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Editor's Page

Bordered by India on its west, north and east, Myanmar on the southeast and by the Bay of Bengal in the south, Bangladesh covering an area of about 140, 000 sq kms and with over 150 million people is among the world's most densely populated countries. Bangladesh has been confronted with the problems of high population growth rate, poverty, floods and cyclones, which have been adversely affecting its economic development. Seventy five percent of the population lives in the rural areas and majority of labour force is employed in the informal economy. Two-thirds of Bangladesh's export earnings come from the garment industry, which employs more than three million workers, 90 per cent of whom are women. Notwithstanding these problems, the country has registered modest economic growth over the past few years, which is sustained by liberal foreign assistance, readymade garment exports and remittances from Bangladeshis working abroad. Though majority of its population (about 89 per cent) are Muslims, there are other communities such as Hindus (9.5 per cent), Buddhists, Christians and others (about 1.5 per cent).

Independent Bangladesh emerged in December 1971 on the strength of Bengali nationalism and as a secular country. However, after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, Bengali nationalism of the pre and post-liberation period was replaced by Bangladeshi nationalism. Soon after, the secular principle of the constitution of 1972 was dropped and the Islamic orientation of the polity became pronounced. The political-bureaucratic-military elite started using Islam to legitimize their leadership. Bangladesh now sought to emphasise its links with the Islamic *Ummah* and stressed the need to maintain special relations with the Islamic countries. This shift in its foreign policy brought Bangladesh certain economic benefits in terms of liberal assistance by the West Asian countries and consequent easing of pressure on its oil import bill. The country witnessed the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, as *Jamaat-e-Islami* and other Islamic outfits such as *Islamic Chhatro Shibir* and *Islami Oikyo Jot* consolidated and expanded their institutional network fully utilizing the Islamic petro dollars. Of late, the existence of Islamist militant underground groups such as *Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami* (HuJI), *Hizbul Mujahideen*, *Lashkar-e-Tayyeba*, *Jaish-e-Mohammad* in Bangladesh and their continued anti-India activities, has been a major security threat to India.

Two radical terrorist organizations, *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh* (JMJB) and *Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh* (JMB) were banned in February 2005. Given Bangladesh's commitment to the global campaign against terrorism, it would be in Dhaka's interest to curb the rise of Islamist extremism and terrorism. Bangladesh should continue to be seen as a moderate, pluralistic society committed to regional peace, democratic values and practices.

Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina came to power with an overwhelming majority of 230 seats out of 300 in the ninth parliamentary election held on 29 December 2008. With about eighty per cent of the electorate having turned up to vote, Sheikh Hasina got a massive mandate to bring peace, stability and development in Bangladesh. During her second stint as the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina has demonstrated her resolve to curb forces of intolerance, extremism and terrorism and take her country back to the liberal, democratic and modernist path. It is after 34 years of long wait that the Supreme Court of Bangladesh awarded on 19 December 2009 death sentence to 12 killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This judgement is a new milestone for Bangladesh, as it reestablished the rule of law and upheld the principles of sovereignty, nationalism and democracy, which were dear to Sheikh Mujib, the founder of Bangladesh. Five of these convicts were hanged on 28 January 2010. In another historic judgement delivered on 3 January 2010, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh lifted a four-year stay on a ban on the "abuse of religion for political purposes". This order marks a new beginning for the country in its walk back to the "secular" Bangladesh as was envisaged in its original constitution of 1972. Given the criticism by the main opposition party *Bangladesh Nationalist Party* (BNP) and its Islamic allies of this judgement, Sheikh Hasina's government has to surmount the challenges in her efforts to take her country back to liberal, secular, democratic and modernist path, while maintaining fine balance between tradition and modernity. However, it remains to be seen if the new government succeeds in cleansing the country of extremists and terrorists. And another important test shall be to amend the Vested Property Act, so as to enable the return of Hindu properties confiscated or grabbed by virtue of this Act to their original owners.

Sharing a common land border of over 4,100 kms., both Bangladesh and India are bound by age old traditions, culture and history. Notwithstanding the significant role played by India in the liberation of Bangladesh, relations between the two countries have been beset with several irritants. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and existence of Islamist militant groups in Bangladesh, illegal migration of millions of

Bangladeshis into India, Bangladesh's reservation to export its gas to India, Dhaka's refusal to provide transit access for India's north-east, existence of enclaves in each other's country and water sharing are the main issues that need to be addressed.

Illegal immigration of over 15 million Bangladeshi nationals to India has changed the demographic profile of some north-eastern states of India, besides putting pressure on land and resources causing social tension. Bangladesh's failure to cooperate with India in the repatriation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants has complicated the problem. It is high time that India takes requisite steps for effective border control, registration of foreigners and their removal from voter lists, issue of photo-identity cards particularly in the states bordering Bangladesh. International agencies like ICRC and UNHCR which have achieved some success in the repatriation of refugees/migrants from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, can be coopted to facilitate the repatriation of Bangladeshi nationals from India to their home country.

Indian official trade with Bangladesh is over 3 billion US dollars, with Indian exports of over 2 billion US dollars. To this should be added over 3 billion US dollars worth of exports through informal channels. The existing imbalance in bilateral trade can be set right if Bangladesh accepts the Indian offer of Free Trade Agreement (FTA). It will help the two countries to move away from a commodity-by-commodity approach to freeing trade and will pave way for increased investments, setting up of joint ventures, transshipment/transit, harmonization of customs procedures etc. The experience of India's Free Trade Agreement with Sri Lanka shows that between 2000 and 2004 latter's exports to India increased by 342 per cent from 44 million to 194 million US Dollars, as compared to an increase of 113 per cent in Indian exports to Sri Lanka during the same period. As regards the transit facility to India's northeastern states through Bangladesh, it was in operation before the independence of Bangladesh. Bangladesh can use its geographical advantage to emerge as a transit port in the region, covering Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, North East Indian states and Myanmar. BIMSTEC (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation) offers an opportunity to both India and Bangladesh to collaborate in various sectors including transport, tourism, trade, investment etc.

With its proven natural gas reserves of about 23 trillion cubic feet (cft) and potential reserves of 60 trillion cft, Bangladesh can utilize its huge economic potential. As most of the gas fields are located in the north

and eastern part of Bangladesh in close proximity to India, the export of surplus gas to India makes the best economic sense. Besides, India and Bangladesh can mutually benefit from joint ventures in exploration, transportation, industrial and commercial usage of Bangladesh gas. There is great scope for collaboration between the public and private sectors of two countries particularly in textile, production of consumer goods and garments, marketing, power generation, mining and exploration, service sector etc. Closer bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and India with higher intra-regional trade and investment can benefit both countries, with fuller utilization of their complementarities and comparative advantages in various sectors. This will not only alter the balance of trade with India in favour of Bangladesh, but will also spur the growth of industry and Indian investments in Bangladesh, leading to overall development of that country.

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in early January 2010 marked an end to decades long "mutual distrust" and paved the way for building new relationship bonded in mutual trust and friendship. Five agreements including three security related pacts – Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Agreement on Combating International Terrorism, Organized Crime and Illicit Drugs Trafficking, and Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons – were signed during her visit. These pacts lay the ground work for a possible extradition treaty between the two countries. Sheikh Hasina assured that "Bangladesh soil would no longer be used by groups inimical to India". On its part, India committed to provide one billion US Dollars credit line to improve the infrastructure in Bangladesh. This is the highest amount provided by India to any country so far. Much of this money will be used to dredge the 50-odd rivers and improve the railway network. India also committed to supply 250 MWs of power to Bangladesh from its national power grid. Now what is required is the speedy and time bound implementation of these agreements at the bureaucratic level. There is need for institutionalisation of bilateral cooperative mechanisms so that no political handicaps affect the process. At the same time, there has to be sufficient political will to ensure effective and meaningful cooperation. It is hoped that with the bilateral relations maturing into constructive engagement, various contentious issues affecting these relations for decades, would be resolved so that there is all round development, peace and stability in the region.

K. Warikoo

INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

*Issues in Trade, Transit and Security**

GURUDAS DAS

Economic relations between two countries are often structured and based on the political/strategic relations between them. However, while this correspondence between political/strategic and economic relations seems to be strong under state-controlled economies, it appears to be weak under market-led-economies. The strong Indo-Bangladesh economic relations exhibited in terms of trading engagement particularly during the post-liberalization era is a case in pointer. This paper argues in favour of stronger political/strategic relations between these two South Asian neighbours for fuller cross-border synergy and economic cooperation for the well being of the people across the border.

A plethora of research has already been done on Indo-Bangladesh trade particularly from Bangladesh point of view.¹ India being the largest source of Bangladesh's imports, her trade relation with India has a significant bearing for the country's overall development. However, such a study is significant from Indian point of view as India's Bangladesh trade is insignificant compared to her total trade.

This paper intends to analyze the nature of economic relations that developed between India and Bangladesh since early 1970s. It attempts to study the trends and structures of Indo-Bangladesh trade in order to analyze the nature of persistent asymmetry in bilateral trade. It also focuses on the various options available with Bangladesh for the reduction of her trade deficit vis-à-vis India. It, then, analyzes the perceived security predicaments of Bangladesh in weighing some of the options which could, otherwise, have brought revolutionary change in her economy.

* This paper is based on the author's presentation made at the ICSSR-NERC Seminar at Shillong on 12-13 July 2005

India-Bangladesh Peace and Friendship Treaty

The "Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh" signed on 19 March 1972 has laid the foundation of Indo-Bangladesh relations. The Treaty was signed for 25 years and on expiry of the term, in spite of provision, has not been renewed due to the fact that Bangladesh found it to be some sort of transgression to her freedom. While the Treaty overwhelmingly dealt with political, social, cultural and security interests of both the countries, Articles 5 and 6 dealt with the pledge of economic cooperation. Mutual cooperation is sought to be developed in 'economic, scientific and technical fields' as well as 'trade, transport and communication', 'flood control, river basin development and the development of hydro-electric power and irrigation'. Being the nascent state, Bangladesh needed assistance from India in order to build infrastructure and war devastated economy. The Treaty, thus, made provisions for both trade and investment between the two countries.

India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement, 1972

The first Indo-Bangladesh trade agreement, viz., "Trade Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh", was signed on 28 March 1972, just a week after the signing of the Treaty. This Agreement was signed for one year. It had two parts, viz, (a) formal trade, and (b) border trade.

- (a) **Formal Trade:** A list of commodities (List-I) was drawn which India would export to Bangladesh and another similar list (List-II) has been drawn which Bangladesh would export to India. For both the lists, money value ceiling of all exportables was agreed upon so that the total value of export and import exactly matched with each other for both the countries. The total value that each country could export to other was kept at 25 crores. The major items that India would export included cement, coal, unmanufactured tobacco, asphalt, cotton yarn, stone boulders/ lime stones/ dolomite, etc. Major items that Bangladesh would export to India included fresh fish, cow hides, furnace oil, newsprint, raw jute and *simul* cotton. It may be noted that the bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh in 1970s was primarily based on reciprocal demand for raw materials rather than consumables and capital goods. Besides this regulated trade,

trade in other goods not included in these two lists or excess imports/exports of listed goods was permitted in accordance with the law of the land concerned.

- (b) **Border Trade:** The Agreement provided for 'border trade' for the people living within the 16-kilometer belt of border between West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram on the one hand and Bangladesh on the other. Indo-Bangladesh border was divided into 6 sectors, viz., Mizoram-Chittagong sector, Khasi Jaintia and Garo Hills-Sylhet Mymensing sector, Cachar-Sylhet sector, Tripura-Bangladesh sector, Rangpur (Bangladesh)-Assam (bordering districts) Cooch Behar / Jalpaiguri (West Bengal) sector, and Rest of Bangladesh - Rest of West Bengal sector. For each sector, list of exportables and permissible quantities for both sides was worked out. Modalities and modus operandi were laid down and trade was made free from import, export, exchange control restrictions as well as customs duty and customs formalities.

Besides trade, Article V of the Agreement provided that both the countries would make mutually beneficial arrangements for the use of their waterways, railways and roadways for commerce between the two countries and for passage of goods between two places in one country through the territory of the other. Article VI provided MFN status to each other.

It may be recalled that while India was engaging Bangladesh during the early 1970s, she was also simultaneously reorganizing its governance in her north eastern region by carving out provinces out of undivided Assam. While Meghalaya and Mizoram were carved out of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh was brought out of the influence of Assam, and Manipur and Tripura were conferred statehood as per the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971. As has been discussed in detail elsewhere,² both India's support to 1971 Bangladesh liberation movement and reorganization of her North Eastern region were the results of her intense security threat perceptions arising out of her being cordoned off by the USA-China-Pakistan axis as part of the Cold War stratagem. Irrespective of economic viability, small north eastern states were created to accommodate smaller ethnic interests in order to defuse internal insecurity feelings. Being far away from national market centers, border trade for them provided the necessary vent for their surplus produce.³ Harmonization of transport and communication channels across India

and Bangladesh could, to some extent, restore the traditional trade and commerce which suffered serious dislocation following the partition of the country.

From Indian perspective, had this Agreement been implemented in letter and spirit, it could have solved much of the isolation of her north eastern region. But unfortunately, before the Agreement could take off, the Government of Bangladesh complained in September 1972, of large scale smuggling across the border, and in October 1972, it asked for the 'border trade' to be scrapped forthwith.⁴ Needless to say that scrapping of the 'border trade' provision could hardly contain smuggling across the border as can be seen from our subsequent discussion. It appears to be perplexing as to why Bangladesh scrapped the 'border trade' provision even without giving it a fair trial! As this Agreement envisaged to promote bilateral trade on a 'state-to-state' basis, not much headway could be done before it was replaced by another Agreement in 1973.

India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement, 1973

The 1973 Agreement made a departure from that of 1972 in that the former did not include the provision of 'border trade'. Moreover, unlike the 1972 Agreement, the details of 'balanced trade and payments arrangements' were not included and were left to be worked out later. Except for 3 new articles, it either repeated or rephrased the provisions of the 1972 Agreement. Among the three new articles, Article 2 provided that both the countries would conduct trade with each other 'in accordance with the evolving international commercial policy'. Article 3 provided for negotiations between them for promoting exports of specific products to each other's market and Article 9 provided Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment to merchant vessels of each other. However, unlike the 1972 Agreement, it was signed for 3 years with effect from 28 September 1973. Like the 1972 Agreement, it also envisaged to promote bilateral trade on a 'state-to-state' basis and hence could not yield any better. It may not be out of place to ask, as to why both the Agreements envisaged promoting bilateral trade on a 'state-to-state' basis?

The answer lies with the model of economic development that Bangladesh followed at that time. On being independent in 1971, Bangladesh, like other developing countries in the world, adopted a model of 'import substitution and industrialization' under heavy protection of domestic industries. The macro-economic management primarily aimed at reviving the war-devastated economy under extensive state control.

With the avowed ideology of state-socialism, the state not only became the *de facto* owner of a large number of enterprises that had been abandoned by their Pakistani owners,⁵ but also undertook efforts for massive nationalization of most of the production entities and introduced heavy trade controls. As Bangladesh was experimenting with a state guided socialistic type of economic development,⁶ it was only natural that bilateral agreements sought to promote trade on a state-to-state basis. Meanwhile, by a protocol signed on 17 December 1974, rupee trade was replaced by freely convertible currency with effect from 1 January 1975.

However, with the end of Mujib era in 1975, a gradual shift from 'state-guided-socialistic-economy' to 'aid-dependent state-sponsored private capitalistic economy' had been initiated since 1976. The transition was marked with the beginning of the process of divestment of the abandoned state enterprises, promotion of private sector, economic deregulations encompassing goods and services sector, limited trade liberalization, etc. As a policy option, in harmony with the privatization strategy, inflow of foreign aid had been encouraged. Bangladesh Government adopted a soft credit policy primarily based on the foreign aid in order to encourage the private sector to come up speedily. Domestic industries were given adequate protection by way of high import tariff for the import competing sector. This change in internal development strategy necessitated a commensurate change in her trade agreement with India which was formalized in 1980.

India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement, 1980

The 1980 Agreement removed the clause 'on a state-to-state basis' for trade between the two countries. It was for the first time that the provisions of the Agreement were kept open for all the stake holders. Besides, it also removed the clause of 'balanced trade and payment arrangement'. By removing these two clauses, the Agreement largely widened the scope of bilateral trade between the two countries. Article IV of the Agreement formalized the use of 'convertible currencies' in trade between the two countries. Apart from these changes, the rest of the articles of 1973 Agreement were incorporated. However, unlike the 1973 Agreement, this agreement provided for bilateral consultation at least once in a year instead of once in six months. This Agreement was signed for 3 years with effect from 4 October 1980 and was renewed several times till a new Agreement was signed in 2006.

Meanwhile, with the formation of South Asian Association for

Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 and subsequent signing of SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) in 1995, formation of World Trade Organization in 1995 and consequent tariff reduction across the countries, liberalization of economies in both the countries since early 1990s, bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh took an upward turn. Bilateral trade Agreement of 1980 lost much of its relevance and the trade has essentially been guided by the comparative and competitive advantages. It may be noted that trade agreements only provide the broad frameworks. No tariff negotiations have ever been initiated based on these Agreements. Indo-Bangladesh bilateral trade usually follows the EXIM policy of the respective countries based on multilateral WTO negotiations, Bangkok Agreement and SAPTA negotiations (SAFTA from 1 July 2006). Hence the bilateral agreements could hardly influence the course of trade between these two countries.

Trends in Indo-Bangladesh Trade

Indo-Bangladesh trade, since inception, is characterized by almost unilateral export from India to Bangladesh. This is true for both formal and informal trade. The annual average export from India to Bangladesh for the period 1980-85 (before the formation of SAARC), was 75.14 million US dollars while the average annual import from Bangladesh was 17.65 million US dollars. India's average annual export rose up to 281.09 million US dollars in post-SAARC pre-SAPTA period (1986-94) while her average annual import from Bangladesh went down to 14.02 million US dollars. For post-SAPTA as well as post-WTO but pre-SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) period (1995-2005), India's average annual export to Bangladesh further went up to 1122.41 million US dollars, while her import from Bangladesh increased to 72.48 million US dollars (Table 1.1). The general trend in Indo-Bangladesh trade is shown in Figure 1.1 and Table 1.2.

TABLE I.1
INDIA'S EXPORT TO AND IMPORT FROM BANGLADESH

<i>Year</i>	<i>(in million US dollars)</i>	
	<i>Annual Average</i>	<i>Annual Average</i>
	Export	Import
1980-85	75.14	17.65
1986-94	281.09	14.02
1995-05	1122.41	72.48

Source: Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook, IMF.

FIGURE I.1
INDIA'S EXPORT TO AND IMPORT FROM BANGLADESH

(in million US dollars)

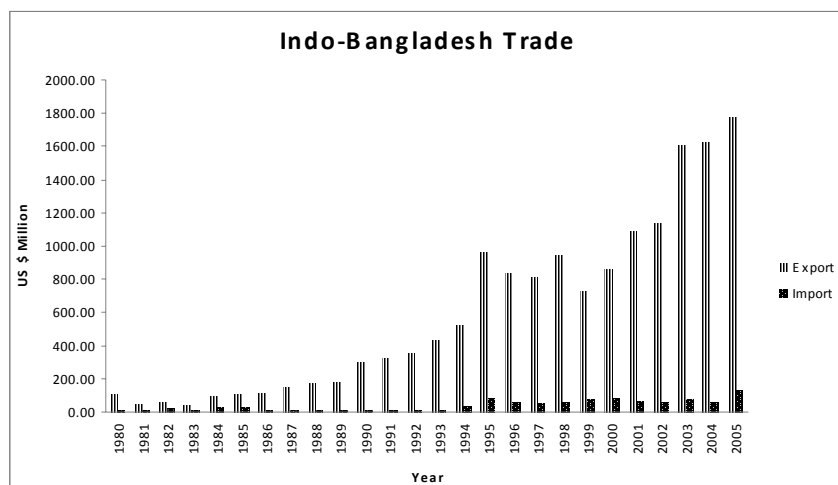


TABLE I.2
INDIA'S EXPORT TO AND IMPORT FROM BANGLADESH

(in million US dollars)

Year	Export to Bangladesh	Total export	Export to Bangladesh as % of total export	Import from Bangladesh	Total import	Import from Bangladesh as % of total import	Trade balance
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1980	105.52	8440.83	1.25	12.35	14822.20	0.08	(+)93.17
1981	49.01	6827.17	0.72	13.55	14549.80	0.09	(+)35.46
1982	60.18	8271.75	0.73	18.61	15634.80	0.12	(+)41.57
1983	41.97	7858.14	0.53	5.75	13892.70	0.04	(+)36.22
1984	89.97	8230.75	1.09	26.74	15115.30	0.18	(+)63.23
1985	104.19	8265.36	1.26	28.90	16329.00	0.18	(+)75.29
1986	112.59	9135.28	1.23	7.90	15051.40	0.05	(+)104.69
1987	145.49	10797.70	1.35	14.11	16838.00	0.08	(+)131.38
1988	169.99	13192.60	1.29	12.28	19034.70	0.06	(+)157.71
1989	176.23	15839.00	1.11	13.95	19297.50	0.07	(+)162.28
1990	297.11	17813.00	1.67	15.26	23991.40	0.06	(+)281.85
1991	324.56	17873.50	1.82	5.73	19509.40	0.03	(+)318.83
1992	353.18	19232.60	1.84	9.78	23196.60	0.04	(+)343.40
1993	429.62	20989.80	2.05	12.93	21268.80	0.06	(+)416.69

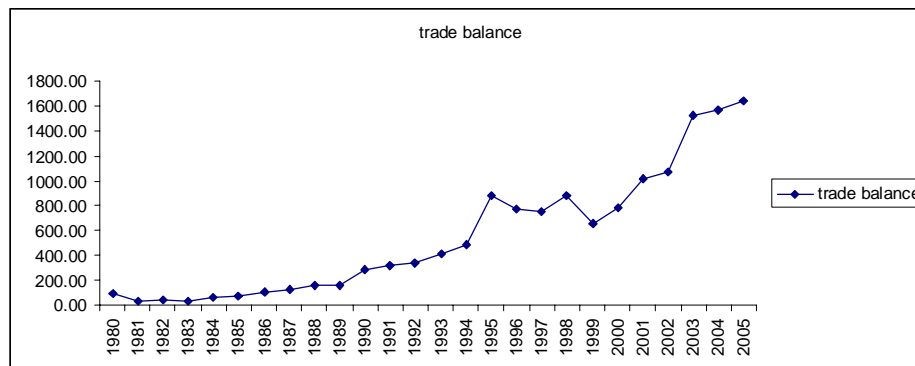
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1994	521.00	24196.20	2.15	34.27	25485.80	0.13	(+)486.73
1995	959.62	30538.00	3.14	78.82	34486.50	0.23	(+)880.80
1996	832.45	32325.60	2.58	57.96	36054.80	0.16	(+)774.49
1997	807.13	34622.10	2.33	53.65	40896.40	0.13	(+)753.48
1998	943.33	33665.10	2.80	59.50	42162.10	0.14	(+)883.83
1999	726.13	35921.60	2.02	74.25	47900.50	0.16	(+)651.88
2000	860.33	42625.80	2.02	79.85	50336.10	0.16	(+)780.48
2001	1086.81	45225.70	2.40	66.88	59016.90	0.11	(+)1019.93
2002	1132.54	50496.30	2.24	61.32	58912.40	0.10	(+)1071.22
2003	1599.55	61118.50	2.62	73.73	74070.00	0.10	(+)1525.82
2004	1624.82	75385.20	2.16	60.57	99835.30	0.06	(+)1564.25
2005	1773.85	99132.60	1.79	130.77	139458.00	0.09	(+)1643.08

Source: Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook, IMF

Thus, as far as the official trade is concerned, there exists a huge trade balance in favour of India. What is more important is that this Indian trade surplus is increasing over time. Figure 1.2 depicts this trend.

FIGURE 1.2
INDIA'S TRADE BALANCE WITH BANGLADESH

(in million US dollars)



Source: Calculated from Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook, IMF

We do not have any precise data to study the trend in informal trade. However, available studies⁷ indicate that like formal trade, informal exports also flow almost unilaterally from India to Bangladesh and the volume of informal export from India to Bangladesh is estimated at almost equal to that of formal export. As a result, the real trade deficit that Bangladesh is having with India is almost double the formal trade deficit. It, thus, appears that the abrogation of "border trade" provision has in no way helped

Bangladesh in stopping movement of goods across the border.

