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BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN RELATIONS : STILL DEVELOPING ?

It is more than a decade that Bangladesh and Pakistan established official relationship through mutual recognition of each other on 22 February 1974 on the eve of Second Islamic Summit at Lahore. Although Pakistani recognition was seen as a response to the initiative and pressure of muslim countries attending the summit and hectic mediation between the two estranged nations through the representative of Kuwait, Lebanon, Algeria, Senegal and PLO¹, Pakistan's own urge for going through this inescapable formality to settle her outstanding problem of POWs and other related issues with Bangladesh as well as legitimising Bhutto's own position was no less instrumental. The relationship however did not immediately blossom and the bitterness lingered. Looking at the process that the new republic went through to achieve its independence, such relation, if at all possible, appeared for a time a distant possibility.

The growth of relations between former adversaries is nothing new and often forms a part of *realpolitik*. There are instances of past enemies entering into excellent bilateral understanding and at times forging multilateral cooperation as found in today's Europe. Most of the newly emergent countries of Asia and Africa forgot the bitterness of their colonial past and developed mutually beneficial relationship with former colonial rulers. Despite a bitter occupation memory, both Korea and China share today a common security

1. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, *Bangladesh's External Relations: The Strategy of a Small Power in a Subsystem* (unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Australian National University, May 1980), p. 119

concern with Japan and derive benefit from economic ties with her. An embittered Algeria after a protracted war of independence harbour little enmity against France any more.

All these happen usually after a period of time that span over a generation or more. With the passage of time new crises and priorities crop up disengaging a nation from old enmity in order to meet new challenges. As the passions fade away a new generation finds such shifts acceptable particularly when it is in their interest. Time is an important factor in healing up the wounds. It has taken Indonesia almost two decades to indicate a thaw in her attitude towards China which was allegedly involved in a communist led coup in 1965 in that country. Even after four decades the memories of 'Nazi Persecution' spark off deep emotions among agrieved Jews as demonstrated recently by the protest against Reagan's homage at Bitberg Cemetery where the fallen SS troops lie buried alongside the persecuted Jews. But the case of Bangladesh-Pakistan relationship is somewhat unique. "After having suffered one of the largest genocides of this century" in the hands of Pakistani occupation force "Bangladesh had its traumatic birth in 1971"². It took her less than three years to come to an amity with her erstwhile persecuter. Unofficial relationship started even earlier in the form of small scale trade through third countries. Given the background, the speed and urgency marking the growth of this relation have few parallels in contemporary history.

The problems were enormous, but virtually nothing stood on the way. For Bangladesh, an 'internal colonialism'³ perpetrated by West

2. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Group Interests and Political Changes : Studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh*, South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p. vi.
3. The concept of internal colonialism implies a process of domination and exploitation of one ethnic group by another within the same nation. For a detailed analysis of concept see Michael Hecter, *Internal Colonialism : The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1975). Pakistan (formerly West Pakistan) pursued a Policy of domination of and exploitation in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) which tantamounted to internal colonialism.

Pakistan (Now Pakistan) for long twenty three years, brutal killing of millions of her unarmed citizens, wide scale war crimes, deliberate massacre of intellectuals on the eve of victory, virulent propaganda by Pakistan against the new republic, resisting recognition by world community through Pakistan's own brand of 'Hallstein'⁴ policy, opposing UN seat—none of these blocked the way. For Pakistan, her injured pride of unconditional surrender did not constitute a serious factor against reconciliation; nor did the domestic situation hostile to recognition create much barrier. Why and how did it all happen ?

An attempt has been made in this paper to examine the factors contributing to this process of rapprochement. The paper also proposes to indicate how that rapprochement developed subsequently, the impediments in the way of the development of the relationship and the prospects for its future.

NEW COUNTRY, OLD ETHOS

To understand Bangladesh behaviour pattern and attitude in its domestic politics as well as external alignments both before and after its independence it is essential to go deep into the genesis of its nationalism, how it developed over centuries and its dynamics. One has also to comprehend : What are her vulnerabilities, threats to national entity and politico-economic security ; her perceptions and strategy of survival adopted in various circumstances. Why the people of Bangladesh behaved in some particular manner at different stages of their history has a great deal to do with all these—particularly their fierce sense of nationalism and threat perceptions. Let us have a brief background of the factors in a historical perspective for subse-

4. Hallstein Doctrine—the doctrine that German Federal Republic would break off diplomatic relations with any country which recognized the German Democratic Republic, was adopted by Pakistan in relation to Bangladesh after the latter's inception but subsequently the former was practically forced to cease it with the growing number of countries recognising Bangladesh.

quent understanding of Bangladesh forging alignments—paradoxical at least at first look.

'Vanga'⁵ to Bangladesh—A Distinct Identity

Bangladesh is one of the newest nation-states but its ethos are old and were built over the entire history of its existence. From the beginning of its recorded history in the early sixth century the area roughly corresponding to present Bangladesh maintained a distinct identity of its own with a political culture and socio-economic structure different from the rest of India. It is mainly because of its peripheral nature of location and river boundary. With whatever name, status or identity it existed through the centuries—whether a mongoloid 'vanga' of ancient time, a cluster of recalcitrant principalities during Muslim rule, an impoverished 'rural slum' of British Indian province of Bengal, part of East Bengal-Assam province in British India, Eastern half of Pakistan or sovereign independent Bangladesh—it retained its basic characteristics of individualism and urge for independence althrough-

With whatever name, status or identity it existed through the centuries, Bangladesh retained its basic characteristics of individualism and urge for independence althroughout.

out. Its people were fiercely freedom-loving and resisted foreign invasion over and again. They differed even from the people of neighbouring 'Gauda' later forming western half of British Indian province of Bengal and subsequently Indian state of West Bengal, though both belonged to the same linguistic group. In old times, the Aryans from Northern India penetrated into 'Gauda' and influenced their culture. But they were resisted by the people of 'Vanga'

5. Mizanur Rahman Shelly, *Emergence of a New Nation in a Multipolar World : Bangladesh*, University Press Ltd., Bangladesh, 1979, p. 29.

successfully in their difficult deltaic terrain thereby forging a cultural wedge between the two peoples of same linguistic group.

From thirteenth century onward the area came under Muslim rule for next five hundred years although the advent of Islam started earlier with the arrival of Arab sailors trading in the coastal areas. Even during the Muslim rule the 'isolationist trend'⁶ continued barring a brief period of about a century when Bengal was incorporated into the Moghul Empire. Moghul rule also did not strike a firm root in Bengal as reflected in *Bara Bhuiyas'* continuous resistance to Moghul supremacy. With the advent of muslims, wary of a rigid system of caste discrimination the people of the area went for mass conversion to Islam. Even while accepting Islam they retained their basic political character—passion for freedom. However with new social status as muslims they came to be regarded as a completely separate entity.

Towards A Concept of Nationhood

This distinction as a separate entity came to a sharper relief when later all throughout the nineteenth century the muslims of Bengal, as elsewhere in the subcontinent, lay prostrate before the rising tide of Hindu revivalism and an assertive Hindu Community under the patronage of British Raj. Socio-economically the conditions of the muslims deteriorated all over India. Particularly in Bengal the muslims who composed the vast peasantry of the province were no match to economically strong and educationally advanced burgeoning hindu middle class in and around Calcutta—the cradle of hindu dominated modern Indian nationalism. Their (Bengali muslim) conditions were exacerbated by the introduction of 'Permanent Settlement' by Cornwallis in Bengal. The muslim and low caste hindu peasantry were hard hit by this and they came to be identified as an oppressed class in Bengal. Also elsewhere in the subcontinent the muslims' fortune was at its nadir. As the interests of the muslims from all over India coincided in the face of a dominating hindu society and British Administration hostile to muslim interests they gradually started closing ranks inspite

6. *ibid*

of racial difference and social cleavages. In Bengal it found expression in Faraizi Movement (1810-1831) and Indigo riots as well as in the communal riots in Calcutta in 1880s. These series of events gave rise to a community consciousness among the muslims in a manner not experienced before. The power of the religion was for the first time felt in rousing and uniting muslims of all classes and all regions of the subcontinent.

