaknesses of the developing countries and conducting activities without any visible check which are not always beneficial to or supportive of the national interests of the developing countries. The self-appointed "do-gooders" have also found co-operative local partners in many countries. Legal steps have been taken to regulate the activities of NGO's in Bangladesh. If properly channeled the NGOs can become important vehicles of fostering goodwill, understanding and mutual respect among peoples of the world. Bangladesh seeks to keep the activities of NGOs within defined, desirable and legal limits.

As informal agents of international relations the NGOs particularly the foreign NGOs, have not generally been able to create a very favourable tradition and image in Bangladesh. Soon after the liberation of Bangladesh literally hundreds of foreign NGOs came in to the country for rendering humanitarian and relief services. Bangladesh at that time, for obvious reasons did not have either any appropriate law or any governmental organisation to closely regulate and properly evaluate their activities. Persistent reports were published in local newspapers during the seventies about the excesses being committed by NGOs in Bangladesh. Subsequently in 1979 Bangladesh Government had to create a new law to regulate the activities of NGOs in Bangladesh. External Resources Division of the Ministry of Finance and the Social Welfare Directorate of the Government of Bangladesh are the focal points of coordination of the activities of foreign registered and foreign-aided NGOs working in Bangladesh.

Specialised Bodies

The UN Association of Bangladesh (UNAB), Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) are among the major Bangladeshi bodies concerning themselves with foreign policy issues. All these institutions seek to create greater awareness and wider publicity on foreign policy issues through dissemination of knowledge, information and views. They organise lectures, seminars and workshops for their members and invitees. Among these, the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), a semi-official organisation of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, is particularly making its mark. The Institute is growing into an effective forum for scholars, policy makers and academicians. BIISS is not only involved in conducting research on major foreign policy and strategic issues, it is also trying to bridge the existing gap between theory and practice through collaborative efforts between academicians and policy makers, planners and professionals.

Groups and Associations

The business community, particularly involved in trade, commerce and finance, is becoming yet another important institution in the conduct of external relations. Bangladesh Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industries has formed joint commission with its counterparts in many countries including Japan, F.R.G. and Belgium etc. The growing global activities of multinationals is also attracting attention of most Third World governments. Therefore, international interactions of private businessmen are acquiring significance and importance requiring governmental attention and even intervention. Trading interests are among the major determinants of foreign policy these days. Private traders while operating within the formal framework of intergovernmental understandings and agreements have their own way of influencing and at times even determining the nature of those understandings and agreements. As the private sector business institutions of Bangladesh are developing competence and gain

experience, they are increasingly playing their role in influencing the formulation and conduct of external relations.

There are small private special interest groups and organisations seeking to influence foreign policy issues. There are organisations of stranded Pakistanis who are still awaiting repatriation from Bangladesh to Pakistan. Their organisations are neither very vocal nor very effective. Occasionally their existence is visible in the streets of Dhaka.

Friendship organisations seek to develop better relations between Bangladesh and involved foreign countries. There is no law regulating their creation or conduct. These friendship associations are voluntary and private. Their sources of finance are supposed to be local but there does not seem to be much public supervision over their activities and sources of fund. It is believed that source of these friendship societies/associations could be used by interested countries for projecting their specific interests. By and large these friendship associations are rendering a satisfactory service in promoting better relations between Bangladesh and other countries. In some countries, Foreign Office finances such organisations and thus exercises a measure of control and influence over their activities. But in Bangladesh there has been no such effort by the Government. As such some of these associations continue to remain in a way susceptible to external influences.

Universities and other higher seats of learning in Bangladesh have often sought to make themselves intellectually relevant and effective in relation to foreign policy questions. University-based organisations of teachers and students with different political persuasions have at times taken open position on certain foreign policy issues.

There is also a growing interest within the academic circle of Bangladesh to discuss and debate foreign policy questions. Many University teachers have now recognised publications and monographs on foreign policy issues. Universities all over the world are known to provide necessary intellectual basis or rationale for foreign policy activities of their governments. As the universities of Bangladesh are coming out of their relative isolation, it is expected that they would become centres of influence in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy of Bangladesh.