India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement, 2006

This asymmetric trade relation was the focus of attention in 2006 India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement. Articles III, V and XII refer to the asymmetries that existed in bilateral trade between the two countries. As per Article III, both the countries agreed to keep in mind this asymmetry while 'augmenting and diversifying' the bilateral trade. It was decided that 'appropriate and special measures' would be considered, particularly in respect of specific products, during periodic reviews, in order to address this asymmetry. Article V put a rider in that the normal trade that followed through the EXIM framework of the respective countries should also take into cognizance this bilateral trade asymmetry. Article XII provided that the issue of asymmetry could be discussed in formal bilateral consultations to be held in order to monitor the implementation of this Agreement. The Agreement was signed on 21 March 2006 and it came into force on 1 April 2006 for three years.

Issues in Trade

India being one of the prime sources of Bangladesh's import, almost one third of the Bangladesh's total trade deficit is caused due to its trade with India. This large trade deficit, arising out of Indo-Bangladesh trade, has been a major concern for Bangladesh. Public perception sees Indo-Bangladesh relations essentially as an exploitative one.⁸ As huge amounts of Indian goods flood Bangladesh market, some quarters perceive this as the phenomenon of economic colonialism. This unequal trading relation, at times, is interpreted by some quarters as Indian hegemony.⁹ There has been a persistent demand by Bangladesh to open up Indian markets for Bangladeshi exports so that the deficit could be reduced. Bangladeshi political and business elites often ask India to open her markets for products keeping in view the export interest of Bangladesh.¹⁰

Let us now consider the justification of these allegations against India. Although overall trade deficit is more important than bilateral trade deficit, persistent bilateral trade deficit of significant magnitude has important political bearing for a nation only if it does not contribute to the productive capacity of the economy. Bangladesh's imports from India mainly consist of raw materials like cotton yarn, machinery and equipment, base metals, chemicals and mineral products like coal, limestone, etc. These are all used in Bangladesh's ready made garments industry, fertilizer,

pharmaceutical, chemical and cement industries. With the liberalization of imports and drastic reduction of import tariff on the industrial raw materials in Bangladesh, Indian products became highly competitive in Bangladesh markets leading to rise in imports from India. Overall export of Bangladesh has also started rising and percentage share of export to GDP has also started increasing overtime. With the growth of export, GDP started moving upwards in Bangladesh and more and more imports could be financed due to higher exports. All these have transformed the Bangladesh economy from aid to trade dependence creating the necessary resilience for sustainable growth. Table 1.3 shows a rise in Bangladesh's average annual GDP growth rate along with declining variation indicating a march towards stable economic growth taking place particularly in the post-liberalization era. The growth path is shown in Figure 1.3.

TABLE 1.3
GDP GROWTH RATE OF BANGLADESH

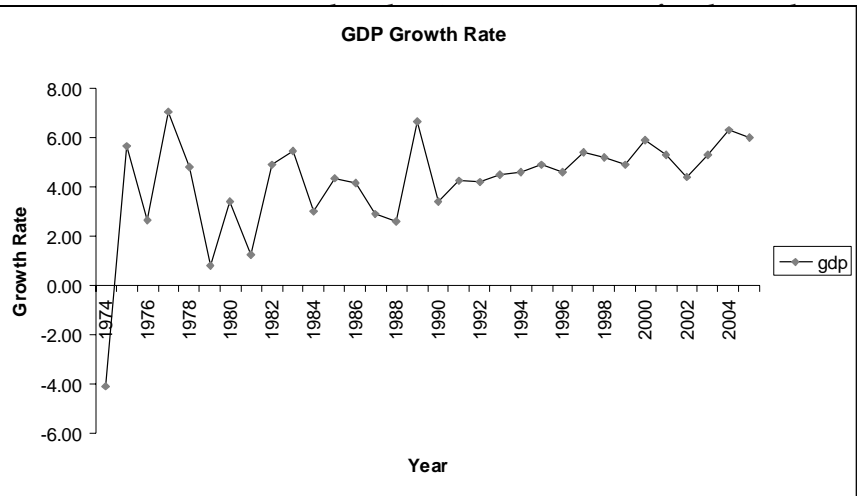
<i>Period</i>	<i>Average Annual Growth Rate</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
1974-1980	2.90	3.699008
1981-85	3.78	1.685497
1986-90	3.93	1.622335
1991-95	4.49	0.288062
1996-2000	5.20	0.494975
2001-2006	5.46	0.736885

Source: Mohammad Alauddin, "Recent Developments in the Bangladesh Economy", ASARC Working Paper No. 13, 2004; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Bangladesh Bank and Asian Development Bank (various reports)

While exports grew from 790 million US dollars in 1980 to 1,670 million US dollars in 1990, i.e., a rise by about 111 per cent, imports grew from 2,610 million US dollars to 3,656 million US dollars, i.e., a rise of 40 per cent. Again exports grew from 1,687 million US dollars in 1991 to 5,589 million US dollars in 2000, i.e., a rise by 231 per cent, while imports grew from 3,421 million US dollars to 9,000 million US dollars, i.e., a rise by 163 per cent. Similarly, while exports grew from 5,735 million US dollars in 2001 to 8,494 million US dollars in 2005, i.e., a rise by 48 per cent, imports during the same period grew from 9,011 million US dollars in 2001 to 13,850 million US dollars in 2005, i.e., a rise by 54 per cent. The growth paths of exports and imports are shown in Figure 1.4. Thus, during the last quarter century, exports of Bangladesh have grown much faster

FIGURE I.3
GDP GROWTH RATE OF BANGLADESH

Source: Mohammad Alauddin, "Recent Developments in the Bangladesh Economy", ASARC Working Paper No. 13, 2004; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Bangladesh Bank and Asian Development Bank (various reports)



...s of the present decade.

...RT OF BANGLADESH

Source: Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF.

While in 1980, only 30 per cent of Bangladesh's imports could be

financed by her exports, this went up to 46 per cent in 1990, 69 per cent in 2002 and came down to 61 per cent in 2005 (Table 1.4), indicating declining importance of aid and growing self-reliance as far as the external sector of the economy is concerned.

TABLE 1.4
BANGLADESH: EXPORT, IMPORT AND TRADE BALANCE

(in million US dollars)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Trade balance</i>	<i>Export as %of Import</i>
1980	790	2610	-1820	30.27
1981	791	2651	-1860	29.84
1982	768	2418	-1650	31.76
1983	724	2291	-1567	31.60
1984	931	2692	-1761	34.58
1985	998	2526	-1528	39.51
1986	888	2550	-1662	34.82
1987	1076	2730	-1654	39.41
1988	1291	3034	-1743	42.55
1989	1304	3617	-2313	36.05
1990	1670	3656	-1986	45.68
1991	1687	3421	-1734	49.31
1992	2037	3730	-1693	54.61
1993	2277	4014	-1737	56.73
1994	2649	4583	-1934	57.80
1995	3129	6496	-3367	48.17
1996	3297	6934	-3637	47.55
1997	3627	6996	-3369	51.84
1998	3821	7370	-3549	51.85
1999	4520	8352	-3832	54.12
2000	5589	9000	-3411	62.10
2001	5735	9011	-3276	63.64
2002	5443	7847	-2404	69.36
2003	6229	9834	-3605	63.34
2004	7585	11590	-4005	65.44
2005	8494	13850	-5356	61.33

Source: Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF.

Commodity Structure of Imports of Bangladesh

An anatomy of Bangladesh's imports shows that the import bill for intermediate goods which are used as industrial inputs has been increasing over time. The annual average share of import of intermediate goods to total import went up from 24.22 per cent during 1980s to 41.79 per cent during 1990s and then to 50.39 per cent during the present decade. In 2006, the percentage share of imports of intermediate goods to total import

bill of Bangladesh stood at 58 per cent. Import share of consumer goods has never been substantial. The annual average share of imports of consumer goods was 4.71 per cent during the 1980s which slightly went up to 6.87 per cent during the 1990s and then registered a marginal rise to 7.45 per cent during the present decade. Import share of food grains substantially declined from an annual average import of 13.40 per cent during the 1980s to 7.20 per cent during 1990s and to 4 per cent during the present decade. Import share of capital goods declined from an annual average of 33.26 per cent during the 1980s to 6.53 per cent during 1990s and then slightly increased to 7.21 per cent during the present decade (Table 1.5 and Figure 1.5).

TABLE 1.5
COMPOSITION OF IMPORTS OF BANGLADESH

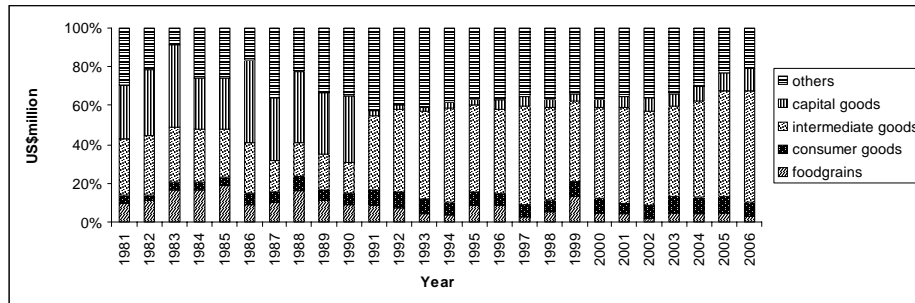
(in percentage)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Foodgrains</i>	<i>Consumer Goods</i>	<i>Intermediate Goods</i>	<i>Capital Goods</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
1981	9.87	4.07	29.29	27.20	29.57	100
1982	11.08	2.95	30.64	34.06	21.27	100
1983	16.72	3.81	28.41	42.49	8.58	100
1984	16.91	3.78	27.20	26.18	25.92	100
1985	18.81	4.12	25.01	26.11	25.95	100
1986	9.31	5.75	25.80	42.43	16.71	100
1987	10.42	5.34	15.76	32.67	35.80	100
1988	16.38	7.20	17.55	36.50	22.37	100
1989	11.08	5.36	18.31	31.70	33.54	100
1990	9.12	5.69	15.83	34.48	34.88	100
1991	8.56	8.24	38.04	2.62	42.54	100
1992	7.65	7.68	42.65	2.08	39.94	100
1993	4.42	7.60	45.06	2.08	40.84	100
1994	3.71	6.31	48.65	3.19	38.13	100
1995	8.44	7.06	44.56	3.51	36.42	100
1996	8.79	5.61	43.91	4.48	37.21	100
1997	2.73	6.58	50.24	4.93	35.53	100
1998	5.25	6.22	47.82	4.06	36.66	100
1999	13.28	7.76	41.16	3.91	33.89	100
2000	4.94	7.36	46.82	4.07	36.81	100
2001	4.03	5.68	49.41	5.57	35.31	100
2002	2.35	6.39	48.03	7.00	36.22	100
2003	4.58	8.62	46.68	6.14	33.98	100
2004	4.30	8.64	49.67	7.28	30.11	100
2005	4.71	8.48	54.52	9.14	23.15	100
2006	3.05	6.99	57.61	11.25	21.10	100

Source: Bangladesh Bank Annual Review of Imports Payments, 2004-05, (for 1991-2005); CPD: 1995 (for 1981-1990), Bangladesh Bank Annual Report 2005-06 (for 2006) Note: Figures since 1991 exclude imports of EPZs

FIGURE I.5
COMPOSITION OF BANGLADESH'S IMPORTS

(in percentage)



Source: *Bangladesh Bank Annual Review of Imports Payments, 2004-05*, (for 1991-2005) CPD:1995 (for 1981-1990), *Bangladesh Bank Annual Report 2005-06* (for 2006)

Note: Figures since 1991 exclude imports of EPZs

Thus, commodity structure of imports of Bangladesh exhibits the growing needs of industrial inputs particularly by the export sector. This is basically developmental import where export component of import is quite high. It is quite natural for the business to draw imports from the cheapest source and sell exports wherever there is demand. Bangladesh is importing more from India not because Indian firms have control over them but because buying from India is profitable for them.

This dimension of viewing Bangladesh's deficit trade balance with India in association with her growing economy and rising export is often missing in the literature of Indo-Bangladesh relations in general and Indo-Bangladesh trade in particular. More often than not, the deficit-trade-balance issue is politicized to gain currency in domestic politics which suffers from Indo-centricism.

Besides India, Bangladesh also imports substantially from China. In fact, in 2005, while 17.77 per cent of Bangladesh's total imports came from India, imports from China stood at 14.27 per cent. In 2006, while 15.78 per cent of Bangladesh's total imports came from China, imports from India was 14.24 per cent (see Table 1.6). Thus, China has replaced India and has become the largest exporter to Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh is having almost the same trade deficit with China, then why is it that she makes it an issue in case of India and not in case of China?

TABLE I.6
DIRECTION OF BANGLADESH'S IMPORTS

(in per cent of total import)

<i>Country</i>	2005	2006
China	14.27	15.78
India	17.77	14.24
Kuwait	4.59	7.73
Singapore	7.85	6.53
Hong Kong	4.66	4.81
Japan	4.85	4.69
Korea	3.66	3.63
Taiwan	3.88	3.61
USA	2.82	2.64
Malaysia	2.44	2.56
UK	2.53	2.51
Thailand	2.89	2.46
Others	27.81	28.82
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Bangladesh Bank, <http://www.bangladeshbank.org>

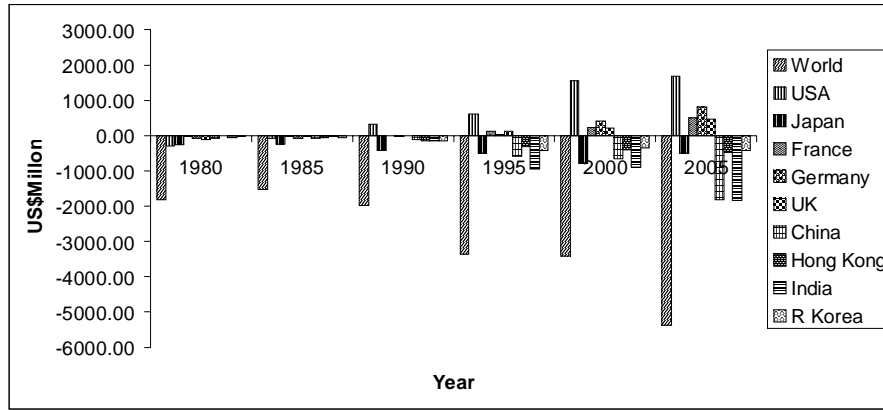
Note: Only import under cash is considered

TABLE I.7
TRADE BALANCE OF BANGLADESH WITH MAJOR TRADING PARTNERS

<i>Country</i>	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
World	1820.39	-1527.28	-1985.59	-3366.89	-3411.20	-5356.50
USA	-286.35	-76.3	324.14	604.60	1565.55	1676.94
Japan	-264.36	-238.43	-417.48	-494.54	-782.78	-506.63
France	-13.53	-19.19	9.78	131.01	224.63	488.74
Germany	-88.63	-69.67	-17.37	23.58	430.99	827.40
UK	-107.46	-36.73	1.14	143.60	200.81	472.05
China	-68.59	-70.15	-98.97	-582.29	-657.94	-1824.02
Hong Kong	6.79	-41.02	-151.29	-303.87	-383.07	-461.21
India	-47.58	-35.29	-148.59	-958.31	-895.32	-1832.36
Korea	-19.72	-61.13	-154.88	-409.16	-336.25	-423.30

Source: IMF: *Direction of Trade Statistics*

FIGURE I.6
TRADE BALANCE OF BANGLADESH WITH MAJOR TRADING PARTNERS



Source: IMF: *Direction of Trade Statistics*

Let us now consider the issue of poor performance of Bangladeshi exports in Indian market. Bangladesh keeps on raising this issue time and again alleging that due to India's higher tariff rates and non-tariff restrictions, Bangladesh exports do not make any dent in Indian market. Bangladesh is persistently demanding for duty free import by India of products of Bangladesh export interest so that she can improve her deficit trade balance vis-à-vis India. In other words, higher tariff and various non tariff restrictions in India are held responsible for Bangladesh's persistent deficit trade balance in Indo-Bangladesh bilateral trade.

Trade and Tariff

Two recently conducted studies by World Bank, one in 2004 and the other in 2006, have dealt with the import policies of both Bangladesh and India in detail and have already established that this Bangladeshi perception is a myth. In the process of liberalization, while in India, the average tariff has been reduced from prohibitive level of 130 per cent in 1990-91 to 35 per cent in 1997-98 and then to 15 per cent in 2005-06 and finally to 12.5 per cent in 2006-07: in Bangladesh the same has been reduced from 73.6 per cent in 1991-92 to 32 per cent in 1995-96 and then to 24.3 per cent in 2006-07.¹¹ Although base level tariff was higher in India, but the depth of tariff reduction is also higher in India. Under SAPTA, India has provided tariff preferences to SAARC LDC members on approximately 2925 tariff lines, about 58 per cent of the total number of its approximately 5,000 six-digit H S which came into force since 2000-01. In most cases

tariff preferences were 50 per cent. This means while average MFN tariff rate was 35 per cent in 2000-01, for Bangladesh it was 17.5 per cent. Subsequently, following another two rounds of tariff reduction in 2005-06 and 2006-07, tariff on Bangladesh import has become negligible. Thus, while the hypothesis of higher Indian tariff as the cause of poor export of Bangladesh products to Indian markets partially explains the asymmetric bilateral Indo-Bangladesh trade in the 1980s and 1990s, it can hardly explain as to why this asymmetry has further increased during the current decade (see table 1.2 and figure 1.2) in spite of the fact that effective average tariff is much lower in India than in Bangladesh. The World Bank study,¹² thus, concludes that "the explanations for the stagnation of Bangladesh exports to India have to do with comparative advantage and supply side factors in Bangladesh, and not lack of demand or protection in India".

Commodity Structure of Exports of Bangladesh

In order to better understand the nature of these 'supply side factors', let us have a look at the commodity structure of exports of Bangladesh. It can be seen from Table 1.8 and Figure 1.7 that Bangladesh's export basket is too narrow. Four commodity groups namely raw jute and jute goods, leather, frozen shrimps and fish and ready made garments constitute bulk of Bangladesh's exports. During the 1980s, jute and jute goods were the principal export items contributing on an average about 51 per cent of annual export earnings of Bangladesh. This declined to 15 per cent during the 1990s and then to merely 5 per cent during the present decade. Export of ready-made garments that include woven garments and knitwear has substituted the export of raw jute and jute products over the years. During the 1980s, on an average ready-made garments contributed around 15 per cent of annual export earnings of Bangladesh. This went up to 56 per cent during the 1990s and then to 74 per cent during the present decade. In 2006, about 76 per cent of total export earnings has come from the ready-made garment sector, while raw jute and jute products contributed only 5 per cent, leather contributed 2 per cent, frozen shrimps and fish contributed 4 per cent and export of other commodities together contributed 13 per cent of the total export earnings.

TABLE I.8
COMPOSITION OF BANGLADESH'S EXPORT

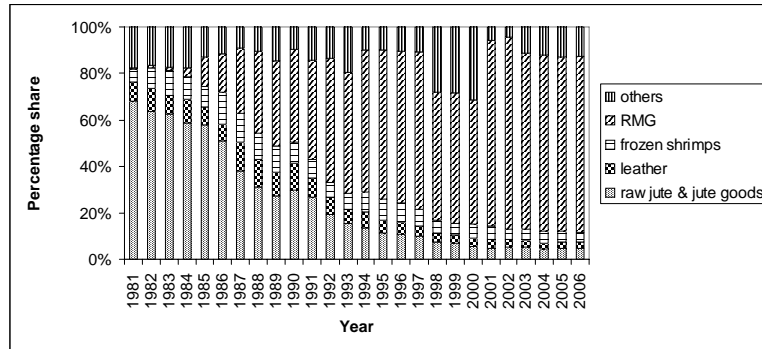
(in percentage)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Raw Jute and Jute Goods</i>	<i>Leather</i>	<i>Frozen Shrimps and Fish</i>	<i>Ready Made Garments</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
1981	68.21	8.02	5.63	0.42	17.72	100
1982	63.80	10.05	8.45	1.12	16.59	100
1983	62.39	8.45	10.50	1.60	17.06	100
1984	58.45	10.48	9.49	3.95	17.63	100
1985	57.92	7.49	9.31	12.42	12.85	100
1986	50.92	7.45	13.80	16.00	11.84	100
1987	37.80	12.57	12.66	27.84	9.12	100
1988	31.03	11.94	11.37	35.26	10.40	100
1989	26.98	10.65	10.96	36.63	14.77	100
1990	29.72	11.75	9.06	39.96	9.51	100
1991	26.91	7.80	8.21	42.87	14.21	100
1992	19.37	7.23	6.52	53.39	13.50	100
1993	15.37	6.21	6.93	52.06	19.44	100
1994	13.46	6.63	8.72	61.43	9.75	100
1995	11.20	5.82	8.81	64.29	9.88	100
1996	10.66	5.44	8.06	65.58	10.25	100
1997	9.71	4.41	7.24	67.93	10.71	100
1998	7.46	3.68	5.68	55.09	28.10	100
1999	7.00	3.16	5.16	56.17	28.50	100
2000	5.79	3.39	5.96	53.58	31.28	100
2001	4.58	3.91	5.61	80.45	5.44	100
2002	5.05	3.46	4.61	82.44	4.44	100
2003	5.16	2.92	4.90	75.86	11.16	100
2004	4.26	2.78	5.13	75.68	12.15	100
2005	4.66	2.54	4.85	74.89	13.06	100
2006	4.84	2.44	4.36	75.81	12.55	100

Source: CPD: 1995, IMF: 2003 and *Bangladesh Bank Annual Report, 2005-06*

Thus, the export basket of Bangladesh was all along dominated by single product - raw jute and jute goods during the 1980s and ready-made garments since 1990s whereas the export basket of India is much diversified. It is precisely because of this, that Bangladesh in spite of enjoying preferential tariff on 2,925 tariff lines which are, in most cases 50 per cent lower than MFN tariff rates, could not make any dent into Indian market.

FIGURE I.7
COMPOSITION OF BANGLADESH'S EXPORT (IN PERCENTAGE)



Source: CPD: 1995, IMF: 2003 and *Bangladesh Bank Annual Report, 2005-06*.

Competitive nature of Export baskets

Moreover, commodity structure of exports of Bangladesh is competitive rather than complementary to that of India. Like Bangladesh ready made garments (RMG), leather manufactures and jute manufactures are also important items of export of India. While in 2000-01, the share of ready-made garments, leather goods and jute manufactures was 12.58, 4.40 and 0.46 per cent of India's total export respectively, the same for 2005-06 amounted to 8.18, 2.6 and 0.29 respectively. Although Bangladesh has comparative advantage in ready made garment sector, it is difficult for India to allow free access in this market segment as it may out compete Indian industries. As a result, just before the withdrawal of import licensing from textiles and garments in 2001, India imposed specific duties on a large number of textile fabrics and garments in order to protect domestic producers against low price import competition.¹³ Use of para-tariffs, however, does not violate the principles of RTA or WTO. Countries adopt them to secure national interest as short and medium term measures. Bangladesh has also imposed a number of para-tariff like regulatory duties (discontinued since 2004-05), license fee (withdrawn in 2002-03), infrastructure development surcharge (in practice), supplementary duties (in practice), etc. However, SAPTA preferences given by India to Bangladesh are also applicable to these specific duties while the same given by Bangladesh to India are not applicable in case of para-tariff.

Besides para tariff, the rules of origin clause under SAPTA also stand in the way of Bangladesh ready made garment export to India. In order

to qualify for India's SAPTA preferences, the cif value of non-SAPTA imported inputs included in the exported product should not exceed 70 per cent of the fob price, i.e., national value added should be no less than 30 per cent of the fob price.¹⁴ As the value added margins in cutting, sewing, assembling garments from imported fabrics are typically around 30 per cent (or even less) of fob prices, if Bangladesh firms import fabrics from non-SAPTA countries like China, this limits their ability to compete in exporting to India.¹⁵

Options for Bangladesh

The options available with Bangladesh to narrow down the deficit balance of trade with India are discussed here. Firstly, as short term measure, Bangladesh can buy fabrics from any of the SAPTA member countries so that it can export ready made garments to Indian market at preferential rate. This will enable Bangladesh to export more in Indian market and thereby reduce the deficit trade balance with India. Imports of fabrics and textile articles constitute about a quarter of Bangladesh's total annual imports. In fact, in 2004-05, the share of fabric and textile articles in total imports was 24 per cent and during the period 2005-06, it was 23.5 per cent.¹⁶ Bangladesh imports fabric and yarn from a number of countries like China, India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, USA, Malaysia, UK and Thailand. However, China, India and Hong Kong are the three most important sources of supply. As both China and Hong Kong are non-SAPTA countries, Bangladesh is left with the only choice to increase its import from India. But as the export strategy of Bangladesh RMG sector is based on the US and EU markets, more than 50 per cent of total woven garments are exported to USA and about 70 per cent of the knit wear are exported to EU,¹⁷ availing of SAPTA preferences appears not to be very high in Bangladesh's import agenda as China has already replaced India as the preferred source of supply of fabrics and yarn in recent years.