The partition of Bengal, 1905, was an important event for the muslims in this region. It brought the Bengal muslims—still sociopolitically inarticulate—a step closer to a sense of nationalism and with a territorial content. Muslim community—the beneficiary of Bengal partition received their first official recognition of having a separate identity. Even when the partition was revoked under strong Hindu protest the resultant polarisation further politicised the muslims and galvanised their unity and cohesion. Nevertheless the muslims being the overall majority in a reunited Bengal stood to gain when legislative politics started. In the competition that ensued in Bengal politics Hindu community rather than British began to be perceived as a threat.

The distinction of Bengal muslim community received another dimension through their adverse reaction to Lucknow Pact (1916) providing for major concessions to hindus in muslim majority provinces at the cost of some gains for muslims in Hindu majority provinces. As it was against the interest of muslims in Bengal, they rose even against their coreligionists proving that the interest of Bengali muslims need not necessarily coincide with those of muslims in Northern India.

British policies regarding gradual devolution of power and the extension of legislative politics for the first time came closest to the solution of the major problem of the Bengali muslims—the translation of their demographic majority into political power. With the introduction of 1935 India Act muslims became a dominant factor in Bengal politics and a separate electorate system gave this

'a built-in bias to power'.⁷ In the wake of continuous power struggle with Hindu dominated Congress the Muslims in Bengal closed their ranks with A K Fazlul Huq joining Muslim League in 1937 and moving Pakistan Resolution in 1940. Thus their alliance with coreligionists outside the region in the face of a perceived threat from Hindu Congress in Bengal was a significant phenomenon. The muslims of the two different regions of the subcontinent wanted to determine their own destiny as they were exploited and dominated by the economically and politically powerful Hindu community. The various economic, social and political factors made the Bengali muslims feel identified with muslims elsewhere in India. This identity of interest led to the emergence of Pakistan. This however proved tragic.

In Pakistan for the Bengali muslims the central problem was that of the translation of their demographic majority into political power. This proved difficult in view of overriding personality of Pakistan's Karachi based Governor General, Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a society heavily dependent on permanent bureaucracy with minimal Bengali representation and a far-off Capital, the focal point of political power. "Of all provinces which made up Pakistan it was Bengal which gave the most solid support to Jinnah in his struggle for the the establishment of a separate muslim state in the subcontinent. Yet, within a short period the Bengalis found themselves in an unfortunate situation" under overwhelming politico-economic domination of West Pakistani ruling elites. So, obviously the honeymoon period was brief.

Historically, today's Bangladesh nation had to deal at different times with two other major communities in South Asia, the hindus particularly of West Bengal who were of immediate concern to them

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7. Shapan Adnan, "Fazlul Huq and Bengal Muslim Leadership 1937-1943", *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, vol-I (Dhaka : *Journal of Bangladesh Itihash* 1976), pp. 4-5
 8. G. W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* C Hurst & Company, London, 1974, p. 5

and their fellow muslims in the rest of India eventually assuming the form of Pakistan. After experience had indicated a distinct set of interest for them, their basic strategy in countering threat from one "was to seek alliance with the other. It was in other words the principle of balance of a three body system".⁹ Moreover two essential attributes that distinguish Bangladeshis from other major regional communities are the combination of their identity both as muslim and Bengali. "The Bangladeshis have always given preference to their collective national interests and, to ensure these, have fought against hindus, christians and their coreligionist muslims".¹⁰

FACTORS LEADING TO RECONCILIATION

India—A Perceived Threat

It is this background that we have to keep in view while examining the events that followed. One such important event was the war of independence itself. Attempts have been made by various quarters to give different explanations of this cataclysmic events. Patent Pakistani view is that Bangladesh Independence was purely an Indian product while India never failed to claim to have liberated Bangladesh. The truth perhaps lay in the fact that when the independence war broke out, "India's desire to weaken Pakistan, her enemy number one coincided with the aspirations of the Bengali nationalist forces".¹¹ The actual dynamics of the struggle were provided by Bangladesh aspiration for self-determination. "India wanted to increase her influence in the subcontinent and maintain her superiority in the region and the Bengalis wanted to win the war and gain their independence."¹² This convergence of interest inevitably brought India and

9. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, *op., cit.*, p. 54

10. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *op., cit.*, p. 239

11. Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh : Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, University Press Ltd., Dhaka, Bangladesh 1983, p. 182

12. *ibid.*

Bangladesh close to each other. Pakistan herself is in no way less responsible for an Indian involvement by pushing Bangladesh to a position of complete alienation. It was mostly the product of the circumstances in the wake of Pakistan Army's crackdown, mass exodus to neighbouring India, limited option on the part of Bangladesh in seeking help from countries other than India and most importantly the absence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the scene although "the war was fought and won in his name".¹³ Bangladeshis, in general, did not quite relish the 'sanctuaries'¹⁴ provided by India, as many old guards even in the rank of Awami League leadership fought for Pakistan less than a generation ago from their new bases in bordering West Bengal state of India and particularly Calcutta. Then there were few options. Besides, the events so rapidly developed that they got also inadvertently and inescapably entangled with the Indians. Whatever might have been the motives or circumstances behind Indian involvement her contribution towards final victory and emergence of Bangladesh is a historical fact. Equally true are the implications her involvement brought for Bangladesh in the wake of its independence. The "position of a dependent state of India"¹⁵ that Bangladesh found herself in was nothing unexpected as desperate dependence on India for everything from diplomacy to gunpowder was ingrained in the entire process of the war of Independence. India never failed to make the best out of it and ensured Bangladesh in making to be totally subservient to her (India) principles and policies.

Once the euphoria of victory was over there appeared elements of irritation. While the continuing presence of Indian Army, its technical experts and advisers long after Pakistan's surrender—the justification notwithstanding—started becoming irksome, much to Bangladeshis' chagrin "the occupation forces" of India "started taking away the arms, ammunition, equipment, machineries and even

13. *ibid.*, p. 264,

14. *ibid.* p. 182.

15. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

furniture and household goods inconvoy of trucks across the border'¹⁶. Even with all the fervour still prevailing for India, an ally in crisis, the baffled Bangladeshis felt somewhat awestruck at the series of events starting from stepped-up form of smuggling particularly of jute to the devaluation of taka and an unfavourable trade balance with India. All these started having adverse effect on country's economy. "The Indian government imposed a trade agreement on Bangladesh providing for free trade within ten miles of the border of each country".¹⁷ Through this agreement "India siphoned off Bangladesh a large part of foreign grants and huge quantity of jute, rice, and other essential commodities."¹⁸ The country was already ravaged by Pakistan occupation Army, now the people started having fears over the presence of Indian overlords and a systematic economic domination of India. "In public mind the high prices became associated with the new relation with India".¹⁹ However, it was the Friendship Treaty signed by Bangladesh and India in March 1972 that created immense apprehension in public mind. The caption, style and the contents of the treaty smacked of an Indo-Soviet hegemonism in the region. Not only that the treaty enhanced "India's image as a liberating power"²⁰ the accord implied "Indian ascendancy in the new state".²¹ The treaty articles particularly on foreign relation, defence and economy left Bangladesh with little manoeuvre. True to their history and tradition the people of Bangladesh could not quite accept these developments without raising questions and many demanded the rescission of the treaty. An anti-Indian sentiment started building up spontaneously. The Bangladeshi apprehension of Indian intention gathered momentum with ominous turns of certain events. In 1974 the unilateral

16. Moudud Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

17. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *op. cit.*, p-185.

18. *ibid.*

19. Shelton Kodikara, *Strategic Factors in Interstate Relations in South Asia*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 19 Canberra 1979, p. 28.

20. *ibid.*, p. 27.

21. *ibid.*

Indian decision of Nuclear Test explosion came as a shock and in Bangladesh it was looked upon as a "veiled threat to her (India's) smaller neighbours".²² In 1975 the annexation of Sikkim by India was still more grave and was viewed with concern in Bangladesh where the press was extremely vocal against the action, although "the official reactions were of serious but cautious concern".²³

While these were only the new irritants in relations with India, equally serious problems embittering the relationship were inherited ones. Even when Bangladesh was the part of Pakistan there were problems of delineation of maritime border, border demarcation, disputed enclaves and most importantly the question of Farraka. The problems remained unsolved even with the emergence of Bangladesh ; rather fresh ones like the possession of South Talpatty island and the fencing problem etc. were added to them. With all these issues unresolved it was difficult to see a "border of eternal peace and friendship"²⁴ as envisaged in the Friendship Treaty.

Most serious of the bilateral problems was one of the construction of Farrakka Barrage by which India had already done an 'irreparable damage' to the life and economy of Bangladesh. Negotiation started on sharing of Ganges water after the barrage was commissioned early 1975. "In spite of all the concessions made to

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Indians the government of Sheikh Mujib could not get a fair deal in Ganges water dispute except for a face saving interim arrangements".²⁵ Even Sheikh Mujib, most sought and befriended by

22. *ibid.*, p. 28

23. *ibid.*, p. 34

24. Moudud Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 186

25. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *op. cit.*, p. 195

India, felt embarrassed at Indian dealings on occasions. He had clear indignation at Indian handling of 'trial of war criminals'. With her military supremacy established after the war of 1971 India, then more mindful of her 'image' was inclined to a show of magnanimity in matters of POWs while Mujib made public commitment on the trial of 195 POWs on the soil of Bangladesh 'not for vengeance but for justice. But "according to prior arrangement in exchange of Pakistan Government's requests and condemnation of the crimes that might have been committed by its soldiers the trial of the 195 POWs was at last dropped",²⁶ during Tripatrie Agreement of 1974. The limit to Mujib's authority vis-a-vis India thus came under sharp focus.

Mujib's attendance of Islamic Summit was obviously not liked by the Indians. "He flew over Indian territory to their utter disgust to attend the Islamic Summit at Lahore".²⁷ Although Indian official reaction to this was not made public, the Indian Press made severe criticism²⁸ of his decision for not taking India in confidence earlier.

Mujib "tried his best to bring Bangladesh out of the Indian subjugation".²⁹ At one stage "he removed Tajuddin to reduce the weight of Indo-Soviet influence inside the government".³⁰ He, it is told, expressed privately his strong indignation to keep Bangladesh a dependent state.³¹ A crafty politician like him never failed to gauge the changed public mood in relation to India. Although he had few options in view of Indian role in independence war and its efforts in securing his release from Pakistan and the understandings reached in his absence by the government in exile he still moved slowly but surely towards a position of independence from India. "Despite Article 12 of Bangladesh constitution which provides for secular policies the government retained the study of Islamiat and

26. Moudud Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 203

27. *ibid.*, p. 26

28. Kuldip Nayar, *Dainik Ittefaq*, March 3, 1974

30. *ibid.*

31. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *op. cit.*, p. 266

Arabic in the school syllabus introduced during Pakistan days. Islamic Academy, a research and publication organization on Islam also continued to function and get government's financial support".³² Rather the Academy was upgraded as a foundation in 1974. The continuing practice of Islam with renewed fervour seemed to be receiving tacit government patronage even during 'secular' Mujib era. His quest for penetration into the muslim world in the Middle East was clear from his personally calling on King Khalid and his visit of large number of Arab countries to improve relations with the Islamic bloc. In sum, a process for disentangling from India could be noticed even during his regime.

The scenario underwent a traumatic change following the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975 and the 'process' was accelerated by the new government not so much committed to India. It moved faster to "counteract India's influence over Bangladesh". To do that the government needed to diversify and improve relations with as many countries as possible. In this general thrust of the diversification of relations it was only expected that Pakistan — a country in the region ever endeavouring to counter India, a common adversary, will be a choice. The history repeated itself and turned a full circle when Bangladesh again sought closer relations with muslim Pakistan after perceiving threat from India. "As a structural response to India, Bangladesh sees it necessary to build external linkages to bolster her sense of security".³³ And perhaps Pakistan was the country most readily available—and also ready to respond.

The Context of South Asian Politics

In an Indocentric South Asian region the preeminence of India is an accepted fact. This preeminence is characterised by her central location, huge size, enormous resources, vast population as well as

32. Akmal Hussain, "Bangladesh and the Muslim World" in Emajuddin Ahamed (Ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh : A Small State's Imperative*, University Press Ltd. Dhaka. 1985, p. 87

33. Iftexhar A, Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, p. 132

her growing military prowess. It is only natural that India exercises an enormous influence on South Asian politics. This overwhelming impact is buttressed by exercise, wherever possible, of her own security perception that calls for a strategic unity in the region and envisages an orbit of control in her immediate neighbourhood. India inherited the concept from the British who evolved it for the defence of India keeping in view the geo-strategic realities prevailing then. She (India) still insists on its validity though in a modified form. Earlier "the proclamation of the strategic unity of India and her regional smaller neighbours became the recurrent theme of Indian pronouncements on relations with these states."³⁴ Although such pronouncements changed later "they reappeared in some guise or another in Indian writings and pronouncements even after the modern South Asian state system"³⁵ had started to function. But even when "the official Indian policy came to assert India's interest in the integrity and territorial inviolability of India's smaller neighbours as a variant of the policy of integration with India",³⁶ she (India) never ceased to exert her strategic influence on the neighbours in one form or other. Notwithstanding India's attitude and assertion the quest of the countries in the neighbourhood to steer their course clear out of its sphere of influence was palpable and gave rise to an inevitable clash which took different manifestations. Pakistan in defiance took a different path for her security and neighbours like Sri Lanka, Nepal and later Bangladesh also sought in one way or other external linkages to buttress their fragile security.

Apart from the differences on security perceptions there are indeed problems between India and her neighbours which in varying degrees affect the neighbours' relations with India almost in an identical way. All in the neighbourhood have a complex set of issues and problems to deal with India who enjoys an advantageous position through her "bilateral diplomacy" in such dealings. This brings all the neighbours in an identity of situation giving them a common attitude

34. Shelton Kodikara, *op. cit.*, p. 17

35. *ibid.*

36. *ibid.*

and psychosis. Indo-Pakistan rivalry is somewhat chronic and deep-rooted and time and again fuelled by fresh hostilities. Polemics now centre on Pakistan's nuclear programme and Sikh problem which New Delhi believes Pakistan is encouraging. Although Bangladesh's problems with India do not create sensation they are complicated and have potentials of escalation. I have mentioned some of these problems earlier in this paper. "Nepal remains suspicious because of its overwhelming dependence on trade and transit with India"³⁷ while India's relations with Sri Lanka are sour because of Tamil autonomy movement and Sri Lankan suspicion of India aiding Tamil guerillas. While this is the pattern of relationship between India and her neighbours, the neighbours surprisingly find themselves at ease with each other and have been able to forge good bilateral relations. Little is known about any bilateral problem among these countries except that Bangladesh and Pakistan are yet to resolve some of their outstanding problems. But in the wider context of the political game in South Asian region all these countries including Bangladesh and Pakistan appear to be on the same side of the court. "India's size and concomitant natural superiority in dealings with all areas that constitute power"³⁸ as well as some of her records in dealings with her neighbours will continue to cause anxiety for them who are likely to move still closer to each other with an instinct of survival.