Secondly, as a long term measure, Bangladesh needs to expand her export basket with products having ability to compete with Indian industries at home. For this to happen, there has to be all-round improvement in productivity, efficiency and technology.

Transit

Thirdly, as a medium term measure, Bangladesh can earn a hefty amount if she chooses to provide transit facilities to India for sending

goods from mainland India to her north eastern region. According to rough estimates, Bangladesh can earn an annual transit fee of Rs 1,000 crores,¹⁸ i.e., roughly 247 million US dollars, as well as can attract substantial investment in infrastructure sector. As Bangladesh is located not only between the mainland India and her north eastern region but also between India and the South East Asia, with India's Look East Policy gaining ground, transit routes and transit trade through Bangladesh will play a more important role in future. Transit through Bangladesh will benefit both India and Bangladesh. India will be gaining in terms of reduced transport cost and Bangladesh in terms of huge transit fees. Presently, Assam's tea travels 1,400 kms to Kolkata port while it could have curtailed about 60 per cent of the distance if access to Chittagong port was available. Goods from Agartala travel 1,645 kms to Kolkata while direct distance would be about 350 kms through Bangladesh. A rough estimate suggests that in the next 20 years, movement of goods to north east region could be around 30 million tons and if even 20 million tons could move through Bangladesh, this would be several times the annual freight handling of Bangladesh railways.¹⁹ Besides transit income accruing from India, the same can also be accrued from Nepal and Bhutan if Bangladesh opens up its ports for these two land-locked Himalayan countries. Apart from transit fees that can accrue from opening up of Bangladesh's roadways, railways and ports, she can also earn 125 million US dollars²⁰ as transit fee from the proposed tri-nation gas pipe line running from Myanmar to India through Bangladesh. Bangladesh is quite aware of the commercial value of her geo-strategic location. It is well known what role transit/transshipment can play in revolutionizing the Bangladesh economy once her multi-modal transportation network is linked and made accessible for regional and inter-regional trade and economic cooperation.²¹ Besides transit fee, Indian investment in infrastructure sector, growth of ancillary transport industry and services, indirect employment and income generation from hospitality services can largely reduce Bangladesh's deficit trade balance vis-à-vis India. In spite of sound economic logic for transit traffic and bilateral framework agreement on this issue already being in place (India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement: 1972, 1973, 1980 and 2006), why is it that Bangladesh hesitates to finalize a concrete deal with India?

Security

It is well known that this issue is rather political than economic and has direct bearing on the security perception of Bangladesh. National

consensus within Bangladesh could not be arrived at on this issue due to the divergence of security perception of different stakeholders like political parties, military, intelligence agencies and civil society organizations. State-centric security perception, foremost in the minds of certain sections, feels that the grant of transit facilities would be tantamount to cut Bangladesh in two to make for an Indian corridor.²² The security doctrine of certain quarters in Bangladesh interprets that for India, Bangladesh remains as a strategic hinterland which is a major hurdle in its national integration particularly in relation to her north eastern states. India perceives Bangladesh to be a hurdle in attaining social, political and economic stability in her north eastern states. Issues relating to cross-border illegal immigration, cross-border movement of insurgent activists, arms trade - all pose a great threat to Indian security.²³ Besides the security concern arising out of her geo-strategic location, in some section, Indian hegemony in bilateral relation is also viewed as a threat to the existence of independent Bangladesh.²⁴

The China Factor

To counter Indian hegemony and to strengthen her strategic value, Bangladesh has developed a deep politico-military relationship with China over the last three decades. In fact, China currently plays a role in the maintenance of Bangladesh's security that no other country does. China is the largest and most important provider of military hardware and also trains Bangladesh armed forces.²⁵ Bangladesh army's artillery is equipped with the Chinese semi-automatic assault rifle (Type 567.62 mm) which is a variant of the AK-47. This is due to be replaced by the automatic Chinese assault rifles (Type 817.62) to be manufactured at the Bangladesh Ordnance Factory in Ghazipur, near Dhaka. The deal with China to this end was finalized in 2003. A licensed production agreement was finalized with China North Industries Corporation (NORINCO) for production of this new assault rifles.²⁶ Bangladesh army also acquired 100 main battle tanks from China and the government has already entered into agreement to upgrade 58 existing tanks out of 232 under Chinese loan for Chinese expertise.²⁷ Bangladesh also bought Chinese made PLZ-45 self-propelled howitzers.²⁸

Bangladesh army's air-defence brigade is equipped with Chinese HN-5/HN-5A man portable surface-to-air (SAM) supplemented by several types of anti-aircraft artillery systems of Chinese origin. The HN-5/HN-5A is due to be replaced by QW-2, low-altitude SAM system produced by

China National Precision Machinery Import and Export Corporation. A contract to this end was concluded in September 2004.²⁹ Bangladesh also procured 16 F-7 fighter aircraft from China.³⁰ Bangladesh is planning to manufacture naval patrol boats with Chinese assistance.³¹ All this shows the depth of Sino-Bangladesh defence cooperation. In fact, all the three wings of Bangladesh army are equipped with Chinese armour and depend on China for manpower training as well as upgradation and service of the inventory.

Besides military cooperation, China has agreed to provide assistance to Bangladesh for peaceful uses of nuclear energy for electricity and medicine. It has assured its help for the installation of Rooppur nuclear power project in Pabna which was conceived even before the birth of Bangladesh in 1961 but could not be materialized due to the shortage of funds.³² China has also extended assistance for the development of infrastructure in Bangladesh. It has already funded the construction of 6 “Friendship Bridges” and has agreed to develop Chittagong town and its link with Kunming. It has already signed Memorandum of Understanding to develop natural gas and petroleum as well as water resources in Bangladesh. Sino-Bangladesh engagement has already paid dividends to China as it has replaced India as the prime source of import.

China has fourfold interest in cultivating Bangladesh. Firstly, like Pakistan and Myanmar, China wants to have access to the Indian Ocean through Bangladesh. Development of the friendship city of Chittagong and its link with Kunming will provide that much haunted southern sea route to China and bring the Chinese sea lane of communication under better surveillance. It may be noted that 80 per cent of China’s oil import is from the Gulf region and the rest is from Africa and is transported through the sea lane of the Indian Ocean.³³ As a result, surveillance of the Indian Ocean sea lanes in general and the Strait of Malacca in particular is very important from Chinese energy security point of view. Moreover, if China could develop the Chittagong port *a la* Gwadar port in Pakistan which is connected with China through the Karakoram Highway and acting as the alternative route for import of oil from the Gulf and Africa, then it can open up another cost-effective Chittagong-Kunming route to enhance its energy security in the long run besides using the same as an outlet for South-West Chinese products for the global market. Construction of road links between Bangladesh and China through Myanmar could also serve military purpose in future as the China-Myanmar-Bangladesh triangle will have potential to draw India’s north

east into its *de facto* sphere of influence.³⁴

Secondly, befriending Bangladesh is a part of grand Chinese strategy to contain India within its border. With Chinese penetration in Bangladesh the strategy of containment-of-India comes to full circle as China has already made Pakistan and Myanmar her strategic partners. Moreover, by developing close relationship with India's neighbours in South Asia, China amply demonstrates her interest to play the balancing role in the region vis-à-vis India. In fact, the role India is playing in ASEAN, China intends to play the same in SAARC. It has already acquired the 'observer' status in SAARC and is destined to play crucial role in the days to come. In fact, the principal Chinese goal is to prevent the rise of any peer competitor in Asia that can challenge China's role in the Asia-Pacific region.³⁵

Thirdly, opening to Bangladesh via Kunming-Chittagong route will enable China to flood the markets in Bangladesh and Eastern India with cheap Chinese merchandise. Already Chinese exports to Bangladesh have surpassed that of India and Chinese consumables are making their way to north eastern states of India via Myanmar.

Fourthly, China has deep interest in Bangladesh's natural gas reserves. Bangladesh has a proven reserve of 15 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of natural gas in the 13 explored fields. About 9 other gas blocks are yet to be explored. The US Geological Survey has estimated that Bangladesh contains 32 Tcf of additional "undiscovered reserves". Thus, Bangladesh has the potential to become a major producer of natural gas. A conservative estimate based on 11.47 Tcf of proven reserve and current rate of consumption forecasts that the reserve will last for 27 years.³⁶ If the reserve is approximated at 47 Tcf (proven plus potential), then at the current rate of consumption it will last for more than 100 years. Even when annual growth rate of national demand for gas is factored into, gas export by Bangladesh appears viable. China requires to import huge oil and gas to support the growing need of her economy. Already China has surpassed Japan to become the world's second largest consumer of oil.³⁷ The competition between India and China for oil and gas has already intensified. Bangladesh's role in tri-nation gas pipeline may well be understood in terms of China factor.

Bangladesh also has its own strategic interest for engaging China. The militaristic perception of national security suffers from a perceived threat from India. As China is not only an Asian power but also one of the leading global players, engaging China will not only enhance the strategic value of Bangladesh but also neutralize 'Indian domination' in

her internal affairs. In fact, immediately after the assassination of Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975, military rulers of Bangladesh established diplomatic relations with China on 4 October 1975. They anticipated Indian intervention following the assassination of Mujibur Rahman who was considered to be pro-Indian and played the China card to avert any such eventuality. This policy of balancing China against India has been further strengthened by the military rulers like Zia-ur-Rahman, Hussain Mohammad Ershad and later Khaleda Zia, the widow of Zia-ur-Rahman and has become the mainstream strategic thinking in the security discourse of Bangladesh.

Thus the Chinese strategic interest of “bottling up” India converges with Bangladesh’s interest of “balancing India”. Bangladesh’s India policy could not be well understood without this China factor. As a long term strategy, this militaristic security doctrine views that Bangladesh will be the gainer, if China continues to grow at the present rate and eventually becomes the major Asian power. With the present US role of global policing and fighting terrorism across the world which will continue to bleed US, the influence of US is destined to decline. In that case, it will be difficult for US to contain China and India will then have to accommodate the Chinese interest in the Asia-Pacific region. If this futuristic strategic calculation goes well, then Bangladesh, already in the good books of China, will only benefit by endorsing Chinese strategic interest which she can not do now fully due to her present geo-political limitations.³⁸

This militaristic doctrine of national security has a bearing on Bangladesh’s denial of transit facilities to India. In fact, India had transit facility through former East Pakistan till 1965 Indo-Pak war. One former Bangladeshi diplomat to China, Enayetullah Khan has confessed that Pakistan had denied this transit right to India following the 1965 Indo-Pak war at the insistence of China.³⁹ Khan is of the view that the issue of transit is a strategic one and not economic. In the event of any future Sino-Indian conflict, Bangladesh will become vulnerable. Moreover, Bangladesh can give transit to India only at the cost of her friendship with China.⁴⁰ It is, thus, obvious that the China factor lies at the back for citing apparently unfounded security threats to Bangladesh in the event of allowing transit to India.

One is not sure whether the China factor is working at the back of Bangladesh’s mind in delaying the contract of tri-nation gas pipe line project for bringing gas from Myanmar to India through Bangladesh. The project would have proved beneficial for all the three stakeholder countries.

Myanmar could have sold its gas and earned revenue while Bangladesh would have earned transit fee as well as realized value for the stranded gas in north eastern Bangladesh and India could have secured energy to feed her growing economy as well as could have tapped the stranded gas in the north eastern region.⁴¹ In spite of the fact that all the three nations agreed in principle on this one billion US dollar project in January 2005, subsequently Bangladesh took a position that her participation in this project is contingent upon (i) India's providing unhindered corridor to Bangladesh for trade with Nepal and Bhutan, (ii) allowing transit passage to Bangladesh for transmission of hydro-electricity from Nepal and Bhutan, and (iii) reduction of trade deficit of Bangladesh arising out of bilateral trade with India.⁴² Meanwhile, due to the delay, Myanmar signed an agreement with Hong Kong-listed Petrochina to sell 6.5 Tcf gas from A-1 block reserve (for which India was negotiating) which is near to Teknaf of Bangladesh through an overland pipeline to Kunming (China) for 30 years.⁴³ Although Myanmar is still willing to supply gas to the proposed tri-nation gas pipeline from other gas blocks, the project cost will go up manifold, as to reach up to the nearest gas block bordering Bangladesh (A-2) will require at least an additional 150 kms long pipeline.⁴⁴

Security and Development

Thus, the geo-economic advantage that Bangladesh could have used for her economic development has become hostage to geo-strategic concern of the militaristic security perception. This overriding traditional security concern undermines non-traditional security threats arising out of the economic, social and political factors. The external sector of Bangladesh suffers from severe limitations like extremely narrow export basket (mainly ready-made garments), extreme concentration of export markets (mainly US and EU), and also extremely limited sources of import (mainly China and India). This, in turn, has severe implications for foreign policy making in Bangladesh.

There is also an alternative liberal perspective of national security of Bangladesh that sees no justification for Bangladesh either to align with China or India. Bangladesh should be friendly to both and enemy to none.⁴⁵ It should take maximum advantage of her geo-strategic locations for geo-economic gains. It should open up to neighbouring countries in order to transform herself into a hub of regional transit traffic, investment and trade. Since military movement through the corridor is out of question, providing the same in no way impacts upon the country's security concern.

An economically well off Bangladesh, then, can play effective strategic role in the region.⁴⁶ Besides economic gains, transit traffic has significant political, diplomatic and strategic significance. As Bangladesh becomes a centre of regional communications network and a crossroad of inter-state traffic, her importance in the geo-politics will naturally increase. Her international image will undergo a metamorphosis. Instead of a country perennially at the receiving end, Bangladesh will have something to offer to others. Peace, prosperity and stability of Bangladesh will be a matter of concern not only of Bangladeshis, but of all with a stake in trade and transit. Bangladesh's security will be strengthened by getting others beyond the region interested in her security and well being.⁴⁷ Since Bangladesh is not competing with India for regional power, there is no reason for her to play off China against India and to become a chess board for powers aspiring for regional/Asian hegemony. It is imperative for Bangladesh to pursue a foreign policy conducive to her economic growth and this can best be achieved through multilateral and bilateral engagements with as many countries as possible. Cementing of Sino-Indian relations will better serve the interest of Bangladesh than their rivalries.⁴⁸ Since in spite of much differences and having competitive relationship between them, China and India are engaging with each other, what purpose does it serve for Bangladesh in being India-phobic?

Conclusion

The asymmetry in Indo-Bangladesh bilateral trade in favour of India is mainly due to the very narrow export basket of Bangladesh. Competitive nature of the export baskets of India and Bangladesh has made it further difficult to resolve this asymmetry through merchandise trade between the two countries. Since India enjoys competitive advantage in most lines of production, even in case of free trade between them, it will be difficult for Bangladesh to significantly increase her export to Indian market.⁴⁹ The resolution of this asymmetry calls for comprehensive bilateral agreement including transit, investment, joint ventures and other forms of economic cooperation. This all out bilateral engagement needs to factor into security concerns of each other. State-centric security perception should give way to cooperative security management and non-traditional security concerns should be factored into the foreign policy making of both the countries.

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INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Issues and Challenges

SHELLY BARBHUIYA

Bangladesh, the erstwhile East Pakistan or former East Bengal, which was known as the “bread basket of India”¹ to the Mughals, became an independent State on 16 December 1971. Prior to 1971, it was a part of Pakistan, popularly known as East Pakistan². Prior to the creation of Pakistan in 1947, it was a part of undivided province of Bengal under British India. The pre-colonial socio-economic condition of present Bangladesh was rich and flourishing. It was not entirely without commercial centers, and Dhaka in particular grew into an important entrepot during the Mughal period. After the arrival of British in the early 17th century, prominence shifted to Calcutta, which developed as a centre for commercial and administrative center in South Asia. Thus, since the colonial times East Bengal served merely as the hinterland of Calcutta³ and the birth of Pakistan lowered it to the status of a periphery of the Western wing of Pakistan, a wasteland of Karachi. The development of East Bengal was limited to agricultural sector only. The colonial infrastructure of the 18th and 19th centuries reinforced East Bengal’s function as the primary producer - primarily of rice and jute - for processors and traders in Calcutta and beyond.⁴ The Muslims of East Bengal later supported the concept of the ‘Two Nation Theory’ and rallied for Muslim nationalism leading to the partition of British India in 1947.

While the partition disrupted the former colonial economic arrangement that had preserved East Bengal (East Pakistan) as a producer of jute and rice for the urban industrial economy around Calcutta on the one hand, the marginal expansion of the cultivated area led to the pauperization of the rural population in East Pakistan between 1947 and 1971. Although, in successive five-year plans, Pakistan adopted a

development strategy based on industrialization, but the major share of development budget went to West Pakistan leading to the widening of regional inequality between the two wings. Within Pakistan, there was wide ranging regional variation between the two regions. Pakistan government followed private sector led strategy of industrialization through import substitution for achieving rapid development. This strategy had built in bias in favor of industrial and urban development against agriculture and rural development.⁵

TABLE I
POPULATION IN MILLIONS

Province	1951	1961	1971
East Bengal	41.9	50.8	70
West Pakistan	33.7	42.9	60

Source: Anwar,n.d._www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_copyrighthtml.

TABLE 2
PER CAPITA INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN PAKISTAN

(in million rupees)

year	East Pakistan	West Pakistan	Difference
1959-60	269	355	32%
1964-65	285.5	419	46.7%
1968-69	291	473.4	62.6%

Source: Anwar,n.d._www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_copyrighthtml

TABLE 3
DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURE

Province	Amount allocated (million Rs.)
East Bengal	40
Punjab	50
Sind	25
NWFP	5

Source: Anwar,n.d._www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_copyrighthtml

Much of the assets and private investments in East Pakistan were owned by the entrepreneurs of West Pakistan. Structural change in the economy of East Pakistan throughout the 'Pakistan Period' had been negligible. In 1948 there were 11 textile mills in the East and only 9 in the West. Further in 1971 when the number of industries in West increased to 150, East Pakistan had only 26 industries. Muslim banking shifted from Bombay to Karachi. West Pakistan controlled the economy and industry of East Pakistan. During 1948-66, East Pakistan was more important trade partner of India than that of West Pakistan, sharing about 74.57 per cent on an average annual trade with India. From 1948-60 East Pakistan's share in Pakistan's export earnings was 51.17 percent, but its share of import earnings was only 39.02 percent. East Pakistan's surplus BOP was used to finance West Pakistan's deficit on foreign account leading to drainage of resources. During 1948-1971 the total turnover of East Pakistan's trade with West Pakistan's increased from US\$ 48-49 million in 1948 to US\$ 458 million in 1970-71. It was maximum, i.e. US \$544 million in 1969-70. Besides, East Pakistan suffered from constant deficit in the trade between the two 'wings' which increased from an annual average of Rs. 162 million in the early 1950s to about Rs. 425 million in the 1960s. The trade deficit was also maximum, i.e., US \$156 million in 1969-70. All these circumstances turned East Pakistan from a surplus economy to a deficit one,⁶ although East Pakistan contributed the larger share of foreign exchange earnings. Besides, 50-70 per cent of Pakistan's export earnings were coming from the East Pakistan. East Pakistan was the world's largest producer of raw jute (a fiber), which was Pakistan's main foreign exchange earner. Other export earning products of East Pakistan were - skin and hides, fish, tea etc. The foreign trade statistics in its first decade for Pakistan were as follows:

TABLE 4
FOREIGN TRADE FIGURES (MILLIONS OF RUPEES)

<i>Five year period</i>	<i>East Pakistan</i>		<i>West Pakistan</i>	
	<i>Exports</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Exports</i>	<i>Imports</i>
1947-52	4582	2129	3786	4769
1952-57	3969	2159	3440	5105

Source: Tanweer Akram:n.d., <http://www.virtualbangladesh.org>

While East Pakistan was earning a larger share of Pakistan's total exports, West Pakistan had greater share in the imports of consumer goods, industrial machineries and raw materials. The inter-wing trade policy was designed to allow the West Pakistani manufacturing sector to dispose its commodities in East Pakistan at a price higher than world market.⁷ Her export sector⁸ was neglected throughout. During Pakistani regime, the major export industries of East Pakistan were – food, cotton textile and apparel, wood, cork and furniture, footwear, ceramics and glass etc. Besides their economic deprivation and despite the Muslim Bengalis of East Pakistan being numerically larger than their counterparts in West Pakistan, they were politically subdued and all important portfolios in the ministry, bureaucracy and army were in the hands of the West Pakistanis.

TABLE 5
ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION OF PAKISTAN, 1951
(% OF POPULATION)

	<i>East Pakistan</i>	<i>West Pakistan</i>
Muslims	76.8	97.1
Scheduled Caste Hindus	12.0	1.1
Caste Hindus	10.0	0.5
Others (including tribal groups)	1.2	1.3

Source: Peiris: 1998:5

TABLE 6
DISTRIBUTION OF CIVILIAN AND MILITARY POSTS BETWEEN THE
EAST AND WEST PAKISTANIS

<i>Position</i>	<i>Central Government Civil Service (1955)</i>	
	<i>East Pakistan/Bengal</i>	<i>West Pakistan</i>
Secretary	0	19
Joint Secretary	3	38
Deputy Secretary	10	123
Assistant Secretary	38	510

Source: Akram, Tanweer, n.d. www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_copyright.html

TABLE 7
DISTRIBUTION OF OTHER PORTFOLIOS BETWEEN THE
EAST AND WEST PAKISTANIS

	<i>(in %) (1969-70)</i>	
	<i>East Pakistan</i>	<i>West Pakistan</i>
Central Civil Services	16%	84%
Foreign Services	15%	85%
Ambassadors/head of Missions (nos.)	9	60
Army	5%	95%
Army: Officers of General Rank (nos.)	1	16
Navy: Technical	19%	81%
Navy: Non-Technical	9%	91%
Air-Force Pilots	11%	89%
Armed Forces (nos.)	20,000	5000,000
Pakistan airlines(nos.)	280	7,000
P.I.A. Directors(nos.)	1	9
P.I.A. Area Managers (nos.)	None	5
Railway Board Directors(nos.)	1	7

Source: Dixit: 15-16:1999

Moreover, the cultural identity⁹ of the Bengalis of East Pakistan was at stake while the rulers of West Pakistan forced them to adopt Urdu as the state language¹⁰. All these factors created a colonial syndrome perceived by the people of Eastern Wing of Pakistan against her Western Wing. After two decades of colonial exploitation East Pakistan further became the victim for another 24 years of political and economic exploitation by West Pakistan. For example, the preference for Urdu-speaking immigrants in the recruitment of employees in the state sector, the compensation of losses that resulted from the ban on the export of raw jute to the mills in the Indian side of the border (one of the most important sources of income to the relatively more affluent Muslims of pre-partition Bengal) was ineffective. The largest jute processing factory in the world, at Narayanganj, an industrial suburb of Dhaka, was owned by the Adamjee family from West Pakistan. Pakistan government followed private sector led strategy of industrialization through import substitution for achieving rapid development. This strategy had built in bias in favor of industrial and urban development against agriculture and rural development. During the Ayub Khan regime, the Bengali intellectuals and the bourgeoisie categorized the maltreatment of the East into the following category: firstly, East Pakistan had been turned into a market to dump West Pakistani products; secondly, the foreign trade policy was biased in favor of West

Pakistani interests; thirdly, the ruling elite allocated and distributed resources in favor of West Pakistan. It also suffered from a transfer of resources to West Pakistan, which amounted to Tk. 3000 crores annually from 1947 to 1968-69.¹¹

In 1971, after almost two-and-a-half decades of colonial rule by their Punjabi and Sindhi west Pakistani brethren, Bengali Muslims started a liberation war against west Pakistan under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman¹² and ultimately attained independence on 16 December 1971.¹³

Role of India in the Evolution of Bangladesh

The Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations are largely governed by the reciprocal perceptions of and expectations from each other. India has been closely associated with the political evolution of Bangladesh. In fact, it was India which scripted the final chapters of the history of Bangladesh's liberation that unfolded in the early 1970s. It is, thus, pertinent to examine the predicament of India in intervening in the liberation war of Bangladesh till its logical conclusion.