Rivalry—Not Enmity

What really bedevilled Bangladesh-Pakistani relation within the framework of a united Pakistan was an intense form of rivalry between two geographical area of a country. Such rivalry existed in various form in many countries among different regions and communities and interest groups. Through national consensus, process of integration and appropriate political order such rivalries have

37. *Asia Pacific Community*, Spring 1985 No. 28, p. 24

38. Dieter Braun, "Indian Relations with Indian Ocean States" in Ian Clark and Lawry W. Bowman, eds., *The Indian Ocean in Global Politics* (Boulder, Cold : Westview Press, 1981), p. 27

successfully been tackled in those countries. In Pakistan where the task was formidable in view of its peculiar geographical configuration and chronic imbalance among the regions the rulers failed to provide the nation a proper political order and thus failed in achieving a desperately needed national cohesion. Consequently the prevailing rivalry turned acrimonious instead of taking the shape of healthy competition. Both political and economic interests of two major regions clashed bringing them to a point of no return. Whether we call it a failure in national integration or an inevitable consequence of deliberate exploitation of a region by another it did not in any

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way erode religious affinity that brought them together, neither did it belie the arguments behind their communion. A fierce Hindu-Muslim antagonism that brought the muslims of British India on to a common platform was only a recent history. Their failure in living together did not necessarily nullify that history. Once the conflict of interests ended with Bangladesh achieving independence there was little to contend for any more.

Moreover there is a segment of people who feel that the emergence of Bangladesh is just the fulfilment of historic Lahore Resolution providing for two autonomous muslim states in two muslim majority areas of subcontinent. To them, the growing relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan should be as desirable, smooth and natural as between any two muslim countries elsewhere. With the context of old rivalry disappearing Bangladesh and Pakistan have little barrier in moving closer to each other inspite of their separate identities.

Islam and the Muslim World

The religion of Islam has been a major driving force for the Muslims in Bengal throughout their history. As early as in first half of nineteenth century when the tribal muslims in the North West Frontier revolted against the British the muslims of Bengal collected volunteers and sent them to camps two thousand miles away from their home. The Islamic religious teachers in Bengal characterised the revolt against British as Jihad and called the muslims to participate in it.³⁹ Later during Khilafat movement the muslim volunteers from Bengal travelled as far away as to Turkey to fight for the preservation of 'Khilafat'. Again it was the most dominant factor that drove them to seek alliance with muslims in the northwest of India even when they knew that the resultant arrangements would be much to their disadvantage. True to their apprehension their experience of the fellow muslims in Pakistan was both disappointing and bitter. But that did not in any manner reduce their fervour for the religion of Islam and it continued to influence their behaviour even afterwards. Even today they are sensitive to the causes of muslims anywhere in the world. Bangladesh volunteers fought and died in Lebanon for the Palestinians. They have sharply reacted to sacrilege of any Holy place or book of Islam. Any setback of muslim or any attack on their faith in any form touches off deep emotion in Bangladesh. Even when Bengali muslims broke away from Pakistan and secular politics was introduced in Bangladesh the relationship with the muslim world was one of the main objectives of Bangladesh's external policies as evidenced from many special steps that were taken to seek recognition from and improve relations particularly with Middle East Muslim countries. Although some Arab countries demurred in the beginning to accord recognition to Bangladesh the muslim world as a whole could not ignore the sovereign existence of Bangladesh—home of the second largest number of muslims in the world. While other contributing factors might have been at work it was ultimately

39. W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Muslims*, (Translated into Bengali by M. Anisuzzaman), 1982 p. 1

the muslim world that was able to bring the two embittered countries together during Second Islamic Summit.

Economic Complementarity

In erstwhile Pakistan, a number of sectors of the country's economy was built on the basis of complementarity between its two wings. The industries came up where there were the sources of raw materials and other inputs and facilities. While textile industries boomed in West Wing, the pulp and papers were produced in the East. The bulk of Jute Industries were in East Wing but their products were consumed in West Pakistan in large quantity. Tobacco grown in the Frontier Province were consumed in East Pakistan whereas there were great demands for Tea from East wing. The betel leaves were in great demand in Karachi and Punjab and most of fruits consumed in Eastern Wing came from the West. This complementarity extends to other fields of production and consumption. While over the years the respective economies of Bangladesh and Pakistan have been adjusting to the changed political reality, a trend towards rediscovering the complementarity is observed in the emerging trade pattern to the mutual benefit of both. Earlier at private level there used to be large volume of inter-wing business. Much of those business transactions have now been reactivated. Then there are plenty of trusts and business contacts cultivated from the days of united Pakistan.

This complementarity played an important role at least in initiating trade links that brought about much needed contact of the people of both the countries even before the official relationship. Subsequently this factor must have been a motivating force in the minds of the leaders while considering the rationale of an early relationship. The present volume and pattern of trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan stand as testimony to such speculation. So the growth of relationship on the basis of this complementarity, it can thus be seen, is not without a logic.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONSHIP—A CURSORY
GLANCE

After having examined some of the factors that could have influenced an early Bangladesh-Pakistan reconciliation it will be pertinent to attempt an assessment of how the relationship has grown over a decade. The period of the relationship can conveniently be covered under two distinct phases with the political changes of August 1975 marking a watershed. The beginning of both the phases were characterised by great enthusiasm and high optimism. A promising start was made in 1974 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Pakistan to attend the Islamic Summit the use of which had, for formal rapprochement, a significant implication. There prevailed an air of reconciliation with earnest efforts afoot on both sides to improve the relations. Again in August 1975 renewed zeal could be noticed on both sides when Pakistan instantly recognised the new regime of Dhaka and both sides decided to open up diplomatic missions.

In both cases however the initial enthusiasm did not last long and the subsequent development of the relations was certainly not in conformity with what it promised to be initially. In the first phase, the immediate and most important product of the mutual recognition was the Tripartite Agreement on April 9, 1974. The significant feature of this agreement was the dropping of the trial of 195 Pakistani prisoners "as an act of clemency" as a step "for the promotion of normalisation of relations and the establishment of durable peace in the subcontinent". "The Prime Minister of Pakistan had declared that he would visit Bangladesh in response to the invitation of Prime Minister of Bangladesh and appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past in order to promote reconciliation."⁴⁰ The Prime Minister of Bangladesh reciprocated telling that "he wanted the people to forget the past and make fresh start."⁴¹

40. Text of the Bangladesh-India-Pakistan Agreement signed in New Delhi on April 9, 1974.

41. *ibid.*

For a time the signs of a 'fresh start' were visible. The three-way repatriation as envisaged in Tripartite Agreement was taking place. And even the proposed visit of Pakistani Prime Minister took place by the end of June 1974. But the warmth generated at Lahore Summit soon started cooling off once the issues of hard bargaining came up. "In Dhaka both the leaders held meetings to settle the disputed issues existing between the two countries. The talks, however, did not make any tangible headway as Pakistan showed reluctance to come to grips with questions of division of assets and absorptions of non-Bengalis in large number. The much vaunted Mujib-Bhutto Summit, as anticipated, did not click and failed to produce any clear results".⁴² That perhaps marked the end of a brief honeymoon period of our relationship with Pakistan during Mujib era. Now onward the relationship seemed to be stalling with little interaction taking place. Neither side took any initiative or interests for opening up diplomatic relations for one and half years after the mutual recognition. While recognition only made bilateral negotiation on pending issues possible the issues themselves were difficult enough to turn more and more complex with divergent views on both sides. As regards the repatriation of 'stranded Pakistanis' although more than 500,000 of them opted for Pakistan, Pakistan kept haggling over the numbers to be accepted by them. On the issue of 'division of assets' also views widely differed. Right from the start the Pakistani attitude to defer the issue could be clearly understood. As a result polemics continued and the postures and utterances on both the sides proved prejudicial to growing relations. That there were deadlocks on these issues could be seen from the fact that Bangladesh raised the "stranded Pakistanis" question in the Third Committee of UNGA in December 1974.⁴³ "Mujib raised it again at the Commonwealth leaders conference in Jamaica in May 1975 when he criticised Pakistan's failure to take back 63,000 Bihari

42. Syed Serajul Islam, "Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations : From Conflict to Cooperation," in Emajuddin Ahamed (ed.) *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh : A Small State's Imperative*, University Press Ltd., Dhaka, 1984, p. 54

43. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, p. 122

families".⁴⁴ These moves were clear proof that the relationship suffered set-back.

The next phase of the relationship was heralded with Pakistan's 'fresh recognition' announced by Bhutto who took the credit of being the first to recognise the new regime following Mujib's assassination and "urged others, particularly the Islamic countries to do likewise". Mustaque, the new President in Dhaka reciprocated through a message to Bhutto expressing confidence for opening a 'new chapter' in relationship with her. Next few months witnessed a flurry of diplomatic contacts between Bangladesh and Pakistan. A high level contact took place with the meeting of Mustaque's Foreign Minister Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury and Aziz Ahmad of Pakistan at New York. Following this meeting, on October 4, it was jointly announced that diplomatic relations at the level of Ambassadors would be established.⁴⁵ By January 1976 the Ambassadors of both the countries took their positions.

The relationship kept growing and there were a great deal of reciprocity of views on issues and matters so long they did not constitute any bone of contention between the two countries. When Farakka issue was taken to UN in 1976 Pakistan lent her support. Similarly in reaction to the developments in Afghanistan in late 1979 Bangladesh views were in concert with those of Pakistan. In order to contribute to this development in Bangladesh-Pakistan relation, Pakistani Foreign Secretary, Agha Shahi paid a visit to Bangladesh in July 1977. During the visit Pakistan agreed to take 25000 'stranded Pakistanis'.⁴⁶ The visit was promptly returned by Bangladesh Foreign Secretary in August the same year. As a result of these visits Transit Visa was introduced and the property right was restored for Bangladeshis who left their property in Pakistan. In December 1977 President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh visited Pakistan and with new Pakistani strongman Gen Ziaul Huq 'reiterated (their) conviction that

44. *ibid*, *Bangladesh Times*, 7 May, 1975

45. Iftexhar A. Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, p. 126

46. *Weekly Robbar*, Dhaka, September 11, 1983, p. 16

the continuance of (bilateral visits) would promote closer bilateral cooperation and strengthen their cultural ties."⁴⁷

The period 1977 onward witnessed a number of exchanges between the two countries. A chronological account of these exchanges helps present a pattern which is worth examining. One of the first few things that was done following the exchange of Ambassadors in January 1976 was the establishment of tele-communication between Bangladesh and Pakistan sattelites. Air services were established the same year in October. Towards further normalisation of relations Pakistan presented a Boeing 707 to Bangladesh. Besides, 28 Railway coaches which were imported earlier for erstwhile East Pakistan Railway were handed over to Bangladesh. To further institutionalise the relations, Joint Economic Commission, Cultural Cooperation and Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreements were signed in 1977. Friendly gestures to each other were also reflected through Bangladesh gift of tea to Pakistan and the latter's donation of clothes to flood victims of Bangladesh. Bangladesh sponsored the extraordinary meeting of Islamic Foreign Ministers on Afghanistan in January 1981. This also had an impact on bilateral relations.

Foreign Minister of Bangladesh visited Pakistan in July 1978 when the issues of the division of assets and repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, among other things, were discussed. On repatriation issue Pakistan deviated from her earlier commitment of taking back 25,000

If the establishment of official relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1974 and its rejuvenation in 1975 was anything extraordinary, its subsequent developments have been far from exciting.

stranded Pakistanis. They now made out a new figure of 16,000. On 'assets' issue they remained confined only to lipservice.⁴⁸ Bangladesh Foreign Minister again visited Pakistan after 5 years in February 1983.

47. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, p. 127

48. *ibid.*

Earlier in September 1978 Bangladesh Home Minister led a delegation to Pakistan with a view mainly to expediting the repatriation of 'stranded Pakistanis' and discussing diplomatic matters. In May 1980 Bangladesh Agriculture Minister made a goodwill visit to Pakistan. In various other fields mutual cooperation increased in general. Some Bangladeshi Forest Officers have already finished their training in Peshawar Forest Institute under Pakistani Fellowship while some more Pakistani fellowships are to be availed in Banking, Railway and Administrative course.

As compared to those from Bangladesh the visits by Pakistani leaders and officials were few and far between. Following a long gap after 1977, Pakistan Foreign Secretary once more visited Bangladesh in October 1980 when bilateral issue of 'assets' and repatriation of 'stranded Pakistani' figured among other things in his talk with officials here. The highest level Pakistani visitor after Bhutto's visit in 1974 was the Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yakub who came to Bangladesh in August 1983. The mutual visits of Bangladesh and Pakistan Foreign Minister in 1983 was essentially of "goodwill" nature. If the intensity of diplomatic exchanges between the two countries witnessed in late 1970s has not receded there are, however, few signs of its further growth. Pakistani Railway Minister came to Dhaka in July 1984 to attend South Asian Countries Railway Ministers Conference while Bangladesh Information Minister visited Pakistan in November 1984. The understanding, it is learnt, was reached to bring the two countries' news media closer.

A cursory glance at the relationship pattern brings to the fore one thing very distinctly. While there has been ample peripheral mutual gains on both sides, on vital questions of bilateral issue both sides remained stiff. Pakistan has allowed certain concessions here and there but on matters of hard issues like 'assets' and repatriation of 'stranded Pakistanis' she hardly yielded anything. She craftily avoided these issues and followed the strategy of dragging on presumably to maintain the status quo. As the years pass the new problems are likely to crop up and these important bilateral issues are bound to

assume secondary importance. The sense of urgency that were attached to questions of 'assets' and 'repatriation' seems to have already been faded with the passage of time. Now all the efforts are expanded mostly to revive the issues after long gaps which seem to be deliberately created. Consequently the aggrieved party (apparently Bangladesh particularly on the issue of 'assets' and 'repatriation') finds itself thrown back to square one every time.

If the establishment of official relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1974 and its rejuvenation in 1975 was anything extraordinary, its subsequent developments have been far from exciting. After more than a decade it can at best be said to be developing and has been characterised by routine, caution and at times stagnation. The mutual recognition of 1974 did not seem to be accompanied by real change of hearts and both sides continued to have reservation in their attitude. Even in the subsequent phase when the prospects looked brighter it produced little in substance. For all frequent references to common faith, history and heritage, number of exchanges, goodwill gestures, talks of past fraternal union and all the warmth displayed on both sides during the years of relationship particularly after 1975—little of the sentiments were translated into reality. As for Pakistan, to many these are just her characteristic expressions when viewed in the light of her hard stand on bilateral issues affecting Bangladesh. They were not directed as much towards a meaningful, fruitful and lasting resolution of Bangladesh's problems with her as for mellowing down Bangladesh in her stand on issues like 'assets' or 'stranded Pakistanis'.

A substantial progress has, however, been achieved in trade relations. Bangladesh and Pakistan signed a Trade Agreement in April 1976 and in pursuance of the Agreement a Joint Committee was formed in order to identify and expand trade areas between the two countries. The meeting of the Joint Committee is held alternately in each other's country and the first meeting was held in December 1977 in Dhaka,

Since the signing of the agreement a number of trade delegations visited each other's country. Recently, a delegation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce visited Bangladesh and signed an agreement for establishing a Joint Chamber of Commerce between the two countries. One of the salient features of trade relations between the two countries is the volume of trade in private sector which constituted about 78% of the whole transactions.