One of the abiding reasons for India to intervene into the liberation war of Bangladesh was to get rid of the Pakistan from her eastern border. Pakistan, a front runner state for USA in its Cold War against the erstwhile USSR,¹⁴ used East Pakistan to destabilize India's North Eastern region. Pakistan followed twofold strategy: bleeding Indian military machine and dismembering the North Eastern region from mainland India by working up the grievances of the ethnic minorities of the region. Pakistan also had territorial interest in India's sparsely populated North East which is viewed to be a natural lebensraum for the overpopulated Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan. The anti-India subversive activities got a new momentum following the Sino-India border conflict in 1962. The USA-China-Pakistan axis had encircled India and coordinated their efforts from East Pakistan to train the northeast rebels and to provide them logistic support across the border in order to intensify their so called struggle for "freedom". The Naga, Mizo and Meitei insurgents were motivated, trained and armed to wage ethnic wars against the Indian state.¹⁵

At one point of time, India's security perception about her eastern border had become so fragile that her intelligence wings were at doubt as to whether India would be able to hold on the region in case of a simultaneous thrust from East Pakistan and China. India found an opportunity to come out of this suffocating security encirclement in the

liberation war in East Pakistan and was quick to take advantage of the situation to get rid of Pakistan from her eastern border.¹⁶

India took the diplomatic initiative to convince the international community about the viability of Bangladesh as an independent country. Indian Foreign Minister and Prime Minister toured the globe and brought the Bangladesh liberation movement into the limelight to garner the support of global powers in favour of independent Bangladesh. As the final stroke, Mrs. Gandhi, the charismatic Indian Prime Minister, signed a treaty with USSR¹⁷ to create a shield against possible security threat from USA, and mobilized the Indian army to liberate East Pakistan.

Though *Awami League* under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won the majority of parliamentary seats in the general election of 1971, he was denied political power in Pakistan. The call for liberation was, thus, rooted in strong ethical and moral grounds. Moreover, the military onslaught that was unleashed on the common Bengali people of East Pakistan by the armed forces of West Pakistan had created a global commotion. For more than nine long months, from 25 March to 16 December 1971, the West Pakistani forces unleashed terror with all forms of brutality. Pakistan's army launched *Operation Searchlight* on 25 March 1971 to curb the Bengali nationalist movement by eliminating all opposition, political or military. Pakistan army killed 1,247,000 Bengalis including 100,000 in Dacca, 150,000 in Khulna, 75,000 in Jessore, 95,000 in Comilla and 100,000 in Chittagong. Pakistani army and allied paramilitary groups killed about one out of every twenty-five people of East Pakistan. Around 400,000 women were raped.¹⁸ The West Pakistani attack had an anti-Hindu dimension. Hindu dominated areas in Dhaka constituted special focus of attack. The only Hindu residential hall - the Jagannath Hall in Dhaka University - was destroyed by the Pakistani armed forces, and an estimated 600 to 700 of its residents were murdered.¹⁹ All these circumstances created a strong public opinion in India particularly in West Bengal in favour of military intervention to put an end to ghastly genocide in East Pakistan.

Within a month of the West Pakistani crackdown, nearly a million refugees had entered into India. By the end of May 1971, the average daily influx into India was estimated at over 100,000. By July 1971, the total number of Bangladeshi refugees in India had reached the figure of eight million. By the end of 1971, Indian government informed the United Nations indicated that some 10 million refugees had entered India.²⁰ The governments of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura established refugee camps along the border²¹ India shouldered the

responsibility to feed and look after this huge displaced population bearing heavy financial burden.

It was this human plight of the conflict which played a compelling role in India's intervention in the liberation war of Bangladesh. Besides providing shelter and logistics to the *Azami League* government in exile, India began the military campaign against Pakistan on 4 December 1971. The Indian Army with support from *Mukti Bahini* launched a 3-pronged pincer attack on Dhaka from West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, taking only 12 days to defeat the Pakistan army. Realizing the possibility of total annihilation, the Pakistan army surrendered *en masse* to the joint command of Bangladesh and Indian forces on 16 December 1971, with the largest number of prisoners of war, i.e., 93,000 in history.²² With the unconditional surrender of the Pakistan army, Bangladesh was finally liberated.

Indian government stood firmly behind the government of newly born Bangladesh. As Bangladesh was looking at India for economic, political and technological support for the reconstruction of war ravaged economy, trade and social set-up, Indian government extended all possible support by providing liberal loans and grants²³ and signing various trade agreements, as was sought by the government of Bangladesh till Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in 1975. An India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement was signed in March 1972 based on friendly co-operative environment; following this another three-year trade agreement was signed on 5 July 1972.²⁴

Metamorphosis of Indo-Bangladesh Relationship

The hang over of Indo-Pakistan inimical relations cast its shadow over the Indo-Bangladesh relations as well. Except a brief spell of Mujib era (1971-75), Indo-Bangladesh relations have remained one of distrust and suspicion. At the root of this hostile relation, lies the orthodox theological perception of Hindu-Muslim divide. The religious fundamentalist perspective that rules out the co-existence and complementarity of these two faiths, often considers each other as competitor. This competitive perspective leads to the formulation of political doctrine of conflict rather than cooperation. In addition to this communal perspective, the psychology of being small also haunts the Bangladeshi entity. Being a small neighbor, Bangladesh fears the Indian domination, deliberately maintaining distance from India. There are several issues that stand in the way of harmonizing the national interests of India and Bangladesh.²⁵

Firstly, Bangladesh shares more than 90 per cent of her international border with India alone which runs about 4,096 kms land border and 180 kms maritime border. That Bangladesh has no agreed sea boundaries with India since 1979 brings about conflicts with India on the extent of Maritime zones rather than the island itself. India wants determination of median line on the basis of equal distance from the shore, while Bangladesh calls for adjustments of the median line considering the physical characteristics of the coastline.²⁶ It also has a 200 kms common border with Myanmar in the southeast.²⁷ Bangladesh is surrounded by the Indian state of West Bengal in the west, Assam and Meghalaya in the north and Tripura and Mizoram in the east. Thus, Bangladesh is surrounded by Indian states. It is this physical geography, which makes the Bangladeshis feel that they are 'India Locked'.²⁸ There are some stretches along the border which have not yet been demarcated. This is particularly true in case of riverine border. The international boundary in Berubari sector of West Bengal at Mouza Daikhata-56 Khudipara- Singhpara, about 1.5 km (56 acres), has not been yet demarcated due to difference of opinion between the governments of India and Bangladesh. As per the Government of West Bengal, the Sui River divides the area along the actual possession held by India and Bangladesh. The state government has integrated positions for the entire Berubari sector, and Daikhata-56 was only a part of it. For the purpose of demarcation in Daikhata-56, the Government of India considers that it is a practical option to accept the Sui River as the boundary. The difference of opinion over the alignment between the two sides still exists and the issue has been referred by the Survey authorities of both sides to their respective governments.²⁹ Another small stretch of land of about 6.5 kms along the Comilla-Tripura border has not yet been demarcated.³⁰ India is concerned about the Hindus living in these lands, if it goes to Bangladesh after demarcation".³¹ Another stretch along Lathitilla/ Dumabari area of Assam involving of about 2.5 kms length (approximately 135 acres of land) is still under dispute. India insists upon the original Gadal Map of 1915-16 of Dhumabari as the basis of demarcation while Bangladesh insists on Theodolite Traverse Data, whereby Bangladesh could claim three villages for itself giving India only two villages³². Another border area is the village of Padua (known as Pyrdiwah in India), adjoining Meghalaya state of North Eastern region of India and Timbil area of Sylhet district in Bangladesh due to its adverse possession. When the map of India was redrawn in 1947, the pillar demarcating the border came up right in the middle of the village. Worse was to follow after the birth of

Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government claimed that India held illegal possession of the area since 1971. This turn of events forced the Indian authorities to post a BSF outpost in that area in 1971. Thereafter, Pyrdiwah has been identified as among the areas in "adverse possession." It was agreed under the Mujib-Indira border agreement in 1974 that any dispute in the un-demarcated area would be settled bilaterally.³³ Half the Pyrdiwah village called Pyrdiwah I is in Bangladesh and another half called Pyrdiwah II is in India.³⁴

Secondly, problems of demarcation of border exist in case of *Char* lands. *Char* lands are the areas that emerge in riverine as well as coastal border areas either due to changes in the course of rivers or due to the natural process of delta formation. People, whoever come first, occupy these *Char* lands leading to claims and counter-claims. For example, during 1979 controversies began over New Moore Islands also known as Purbasha in India and Talpatty in Bangladesh, an island of about 24½12 kms formed at the mouth of river Hariya Bhanga that flows through Sundarban and forms the border between India and Bangladesh. Both India and Bangladesh claimed the island to have emerged in their own territorial waters. As India occupied it, Bangladesh felt deprived. Bangladesh staked its claim since 1979, when the West Bengal Government started calling New Moore island "Purbasha". Bangladesh thought there were two islands –New Moore and Purbasha. They claimed the former as its own, calling it South Talpatty. This ignorance indicates that Bangladesh's claim on this island was not based on any assured facts.³⁵ Anti-Indian criticism and political slogan mongering filled the air in Bangladesh.³⁶

Riverine borders are not easy to manage like the fixed land borders. Riverine India-Bangladesh border stretches about 200 kms of southern extremity of West Bengal border and 50 kms of Assam.³⁷ Landmarks based on which demarcation has been agreed upon, keep on changing due to the change of the course of rivers. One such problem is associated with the Muhuri river of Tripura (Belonia sector)-Comilla Sector of the India-Bangladesh border. The dispute in this area could not be solved due to the change in the course of Muhuri river and formation of a *Char* (around 46 acres) due to the shifting nature of the river in spite of bilateral agreement (para-5 and 6 of Article-I of the 1974 Agreement).³⁸

Third, the emergence of enclaves known as *Chitmahals*, due to the faulty demarcation of the borders, following partition, continues to be an irritant in Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations. Enclaves are the villages or pockets of land physically located in one country, but occupied by the

citizens of other country. Obviously, large number of Indian citizens are residing in the *Chitmahals*, surrounded by the Bangladesh land and Bangladeshi citizens and vice versa. The social, economic and political conditions of these dry islands on both sides are dismal due to the lack of proper administrative arrangements and the concentration of anti-social activists involved in cross-border illegal activities. There are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh involving 17,258.24 acres of land and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India involving 7083.72 acres. Due to the riverine nature of the border at some areas that leaves *Chars* after the floods cause adverse possession of that land. The ownership of 65 enclaves in West Bengal-Bangladesh border is disputed: out of them 35 are in adverse possession and 30 are in reverse possession.³⁹ As per Border Agreement of May 1974, Bangladesh agreed to hand over Berubari to India and Bangladesh would retain the Dahagram and Angorpota enclaves. To connect the Dahagram with Paubari Moaza in Bangladesh, India would lease in perpetuity land corridor (Tin Bigha) measuring 178 meters × 85 meters to Bangladesh. While Bangladesh would get 100.44 sq kilometers, India would get 49.17 sq kms territory. India handed over the Tin Bigha on lease and opened it for use by Bangladeshi passengers and vehicular traffic on 26 June 1992, while Bangladesh demanded permanent ownership of the corridor.⁴⁰ There are 2,853.50 acres of Indian land under the adverse possession of Bangladesh, whereas around 2,154.50 acres of Bangladeshi land are under the adverse possession of India.⁴¹ The enclaves in the Assam-Meghalaya-Bangladesh borders covering an area of 755 acres remain unresolved; out of these 520 acres are with India, the remaining being with Bangladesh.⁴²

Fourth, the support of cross-border terrorism and insurgency is another bone of contention. India's security concern about North Eastern states has already been mentioned, as North East insurgents were being provided safe sanctuary in East Pakistan. Except for a brief period during the Mujib regime, the game of terror export across the border has been the major irritant in bilateral relations. While Bangladesh accused India of sponsoring the *Shanti Bahini*,⁴³ a militant outfit of Chakmas of Chittagong Hill Tracts fighting against the Government of Bangladesh for their rights⁴⁴, India accused of sheltering and patronizing the ethnic militant groups of the North Eastern region like ULFA⁴⁵, ACF⁴⁶, UPDS⁴⁷, DHD⁴⁸, NDFB⁴⁹, BLT⁵⁰, MULTA⁵¹, NSCN-IM⁵², NSCN-K⁵³, ANVC⁵⁴, HNLC⁵⁵, PREPAK⁵⁶, PLA⁵⁷, UNLF⁵⁸, KYKL⁵⁹, KCP⁶⁰, ATTF⁶¹, NLFT⁶², TNV⁶³, KLO⁶⁴, KNF⁶⁵, MNF⁶⁶, BNLF⁶⁷ and HPC(D)⁶⁸, UBLF⁶⁹. In spite of the resolution of the

Chakma issue in 1997, India feels that the anti-India elements in Bangladesh continue to provide logistics to insurgents from India's North East. Indian security forces provided a list of 175 camps⁷⁰ of various ethnic militant groups from the North Eastern states that have been thriving in different parts of Bangladesh.⁷¹ Indian security analysts believe that Bangladesh has been using the Indian militant groups as pawns to settle other bilateral issues and to keep India under pressure. Bangladesh, on the other hand, accused India of sheltering its criminals and 39 anti-Bangladesh camps, including those of the *Shadhin Bangabhumii Andolon* and the *United People's Democratic Front* (UPDF).⁷² Besides providing shelter to the Indian ethnic militant groups, of late Bangladesh based Islamic fundamentalist forces like HuJI⁷³ have emerged as a serious threat to the stability of India. Indian intelligence and security forces have traced a number of subversive activities undertaken in India to this organization.⁷⁴

Fifth, the issue of illegal immigration of the Bangladeshi nationals has been perceived as another threat to the socio-political stability of India in general and states along the Bangladesh border in particular. That while the growth of population in the border villages in Bangladesh has been comparatively lesser than her national average, the same being just reverse on the Indian side of the fence,⁷⁵ proves the fact of illegal migration from Bangladesh.

TABLE 8
POPULATION GROWTH RATE

<i>Bangladesh</i>		<i>India</i>	
Greater Joshore	1.97%	Uttar 24 Pargona	3.16%
Greater Kholna	1.58%	Maldoho	2.96%
Greater Satkhira	1.68%	Marshidabad	2.80%
Greater Bagerhat	1.72%	Coochbihar	2.18%
Greater Rajshahi	2.00%	North-South Dinajpur	3.25%
Greater Meherpur	1.99%	Nodiya	2.98%
Greater Rongpur	1.95%	Karimganj	3.18%
Greater Kurigram	1.87%	Dhubri	3.94%
Greater Dinajpur	1.95%	Goalpara	2.98%
Greater Kushtia	2.01%	East Garo Hills	3.84%
Greater Mymensing	1.81%	Jayantia Hills	4.1%
Greater Netrokona	1.80%	West Garo Hills	2.91%
Greater Sylhet	1.82%	Tripura	3.36%
Greater Comilla	1.89%		
Greater Moulvibazar	1.89%		

Source: *The Bartaman Patrika*, 16 December 2008.

This fact has been used to draw inferences about the illegal immigration of the Bangladeshi nationals into India. Since India has neither any national population register, nor any national citizen identity card, it is difficult to prove in the court of law the citizenship of an immigrant and also to arrive at any reliable estimate of the size of the Bangladeshi immigrants into India. However, in a Group of Ministers report on national security, headed by the then Home Minister, Lal Krishna Advani, it was estimated that a total of 15 million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are staying in India⁷⁶ Of these, 12 million are staying in different states of North East India In fact the issue of illegal Bangladeshi immigration has already destabilized⁷⁷ the border state of Assam⁷⁸ and it is spilling over to other North Eastern states. The public demand for fencing the Indo-Bangladesh border can be seen as a defensive measure against this illegal cross-border infiltration.

Sixth, India's fencing work along the Indo-Bangladesh border in order to stop illegal immigration, free movement of the insurgent groups and smuggling of small arms has met with criticism from Bangladesh.

TABLE 9
STATUS OF FENCING AND BORDER ROADS ON INDO-
BANGLADESH BORDER FENCING

(Length in Km)

<i>Name of state</i>	<i>Border length</i>	<i>Fencing in phase-1 completed</i>	<i>Fencing in Phase-II (sanctioned)</i>	<i>Fencing in Phase-II (completed)</i>	<i>Total completed in Phase-I & II</i>
West Bengal	2216.7	507	1021	680	1187
Assam	263	149.29	71.5	51.42	200.71
Meghalaya	443	198.06	201	180.19	378.25
Tripura	856	—	736	688.19	688.19
Mizoram	318	—	400	136	136
Total	4096.7	854.354	2429.5	1735.80	2590.15

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI at <http://www.theministryofhomeaffairs>

India finds no alternative other than to erect fences all along the 4000 kms long border as she has not received any cooperation from Bangladesh to stop infiltration of insurgents and illegal migrants. Managing the border has become a big challenge for India. Bangladesh, however, does not see the fencing activities as a good neighborly behavior⁷⁹.

Seventh, India's request to have transit facilities to move goods from mainland India to the North Eastern region was not accommodated by

Bangladesh. As the territory of Bangladesh chips in between the mainland India and her North Eastern region, a distance of 700 kms from Kolkata to Agartala via Dhaka becomes 1700 km via Guwahati while travelling through Indian territory. As a result, it involves huge amount of transportation cost to move goods from the mainland to the North Eastern region of India. A transit facility through Bangladesh could cut the cost by less than half. This would be beneficial for both sides, as India can move goods from mainland to North East at a lesser cost and in shorter time, while Bangladesh could earn transit fee in return.⁸⁰ Another example where a more cooperative Indo-Bangladesh relationship can be developed is by enhancing regional utility of Chittagong port⁸¹, for all exports from India's North Eastern region as well as Bhutan and Nepal⁸², generating billions of dollars of revenue annually for Bangladesh and considerable savings for India.⁸³ However, in spite of repeated requests, Bangladesh declined to provide the transit facilities to India citing security reasons.

Eighth, the river system of Bangladesh, being the lower riparian country, is an extension of the river system of India - the upper riparian country. Rivers originating in the Himalayas find their way to the Bay of Bengal through the coastal Bangladesh. The three major rivers of Bangladesh, i.e., the Ganga⁸⁴, the Jamuna⁸⁵ and the Meghna, are the older version of Ganga, Brahmaputra and Barak of India respectively. Some eastern Himalayan and Patkai hills rivers like Tista, Torsha, Mahananda, Atrai, Surma, Kushiara, Baulai, Karnaphuli, Gumti which flow through the Indian territory feed the Ganga-Jamuna-Meghna river system of Bangladesh. As the river systems of India and Bangladesh are integrally linked, both the countries are having overlapping competitive interest as far as water is concerned. Being the upper riparian country, India enjoys the advantage while Bangladesh finds itself at the receiving end. Free flow of these water bodies from India is in Bangladesh's interest. As India has the same set of rivers as her resource, it is but natural that she will plan out the best utilization of her water resources. Given the vastness of India and her growing needs, Bangladesh is concerned about her water security. Being primarily an agrarian country, Bangladesh requires water for cultivation and for allied activities. She feels that given the Indian intention to control the water flows of these rivers and ambitious river inter-linking project⁸⁶, there will not be enough water left for Bangladesh particularly during the lean season. Bangladesh protested against the river-based development projects of India with implications for Bangladesh like the Farakka barrage⁸⁷, Tipaimukh dam⁸⁸ and river inter-linking project.

Bangladesh feels that India is not sensitive about her needs. The Bangladeshi protest is, in turn, not viewed as friendly gesture by India and it is often interpreted as the unnecessary intervention in the internal affairs of India. The search for the harmony of interests led to the signing of the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty between the two countries. However, forces inimical to India often make it an issue to fan anti-Indian sentiments in Bangladesh.

Ninth, being a small neighbor, Bangladesh suffers from the fear psychosis of Indian hegemony. In terms of land mass, India is about 23 times larger than Bangladesh. In terms of population, India is about 7 times more than Bangladesh. In terms of GDP, Indian economy is about 25 times larger than Bangladesh. India also expects that Bangladesh should fit herself into the Indian regional strategy as a gesture of goodwill to reciprocate India's role in the liberation war of Bangladesh. India seeks to keep China out of South Asia. While India intends to shape the foreign relations architecture in South Asia and expects Bangladesh to harmonize her foreign relations matrix to that of India, Bangladesh, in turn, gravitates away towards China-Pakistan axis in order to minimize the influence of India. This disharmony in the foreign policy goals of these two neighbours often acts as the springboard of bilateral tension.⁸⁹

Tenth, Bangladesh is facing a deficit balance of trade vis-à-vis India. India being one of the largest trade partners of Bangladesh, the other being China, Bangladesh requested India to undertake measures so that the trade asymmetry could be reduced. Although India has reduced tariff lines on a large number of imports from the SAARC nations, of which Bangladesh is a member, the trade asymmetry has shown no sign of reduction. While India views the extremely narrow export basket of Bangladesh as the prime cause behind this trade asymmetry, Bangladesh feels that protectionist measures on the part of India stand in the way of enhancing exports of Bangladeshi goods into the Indian markets. Anti-Indian forces in Bangladesh often make this trade asymmetry an issue to trumpet their horn in order to derive political mileage out of it which in turn hots up the Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations.⁹⁰

Besides, there are some minor issues like: misplaced border pillars⁹¹, cutting of barbed wire⁹², smuggling⁹³, cross border trafficking of women,⁹⁴ which stand on the way of developing cross-border friendly relations. The trajectory of Indo-Bangladesh relations has not been grounded in realistic foreign policy approach. While India, particularly the Congress-led government, appears to have practiced a regime specific Bangladesh

policy, Bangladesh followed a country specific India policy often couched in binary religious perspective.⁹⁵ Indo-Bangladesh relations need to be freed from these idealistic prejudices.

Conclusion

Till recently, India-Bangladesh relations deteriorated over the years despite the goodwill generated from India's support for Bangladesh during its war of independence. It is natural for close neighbors to have problems. Intimacy is not always easy, but the damage is repairable. There are many opportunities that could be exploited for the greater benefit of both countries. Both countries need to recognize the opportunities to improve bilateral relations by initiating proper policy measures, mutual cooperation and above all political will. The governments and the private sector of both countries need to work together to bring these measures into reality. If the opportunities are economic, the challenges are mostly political. Cross-border illegal infiltration is one such problem. There is an urgent need to address security issues in a candid and pragmatic manner. Fundamentalism and all other threats must be confronted together. There should be a conducive environment for promoting people-to-people contact between India and Bangladesh. Both countries need to confront such obstacles through joint efforts.

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- Independence Act. Mountbatten announced the Radcliffe Boundary Award on the evening of 17 August 1947, by which two independent territories were created, namely, India and Pakistan, and all the native states were left to accede to either. The region of Bengal was divided along religious lines. The predominantly Muslim eastern half became a part of the newly independent Pakistan being designated as East Pakistan till 1971; the predominantly Hindu western part joined in India as a province, rechristened as West Bengal. For details, see Ramesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, Volume 1, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1960; J.N. Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond: Indo-Bangladesh Relations*, Delhi, Konark Publishers, 1999; Sanjoy Bhardwaj, "India and Bangladesh: Border Issues and Security Perceptions", in Sobhan Farooq (ed.), *Bangladesh-India Dialogue: Vision of Young Leaders*, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, The University Press LTD. Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2006; Gyanendra Pandey, "Remembering Partition, Violence, Nationalism and History in India", Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001; E. Sridharan, "Economic Cooperation and Security Spill-Over: The Case of India and Pakistan", <http://www.stimson.org/southasia/pdf/>
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 7. Islam, Ibid; Madaan, Ibid; Tanweer, Ibid; Sridharan, op.cit.
 8. Islam, Ibid; Sridharan, Ibid.
 9. The Muslims as a community in Bengal was internally classified on the basis of overlapping categories of class and status in to few groups- firstly, the Mughals Ashraf, who belonged to the Urdu speaking and urban based social stratum, claiming their descent from Arabia and formed the elitist group and tended to follow the sub-culture of North Indian Muslim aristocracy. Secondly, the Muffasil Gentry belonging to the Sunni sect used both Urdu and Bengali as languages and claimed

foreign descent. Below these two groups there was the Lesser Ashraf - the rural potentates, who also claimed foreign ancestry and had weakness for Islamic languages (Urdu, Persian, etc.). Against the Ashrafs were the Atrafs, Ajlafs or Arjals - the ordinary peasants and craftsmen who followed degraded occupations like weaving, oil-pressing or fishing. In the absence of a sizable middle stratum, there was a marked structural gap between the Muslim elite and the common Bengali Muslims. For details, see Jan Abid Ullah, op. cit; Maneeza Hossain, "Broken Pendulum: Bangladesh's Swing to Radicalism", Hudson Institute, Centre on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World, 2007, <http://www.hudson.org> or <http://www.futureofmuslimworld.com>; Islam and Islam, op. cit.