The major items exported from Bangladesh in private sector are tea, raw jute, jute goods and betel leaves. In 1982-83 tea constituted 39.61 per cent while raw jute constituted 35 per cent of the total volume of export to Pakistan. Other major exportable items from Bangladesh to Pakistan are paper and paper products, newsprint, hardboard, wires and chemicals. Pakistan's export to Bangladesh are constituted of textile fibres, textile yarn, tobacco, oil seeds, fruits, chemical compounds, iron and vegetable oil.

The special feature of trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan is that the balance of payment is generally in favour of Bangladesh. This position is discernible from the following table:

External Trade of Bangladesh with Pakistan⁴⁹

Figures in Million Taka

Year	Value of Export Receipts	Value of Import Payments	Total Turnover
1974-75	—	0.5	0.5
1975-76	64.5	425.0	489.5
1976-77	357.9	80.5	438.4
1977-78	696.2	294.9	991.1
1978-79	648.3	297.6	945.9
1979-80	573.2	414.7	987.9
1980-81	962.1	965.2	1927.3
1981-82	792.4	551.1	1343.5
1982-83	1211.1	309.1	1520.2
1983-84	1483.9	573.4	2057.3

49. *Bangladesh Bank, Annual Export Receipts and Annual Import Payments, 1979-80, and 1983-84, (Dhaka).*

SOME IMPEDIMENTS

The Bangladesh-Pakistan relationship has considerably grown particularly in post-1975 period but there is a conspicuous lack of breakthrough as it can be gauged from the foregoing overview. Why is it so? Whereas the stalemate prevailing in the relationship prior to the political changes in 1975 can be understood, the conditions created afterwards were all favourable for a total rapprochement. There were definite shifts in domestic politics and external politics of Bangladesh since then. The posture of the new government was to seek a greater balance and independence in her external relations. A reorientation of foreign policy was in the offing. The reasons actuating the leadership for breaking away from Pakistan was no more relevant. The political elements favouring close links with Pakistan started acquiring influences in the domestic politics of Bangladesh. The muslim characteristics started getting more projection at government level through various official organs. Any signs or synonyms bearing pro-Indian stigma were abolished. In fact the changes in Bangladesh were publicly rejoiced by Pakistanis who did not conceal their sense of relief and satisfaction at the development taking place in Bangladesh. There were plenty of expressions of goodwill on both the sides. Pakistan's instant recognition of the new regime and almost simultaneous recognition of Bangladesh by two of the closest allies of Pakistan—Saudi Arabia and China—were all demonstrative of it. In sum, the conditions were all very congenial for a very friendly relationship to be grown between the two countries. As expected, at least in the beginning it grew rapidly and there were plenty of initiatives on both sides. At a later stage, however, it lost much of its initial momentum. Let us now see what all could have been the impediments in the way of a continuing smooth developments of relation bringing it to point of breakthrough.

Shadow of the Past

A historical bitterness still pervades the minds of the people in both the countries. For Bangladesh the bitterness is that of politico-

economic exploitation and domination of west Pakistanis in erstwhile Pakistan as well as Pakistani atrocities during the independence war. For Pakistan the bitterness is grown mainly out of the humiliating defeat in the war of 1971. Although much of the agonising memory of the cataclysmic event has subsided the bitterness however lingers. It gets fueled on various occasions like 21st February Martyr Day, Bangladesh Independence Day, the Martyr Intellectuals Day and the Victory Day all of which are officially celebrated. There are both official and unofficial arrangements for the preservation of the ideals and values of independence war which all have anti-Pakistani undertone. The contemporary arts, literature, sculpture and painting are much coloured with the harrowing tales of atrocities carried out by the Pakistanis. Every year the fateful 25th March of 1971 is recalled with renewed emotions. The National Museum and archives have exhibits and records that keep these memories alive. Even the new generation grows up with information and knowledge contained in the text books or contemporary history that easily generate bitter feelings for Pakistan. As I have mentioned earlier that the time is an important factor in healing up the wounds of the past. So the present bitteresses are likely to be forgotten in a changed context. They nevertheless constitute a major impediment in the way of total rapprochement for the present. On both sides there are sporadic incidents which are supposedly the product of such bitterness and they over and again put strain on relationship thus slowing down the process of normalization.

Issue of the Repatriation of "Stranded Pakistanis"

First let us see who are these 'stranded Pakistanis'. Where did they come from? And how are they 'stranded'? Following the partition of India in 1947 the muslims of Bihar province of India migrated enmasse to erstwhile East Pakistan perhaps being physically nearer to their original home. In prevailing warmth of new muslim nationhood these people were cordially accepted by the Bengali muslims who provided much needed succour to these uprooted muslim brethren

from India. But unfortunately the gestures of the Bengali Muslims were not reciprocated by these Urdu speaking refugees from Bihar. Instead of merging with the mainstream of Bengali society they preferred to live as alien in the land of the hosts. The government of erstwhile Pakistan rehabilitated them in a few selected 'pockets' with facilities and privileges in preference to local population. They never identified themselves with the problems and the aspirations of the native citizens. Instead they served the purpose and advanced the interests of the West Pakistani rulers. During the War of Independence most of them collaborated with Pakistani occupation Army and worked as their agents. Naturally after Pakistani defeat and emergence of Bangladesh these people felt insecure here. They were given an option to exercise their right to citizenship either of Pakistan or Bangladesh through the International Red Cross Society. Out of a million strength Bihari population in Bangladesh 500,000 of them opted for Pakistan at the end of the war. Those who opted to stay in Bangladesh and expressed their allegiance to the new republic were again received well and they have gradually been merged with the local population. Problems arose, however, with the ones who in free exercise of their will expressed allegiance to Pakistan and want, for their own good reasons to go to Pakistan. In last fourteen years they have not changed their allegiance and been consistently demanding repatriation to Pakistan.

From the beginning Pakistan was reluctant to accept them at least in large numbers as they were likely to increase the ranks of refugees in Karachi 'exacerbating local-non-local conflict in Sind province'.⁵⁰ Although the repatriation of certain categories of stranded Pakistanis had already started as per Delhi Agreement of 1973, the revolving round the number to be accepted dragged on although the Tripartite Agreement of 1974 well explained the categories to be accepted by Pakistan. At one point during Mujib-Bhutto talk in June 1974 the latter showed unwillingness to accept a larger figure than 115,000 out of the 400,000 'eligible Pakistanis' still stranded in

50. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, p. 121

Bangladesh. In the meantime the repatriation of 'stranded Pakistani' initiated in 1973 stopped due to financial difficulties of the ICRC and were not either resumed or discussed till 1977 when following hectic diplomatic efforts Pakistan agreed to take back 25,000 'stranded Pakistanis' and out of this 4790 were repatriated by sea. The process was again halted due to disturbed political situation in Pakistan.⁵¹ Following further talks by both the government and agitation by 'stranded Pakistanis' repatriation by air was resumed briefly in September, 1979. This followed a stagnant period till date when virtually no developments took place on the issue. Even when Pakistan Foreign Secretary Mr. Riaz Piracha visited Bangladesh in October 1980, he set aside the issue by saying "since we have no

Pakistan's non-acceptance of these citizens of her will tantamount to lack of cooperation. It will also mar the spirit of Tripartite Agreement that set out to normalise the relations in South Asia.

dispute there is no question of agreement to be reached in this meeting".⁵² However a flicker of hope appeared when Pakistan Foreign Minister came to Bangladesh in August 1983 to discuss bilateral issues among other things. He at the conclusion of his visit expressed to journalists that Pakistan might take 50,000 more 'Biharis' from Bangladesh on the basis of criteria set in Tripartite conference in 1974.⁵³ In spite of all words spoken and efforts made on the issue no further repatriation took place in last six years. In the meantime these large number of 'Pakistani citizens' continue to anguish in despair in several repatriation camps with their numbers increasing and problems multiplying every year.

51. *ibid.*, p. 122

52. Syed Serajul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 55

53. Weekly *Robbar*, Dhaka, September 11, 1983, p. 19

The question of repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis is a vital issue of bilateral relation with Pakistan. Any failure in the solution of this problem constitutes a major barrier in the way of the flowering of relations between the two countries. Not only that Pakistan's non-acceptance of these citizens of her will tantamount to lack of cooperation (in taking back their citizens stranded here due to the force of circumstances) it will also mar the spirit of Tripartite Agreement that set out to normalise the relations in South Asia. Besides, the presence of these large number of foreign citizens is an unbearable financial strain on Bangladesh and also complicates its socio-political problems. All these years Bangladesh has been taking care of them only in the spirit of helping out stranded foreigners for their safe passage back home. She can not be expected to carry their burden for indefinite period. Moreover, as they owe no allegiance to this country they constitute a constant source of security problems. There are instances of law and order as well as pollution and hygenic problems in and around the 'camps' in already crowded urban centres of Bangladesh.

Notwithstanding the past records of these 'stranded Pakistanis' and the difficulties of Bangladesh vis-a-vis Pakistani attitude with regard to these people the human aspect of the problem merits attention. In all fairness it is to be admitted that these people suffered badly. In a generation's time they were uprooted also earlier in 1947 when they resolved to live and fashion their lives according to the tenets of Islam in a country they thought would be more congenial. An enterprising people of high efficacy they later fell prey to political game by West Pakistani rulers who exploited them for their ulterior purpose. While those who exploited them got away with their gains these are the people who felt abandoned and stood to lose at the tragic end of the 'vicious' game they were subjected to. Today they live in sub-human conditions constantly haunted by an uncertain future. Since the issue relating to these hopeless muslims concern two muslims countries there are all the more reasons that it is dealt with compassion, fairplay, justice and humanity dictated by Islam.

Although the latest developments on the issue are not accurately known it can be presumed from remarks and comments on both sides that a fresh Pakistani intransigence has dead-locked the issue. News have appeared recently in the press reporting Pakistan President's comments on stranded Pakistanis calling their (stranded Pakistanis) problem "the problem of Bangladesh".⁵⁴ There have been sharp reactions to such comments both in Bangladesh and Pakistan. A Foreign Office spokesman took serious exception to such remarks.⁵⁵ Bangladesh has also been constrained for the first time after 1975 to raise the issue in a multinational forum i.e. ICFM Conference in Saana requesting the muslim countries to bring in pressure on Pakistan to take back her citizens.⁶⁵

Unless Pakistan changes her present attitude and come forward for a permanent solution of it for the sake of social and moral obligation, friendship between the two neighbourly countries and above all, in deference to the agreements reached in 1973 and 1974; the growing relation will continue to be dogged with a sense of lack of sincere efforts.

The Issue Relating to the 'Division of Assets'

The people of Bangladesh have a deep sense of belonging for the assets that lay in Pakistan before the independence and genuinely feel that an equitable share of it is due to them. For obvious reasons the bulk of national assets of erstwhile Pakistan remained in West Pakistan. With the seat of government, financial as well as industrial centres and national institutions like shipping and airlines all located in West Pakistan the public properties grew and got concentrated in important urban centres there. The discriminatory policies as well as overwhelming politico-economic domination of West Pakistan always stood in the way of 'East Pakistan' receiving a reasonable share of national wealth. Later a substantial part of

55. *New Nation*, Dhaka, January 3, 1985

55. *Dainik Ittefaq*, Dhaka, January, 1, 1985

56. *Dainik Ittefaq*, Dhaka, January 2, 1985

meagre assets located here were allegedly taken away by the Pakistanis during the period of their occupation of independent Bangladesh after 26 March 1971.

Although the bulk of the assets were located in West Pakistan they were however the fruit of the combined efforts of all people of whole of erstwhile Pakistan and thus their common property. In fact at the initial stage when the jute fibre of East Pakistan was the major foreign exchange earner for Pakistan, much of the nation's economic infrastructure was built on that earnings. So, the Bangladeshis have an emotional link to the claim for the division of these common assets. But unfortunately this has appeared to be the most intractable major issue with Pakistan. The issue is one that in fact halted the slowly growing rapprochement in the initial stage and led to the failure in 1974 of Bhutto's visit which was to be the "journey of amity" by the Pakistani Prime Minister. The first dialogue on the issue started during Mujib-Bhutto talk in 1974 much to the reluctance of the latter. In that meeting Mujib called for (1) agreeing in principle to equitably share the assets and liabilities, (2) examining the detail through a joint commission and (3) making on immediate token payment within two months, consisting of quantifiable assets like gold resources, ships, aircrafts, etc. to meet increasing need of Bangladesh.⁵⁷ Bhutto, a wily politician, obviously could not agree to the proposals and instead suggested that the question should be referred to an expert committee presumably to gain time for subsequent diplomatic manoeuvre to extricate Pakistan out of it altogether. Bangladesh demand of the share of Pakistan gold and foreign exchange reserves came to \$ 11,000,000 and other assets totalled at \$ 4000 million.⁵⁸ Bhutto managed to get out from any formal commitment on the issue. Thereafter the relationship started to stagnate. Middle East Muslim countries were much interested to see the diplomatic relationship steadily growing between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Pakistan was under certain pressure from those

57. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, p. 123

58. *ibid.*

countries to mutually establish the diplomatic missions. Bangladesh now linked this to the issue of division of assets. Bangladesh considered that Pakistani urge (even if under pressure from muslim countries) to establish diplomatic relation as one of the last leverages available with her to persuade her (Pakistan) to come to a reasonable solution of the issue. During the conference of ICFM held in Jeddah in July 1975 Bangladesh Foreign Minister sought the arbitration of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE or any one of them on the question of the 'division of assets' and announced his government's willingness to abide by the outcome. Thus by mellowing down the Arabs Bangladesh expected a positive and substantial outcome. It was agreed that the matter would be settled after the forthcoming Nonaligned Conference in the following month i.e., August 1975.⁵⁹ For obvious reasons the strategy did not work.

In a new context with different orientation and emphasis the diplomatic relation was established soon after the new government in Dhaka took over. Thus the leverage available with Bangladesh to bring Pakistan to hard bargaining on the vital issue seemed lost. With changed circumstances as the new priorities were set raising

While a reasonable sharing of assets through a spirit of justice, equity and muslim brotherhood can make Bangladeshis forget the bitterness of past exploitation, a Pakistani refusal on the issue will be considered by them as a continuation of the past deprivation.

hard issues like division of assets did not immediately appear appropriate; neither did it fit in the new thrust or directions of relationship—at least for a time. Also the deteriorating political situation in Pakistan made an early raising of the issue with Pakistan impossible. Although subsequently at a later stage sincere and serious efforts

59. *ibid.*, p. 124

were made to deal with the issue it was perhaps late and by then Pakistan hardened her position finding Bangladesh left with few options. Bangladesh however made considerable groundwork for a possible resolution of the issue. She worked out and proposed four different principles as basis for the division of assets. Bangladesh Planning Commission also prepared a report on the modalities for a possible division.