10. The rivalry between the Urdu-Bengali linguistic groups of Pakistan became a specific national dispute concerning language in 1952, when the Pakistan government affirmed its intention of making Urdu as the 'State language' (although only 3 per cent of the population of Pakistan spoke Urdu and over 56 per cent spoke Bengali). Large majority of people in East Pakistan, the Bengali intelligentsia and political leadership demanded that both Urdu and Bangla should be declared as the state languages and thus started a language movement. The protests culminated on 21 February 1952 and the eventual death toll has been estimated at about 1.5 million. For details, see Peris, op.cit; J. N. Dixit, op.cit; Jan Abid Ullah, op. cit; Nazrul Islam and S. Aminul Islam, op. cit; Akram Tanweer, op. cit.
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General Ayub Khan staged a military coup in Pakistan in 1958, Mujib was arrested once again and released after 14 months in prison but was re-arrested in February 1962. On 7 March 1971, nearly two million freedom loving people assembled at the Ramna Race Course Maidan to hear their leader, Mujib. On 25 March 1971, the Pakistani army arrested Mujib and whisked him away to West Pakistan. Mujib had been chosen President while in prison in West Pakistan, and was released under political pressure on 10 January 1972. He set up a government and his life was cut short in 1975. For details, see J. N. Dixit, op. cit; Samina Ahmed, "Politics in Bangladesh: The Paradox of Military Intervention" in Virander Grover (ed.) *Bangladesh; Government and Politics*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi, 2000; Iftekhhar Zaman and Mahbubur Rahman, " Transition to Democracy in Bangladesh; Issues and Outlook" in Virander Grover (eds.) *Bangladesh; Government and Politics*, Deep & Deep Publications PVT.LTD, New Delhi, 2000; <http://www.bangabandhu.org>

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 27. Bhardwaj, op. cit
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 29. N.S. Jamwall, "Border Management: Dilemma of Guarding the India-Bangladesh Border", 2004, <http://www.idsa.in/publication/strategic-analysis/>; Sobhan, op. cit; Bhardwa, op.cit.
 30. Datta, op. cit; Bhardwaj, op. cit.
 31. Datta, Ibid.
 32. Sobhan, op. cit; Jamwall, op. cit.
 33. Kalayan Chaudhury, 2001, "Disturbed Border", 28 April-11 May 2001, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1809/18090220.htm>.

34. Ibid; Bhardwaj, op. cit.
35. Ishtiaq Hossain, "Bangladesh-India Relations: Issues and Problems", in Emajuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh; A Small State's Imperative*, University Press LTD, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1984; Dilara Choudhury, op. cit; Rashid, op. cit.
36. Bindra, op. cit; Ahmed, op. cit; Hossain, op. cit; Dixit, op. cit; Kuldeep Singh, 2000, "Border Dispute between India and Bangladesh", in Virander Grover (eds.), op. cit; Sobhan, op. cit; Datta, op. cit; Baruah, op. cit; Bhardwaj, op. cit; Haque, op. cit.
37. Bhardwaj, op. cit.
38. Ahmed, op. cit; Singh, op. cit; Sobhan, op. cit; Jamwall, op. cit; Bhardwaj, op. cit.
39. Datta, op. cit; Bhardwaj, op. cit; Haque, op. cit.
40. Bindra, op. cit; Sanjay Bhardwaj, "Bangladesh Foreign Policy vis-a-vis India", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 27, No. 2, April-June 2003; Datta, op. cit; Bhardwaj, op. cit.
41. Bhardwaj, 2006; Jamwall, op.cit.
42. Datta, op. cit; Bhardwaj, 2006.
43. The Shanti Bahini, was formed in 1972.
44. Bangladesh has a significant number of Hindu population in the plains and sizeable number of Buddhist tribals in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs). For details, Singh, op. cit; Sobhan, op. cit.
45. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was formed in April 1979 at the deserted Rang Ghar Pavilion. It has its bases in the Tirap, Changlang, and Lohit Districts of Arunachal Pradesh and it has been using Arunachal Pradesh as a transit to Myanmar. In Bangladesh the ULFA camps are located in Mymensingh, Jaintiapur, Joydebpur, Adampur, Bhanugach, Sri Mangal, Maulvi Bazaar. For details, Datta, op. cit.
46. Adivasi Cobra Force (ACF), also known as the Adivasi Cobra Militant Force (ACMF) was formed in the second half of the 1990s for protecting the Adivasi (tribal) people of Lower Assam through an armed revolution connected with the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO).
47. The United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) was formed in March 1999 with the merger of two terrorist outfits in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, the Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and Karbi People's Front (KPF).The outfit is known to have grown with the active assistance of the NSCN-IM, NDFB, and ULFA.
48. Dima Halim Daogah (DHD) is an offshoot of the erstwhile Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF), which had surrendered en masse in 1995. Its declared objective is to create a separate State of 'Dimaraji' for the Dimasa tribe, comprising Dimasa dominated areas of the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts of Assam and parts of Dimapur district in Nagaland. It maintains links with the ISI, NSCN-IM and NDFB.

49. Bodo Security Force (BdSF) changed its name calling itself the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in 1989 aimed at setting up an autonomous region of Bodoland, operated from camps inside Bhutan. For details, see Datta, op. cit.
50. Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) also known as the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force or BLTF was established on 18 June 1996. It operates in Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari and Darrang districts of Assam for the creation of a separate Bodoland in the north bank of the Brahmaputra; creation of an autonomous district council in the south bank of the Brahmaputra; and inclusion of the Bodos of Karbi Anglong district in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
51. The Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) was formed in 1996. MULTA and the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) are also said to be part of the All Muslim United Liberation Forum of Assam (AMULFA). MULTA allegedly maintains base in Jiribam sub-division of Manipur. It has links with NSCN-IM, ISI and JEI of Pakistan and *Jamaat-i-Islami* (JeI) of Bangladesh.
52. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed in 1980 to establish a Greater Nagaland, encompassing parts of Manipur, Nagaland, North Cachar hills (Assam). It received training in Salopi and Chacheng in the Chittagong Hill tracts, in Bangladesh. The NSCN split in 1988 to form two groups namely NSCN(IM) & NSCN(K).
53. Formed in 1988, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland–Khaplang (NSCN-K) is the second faction with the same aim of a Greater Nagaland.
54. The Anhil National Volunteer Council (ANVC) was formed in 1995 in Meghalaya with the intention of forming an Achik Land in the Garo Hills in Meghalaya. It has camps in Bangladesh. Its activities included extortion from the business community in the name of 'fund collection' and pumping fake currency into circulation initiated by ISI. It has severed its links with the Naga outfit, NDFB and ULFA.
55. Established in 1992 after the split in the Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC), the first militant tribal outfit in Meghalaya, the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) aimed to free Meghalaya from Garo domination. The HALC split due to inter-tribal antagonisms leading to the formation of the HNLC and the Achik Matgrik Liberation Army (AMLA). It also aims to fight against the presence of 'outsiders', as the HNLC feels that Khasi youth are deprived of the fruits of development in the state, connected with NSCN-IM and NLFT.
56. The People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) was formed on 9 October 1977. Claiming to be the "most genuine revolutionary group" in Manipur, the PREPAK's main demand is the expulsion of 'outsiders' from the State. It received weapons and training in exchange for hard cash from the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) of Myanmar. It is also reported to have training camps in Bangladesh.

57. People's Liberation Army (PLA) was formed in 1978 in Imphal Valley, Manipur. It urged the young Meiteis to reassert their Meitei identity, and also to reject Bengali script. They received training in the Myanmar and in NSCN camps.
58. The United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the oldest Meitei insurgent group in Manipur was formed in 1964 and demands an independent socialist state of Manipur.
59. Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) is a Meitei terrorist group formed in January 1994. Its objective is to 'rebuild' the Manipuri society by clearing it of all vices like immoral activities, drug trade and corruption. It operates in the four valley districts of Imphal East, Bishenpur, Thoubal and Imphal West in Manipur. The outfit has close linkages with the Nagaland-based NSCN-IM, NSCN-K and ANVC.
60. The Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) was formed on 13 April 1980 and is concerned with the preservation of Meitei culture. It maintained operational linkages with the NSCN-K and the ULFA.
61. The All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) was formed in 1990 with the sole aim of the expulsion of all Bengali speaking immigrants and removing all tribal political outfits from the area, and is connected with the NSCN and the ULFA. For details, see Datta, op. cit.
62. The National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) was formed in March 1989, as ethnic tensions between the Bengali immigrants and the tribal native population increased. For details, see Datta, op. cit.
63. In 1978, the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) was created, financed and trained by MNF; it soon became the leading armed group intent on reviving tribal culture. In 1986, the TNV came to an agreement with the Indian government to put an end to the political unrest. For details, see Entregue, op. cit.
64. Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) came into existence on 28 December 1995, consisting of Rajbangshis, fighting for a separate state of Kamtapur. Their objective is to carve out a separate Kamtapur State comprising six districts - Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North and South Dinajpur and Malda - of West Bengal and four contiguous districts of Assam - Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara. It has links with ULFA, NDFB and ISI, Kamtapur People's Party (KPP) and Tiwa National Revolutionary Front (TNRf). For details, see Datta, op. cit.
65. Kuki National Front (KNF) was formed on 18 May 1988 to secure a separate State or Union Territory for the Kuki community and the unification of all scattered Kukis in the Kukiland. KNF operates extensively in the Churachandpur district of Manipur.
66. On 22 October 1961, the Mizo National Front (MNF) was formed seeking to create a Greater Mizoram, independent of India. For details, see Entregue, op. cit.
67. The Bru (Reangs) National Liberation Front (BNLF) was formed in 1997 in Mizoram to protect the rights and dignity of the Reangs. Defending

- Reang interests, the *Bru National Union* demanded an Autonomous District Council within Mizoram. It became violent with the radicalisation of the young Reang leaders who formed the *Bru National Liberation Front* (BNLF) with help from NLFT, ULFA and Muviah's Nagas. See Entregue, *ibid.*
68. Hmar People's Convention-Democracy, HPC (D) was formed in 1995 in Mizoram to create an independent Hmar State. But of late they have merged with other Hmar revolutionary groups in neighboring Manipur and Assam with the aim of bringing the Hmars under one administrative unit.
 69. The United Bengali Liberation Front (UBLF) was formed in October 1999 overtly to protect the Bengali population with the help of arms, together with some smaller groups like the *Bengali Tiger Force* or the *Amra Bengali* (We Are Bengali), tried to counter the NLFT and ATTF attacks and crack down on their networks. For details, see Entregue, *op. cit.*
 70. There are reported to be 172 camps of North Eastern militant outfits located in Bangladesh. For details, see Mariet D'Souza, "Border Management and India's North East", <http://www.idsa.in>; Hussain Sakhawat, "Strategic Factors in Indo-Bangla Relations", Strategic issues, 21 January 2005, <http://www.thedailystar.net>.
 71. *The Telegraph*, 29 January 2008; Baruah, *op. cit.*; Haque, *op. cit.*
 72. Bidhu Prasad Routray, September 2004, "Indo- Bangladesh Relations: Stuck in the Muddle", Article No.1506", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, http://www.ipcs.org/south_asia.jsp
 73. The *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HuJI) is a Pakistan-based terrorist group with an affiliate in Bangladesh. The HuJI continued to exist after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 by merging with another Pakistani militant group known as the *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*, It draws inspiration from Osama-bin-Laden and the Al-Qaida. It has linkages with Pakistan-based *Jaish-e-Mohammed* (JeM) and *Lashkar-e-Tayyeba* (LeT). Following Sheikh Hasina's victory in 1996, HuJI became active in Bangladesh. For details, see Datta, *op. cit.*; Bibhu Prasad Routray, *op. cit.*; Hussain Sakhawat, *op. cit.*; Chietigj Bajpae, "India held back by Wall of Instability", *Asia Times*, 2006, <http://www.atimes.com>; Supria Singh, 2006, "Bangladesh: A New Front for Al Qaeda?" *Peace and Conflict*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2006; *Magnis-Suseno Franz SJ*, "Opinion; Islam and democracy: Can they go together?", 2007, <http://www.garoweonline.com>; *Abu Nasar Ahmed*, *op. cit.*
 74. Sreeradha Datta, *op. cit.*; Choudhury Ishfaq Ilahi, "Transit and Beyond: Economic and Strategic Significance", 21 January 2005 <http://www.thedailystar.com>; Hussain Sakhawat, *op. cit.*
 75. Partha S. Ghosh, *Migrants and Refugees in South Asia: Political and Security Dimensions*, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong, 2001; Sobhan, *op. cit.*; Jamwall, *op. cit.*; Dilara Choudhury, *op. cit.*; Dilara

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76. At present, there are 15 million Bangladeshis, 2.2 million Nepalese, 70,000 Sri-Lankan Tamils and about one lakh Tibetan migrants living in India. For details, see "Reforming the National Security System: Recommendations of the Group of Ministers", Government of India, New Delhi, 2001.
77. In Assam, due to immigration from East Bengal, the situation only got worse in the post-colonial period. Its economic roots lay in the economic stagnation of the State resulting in the fierce competition among the middle class people belonging to different linguistic groups (especially, the Assamese and Bengalis) for government jobs on the one hand and increasing pressure of population in the State in general and its valleys in particular (Baruah, 2004). The IMDT Act has not served the purpose of detecting and deporting illegal migrants from Assam (Partha S. Ghosh, op. cit; Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, "Northeast Insurgent Groups and the Bangladesh Connection", Article no. 2449, 26 December 2007, <http://www.ipcs.org>).
78. Assam accounts for about 2.4 percent of the country's total geographical area. According to the Census of India, 2001 the population of Assam stands at 2,66,55,528, The decadal growth of the State's population works out to 18.92 percent during the decade 1991-2001 as against 21.34 percent for the country as a whole. See Baruah, op. cit; Census Report, 1991 and 2001, Government of India.
79. Bangladesh objected to border fencing, citing the 1974 Indira-Mujib Land Boundary Demarkation Agreement and said that it would affect friendly ties. For details, see Dilara Choudhury, 2 November 2004; Pattanaik, op. cit; Rashid, op. cit; Haque, op. cit; Mustafa Faruque Mohammed, "Bangladesh-India Relations", 19 February 2006 <http://www.thedailystar.com>; Bhardwaj; 2006.
80. Gurudas Das, "*Indo -Bangladesh Relation: Issues in Trade, Transit and Security*", in Gurudas Das and C J Thomas, op. cit; Choudhury Ishfaq Ilahi, op. cit; Harun Ur Rashid, 9 November 2005, "SAARC Summit: The Issue of Transit and Transshipment", <http://www.thdailystar.com>
81. Indian Maritime outposts, the Andaman and Nicobar islands are only 300 miles South of Bangladesh's prime seaport of Chittagong. Chittagong seaport is just 75 km from South Tripura. For details, see Harun Ur

- Rashid, 9 November 2005; Hussain Sakhawat, op. cit.
82. In the north, Bangladesh is separated from the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal and Bhutan by a strip of Indian territory, known as Shiliguri corridor. This corridor is a crucial determinant of Bangladesh's importance in regional geo-strategy. For details, see Hussain Sakhawat, op. cit.
83. J. N. Dixit, op. cit; Pattanaik, op. cit; Harun Ur Rashid, 9 November 2005; Zafar Sobhan, " How Best to Strengthen Indo-Bangladesh Relations", in Sobhan Farooq, op. cit; Mustafa Faruque Mohammed, 2006.
84. Bangladesh constitutes one of the largest deltaic regions of the world receiving alluvial deposits of no less than 230 rivers of which fifty-seven are trans-boundary rivers - fifty-four entering Bangladesh from India and the remaining three from Myanmar. The total area flushed by the tributaries of the Ganga (e.g. the Brahmaputra and the Meghna) is about 1.72 million square kilometers. Ganga flushes a total area of 1,087,001 sq km of which 860,000 sq km falls in India and 46,300 sq km in Bangladesh. For details, see (<http://www.banglapedia.search.com>).
85. The Jamuna River is one of the main rivers of Bangladesh. It serves as the main branch of Brahmaputra River, which flows through Tibet (China) and India. Merged with the Padma, it meets the Meghna River near Chandpur.
86. The river linking projects in India envisaging transfer of Himalayan waters to the peninsular south, include plans for diversion of water from the two major rivers –Ganga and the Brahmaputra and other trans-boundary rivers by a system of canals to irrigate drought ridden parts of central and western India. For details, see Sreeradha Datta, op. cit; Dilara Choudhury, 2004; Haque, op. cit; Zafar Sobhan, op.cit, Bradnock, op.cit; Mustafa Faruque Mohammed, 2006; Ramaswamy Iyer, op. cit.
87. The dispute was generated by the construction and operation by India, the upper riparian, of a barrage across the Ganges at a place named Farakka in West Bengal in 1974, about 17 kms upstream from the western borders of Bangladesh and India. The barrage was designed to divert a certain portion of the Ganges dry season flow in to the Bhagirathi – Hooghly River of India to resuscitate the Calcutta port with silt free-water, thereby improving the navigability of the harbour by supplying sufficient water during the lean months. Although several agreements were signed between 1977 and 1996, the issue is not yet resolved. For details, see Bindra, op. cit; Hossain, op. cit; Peiris, op. cit; Vandana Asthana, "River Water Dispute in Delhi-Dhaka Ties" in Virander Grover, op. cit; Islam, op. cit; Datta; op. cit; Sobhan, op. cit; Bhardwaj; 2006, Mustafa Faruque Mohammed, op. cit.
88. This Dam on the Barak River in Manipur is meant for generating 1500 MW electricity and not to divert water from the river. However, it would change the traditional flow and use of the Barak River that constitutes the source of two rivers, Surma and Kushiara, in Sylhet, which

- in turn feed the Meghna river of Bangladesh. For details, see Brdnock, op. cit; Asif Nazrul, "Interlinking of Rivers and Water Sharing Issues" in Sobhan Farooq, op. cit; *The Daily Star*, 15 February 2008.
89. Pattanaik, op. cit; Rashid, op. cit; Hussain Sakhawat, 21 January 2005; Kibria Ruksana, "Strategic implications of Bangladesh-China Relations", 19 February 2006, <http://www.thedailystar.net>; Hussain Sakhawat, 19 February 2006
90. Ihtesham and Rahman, op.cit; Rahman, op. cit; Monjur Mahmud, "Bangladesh Closes Trade Deficit with India by 14 pc, Exports Rose 68 pc in 2005-06", 6 October 2006, <http://www.thedailystar.com> ; Ahmed, op. cit.
91. Border pillars show the arrangement of the boundary on the land borders. These dividing pillars sometimes get stolen or removed by criminals/ insurgents in order to create stress on the check-posts and utilize that occasion for smuggling, illegal migration and arm trafficking etc. For details, see Jamwall, op. cit.
92. Insurgents have discovered a very inventive way of dealing with the security forces on both sides who try to hinder their activity - by cutting the barbed wire. Barbed wire spreads over a longer distance and passes through No Man's land which may not be under the direct observation of security forces. For details, see Jamwall, *ibid*.
93. A significant volume of informal trade flows across Indo-Bangladesh border. A few items are exported from Bangladesh through the informal channel and they are in small amounts. On the other hand, a wide variety of products are imported from India and in large quantities. As a result, the real trade deficit that Bangladesh is having with India is almost double the formal trade deficit. For details, see Srinath Baruah et al, 1996, *India's Border Trade with Selected Neighbouring Countries*, RIS, New Delhi; P.C. Dutta and Niranjana Roy, *The Impact of Cross- Border Human Traffic: A Case Study of Karimgang District*, in Gurudas Das and R.K. Purkayastha, op. cit; M.P. Bezbaruah, " Libelalisation of Border Trade: Prospects and Impediments" in Gurudas Das and R K Purkayastha, op. cit; B.K. Sarma and S.N. Goswami, "Border Trade in North East India; An Overview", in Gurudas Das and R K Purkayastha, op. cit; Sanjib Pohit and Nisha Taneja, "India's Informal Trade with Bangladesh and Nepal: A Qualitative Assessment", www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1467-9701.00568 ; Gurudas Das, 2000 and 2007; Hossain and Rahman, op. cit: Sreyashi Dastidar, "Bangladesh-India trade: economic and investment outlook" in Sobhan Farooq, op. cit.
94. Many groups of women cross the Indo-Bangladesh border as construction labour or seasonal workers. With the help of *Dalals* they collect work permit for India, Gulf States and West Asia. Often women concerned are recruited for some other work but are then forced into prostitution. Over the last 20 years, 200,000 Bangladeshi women were lured under false circumstances and sold into the sex industry in nations including

Pakistan, India and the Middle East. There are 500,000 foreign prostitutes in India - 1 percent is from Bangladesh and 2.7% of prostitutes in Calcutta are from Bangladesh. Every day, over 50 women and children are trafficked out of Bangladesh through the land border areas. Girls from the southern part of Bangladesh are usually trafficked across the northern borders. Traffickers use 20 main points in 16 western districts of Bangladesh near the Indian border. The main trafficking route is Dhaka-Mumbai-Karachi-Dubai. For details, see Sobhan, op. cit; Routray, Bibhu Prasad, op. cit; Sreyashi Dastidar, op. cit; Factbook on Global Sexual Exploitation; Bangladesh,

95. See Pattanaik, op. cit; Supria Singh, op. cit.

CRISIS OF GOVERNANCE IN BANGLADESH

KAZI S.M. KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

Economic emancipation, strong polity and many more things were promised before and at liberation. Have the promises been fulfilled and to what extent? There were vicissitudes up to 1991 before the restoration of democracy. Bizarre democratic systems were in place for quite a long time between 1971 and 1991. A truly democratic system was again in place in 1991. Political leaders ravaged the true spirit of democracy. Many uncanny events marked the period of BNP-led government (2001-2006) which also comprised religion-based political block spearheaded by *Jamaat-e-Islami*. The incidents ranged from blood-letting local mayhems in Kansat, Fulbari to gross deviations at the national level such as politicization as well as polarization of presidency, judiciary, intelligentsia, caretaker government system and so on. While local events resulted in the triumph of people's power, the national ones turned the political landscape extremely murky.

Notwithstanding the democratic aspirations of the people of Bangladesh, incumbent governments have generally undermined a free and fair electoral process. The ruling parties used public resources in order to stay in power. This led to debatable use of government functionaries and facilities involving coercion and fraud, resulting in political violence.¹ And, the people of Bangladesh and beyond watched manipulations by the ruling party and terrible violence on the streets towards the end of 2006.

This paper is an account of those key events that had tremendous effect on the country's politics and administration in and around 2006, a watershed in the chequered political history of Bangladesh. In fact, those

developments would hardly go into oblivion in the minds of the people of Bangladesh because of the nature of the rot they represented. An effort has also been made to record the events authentically by citing them as they happened.

Ravaged Kansat (April 2006)

The people of Kansat proved that the people of Bangladesh are not to be subdued by any undue force but they had to pay a heavy price for upholding this truth. Their sacrifice, however, sets another milestone in Bangladesh's national history. A distinct fact that emanates from the Kansat phenomenon is that organized and determined people – without constant support of the political parties – can compel a tyrannical administration to abandon high-handed approach of suppressing just demands of the people.

At last a compromise deal with the Kansat people was struck. But, can we forget that Kansat again flared up with the background of *Time* magazine's report of a rebuilding Bangladesh? From its handling of the issue, it seems that the government was habituated to ask for trouble. Instead treating things with a bit of maturity and sanity, it became more interested in messing them up for mere gratification of its overbearing party leaders and errant law enforcement agencies.

The government's too lenient approach towards the callous activities of its party leaders and activists and excesses of law enforcers only added to its failure in providing bare necessities such as electricity, oil, fertilizer and so on. Unfortunately, the government was not able to come out of its age-old frame of mind of smelling conspiracy in every incident or accident though it had only five more months to heal the seething public feelings.

It indulged in opposition bashing and even innocent people were termed as opposition conspirators. Admittedly, only the government's stupidity propelled the situation to reach such a pass at Kansat. Just three months back in January 2006, ten people were killed in Kansat in police firing while demanding electricity they had already paid for. Ten more people were killed later. It was a trigger-happy action that led to these deaths. The local *Bangladesh Nationalist Party* (BNP) cadres' attempt to show off muscle reportedly kindled the incident. The local BNP cadres sought to foil a demonstration of the locals of the area under the power-starved Kansat villagers' banner *Palli Bidyut Unnayan Sangram Parishad (PBUSP)*, to air their grievances at the failure of the Rural Electrification

Board (REB) in providing them with adequate and uninterrupted power supply.