After the failure of Mujib-Bhutto talk in 1974 till President Zia's visit in 1977 no formal talk took place on 'assets' issue. "On the conclusion of Zia's visit it was stated in a joint communique that Pakistan was ready to discuss the question of the division of assets and liabilities"⁶⁰ without any precondition. After another three years in October 1980 during the visit of the Pakistan Foreign Secretary it was agreed that a working group composed of inter ministerial representatives and experts of the two sides would meet in Islamabad to consider these questions and to report to the Foreign Secretaries.⁶¹

Despite reminders Pakistan side is yet to convene a meeting. The matter was raised on several occasions. Pakistan, however, made it clear that any meeting on the subject will be held without any commitment that Bangladesh has a legal claim on the assets of Pakistan. While the 'working group' is yet to get off the ground, nothing much about its function and extent of power is made known except that Pakistan Foreign Secretary vaguely pointed to its 'technical aspects' during his interview with the journalists in Dhaka.⁶² Even when Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Sahibzada Yakub Khan visited Bangladesh in August 1983 he also pointed to the issue of 'assets' as a matter of 'enormous complexity'⁶³ without elaborating the content of his talk in this regard with his counterpart in Bangladesh.

From the beginning it was Pakistan's strategy to drag on the issue to an extent when an exhausted (of pursuing it in vain) Bangladesh

60. *Dainik Ittefaq*, 23 December, 1977

61. *Ganokantha*, 30 October, 1980

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Dainik Ittefaq*, 14 August, 1983

will be brought on to point of giving it up. Thus it may be possible on the part of Pakistan to win the game but it will constitute a permanent barrier on the way of mutually beneficial full fledged relationship between the two countries. While a reasonable sharing of assets through a spirit of justice, equity and muslim brotherhood can make Bangladeshis forget the bitterness of past exploitation, a Pakistani refusal on the issue will be considered by them on the other hand as a continuation of the past deprivation.

Apart from these major impediments there are others that take the form of frictions and strain the relationship from time to time. One such recent friction revolved round the candidature for the post of Secretary General of Islamic Conference. Both in 1979 and 1983 Bangladesh decided to put up candidate for the post. In 1979 customarily it was the turn of a non-Arab Asian country to fill in the post and Bangladesh well qualified for it with her growing image among the Arabs who significantly mattered in the election. At a later stage Pakistan also decided to contest for the post. Perhaps, sensing a Bangladesh-Pakistan clash over the post Tunisia, an Arab country also put up candidate. With Bangladesh withdrawal of candidature for the greater interest of Islamic Umma Tunisian candidate was elected apparently to avert a possible split in the rank of OIC in view of a likely contest between Bangladesh and Pakistan⁶⁴. In 1983, Bangladesh was the first country to project its candidature and the possibility of her candidate getting elected appeared bright with 22 countries' (out of 41 countries) supports forthcoming⁶⁵. But again Pakistan did not want to let it go unopposed. In spite of Bangladesh indication of her expectations that Pakistan would withdraw her candidate in favour of the former⁶⁶. Pakistan remained adamant. In 14th conference of ICFM held in Dhaka in December 1983 the election was withheld again to avert a crisis, because as per OIC tradition the election to the post is

64. The information has been gathered during a discussion with Professor M. Shamsul Huq, Former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh.

65. *Bangladesh Observer*, 14 May, 1983

66. *Dainik Ittefaq*, 3 April 1980

expected to be made on the basis of consensus. Finally in Saana Conference of ICFM Pakistan with her enormous influence in Arab lobby managed to get her candidate elected. The Pakistani attitude in the matter is widely viewed as one far from friendly and put certain strains on bilateral relationship.

Then there are continuing misperceptions among Pakistanis about the creation of Bangladesh. Even after fourteen years of the tragic event of 1971 the trauma is not yet over and debates over the catastrophe still seems alive in Pakistan. Many Pakistanis still consider Bangladesh purely a product of Indian military intervention ignoring the fact of Pakistan's own failure in national integration and an universal Bangladeshi urge for self-determination in the wake of Pakistan Army's crackdown. In the course of his interaction with a responsible section of Pakistan's intelligentsia the author during a recent visit to Pakistan observed the phenomenon with pain, if not surprise. Today when after more the than a decade arguments of indian mechinations as an exclusive reason are advanced by the Pakistanis one wonders if they still have so little realisation of the ethos of the people of Bangladesh and the dynamics of its politics, particularly during the years preceeding its emergence. It would be simple to ignore the phenomenon as innocent ignorace had such perception not been in contradiction with Pakistan's acceptance of Bangladesh's sovereign entity. Pakistan will, with such perception, continue to misjudge the basis of her relationship with Bangladesh as well as acheiving its objective.

Future Possibilities

A total Bangladesh-Pakistan rappaachment holds out enormous promises for the future. It is pregnant with the possibilities of opening up new horizon of constructive cooperation both in international and regional fields. Both the countries have identity of positions on many International and regional issues. There is a striking similarity in their foreign policy directions and linkage pattern. Both are close

with the West and have friendly relations with China. Both stress special relationship with the Muslim World and support the cause of muslim Umma.

Both are members of Non-aligned Movement and Organization of Islamic Conference. They are partners in emerging South Asian Regional Cooperation and immersed in the politics of the region. Bangladesh is a member of British Commonwealth and known to have lent support for re-entry of Pakistan who left it in the wake of post-war developments in the subcontinent in 1971.

Both the countries believe in the UN resolution on the declaration of the Indian ocean as zone of peace and urge the participation of littoral and hinter land states of Indian Ocean. They are also of similar opinion that a zone of peace in South Asian region can be established by eliminating the rivalry of the great powers and creating conditions of security for all the countries of the region. Both of them uphold the UN resolution calling for a complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territory. In the United Nations both worked in close concert and are found to be on the same side in the UN voting. Both the countries pledge their adherence to the Charter of Islamic Conference, share a common urge to uphold and promote Islamic solidarity and take a prominent role in the conduct of the affairs of the OIC. Both worked together in their efforts for peace in Iran-Iraq war.

In Non-aligned movement they have identical stands on issues and matters. Particularly in matter of Afghanistan, Kampuchea and Namibia they have similar positions. Both urged for the vacation of Afghanistan by Soviet Union, favoured the Provisional Democratic Government in Kampuchea and supported Namibian people's right to self-determination.

With this rare blending of views and interest as well as perceptions they, as two of the three core countries of South Asia, can work in concert to play their historic role to promote the cause of durable peace and bring about a friendly and harmonious relationship in South

Asia. They together with other nations of the region have a special responsibility to strive for the improvement of the quality of life in this region—home of the poorest fifth of the humanity. For this, immense opportunities are provided within the framework of emerging South Asian Regional Cooperation.

Almost one-fifth of the muslims of the world live in these two countries and they are expected to have an impact on entire muslim Umma. Much of how they (the Umma) fair in world affairs depends a great deal on the performance of these two countries in Organisation of Islamic Conference as well as in other international forums for the cause of the muslims. In the past both these countries actively participated and cooperated in efforts aiming at the well being of the muslim countries. Such cooperation can increase manifold with commonality of purpose and accomodation of each other's interests.

As members of Non-aligned movement both the countries encourage ECDC and stand for equitable trade balance with industrially developed North on the basis of New International Economic Order. There is an immense scope for both the countries for promoting these common causes and thus contribute towards socio-economic upliftment both at home and in the third world as a whole. Also for the realisation of largely identical Foreign policy objectives both these countries can continue to work together at UN and other international forums as they did in the past.

Much of these prospects remain, however, to be viewed in the light of the existing and future relations between these two countries. Whether it is the continuation of past cooperation or its expansion, a great deal will depend on how prudently and expeditiously they can settle their own bilateral issues and move to a total rapprochement. The outlook for closer friendly relations and cooperation between the two countries despite some of the uphappy historical memories appears to be bright provided they come forward to settle their own outstanding problems and with a change of heart.

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