The government was at last forced to come back to its senses. The government agencies killed as many as 20 innocent people by using violent means such as indiscriminate firing, inhumane beatings, raids, loots, mass arrests and arson to force the agitating Kansat people to bow down. Even minors were not spared. Party activists were used in the guise of security personnel and media people were barred from covering the atrocities.² The mostly unarmed people upon whom the police pounced upon were formerly ruling party supporters. Like media, the judiciary also seemed to be showing some activism which is indeed a good sign for our democracy. In the cases of Election Commission, the Kansat incident and Shanta incident, the higher judiciary came out with decisive rulings, asking the government to explain the shortage of electricity, non-payment of compensation and above all the unwarranted firings.

The shortage of power, in fact, became a real sore for the ruling coalition. Both the opposition, media, the party leaders and workers voiced deep concern over the government's failure to provide the citizens with adequate electricity throughout the country. The party workers remarked that they would find it difficult to stay in their localities or appeal for vote to the electorate if the situation did not improve. Though the government consistently put the blame on increased demand and the media, its inability to produce new sources of electricity stood out like a sore thumb. The government's disregard for human lives and rights was badly exposed by the Kansat carnage.

Hijacked Presidency (July 2006)

In the budget session of the parliament, the Prime Minister and the opposition leaders exchanged rather humorous remarks regarding our Presidency. The Prime Minister in her speech made it clear that she had no desire to become the President. Even the diehard supporters of the government recognized that the government was largely responsible for the smokescreen that emanated from the government's hide and seek game regarding President Prof. Iajuddin Ahmed and Acting President Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar. The coalition government seemed to be playing a funny game. There was disagreement even in terms of the naming of the two Presidents.³

While the Bangabhavan advised to call the makeshift President Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar as the *Astahyee Rastoprati* (Acting President),

the Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed preferred to call Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar as the *Bharprapto Rastoprati* (President-in-charge?). The casual approach of the government on the nomenclature of the two Presidents exposed the dent in their collective responsibility.

Article 54 of Bangladesh's Constitution clearly spells out the provision for conducting the affairs of the President temporarily until the President recuperates or a new President is elected. The article states: "If a vacancy occurs in the office of President or if the President is unable to discharge the functions of his office on account of absence, illness or any other cause, the Speaker shall discharge his functions until a President is elected or until the President resumes the functions of his office, as the case may be."⁴

But, the government's flip-flop regarding the protocol and status of Professor Iajuddin Ahmed raised many eyebrows. The constitution does not state that the President would have to be stripped of his flag and insignia. Many legal experts called this action as unconstitutional. In fact, it was humiliating for a President. Even more disconcerting was the fact that this government sacked another President. Sacking of Badruddoza Choudhury invited criticism as well. In the previous *Awami League* rule, there were reports of strained relations between the then President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and the *Awami League* government. Some circles in *Awami League* were also reported to have made adverse comments regarding Shahabuddin Ahmed. But, the *Awami League* did not sack Shahabuddin Ahmed.

President Iajuddin Ahmed's illness could be a natural case but the very handling of the issue by the government raised doubts in the minds of the opposition parties and the general people. President's return from Bangkok and going to CMH instead of Bangabhaban and withdrawal of his flag and insignia must have compounded the doubts that the government had different scheme of things regarding Iajuddin Ahmed. Even the civil society requested President Iajuddin Ahmed not to relinquish Presidency. Some also requested the government not to remove President Iajuddin Ahmed. The people of the country were concerned over these unsavoury developments. This concern was due to the fact that President of Bangladesh - though a figurehead in an elected government's tenure - had significant role to play during the Caretaker regime.⁵ As the President is in charge of the armed forces as well, his role is all the more crucial in a Caretaker regime.

Exploited Religion (August 2006)

As a step towards retaining the support of the religion-based political parties and their vote banks, the government announced that the highest degree awarded by the *Quomi madrassa* would be equated with the Master's degree. The ramifications of the announcement - as *The Daily Star* aptly stated- were so far reaching that many thought that it would forever change the intellectual superstructure of the Bangladesh society, economy, politics, culture, society, civil administration and law and order. There exists a serious divide among the religion-based parties in Bangladesh. Even an influential section of religion-based political parties openly denounced the *Quomi madrassa* education and termed the government decision to recognise the *Dawra* degree to be suicidal.⁶

Besides, militant organisations with bases in religious institutions crept up and thrived in connivance with a section of the government resulting in an unprecedented level of militant activities. The damage that militancy caused will take a long time to heal. The deadly impact is being felt not only by the government but also by the general people.

Whereas religious education is not necessary or that *madrassa* degrees are bad, one would echo the universal call for its modernisation instead. But, to recognise the degree of the religious education, about which curriculum the government has no clear idea, choice and control, is not only imprudent but also ridiculous. From an objective point of view, it is kind of recognising the self-proclaimed quality of an unknown quantity. Political ambition is not a vice but the Mullahs with high political ambitions have been tempting the innocent people with assurances of heaven hereafter. However, the underlying objective of most of them is nothing but getting hold of state power. And, use of religion as well as fascination for piety among the common men has turned out to be eminently suitable for them.

Many eminent scientists emerged from religious education in the chequered Islamic history in the course of their scientific study of the holy Quran. Once they deviated from the scientific study, only clerics have spawned. Islam ordains the Muslims to gather knowledge of the broader world from whatever sources. But, to the *Quomi madrassa*, even English language is an anathema.

Then, how to go ahead in the quest for knowledge and wisdom merely on the basis of religious education? Admittedly, 'Islamisation of the society' gathered steam whenever a military government tried to seek legitimacy

as has been experienced in Pakistan and Bangladesh for long. But, this tendency is not popular with democratic governments in Bangladesh. And as another dose of 'Islamisation', Prime Minister Khaleda Zia equated the *Quomi madrassa's Dawra* degree with Master's. She, however, only made the announcement, leaving the responsibility of implementing it to the next government, whichever party may form it, or even the caretaker government. It was a neat politically expedient move with no immediate hazards of execution and so many votes in the bag well in advance!⁷ What makes it all the more excruciating is that this 'Islamisation' was not done for the purpose of glorifying Islam as a great religion but simply for populism. Interestingly, however, even *Awami League* did not contradict the decision to obviate anti-*Awami League* propaganda.

In 1977, during the General Zia regime, a martial law changed the secular face of the constitution by inserting a phrase that a fundamental state principle is "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah". The phrase *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim* (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) was inserted before the preamble of the constitution. The change was later legitimised thorough the 5th amendment in 1979.⁸ Later on, military dictator General Ershad, in his desperate bid to get cheap popularity, brought about the 8th amendment to the constitution in 1988, recognising Islam as the state religion. These amendments to the constitution were just subterfuges of the then military dictators to play on the sentiments of the Muslims. Though these didn't bring any good to the Muslims, the scar they left on the people of other faiths is difficult to heal. They also created sort of a value conflict in the predominantly secular social settings. Even the majority of Muslims believe that those moves were highly fortuitous. However, as happened to the constitutional amendments, future governments - even secular - are unlikely to even review this Islamisation for the fear of orchestrated reactions.

Wounded Fulbari (August 2006)

To many, Fulbari is reminiscent of 1971, another people's war for national cause. Yet another Kansat-like massacre of lives in BDR firing at Fulbari, Dinajpur has been rightly termed as the outcome of an agreement signed without discretion and at the cost of national interests. Originally, it was the BNP government that reached the accord with the Australian company BHP in 1994 and when the BHP handed over the license to the Asia Energy Company (AEC), a British company, the *Awami League* government finalised the deal with it in 1998. Those who protested against

this, were fired upon. It was the government's fault in the first place to have reached such an anti-national agreement and killing people was yet another crime.

In this case, there were three crucial aspects to the issue: a) the immediate displacement of around 50,000 people from the area and desertion of their homesteads by another 500,000 because of irreparable damage to an area of more than 650 sq kms; b) environmental disaster; c) only a six per cent royalty for the government meant that the company would get almost the entire benefits from the mining for free.⁹ Moreover, the agreement signed was reportedly to be faulty on several counts. Open-pit mining is considered not only obsolete but also unsuitable for areas close to human settlements and cannot be a viable option for a country where lands for both home and agriculture is extremely scarce. This was a sure recipe for an environmental disaster.

Anu Muhammad said in this regard that hundreds of thousands of people in the area would be without shelters, while the environment and water level in the surrounding areas would be seriously damaged if the AEC extracted coal by open mine method. The AEC company was reported to be bribing professionals and business houses and it began setting up of machinery, construction of different structures.¹⁰ According to former PDB Chairman Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal, AEC made no comprehensive feasibility study, but it did all other studies in secret so that the results went in their favour. Thus, it was very natural for the people of the area to voice their anger against the Asia Energy Company, which submitted a scheme for development of the site and extraction of coal. Experts too were opposed to this agreement. Questions were raised as to why such important issues did not figure in the parliamentary deliberations.

About 6,500 acres of agricultural land covering the proposed mining area are reported to be gobbled up by the mine and its impact would cover as wide an area as 650 square kilometres. The natural habitat of such a wide area, experts reckoned, would be destroyed forever and around 500,000 people would have moved out for settlement elsewhere. Thus, the cost would have been many times more than the company was to give at six per cent royalty which was roughly estimated at Tk 9,000 crore. However, the main concern was that, as different forums estimated, the country would lose Tk 10,000 crore a day as a consequence of its direct and indirect impact for 30 years, with a total loss of Tk 300,000 crore.¹¹

It was alleged that the company was distributing Tk 500 to each

member of the families along with lungis and saris among the affected people in the area. It seems that the government was desperate to assure investors that the business climate is favorable and that the government would go to any length to protect their interests. Though the government might not be in a position to scrap its contract with the AEC, it is unlikely that the AEC would be able to conduct open-pit mining in Fulbari so long as people resist the same.

The masses have again risen to the occasion and the government machinery has again failed to uphold national interest and protect human lives. The government's role has again been badly exposed from the Fulbari episode. The government just repeated the blunder committed in Kansat just a few months back. Significantly, it is the common people who have again protected national interest which is the prime duty of the government.

Politicized Judiciary (December 2006)

In December 2006, the country witnessed an unprecedented violent scene at the Supreme Court on Thursday and the apex court's sanctity and its standing as the last repository of the nation's faith was grossly undermined in the process.¹² Lawyers resorted to violence and vandalism over the Chief Justice's stay order delivered moments before a High Court bench was about to issue ruling after hearing the case for two days. Moreover, some legal experts opined that it was violation of the Constitution as well. Former Chief Justice (CJ) Mostafa Kamal observed that the Chief Justice reserves the constitutional right to constitute or reconstitute any bench. Theoretically, therefore, he has the power but it depends on the Chief Justice how he exercises the authority, which would determine whether he has used the power in a bonafide or malafide manner.¹³ He also stated that in his 40-year legal career he never saw any Chief Justice exercising his power in this manner. *The Daily Star* editorial rightly asked as to why did the CJ prevent his two colleagues from carrying out their judicial duties, and why did he intervene minutes before the order was to be issued? Did he intervene to save justice or was it to prevent justice from being served?

Regrettably, even the manner in which the CJ's order was carried by the Attorney General (AG) to the High Court Bench was something new in the history of judiciary in Bangladesh. Besides the judiciary, the Election Commission (EC) was also accused of partisanship and more so with the induction by the President of at least one more blatantly BNP-aligned

commissioner in the year 2006. NDI's survey revealed 1, 22, 00,000 fake voters in the updated voters list raising questions over the EC's credibility. As the bureaucracy has been embedded with the BNP and *Jamaat's* own people ridding even the slightest partisan colour of its ranks is a gigantic task.¹⁴

This was not the first case of perceived indiscretion by the Chief Justice of Bangladesh apex court. Previously, among many other instances, on 18 June 2005, a Division Bench comprising Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Mainul Islam Chowdhury of the High Court issued a ruling calling upon the respondents to show cause as to why the holding of two constitutional posts at the same time by CEC Justice M A Aziz should not be declared to have been done without any lawful authority. Interestingly enough, within an hour of issuance and hearing of rule, the concerned judges' writ jurisdiction was taken away. All these developments inside the court premises no doubt sent the wrong signals to the people of the country.

Almost all the political parties other than BNP and *Jamaat* and a large segment of civil society were against polls schedule before printing of the electoral roll, but the Election Commission (EC) declared rather hurriedly the election schedule for the 9th General Elections, as desired by the 4-party alliance.¹⁵ Usually election schedule is declared 45 days before the election. But this time, it was done before 54 days. And, the 10 advisers were also in the dark regarding the schedule before the declaration.

Conclusion

We attained independence, we brought back democracy and we claim to have made arrangements for ensuring equitable justice. However, we could not enjoy the fruits of independence, democracy and justice to the extent we require it to call our society a truly civilized one as the stated phenomena are still hemmed in by some invisible hands or equations. Painfully enough, despite rhetorical commitment and prolonged struggles to establish democracy, the political parties of Bangladesh have miserably failed to establish a consensus over the ground rules for democratic competition and dissent.¹⁶

And, such politics breeds a politicized bureaucracy and a malevolent system of law and order. And, these instruments of governance, operating without accountability and transparency, lead to the machinery of state

being used as a political resource rather than an instrument of governance.¹⁷ Even the casual observers could discern the very existence of such a horrible scenario in Bangladesh in the recent past.

Obviously, good governance is a must for the development and growth of a nation. And, the most important distinction among countries relates not to their form of government but to their form of governance. The tumultuous politics and politicized state institutions have always had a bearing on governance and Bangladesh is hardly an exception. Bangladesh almost reached the brink of being a failed state following such an unprecedented chaos.

A democratic polity is an essential precondition of good governance in Bangladesh. Since the birth of Bangladesh, democracy as a form of governance was not given a fair deal by political leaders. It is an irony that democrats, after assuming power, turned out to be autocrats and that military generals grabbed power in the name of saving the country and ruled it as their personal fiefdom.¹⁸

Meanwhile, accountability is the most neglected phenomenon in the domain of our politics and officialdom. No one is answerable here for his or her misdeeds. No one has to feel shame for plundering money in this land of *horilut*. Most politicians cry hoarse for democracy but do not tell anything about accountability and many official incumbents cite constitutional parentage to legitimise their misdeeds but do not feel even responsible, let alone accountable.

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BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS

Some Perspectives

LAILUFAR YASMIN

Bangladesh-China relations did not start on the friendly plain in the geopolitics of South Asia, especially in the context of 1971 war. With India's overwhelming support for Bangladesh's independence, the latter's emergence as an independent country was seen and conceived as India's strategic goal to divide Pakistan. China being Pakistan's trusted ally, cast its first veto as a United Nation's Security Council's permanent member to bar Bangladesh's entry into the UN. With the changes in the domestic politics in 1975, Bangladesh's foreign policy priorities assumed a new dimension of having closer linkages with both Pakistan and China. China officially granted recognition to Bangladesh on 4 October 1975 and since then it has remained a trusted partner in developing strategic relationship with Bangladesh taking into consideration the geopolitical configuration in South Asia.

The geopolitical diktat regulates Bangladesh to be an India-locked country, due its sharing more than 4,000 kilometers of land border with India. Not only for Bangladesh, but also for India, it is of vital importance besides being a reality that can not be ignored. India shares its largest international border with none other than Bangladesh. So, while at one end Bangladesh has constantly been intrigued by the "India factor" in formulating its foreign policy, on the other hand India has to take into account the Bangladesh perspective on its eastern border as well. Bangladesh may be geographically a small country, but being a Muslim-majority country with strong relationship with both Pakistan and China, it poses a security dilemma for India. Not only from a South Asian perspective, but also when India tries to secure its interest with United States, Bangladesh needs a formidable partner where China can fit in.

China has its own strategic calculations to bring Bangladesh closer to it. While China eyes for a global role, it cannot ignore the sure and steady rise of India in its own backyard. India has not only a strong economy and formidable relationship with United States, but it is also a nuclear power. Therefore, China looks out for formidable partners in South Asia to counterbalance India. In the western flank of India, Pakistan is already there to fulfill its own strategic interests vis-à-vis India besides taking care of China's interests. On the eastern flank, China eyes on Bangladesh.

Evolving Relationship between Bangladesh and China

Political Relations

Since the establishment of bilateral relationship, a number of high-profile visits took place between the two countries, including the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit in April 2005, marking the completion of 30 years of official relationship between China and Bangladesh. Previously, Bangladeshi leaders like Zia-ur Rahman, H.M. Ershad, Begum Khalida Zia and Sheikh Hasina went to China on state visits while Chinese Vice Premier Li Xiannian, Premier Li Peng, Premier Zhu Rongji and Premier Wen Jiabao came to Bangladesh. During the last visit of Chinese Premier, a number of agreements were signed between the two countries, but the most important one has been China's assistance for the development of nuclear power generation capability in Bangladesh.

Economic and Trade Ties

In 2006, Bangladesh-China trade amounted to 3.2 billion US dollars¹ and the trade balance was completely in favour of China. Bangladesh imports from China are mainly in the fields of textiles, machinery and electronic products, cement, fertilizer, tyre, raw silk, maize. On the other hand, China imports from Bangladesh raw materials like leather, cotton textiles and fish. Bangladesh is the third largest trading partner of China in South Asia.

Military and Defence Cooperation

Bangladesh and China have a deep cooperation in this field. Bangladesh's armed forces are equipped with Chinese arms, ammunition, combat aircrafts and frigates. The two sides signed a Defence Cooperation

Agreement in 2002 when Khaleda Zia visited China during her first term in power. The major objective of this agreement was not only to deepen the existing relationship between the two countries, but also to enhance the efficiency of Bangladesh's defence sector by institutionalizing the bilateral defence cooperation. The significance of the treaty lies in the fact that unlike general defence treaties, its emphasis is more on military training as well as maintenance of the Bangladesh armed forces.

Bangladesh and China in the Context of South Asia

The ever-growing relationship between Bangladesh and China is viewed suspiciously especially by India in the context of South Asia. Often this relationship is viewed as a Chinese effort to contain India in the region, as China has a deep commitment towards Pakistan. Moreover, as Subhash Kapila states, by developing a strong relationship with Bangladesh, China seeks to "divert some of India's strategic attention from the West to the East, lowering pressure on Pakistan."² He, in fact, stresses that this is a part of broader Pakistani aim to contain India through China.

However, it may be argued that Bangladesh has its own geopolitical significance for the rest of the world, especially to China, in Bangladesh's own regional setting. Firstly, Bangladesh is strategically situated between South and Southeast Asia and is located in proximity to both India and China. Bangladesh, therefore, presents logical ties with China in the latter's bid to contain India in the subcontinent.

Bangladesh is a gateway to the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal and towards the Middle East where China can transport its goods via the proposed road links through Myanmar. China is already assisting Pakistan to build a deep sea port at Gwadar and taking up steps to develop the Karakoram Highway for transporting its goods to Pakistan. But the internal situation in Bangladesh is much more cohesive than that of Pakistan which ensures a safe passage of Chinese goods to the seaport of Chittagong. As such, China is assisting Bangladesh as well to develop the facilities at the port. Moreover, Bangladesh is also planning to build its own deep sea port, where China's assistance can bear significance for both the countries. Bangladesh and China have proposed a road link under a transport protocol that will connect Chittagong (of Bangladesh) with Ruili and Kunming of China via Mandalay of Myanmar. This proposal is still subject to approval by Myanmar. But given the patron-client

relationship between China and Myanmar, it is expected that the latter would not veto the proposal of a 1,700 kms road link that would benefit Myanmar as well.

Bangladesh's natural gas reserve also brings it in the forefront of China's global search for energy, where Bangladesh outbids Indonesia, due to Bangladesh's proximity to China via Myanmar. Bangladesh has already given rights to China to explore gas in the country, welcoming China's entry in this sector.

Bangladesh and China in the Global Setting

China has emerged as a major power in recent times. It has been able to maintain a steady rise of 9 percent GDP growth for quite some time now. With the current trend, it is projected that China would catch up and even surpass the US economy in the coming years. China is also building strategic relationship with other countries in different continents. The growing American interest in India makes China vulnerable in its Western flank, which makes Beijing to seek regional allies in the subcontinent. With deepening ties between Bangladesh and China, Beijing's foot in the subcontinent gets stronger and viable. It can offset US presence in the region by making its ties even more strong with Bangladesh as well as other South Asian countries.

China's foreign policy is now guided by two concurrent principles: policy of "peaceful rise" (*heping jueqi*) and also "hide one's capabilities and bid one's time" (*tao guang yang hui*). Besides, in international politics, China maintains certain policies which are as follows:

1. The five principles of peaceful coexistence;³
2. Setting up a fair and reasonable political and economic world order;
3. No use of force or threat of the use of force in international relations;
4. All nations, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal in international affairs; and
5. China should always side with the developing countries, it should never seek hegemony or superpower status.

Since a growing China would behave as a responsible power in international politics, its relationship with Bangladesh can be seen through this broader perspective of a *new China*.

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3. The five principles are: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutual benefits; and peaceful co-existence.

ETHNIC CLEANSING IN BANGLADESH

RICHARD L. BENKIN

One of the greatest challenges facing anyone trying to cover human rights violations, especially in South Asia, is to separate fact from hyperbole (which comes from the victims and their champions) and fact from denial (which comes from the victimizers and their apologists). Throughout the month of May 2009, reports began reaching the West of what can only be described as an anti-Hindu pogrom in Dhaka. According to the reports, the pogrom was carried out by “hundreds of Muslims” in three stages: March 30, April 17, and April 29. The reports alleged that a community of approximately 400 Hindus was going about its business when suddenly gangs of Muslims stormed their colony, started beating the residents, and demanded they quit the homes which they and their families had occupied for the past 150 years. They also reported the deliberate destruction of a Hindu Temple and its deities. The headline in *The Daily Samakal* highlighted that, “400 Hindus evicted from their ancestral home and Temple bulldozed by Muslims.”¹ Although every Hindu as well as the international community should have reacted with horror and outrage, neither did.

In fact, my own sources inside Bangladesh - including dissidents, journalists, government officials, and minority activists - tended to dismiss the notion of a pogrom and initially reported hearing nothing outside of that which was printed in the newspapers; a position that would change for many of them in the subsequent days. The government denied that any such thing happened, and the local police chief, Tofazzal Hossain, told the press that “No demolition of temple occurred. There was no temple there, only a few idols.”² Yet, the initial sources for the allegations included a European human rights organization and two US-based associations

dedicated to helping Bangladeshi minorities, in addition to several newspapers; all of them considered credible. It was one incident, but had two versions with each side exaggerating its point. None of it was necessary though not the hyperbole because the reality was even more chilling than a pogrom, and exaggerated claims only undermine real complaints' credibility³; not the denials because that was not denied but only confirmed government-tolerated minority oppression in Bangladesh.

For a while, not all 400 Hindus were made homeless, a significant number of them had to face such situation. As one victim put it, "We are now passing a miserable life with no home and very little to eat."⁴ Police involvement was confirmed, and the government never thought to deny their presence even while Muslim attackers beat Hindu residents indiscriminately. Moreover, the former had been trying to grab the land in question for some time but had no legal title to it. So they simply seized the land with police support both during and after the attacks; that is, these "enforcers of the law" became "enforcers of lawlessness", sending the message that in Bangladesh, legal protections are suspended for minorities in general and Hindus in particular. This is not about a sensational event that occurred in March or April 2009, but about a system of legalized oppression and ethnic cleansing that has been proceeding almost without a break for more than three decades. That is the reality for Bangladesh's 13-15,000,000 Hindus⁵, and it places every one of them at risk. For despite government protestations to the contrary, they live without equal protection under the law and are, therefore, subject to arbitrary actions by the Muslim majority.⁶

That reality has tragic consequences. Professor Sachi G. Dastidar of the State University of New York, Old Westbury, has estimated that approximately 49 million Hindus are "missing" from Bangladesh.⁷ That is, using demographic methods of natural population increase and decrease, he calculates that there should be 49 million more Hindus in Bangladesh than there are. The reduction of the Hindu population of Bangladesh⁸ from 30 per cent at the time of partition (1947) to nine per cent today has been accomplished by violence, its tolerance by successive governments, and a Nuremburg-type law that rewards the victimizers with the victims' property. As terrible as that is, the real tragedy is that it has proceeded with no effective resistance and continues today with none. The many entities charged with protecting the rights of minorities worldwide have been noticeably silent about this institutionalized atrocity, making it "A Quiet Case of Ethnic Cleansing."

Legal Support for Ethnic Cleansing In Bangladesh

Tensions between Hindus and Muslims on the Indian subcontinent have existed almost since Islam's appearance there. The 1947 partition of the subcontinent into two nations, India and Muslim Pakistan, formalized the notion that the two communities cannot even live together in the same polity. It certainly did not defuse tensions or end inter-communal violence. Tensions between India and Pakistan have been high and constant, making their conflict a perennial "hot spot" in the minds of world leaders and diplomats; and the two nuclear-armed states went to war with each other four times in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999. But something happened in 1965 that represented a seminal change in those relationships, and it is something that should have caused a loud and sustained international uproar, but it did not.

Indo-Pak war in 1965 resulted in another humiliating defeat for the Muslim nation, which passed the *Enemy Property Act* (EPA) in an undisguised act of retaliation. Aimed deliberately at Pakistan's Hindu population, the act empowered the government to declare their land and possessions enemy property and to seize it. When Bangladesh won its independence, the EPA became the *Vested Property Act* (VPA), with explicit language stating that only the law's title had changed, not its content. Hindu lands have become the reward for those who attack Hindus and drive them out of Bangladesh, which is what happened in the attack at Sutrapur. Coveting the land but without legal title, the attackers moved into the community only after the government "listed the lands as vested properties," signaling that the government would support their seizure.⁹ Lakshmi Rani Das, who remained homeless even three months after the attack said, "The land-grabbers ousted us with the help of thugs and policemen from the place where we have been living for 150 years."¹⁰

In the Sutrapur incident, it was the common people, not a *Gestapo* that carried out the actual violence, which is the *modus operandi* for ethnic cleansing in Bangladesh. In 2008, I interviewed dozens of Bangladeshi Hindus scattered throughout North and North East India in illegal and semi-legal refugee camps. Although some spoke of police involvement in the attacks, most informants who mentioned the police described the same sort of supportive role seen in Sutrapur both during and after attacks; and while they only occasionally spoke of "radicals," they always spoke of "Muslims," often people they knew as neighbors. One gentleman told of how his chicken wandered into a neighbor's yard, who seized the bird

and ate it. When asked why he did that, knowing it was his neighbor's, the man said, "I did it because it is what I am entitled [or obliged] to do as a Muslim."¹¹ In 2009, I returned to the camps and heard similar stories. One young girl told me about being raped - not by radicals or the police, but by "Muslims."¹² History's most "successful" cases of long term ethnic cleansing were possible because otherwise law-abiding citizens carried them out, somehow convinced that it was all right for them to attack, plunder, and even murder fellow citizens because they were of a different faith or ethnicity. Sometimes, they are given uniforms or semi-official titles, other times not. Hannah Arendt famously observed this while covering the Jerusalem trial of Adolf Eichmann, the man who was in charge of the Nazis' extermination of 6,000,000 European Jews. She coined the term "banality of evil" to describe how Eichmann and numerous other Germans participated in mass murder without seeing it as anything more than doing their job.¹³

As one political thinker summed it up, "For all of our vaunted progress, for all of our enlightened progress and democratic institutions, for all of our material comforts and technological gizmos, we found that we could commit calculated acts of cruelty unto one another - and somehow not be utterly shaken at the horror of it all. People could now commit atrocities [and] no longer quite recognize themselves or their actions or the effects of their actions as cruel."¹⁴ That is the situation that pertains today in Bangladesh.

The VPA is critical to maintaining the system that supports the social acceptability of ethnic cleansing because it provides a legal reward to those who implement it. The Sutrapur attackers were granted title to land they otherwise could not seize legally. Those who attacked the Bangladeshi refugees, I interviewed in India, were rewarded with the victims' family farms. That is, even though Bangladesh governments *in theory* support minority rights, they and the police *in reality* undermine them by enforcing this deliberately discriminatory law that applies only to minority communities. Formally and informally, in Dhaka and elsewhere, Bangladeshi officials from the last four governments have admitted the VPA's anti-minority essence, calling it a "black law that must be repealed."¹⁵

Massive corruption at every level has long seemed endemic in Bangladesh. The nation was perennially listed among the world's three "most corrupt countries" in Transparency International's authoritative rankings until 2008, when the military-backed government's anti-

corruption actions dropped it a few notches.¹⁶ Thus, if the VPA could become embedded in Bangladesh's system of corruption, with every major party benefiting from it, its role in ethnic cleansing would be solidified; and that is what happened. Dhaka University's Dr. Abul Barkat is considered the world's foremost authority on the VPA. He has devoted the last several decades to studying it. According to Barkat, it is power, not ideology, that determines which party benefits the most from it.

Between 2001 and 2006, when the right-center *Bangladesh Nationalist Party* (BNP) held power, 45 per cent of the spoils went to it, with 31 per cent going to the out of power and left-leaning *Awami League*. Smaller parties divided the rest, and even the Islamist party, *Jamaat*, which fashions itself as pristine, grabbed eight percent. That the BNP took the largest share would surprise few Bangladeshis, especially those who voted for what they believed was a pro-minority rights *Awami League*. Yet when Barkat looked at the figures during its last stint in power, he found that *Awami League* grabbed more than the BNP by 44 to 32 percent.¹⁷ Thus, it should not be surprising that victims in Sutrapur identified the attackers as *Awami League* supporters and even identified party officials present during the attacks.¹⁸ The party in power gets the most, and right now that is the *Awami League*.

Imagine for a moment if United States law empowered the government to seize the land and property of non-Christians and give it to Christians; or if Indian law did the same to non-Hindus. Imagine the international hue and cry that –justifiably - would be heard from every human rights NGO and government entity that could afford a fax machine. And imagine the sustained and passionate cries of 'racism, racism, racism,' the loudest likely coming from Americans and Indians themselves. Of course, no such laws exist in the US or India, but they do in Pakistan and Bangladesh where these have been on the books for decades. The only difference is that these are Muslim majority countries and the laws put property of non-Muslims up for grabs. Yet, aside from periodic statements from one or another NGO - statements never coupled with action or sustained outrage - the world has uttered nary a peep about this blatant form of *de jure* bigotry.¹⁹

For centuries, and even through the subcontinent's partition, Hindu and Muslim Bengalis have co-existed with far less acrimony than is the case elsewhere in South Asia. In fact, there is a strong current of thought that holds British administrative and political decisions (including the partition of Bengal in 1905) responsible for increasing Hindu-Muslim

tensions in Bengal. Those tensions continued to grow, reached a nadir at the time of Bangladesh's independence and shortly thereafter, but took a monumental leap with the rise of a more aggressive and radical Islam, fuelled by Middle Eastern money.²⁰ Newly independent Bangladesh initially declared itself a secular nation. Three years later in 1974, it enacted the VPA, and mere three years after that did an about face and proclaimed itself an "Islamic republic," much to the chagrin and horror of its Hindu and other religious minorities. As one noted, "Every time I hear some westerner call Bangladesh a 'moderate Muslim nation,' I feel like I am not even legitimate in my own country."²¹

The implications of this progression are critical for what was to come. In 1971, Bangladesh was beholden to India without which it would not have won its independence. India provided financial and logistic support to East Bengali rebels and eventually sent troops to the area and quickly overran the Pakistanis whose surrender was the largest since World War II. Declaring itself a secular state Bangladesh, rubbed salt in that Pakistani wound, as well. The power of Islamist parties was at its ebb then. For they had come out vociferously against independence and often fought alongside the Pakistanis to prevent it. Their involvement in Pakistan's brutal massacre of perhaps three million Bangladeshi non-combatants was the proximate event precipitating full-scale revolution. But they soon re-established themselves in Bangladesh and especially among its officialdom and were not called to account for their crimes.²² As they did, Bangladesh moved further away from India and its pluralistic beginnings. In a terrible irony, some of the participants in the 1971 atrocities gained positions of governmental power over the relatives of their victims and presided over land seizures under the VPA. With the rise of radical Islam nationally and internationally, Bangladeshi Islamists have garnered continually growing influence. Though a small part of the overall Bangladeshi population, they have entrenched themselves in almost every major institution from education to banking, from the police to the judiciary, and were members of the ruling coalition between 2001 and 2006. Had the 2007 elections proceeded as scheduled, they would have been so again no matter who won a majority. Despite the Islamist parties' open calls to "Talibanize" Bangladesh and impose *Sharia* Law, both major parties had agreed to include them in the government.²³

Islamist Attacks and Government Collusion

The ethnic cleansing of Bangladeshi Hindus is almost unknown in

the West and if human rights organizations or the United Nations have some notion about it, they do not realize its extent. With the exception of occasional reports, incidents protested on websites, periodic conferences attended largely by individuals already aware of the problem, and the rare academics, like Sachi Dastidar, who writes about the issue; western literature and activism are largely devoid of news about the plight facing Bangladeshi Hindus. In fact, at a 2008 Congressional Briefing on religious minorities in Bangladesh, I was the only one of the five speakers who referred to what is happening there as ethnic cleansing. Most speakers ignored the issue, instead focusing on the military-backed interim government and their wish for a return to democratic rule as the minorities' best hope.²⁴ Rhetoric aside, there is a high level of tolerance for human rights violations in South Asia,²⁵ and people have offered numerous explanations for this deadly silence: anti-Hindu bias; pro-Muslim bias; Petro-dollars; moral cowardice and a general reluctance to confront human rights violations; international politics, NGO politics and funding; corruption on both sides of the Bangladeshi border; government denials and cover-ups; Hindus' passivity; their failure to stand up for their co-religionists; the same failure by the world's largest Hindu majority nation - India; and pseudo-secularism.²⁶ There likely is a bit of truth to all of them, but attempting to say what that kernel is would be little more than speculation.²⁷ Thus, the next section of this paper focuses on twelve anti-Hindu attacks that took place in Bangladesh in January and February 2009. They are not meant to constitute an exhaustive list, but all have been carefully vetted to withstand accusations of hyperbole and whatever denials the perpetrators or their appeasers might raise. In addition, they have occurred since the installation of a new and democratically-elected Bangladesh government that promised to end the acceptance of anti-Hindu violence. That has not happened, even though Sheikh Hasina's *Awami League* makes regular protestations about being the party that defends minorities. They also stand in stark contrast to the veritable cottage industry of apologists in the West who along with numerous minority organizations, continue to support that discredited notion. In all of the cases noted here, the government deliberately refrained from stopping the violence or punishing the perpetrators.²⁸

Twelve Incidents²⁹

On 1 January 2009, 14-year-old Subarna Karmakar was on her way home from school in the Barisal district when several Muslim males grabbed

the girl, forced her onto a motorcycle, and carried her off. The girl cried out for help while being abducted, but no one came to her aid. Her father, Paran Chandra Karmakar, complained to the police, who have taken no action to date either to locate the girl or prosecute the alleged perpetrators. To this date, the girl's whereabouts remain unknown.

On 15 January 2009, nine Muslim males kicked in the door of a family home in the Khulna district, and forced their way in the house. They seized eight-year old Choyon Bairagee and when his mother Aduri begged for mercy, the kidnappers threatened to kill her and the child if she reported the matter to anyone and also demanded a 20 million taka ransom. The officer-in-charge of the Dumuria police station told the press that there was no case for the police to pursue. To this date, the boy's whereabouts remain unknown.

On 24 January 2009 in Khulna, five or six Muslim fundamentalists attacked Thakur Das Mondol, a member of the Hindu Union Council and Chairman of *Magur Khali Union Jubo Dal*. He was returning home when attacked. Locals found him in a "senseless condition" and carried him to Khulna Medical College Hospital. Police have taken no action despite numerous appeals.

On 26 January 2009 in Faridpur, a group of local, heavily armed Muslim fundamentalists, led by Mohammed Siraj, former Banesordi chairman, attacked a Hindu funeral site and a nearby Kali temple, which they destroyed completely along with its deity. When locals tried to save the temple, the fundamentalists threatened them with arms. Since then, the attackers have claimed the temple land, and police have taken no action as of this date despite numerous appeals.

On 28 January 2009, a *madrassa* was built on the land of a Hindu temple to the Goddess Kali in Dinajpur. Police have taken no action despite numerous appeals, including one to the Prime Minister through Zahid Hasan.³⁰

On 30 January 2009 in the Chittagong district, 10-15 Islamists attacked the Swaraswait Pandal, destroying the temple and a deity. They also physically attacked several worshippers leaving at least ten seriously hurt. Police have taken no action despite numerous appeals, including one to the Prime Minister through Zahid Hasan.

Also on 30 January 2009, in Dhaka district, Md. Hasan Habib, a local *Awami League* official, taking advantage of his position in the new government, forcibly occupied land belonging to Monindra Nath Mondal and threatened the victim should he report the infraction.

On 13 February 2009, in the Dhaka district Muslim fundamentalists attacked the Sidditala Durga temple, destroyed at least ten Hindu deities, and demolished a Kali Temple, Shitala Mandir, and Manasha Mandir. Locals caught one attacker whom the police termed a “mental patient,” thus preventing the charge of this being a religious crime, even though the other perpetrators were all part of the Islamist party, *Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh*. Police have taken no action or tried to arrest the other perpetrators despite numerous appeals, including one to the Prime Minister through Zahid Hasan.

On 15 February 2009, *Awami League* operatives stormed a minority-owned home. They still occupy the property, citing their rights under the Vested Property Act. Police have taken no action despite numerous appeals, including one to the Prime Minister through Zahid Hasan.

On 19 February 2009 in the Barisal district, a retired Hindu school headmaster, Adhir Chandra Das was shot and killed by four or five Muslim attackers. Police also declared this not to be a religious crime, citing unidentified “previous enmity.” To this date, no action has been taken to investigate the crime or punish the perpetrators.

On 26 February 2009, 14-year-old Tanusree Roy was abducted by two Muslims, Babul Hossain Zihad alias Zikrul Islam and Md. Razzak Ali and raped repeatedly. The family filed a complaint with the Kotwali police station (Barisal), but the police have taken no action to find the girl or punish the perpetrators. She remains missing to this day. In his report, Tanusree’s father notes that the kidnappers repeatedly threaten to kill him and his family, but the police have taken no action to follow up those charges.

In late February 2009, local Muslims stormed a small family farm in Dinajpur district and ordered the residents to leave, claiming the land for themselves. When the head of the family protested, the attackers beat him and forced the family off their land. Muslims also raped the family’s 14-year-old daughter. Police refused to act and the family fled to India.

Implications and Needed Action

The first question to answer is: Do we find these allegations credible? The second is: What do they tell us? And the third is: What action, then, are we morally bound to take? Answer to the first question is that the allegations have been vetted and verified and represent only a small portion of the many that have been made.

What do they tell us?

The first and most obvious conclusion is that sections of the Bangladeshi government are culpable and their actions demonstrate that they cannot be relied upon to provide a solution. If the government instead acted in a responsible and moral fashion, the anti-Hindu atrocities would not be taking place. In all of the cited cases, the government has taken no action to pursue the perpetrators even when known to it, plus: in three cases, children of Bangladeshi citizens remain missing and police are not trying to find them; in five cases, Hindu land is being occupied by the attackers, and police are allowing it; in four cases, appeals to the Prime Minister's office have gone unheeded; and in at least two cases, the perpetrators referred to the government to justify their right to the attack.

The victims are not random but deliberately targeted because they are Hindu. Four of the cases involved destruction of Hindu temples and deities; two were attacks on individuals with positions of prominence among Hindus. In two of the religious desecration cases, the police declared each not to be a "religious crime," and ascribed one of the attacks on a Hindu notable to "previous enmity." The government is pursuing neither justice nor restitution for the victims, while also denying the fact that the attacks were directed against Hinduism and the Hindu community. The importance of that is to absolve the government of responsibility for admitting that the problem even exists; let alone rectify it.

Finally, there is a deliberate attempt to reduce the Hindu gene pool in Bangladesh to force demographic change. That the victims of rape and abduction are all minors, follows a pattern common to Islamist action in Bangladesh and elsewhere; a pattern in keeping with findings that, during the period of suicide bombings in Israel, victims were disproportionately young people of child bearing years.³¹ While the appellation, genocide, might as yet be a stretch, one of its components is "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group."³²

What must be done?

The international community, including those entities charged with protecting human rights, has been silent. The systematic oppression of Hindus and other minorities is deeply embedded in Bangladesh's social and political structure, and the current government despite rhetoric to the contrary is supporting it. Effective action will not come as a result of waiting for that to change. History demonstrates that. Not a single minority

life will be spared if advocacy groups stick with the same methods that have been ineffective for decades. The time for new methods has arrived, for as the Hebrew sage famously asked, "If not now, when?"³³

The oppression of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh is an international disgrace. Bangladeshi governments regardless of party have remained impervious to appeals for justice. They similarly have demonstrated a consistent refusal to take actions that would upset Islamist constituencies who drive the oppression or that would disturb the corrupt system that rewards cronies and average Muslims who carry it out. Activists must identify those pressure points that the Bangladeshi government find more painful than angering those constituencies. There are at least two: trade and participation in UN peacekeeping missions.

There is no internal dynamic by which the Bangladeshi government will change things. The only way to effect change is to get to it indirectly through the action of third parties. The economic slowdown has left the Bangladeshi economy (and therefore the party in power) vulnerable, depending as it does on exports of consumer goods to North America and Europe. Activists have thus far frustrated Bangladeshi attempts to secure trade benefits in the United States, based on human rights issues. That sort of pressure must be maintained there and in other significant importing nations. It requires daily vigilance to identify and fight potential legislation and lobby lawmakers. It also requires persistence. Despite having been frustrated for years, Bangladeshi officialdom continues to assert that one event or another will allow it to achieve its goal of tariff relief without real reform of its dismal human rights record. This sort of unrelenting activism offers the only hope of convincing them otherwise.³⁴

Bangladesh supplies the second largest troops for United Nations peacekeeping operations.³⁵ Excluding Bangladesh from this function would cut off a significant income stream to that nation plus send home a number of angry and armed young men - not a pleasant prospect for any political leader. The matter is so sensitive that even the prospect of it precipitated the 2007 military coup.³⁶ There is significant data for the UN to question Bangladeshi peacekeeping on the basis of the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Hindus and other minorities. The fact that it is enshrined in law and tacitly supported by the government strengthens the argument. The UN will not act, however, if they are not forced to acknowledge the reality of these charges and recognize their own violation of UN principles by giving Bangladesh such a large role in peacekeeping activities. It is up to activists to put together such an effort and do so in a public way that

would require some response from the UN.

Stopping this ethnic cleansing requires activists and others to stop communicating almost exclusively with their own favorite media and online groups already convinced of the problem. The only way to get other people outraged is to make sure they know about the problem, which requires sober but passionate articles in widely-read newspapers, speeches to general audiences, and other efforts to general audiences whose support will determine how importantly politicians, businesses, and others will consider the issue. Most newspaper editors and publishers like to consider themselves champions of the downtrodden, unafraid to confront governments with their “bad” actions or decisions; no major newspaper will turn down the chance for an expose of a supposedly “good” government’s complicity in something as heinous as ethnic cleansing. But the periodic press release or unsubstantiated claim will not convince them to pursue it. Similarly universities, radio stations, and groups of all types are constantly looking for speakers. There must be a deliberate and persistent effort to reach people who still claim ignorance of this horror.

People are far more likely to recognize the human tragedy in a particular incident or individual. The aforementioned attack in Sutrapur, which could be described as an anti-Hindu pogrom; the young girl and her family whom I met in Northern Bengal in early 2009; the young Bengali Hindu I met in 2008 who likely will never realize her dream to teach pride to other Bengali Hindus without our help; all put real, human faces on the concept of ethnic cleansing. On another front, the Vested Property Act (VPA) could be addressed passionately in an international legal forum, at the United Nations, or elsewhere, especially with the statistical evidence of its anti-minority effect in the work of scholars like Barkat and Dastidar. Any of these issues could be the focus at a “counter-demonstration” the next time the United Nations Human Rights Council meets or at Durban III, the UN Conference on Racism.

The specific issue is secondary; the greater goal is primary. There is little doubt that if left unchecked, radicals will carry out their intended ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Bangladesh, just as they have done in Pakistan. The so-called civilized world has been consistently ineffective when it comes to genocide and similar atrocities. The Nazi holocaust against the Jews, Rwanda, Darfur and others come to mind. Nothing was done until the bodies were piled too high to ignore. This time, we can stop ethnic cleansing before its perpetrators complete the job -but the responsibility for doing so rests squarely on our shoulders. We have the

power to choose how history will remember us.

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2. *Weekly Janmabhumi*, 30 April 2009.
3. See Richard Benkin, "False Accusations Harm Cause of Human Rights: The Case of Mary Mondol," *Canada Free Press*, 20 May 2008.
4. "Sweeper colony residents demand return of land," *The New Age*, 14 May 2009.
5. Accurate figures are extremely difficult to verify due to primitive conditions throughout large parts of Bangladesh, unreliability of reported data, and intimidation. Population figures in this article are an amalgam taken from the Bangladeshi census, Indian census, CIA World Factbook. The figure of 13 million is based on an estimated population of 14.7 million with Hindus representing 9.2 percent. Readers are advised to understand these numbers in general terms, which give strong backing to the conclusions in this article.
6. A general caveat seems obligatory. This is not an indictment of all Islam, but the violence described is motivated by communal hatred. The victims do not just happen to be Hindus. They are attacked *because* they are Hindus, and this must be understood as part of international *jihad*.
7. Sachi G. Dastidar, *Empire's Last Casualty: Indian Subcontinent's Vanishing Hindu and Other Minorities*, Firma KLM: Kolkata, 2008.
8. The area currently comprising the nation of Bangladesh has been referred to as East Pakistan and East Bengal. Although this article refers to the nation-state as Bangladesh, the other two references are used interchangeably with it when referring to the area.
9. *Daily Samakal*, *op.cit.*
10. "Call to stop eviction of Dalit people," *The New Age* (Dhaka), 10 April 2009.
11. These interviews were conducted in over two dozen illegal refugee colonies in the Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur, and other Districts of West Bengal between 21 and 28 February 2008.
12. The girl, who wishes to remain anonymous, spoke to me north of Siliguri in Darjeeling on 23 March 2009 about an incident that occurred in Bangladesh at the end of February 2009.
13. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin: New York, 1963.
14. John Seery, "Political Theory in the Twentieth Century," in Alan Finlayson (ed.), *Contemporary Political Thought*, NYU Press: New York, 2003, p. 38.
15. The statement was made to me by a Bangladeshi official at its embassy in Washington, DC on 30 July 2007. Numerous officials from each one of the last four Bangladesh governments have made similar statements to

- me. Also note that on the day of the third anti-Hindu attack in Sutrapur - while the government continued to deny anything wrong transpired - Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told Vice-Admiral of French Navy and Commander of the Joint Forces in the Indian Ocean region Gerard Valin that her government would repeal "all laws and rules" that discriminate against minorities. *The Daily Star*, 30 April 2009.
16. *Transparency International*, 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index.
 17. Abul Barkat, *Deprivation of Hindu Minority in Bangladesh: Living with Vested Property*, Pathak Shamabesh: Dhaka, 2008.
 18. *The Daily Samakal*, *Weekly Janmabhumi*, *New Age*, and *Daily Star*, *op.cit.*
 19. The VPA should not be confused with temporary laws in India and elsewhere to administer abandoned/evacuee property during times of massive population transfer.
 20. Richard L. Benkin, "AL makes disingenuous pitch to U.S." *Weekly Blitz*, 6 August 2008. In 2008, the Bangladeshi government made a rare move and revoked the charters of two Islamic charities: the Saudi *Al Haramain*, and Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage. Both had been operating freely around the country, spreading *jihadi* philosophy, the reason given for the revocations.
 21. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "USCIRF Forum on Bangladesh's Upcoming National Elections," 13 October 2006, Washington DC. Comment made by Bangladeshi Hindu audience member.
 22. After years of promises, the *Awami League* government said it would set up a commission to hold trials of accused war criminals - almost 40 years after the fact, which makes credible testimony highly unlikely.
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 24. Congressional Briefing by Rep. Trent Franks of Arizona on 9 May 2009 on "The State of Religious Minorities in Bangladesh", Washington DC.
 25. "SA's 'human rights' is Just Talk: US Expert," *Hindustan Times*, 14 March 2009.
 26. Pseudo-secularism refers to the prevailing system in India whereby the desire to be seen as secular results in a false (or pseudo) secularism that advantages non-Hindus.
 27. For one view, see Richard Benkin, "Stop Them before they Kill Again." *Canada Free Press*, 26 December 2007.
 28. See Richard Benkin, "Does Awami League Victory Offer Hope for Real Change?" *The Asian Tribune*, 4 January 2009; and Richard Benkin, "Awami

- League Blowing its Chance," *News from Bangladesh*, 1 March 2009. Also on 10 January 2009, a consortium of Bangladesh minority advocacy groups asked me to be the guest speaker on a call about the implications of the *Awami League* victory for their organizations. I told them that it would be a "monumental mistake" to refrain from pressing their claims aggressively, and that they would thereby reinforce the belief among Bangladeshi officialdom that the *Awami League* has sufficient goodwill that it can get away with taking no action to end the oppression of Hindus and other minorities.
29. The incidents listed in this section have been gathered and vetted by Dr. Richard Benkin. Sources of information for them include: Global Human Rights Defence Fund; Bangladesh Minority Watch; Bangladeshi Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Unity Council; Christian Development Alternative; Nagorik Uddyog; Dalit Movement in Bangladesh; and numerous Bangladeshi newspapers in Bangla and English language including: *The New Age*; *The Daily Star*; *Daily Samakal*; *Daily Janakantha*; *Daily Bohrer Kagoj*; *UPI Asia*; *Daily Prothom Alo*; *Daily Independent*; and many others. Information presented is also based on direct testimony of victims to the author.
 30. On 19 February 2009, the BHBCUC presented a personal appeal to Sheikh Hasina through her Vice Counsel that included specific appeals for help on several cases mentioned here.
 31. See, for example, Robert Baer, *The Cult of the Suicide Bomber*, 2007. Also "AP: Palestinian Terrorists 'Shocked' at Killing of Children." *The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America*, 7 September 2004.
 32. Article II, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. Adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the U.N. General Assembly on 9 December 1948. Entry into force: 12 January 1951.
 33. Hillel the Elder, 110BCE to 10CE. "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when." *Pirkei Avot 1:14*.
 34. See as examples: Richard Benkin, "Bangladesh at a Crossroads," *Weekly Blitz*, 9 May 2007. Benkin, "Trade Bill Stalled in Senate Committee," *News from Bangladesh*, 8 June 2007. Benkin, "Bangladesh's Consolation Prize Dead in the Water," *Weekly Blitz*, 30 July 2008. Also, rationales for non-action were communicated to me privately by several Bangladeshi officials between 2005 and 2009.
 35. In May 2009, for example, Bangladesh provided 9,849 troops; Pakistan 10, 618; India 8,612. Nigeria was the only other nation supplying more than 5000 troops. Figures from *United Nations Peacekeeping*, "Monthly Summary of Contributors of Military and Civilian Police Personnel," May 2009.
 36. In January 2007, every Western embassy in Dhaka condemned the upcoming elections as rigged, and the United Nations was about to join

them, sparking a review of Bangladeshi peacekeeping participation. Several Bangladeshi military leaders and civilians told me privately (in Dhaka and Washington) that this was the “straw that broke the camel’s back” and forced the military to intervene and promise new elections.

TERRORISM IN BANGLADESH

A Security Threat for India

MANSI MEHROTRA

Conventional definition for security refers to conditions that result from the establishment and maintenance of protective measures that ensures a state of inviolability from hostile acts or influences. In the present times, security is directly related to globalisation due to growing interdependencies in all aspects of our lives. Development has created suitable environment to achieve economic affluence, spread of political freedom and promote peace on the one hand and social fragmentation and implanting the seeds of hostility and conflict on the other.

At the root of threat to security lie variety of forces that have become global in scope and more serious in their effects. It is the result of the spread of knowledge, the dispersion of advanced technologies and the movement of people as manifested in the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the recent terrorist attacks in India in 2008. These attacks demonstrated the use of advanced technologies, global financial networks and the easy movement of people. At the same time, greater economic interdependence is likely to create political, social and ethnic tensions between and within nations as the communities try to exploit or resist competition. It is expected that economic pressures may lead to resurgence of anti-capitalist ideologies due to resentment arising out of perceptions of injustice among those whose expectations are not met.

India played a major role in the establishment of an independent Bangladesh in 1971. However, since then, New Delhi's relations with Dhaka have neither been close, nor free from irritants and disputes. Soon after independence, Bangladesh began to move away from language to Islam as the binding force of Bangladeshi nationalism. Factors like the emphasis on Islam, Bangladeshi concerns over India's military build-up,

bilateral disputes over shared water resources, narcotics and arms smuggling, and attacks on Hindu minorities and religious places in Bangladesh have been influencing fluctuations in Indo-Bangladesh relations and threaten the security of the region. In recent years, New Delhi has found Pakistani and Bangladeshi militant groups being involved in attacks on religious sites, public venues and public transportation in India.

Terrorism in Bangladesh: An Overview

The basis of the creation of East Bengal, later East Pakistan, was the principle of religion, the “Two-Nation Theory” and hatred towards Hindus. Bangladesh’s long tradition of moderate Islam has increasingly been under threat from Islamic extremism that is one of the catalysts for the growth of menace of terrorism and is seen as propagating and maintaining anti-India posture. In fact, Bangladesh has recently been termed as the ‘base of Taliban’¹ and ‘cocoon of terror’².

Religion and Politics

The role of religion in the politics and society of Bangladesh gained momentum when Bangladesh adopted Islam as a “state religion” during General Hussain Mohammad Ershad’s regime (1982-1990). Earlier, President Zia-ur Rehman (1977-1981) initiated the process of cultivating extremists for gaining political support who in turn facilitated terrorist groups in Bangladesh. The trend to seek political support of the extremists was encouraged by the successive governments.

The fundamentalists and *jihadi* elements were the notable allies of Begum Khalida Zia’s *Bangladesh National Party* (BNP). During her regime she reportedly manipulated the Islamists in weakening the then opposition *Awami League* and its allies as well as to destabilise India. The *Jamaat-e-Islami* of Bangladesh (also called *Jamaat*), which is the leading Islamist political party of Bangladesh and the largest Islamic party in the sub-continent, formed part of the government during Zia’s second tenure as Prime Minister (2001-2006). *Jamaat* had as many as 16 members elected to parliament.³ Leaders like Motiur Nizami Rahman, who were opposing the freedom struggle of Bangladesh and took over *Jamaat-e-Islami* in late 2000, became ministers during her regime. Azizul Huq, the Chairman of the *Islamic Ojikko Jot* (OIJ) a radical Islamist party and a member of the advisory council of *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh* (HuJI-B) (a

Bangladeshi terrorist group banned in February 2005), formed part of the coalition government of Begum Khalida Zia.⁴

It should be noted that *Jamaat-e-Islami* was banned until 1979 due to its support for the Pakistani army during the liberation war. The party has never apologized for its role and has been a target of the secular nationalists.⁵ According to Lt. General Yogendra Bammi, the *Jamaat* has now claimed that they are nationalist to the core. During the Indo-Pak war of 1971, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan so they opposed the anti-Pakistan Bangladesh liberation movement that was backed by India. Bammi believes that their policies have not changed and that they will continue to support any movement that is anti-nation or anti-Bangladesh.⁶

The main motto of the *Jamaat* is: "Allah is our Lord; The Quran and the Sunnah is our ideal; Jihad is our means; and Salvation is our end."⁷ *Jamaat-e-Islami* even provided financial assistance and manpower to the terrorist groups. For example, in November 2001, Gopal Krishna Muhuri, Principal of Nazirhat College in Chittagong and a leading secular humanist, was killed by four hired assassins, who reportedly belonged to a gang patronised by *Jamaat-e-Islami*.⁸

The other party that formed part of Khalida Zia's government was *Islamic Ojikko Jot* (IOJ). It has been openly vocal about its support for the Islamist militants, the Taliban and the Al Qaeda.⁹ IOJ is not a single political party but a conglomeration of six smaller radical organizations namely, *Khelafat Majlis*, *Nezam-e-Islam*, *Faraizi Jamaat*, *Islami Morcha*, *Ulama Committee Bangladesh*, *Bangladesh Farayazi Jamaat*, *Bangladesh Nizam-e-Islam Party*, and *Jamiyate Ulama-e-Islam*. Some of these radical organizations have previously expressed solidarity with the Taliban regime.¹⁰ Both IOJ and *Jamaat* promote anti-Indian and extremist Islamic policy which provide ideal breeding ground for the growth of militancy.¹¹ Their presence in the political power structure encouraged the extremist elements to act without any fear as they enjoyed the patronage of the authorities. Some other well-known Islamist political parties that are anti-Indian include *Jamaat-e-ulema-e-Islami*, *Muslim League*, *Nizam-i-Islami*, *Islamic Democratic League*, *Islamic Republic Party* and *Bangladesh Republic Party*. They have well disciplined cadres among youths and students.

In fact, the political environment of Bangladesh has changed. Even Sheikh Hasina Wajed, a promoter of secular ideology during the latter half of her tenure as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh (1996-2001), changed her attire by wearing dress of a Haj pilgrim and wearing the black Muslim headgear. She was even accused of not taking any actions

against the Islamic extremists involved in the killing of ethnic minorities, which was reportedly due to her desire to obtain Muslim support for the 2001 elections. The pro-Islamic extremist political environment offered Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) a ready ground to have its operational base in Bangladesh.

According to Bertil Linter, a Swedish journalist, the importance of Islam grew as the *Awami League* fell out with the country's powerful military, which began to use religion as a counterweight to the *Awami League's* secular, vaguely socialist political policies (many hard-line socialists, however, were opposed to the idea of a separate Bengali state in Bangladesh, which they branded as 'bourgeois nationalism').¹² Ali Riaz, in his book *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh* identifies the main cause for the rise of Islamism as a political ideology as: the crisis of hegemony of the Bangladeshi ruling classes - both civilian and military; the crisis of legitimacy of the military regime post-1975; the politics of expediency of the secularist parties; and the ineffective resistance of civil society.¹³ Political radicalisation of Islam in Bangladesh provided an ideal platform for the escalation of activities of Islamic extremists and terrorist groups pursuing a pro-active Taliban agenda.

Bangladesh in Turmoil

In 2001, two simultaneous events in the South Asian region - the formation of Begum Khaleda Zia's government (2001-2006) in Bangladesh and the United States (US) led "War on Terror" that led to the invasion of Afghanistan, redefined India's regional security scenario. India's security threat, which until then existed primarily from its western border, also extended to its eastern border.

The 9/11 and subsequent "War on Terror" brought many extremist outfits in Afghanistan under the US scanner. These terrorist outfits required an alternate place to camp and operate. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service in its July 2003 report noted that the (Islamist) radicals in Bangladesh established links with Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden's *International Islamic Front* (IIF).¹⁴ Following the October 2002 Bali blast, some Indonesian and Malaysian terrorist groups shifted their bases to Bangladesh.¹⁵

The unstable social, political and economic setup along with long absence of democratic polity made Bangladesh a soft country for the extremists and terrorists to establish their base. Easy money laundering provided ideal conditions for making it a breeding ground for recruitment,

motivation, support, infiltration and safe haven for international terrorist groups, gun runners, smugglers, pirates and ethnic insurgents. Ali Riaz, Associate Professor at Illinois State University, recognises certain internal factors that contribute to the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh. These include: favourable socio-political environment; coercion as an acceptable mode of governance; criminalisation of politics; absence of state institutions in certain geographical areas of Bangladesh; a sympathetic civil administration, particularly at the local level; and mobilisation of popular culture for Islamist objectives. He also points out four regional factors that contribute to the rise and proliferation of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh as: Indo-Bangladesh relationship; cross-border cooperation among the militant groups of Myanmar, North East India and Bangladesh; easy availability of weapons; and the “proxy-war” between India and Pakistan.¹⁶ According to Hiranmay Karlekar, “one of the reasons that makes Bangladesh an ideal base for their operation is that it is a soft state with ineffective governance and an inefficient police force, which fundamentalist Islamist organisations like the *Jamaat*, IOJ, and HuJI-B, with their highly organised, trained and armed cadres, can dominate without much trouble since they already have a foothold in the government.”¹⁷ According to Professor Sayeed, these Islamists controlled vast stretches of the country with the help from the *Jamaat* and a section of the BNP. Islamist militants had their people in all government departments and sections of society, including mosques, *madrassas*, educational institutions, the Secretariat, the judiciary, civil society, mass media and even the armed forces. Islamists had also developed a strong countrywide network to capture power through Islamic revolution.¹⁸

It may be noted that, serial bombing in 2005 where more than 400 small bomb blasts rattled the capital Dhaka and towns across Bangladesh within a span of half an hour, demonstrated a steady increase of terrorist inroads in the political and social setup of Bangladesh.¹⁹ The rise of suicide bombings carried out by Bangladeshis in the region including India thus extending their area of influence across borders is another cause of concern.

The extremists in Bangladesh have been able to establish themselves firmly also because they are receiving support from the security agencies within Bangladesh, as they have infiltrated these agencies and institutions of governance. It is reported by the intelligence sources within Bangladesh that February 2009 mutiny by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) had revealed some possible links with the *Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh* (JMB), an extremist group banned in 2005.²⁰

Extremist Groups in Bangladesh

There are reportedly over 20 Muslim militant organisations operating in Bangladesh. However, only a few of them have been reported by the news media. Security agencies in Bangladesh have reportedly identified 48 training centers across the country run by Islamic organizations.²¹ Some of the terrorist organizations in Bangladesh include: *Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen (Bangladesh)*; *Islamic Brothers Cell*; *Muslim Ummah Sanghati Parishad*; *Islamic Markaz Party*; *Jagrata Muslim Janata-Bangladesh (JMJB)*; *Zaker Party*; *Shahadat-e-al-Hikma*; *Khadimul Islam*; *Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis*; *Jaish-e-Mustafa*; *Lashkar-e-Jihad*; *Jamaat-e-Yahia Trust*; and *Islami Shasantantra Aandolan*. Amongst them JMJB is considered as one of the most feared Islamic outfit. Its operational commander was known as 'Bangla Bhai'.²² Another terrorist group *Sahadat-i-Al-Hiqma* was banned in February 2003.²³

It also stated that Sheikh Abdul Salam Mohammad alias Fazlul Rehman, leader of the *Jihad Movement in Bangladesh*, signed the official declaration of Al Qaeda's 'holy war' against US on 23 February 1998. In fact, *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami of Bangladesh (HuJI-B)* was formed in 1992 with the aid of Osama bin Laden. Incidentally, HuJI-B also included Bangladeshis who had fought as volunteers in war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.²⁴ HuJI-B is headed by Shawkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid in Chittagong and, according to the US State Department, it has "at least six camps" in Bangladesh.²⁵ According to *Bangladesh Assessment 2003*, HuJI-B has 15,000 members of whom 2,000 are 'hardcore'. The survey further stated that "Bangladeshi Hindus and moderate Muslims hold them responsible for many attacks against religious minorities, secular intellectuals and journalists."²⁶ Amnesty International reported in December 2001 that Hindus-who now make up less than 10 per cent of Bangladesh's population of 130 million - in particular have come under attack. The Hindu places of worship have been ransacked, villages destroyed and scores of Hindu women are reported to have been raped.²⁷ HuJI-B is also involved in attacking US establishments in the region, supporting terror attacks and aiding terrorist organisations outside Bangladesh. In the year 2000, it was also suspected of an assassination attempt on the then Bangladeshi Prime Minister Hasina, who is regarded as pro-India and a secular leader. It was alleged that they were supported by *Jamaat*.²⁸

According to a 2005 report, submitted to US Congress on 29 April 2008, the mission of HuJI-B is to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh. It

has connections with the Pakistani militant groups like *Harkat-ul-Jihadi-al-Islami* (HuJI) and *Harkat ul-Mujahideen* (HUM), who carry out anti-Indian propaganda in Pakistan and Kashmir and have been responsible for attacks in cosmopolitan cities of India.²⁹ *Jamaat-e-Islami* and its student wing *Islamic Chhatra Shibir* (ICS) have maintained an anti-India stance and are supporting the insurgent groups in the North East India. Like the *Jamaat*, the *Shibir* blames 'a secular society' for Bangladesh's decadence. Maintaining close links with terrorist outfits operating in South Asia³⁰ and Afghanistan, the *Shibir* has been acting on their behalf in Bangladesh, mainly by helping them to recruit and indoctrinate fanatical youth and provide shelter for stockpiling weapons and their supplies in Bangladesh. A significant number of the ICS members were reportedly sent to Pakistan and Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban regime where a large number of fanatic youth came under the direct command of Osama bin Laden. The members of the ICS have been involved in murders and terrorist attacks in the region.³¹ ICS is also reportedly involved in bombings within Bangladesh. In fact, Maulana Mirza Nurul Huq, Convener of the *Bangladesh Madrassa Teachers Association* (BMTA) in a press conference stated that "the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and its student front *Islami Chhatra Shibir* are involved in terrorist activities in educational institutions using the name of Islam".³² However, no serious steps have been taken to curb its activities. Other terrorist groups which are also quite active in Bangladesh include - *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh* and *Purba Bangla Communist Party*. Amongst them *Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh* (HTB) is emerging as a distinct Islamist organization. It is active particularly in the universities of Bangladesh and is having international connections.³³ The recruits of these militant organisations, referred to as "Bangladeshi Taliban", are students of Deobandi *madrassas*³⁴ that have mushroomed throughout the country including the border areas of Bangladesh and Assam and West Bengal in India. It has been reported that these *madrassas*, such as Jagadal Dakhila *Madrassa*, District Panchgarh have held meetings of JEI-Bangladesh where local leaders discussed motivation of Muslims in the areas on both sides of the border to arouse the feeling of *jihād*. A number of such bordering *madrassas* are reported to have been visited by JEI-Pak leaders who utilized the opportunity to criticize India on the Kashmir issue and to give calls for sending *mujahideen* to India and other non-Islamic countries. JEI-Bangladesh and ICS-Bangladesh have also been noticed delivering lectures on the need to liberate the bordering villages in West Bengal from India and merging them with Islamic Bangladesh. Indian Muslims are urged to

take up arms to defend their faith and are assured of training and supply of weapons.³⁵

It is also reported that the members of HuJI-B easily crossover to India and hide in *madrassas* and mosques in West Bengal and Assam. Thus, it is important for India to become conscious about the security of its North Eastern region and prevent it from becoming like Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (FATA) (which is a safe haven for Taliban) particularly when connectivity with North East India remains a challenge and border between India and Bangladesh remains porous.

In May 2002, nine Islamist fundamentalist groups, including HuJI-B, formed the *Bangladesh Islamic Manch* (Association) at a camp near the small town of Ukhia south of Cox's Bazaar. The *Manch* included Rohingyas,³⁶ a Muslim minority in Burma, and the *Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam* (MULTA), a small militant group operating in India's North East. Members of MULTA were reported to be trained by the Bangladeshi veterans of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan of 1980s, in at least two camps of southern Bangladesh. The surrendered MULTA cadres revealed that most of them had crossed over to Bangladesh and took military training there, mostly in private *madrassas* located in three adjoining districts of Bangladesh, i.e., Kutigram, Jamalpur and Sherpur, very close to Meghalaya and Cox Bazar. The trainers were tall, sturdy and Urdu speaking men who appeared to be Pakistanis.

Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), classified as a terrorist organisation by Dhaka, is an Islamist group based around north-western region of Bangladesh. It is believed to have links with Taliban and Al Qaeda and it espouses the ideals of the Taliban. There are significant reports suggesting that JMJB was supported by the members of BNP as the former Deputy Minister for Land, Ruhil Kuddud Talukder Dulu, was reportedly having close links with the outfit. Besharat Ullah, the BNP Joint Secretary, purportedly addressed the first rally of JMJB.³⁷ *Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh* (JMB), founded in 1998 is a banned Islamic extremist organisation that gained prominence in 2001 when bombs and documents detailing the activities of the organisation were discovered in Parbatipur in Dinajpur district. JMB's youth front *Al Mujahideen* that began working in mid-1990s remains obscure even today. It is also said that JMB is another name for the vigilante Islamist group, the *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh*.³⁸

Indian Insurgent Groups in Bangladesh

The radicalisation in Bangladesh determines the intensity of its indulgence in supporting the North East insurgents and terrorist activities in India. However, the links of the insurgent groups fall into three categories, namely: links with Islamic terrorist groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir; links with Indian insurgent groups, including Islamic groups, operating in the North East; and links with umbrella organizations to synergize the activities of the fundamentalist and terrorist groups in Bangladesh and India.³⁹ There are substantial reports of use of India's North Eastern territory by the Islamist groups of the region as a transit route to infiltrate into Jammu and Kashmir. There have also been apprehensions about occasional and potential strikes by the extremists and separatist groups targeting West Bengal, Assam and the cosmopolitan cities of India.

In fact, Nagas and Mizo insurgent groups of India's North East were able to establish their base in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) immediately after the partition of India.⁴⁰ Presently, there are two armed militant groups in Nagaland, 39 groups in Manipur, 37 groups in Assam, 30 groups in Tripura and four groups in Meghalaya. Most of these groups are aided and provided safe havens in Bangladesh.⁴¹ It was under the regime of Begum Khalida Zia (2001-2006) that the number of extremist groups of the North East increased.

In 1956, after the Indian Army was called out to fight Naga insurgency, A. Z. Phizo, the leader of the Naga movement, crossed over to Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). He established his base in East Pakistan from where he armed his group and mobilised international support.⁴² Though the sanctuaries of the North East groups in Bangladesh were eliminated for a short period after the birth of Bangladesh, the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman witnessed Mizo rebels regaining some of the lost grounds in Chitagong Hill Tract (CHT) as collaborators of the local authorities, helping them in settling Bengali Muslims in CHT and ensuring their own safe refuge in return.⁴³

In 2005, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India had prepared a list of 172 camps run by Indian insurgent groups.⁴⁴ located particularly in Dhaka, Chittagong Hill Tract, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Sherpar, Moulawi Bazar, Sunamganj, Rangamali, Khagrachari, and Bandarban. Cox's Bazar in Chittagong district is particularly used for the transshipment of weapons and explosives.⁴⁵ The route adopted is Cox's Bazar, Alikadam,

Kasalang Reserve Forest, Mizoram, Silchar, Jiriban, Tamenglong and Paren. India's Border Security Force (BSF) had submitted a list of 79 militant camps in Bangladesh to the BDR officers during a meeting at Shillong on 22 October 2003. A more detailed involvement of Bangladesh extremists support to North East insurgents was disclosed in a 10 page press note released on the occasion of BSF Raising Day in November 1995. The note disclosed that most insurgent outfits in the North East were acquiring sophisticated weapons from Thailand in connivance with the Bangladesh intelligence agencies.⁴⁶ The facilities enjoyed were broadly the same as those available to the Islamic terrorist groups.⁴⁷ In fact, links between Bangladeshi militants and India's radical militant groups is one of the major security challenges for India.

The Bangladeshi extremist groups have extensive contacts with the Muslim groups of the North East India like *Muslim Liberation Tiger of Assam* (MLTA); *Students Islamic Movement of India* (SIMI); *Students Islamic Organisation* (SIO); *Islamic Liberation Army* (ILA); *Liberation of Islamic Tiger Force* (LITF); *Muslim Liberation Army* (MLA); *Muslim United Liberation Tiger* (MULTA); *People's United Liberation Front*; *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*; *United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam* (UMLFA); *Muslim Liberation Army* (MLA); *Muslim Security Council of Assam* (MSCA); *Muslim Security Force* (MSF); *Muslim Tiger Force* (MTF); *Muslim Volunteer Force* (MVF); *Harkat-ul-Jihad* (HUJ); *Islamic Liberation Army of Assam* (ILAA); *Islamic Sevak Sangh* (ISS); *Islamic United Reformation Protest of India* (IURPI); *Islamic Revolutionary Front* (IRF); *Islamic National Front* (INF); *United Islamic Liberation Army* (UILA); *United Islamic Revolutionary Army* (UIRA); and *Zomi Revolutionary Volunteer* (ZRV).

The *Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen*, a banned terrorist organisation in India, has also reportedly been using Bangladesh as an important transit point for its cadres. The *Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen* (TuM), which has close links with *Ahl-e-Hadis*, has been using Bangladesh for the outlet of its cadres. Top TuM terrorists, Ahmedullaj Nahami alias Ahmed Jan (arrested in 1997 in Delhi) and Mohammad Yousuf Rather (arrested in 1998) made disclosures about the *Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen* (TuM) network in Bangladesh. There are reports of the top *Lashkar-e-Tayyeba* (LeT) leaders visiting Bangladesh to converse with the leaders of the JEI (BD) and its students wing, the ICS, have also been received from time to time. In June 1999, Abdullahil Arman and Mohammad Yaqub Ali of LeT (Pakistan) visited Bangladesh to meet Motinur Akand, President of the ICS and asked him to send volunteers to join the Kashmiri militants. Again in July 2000, Maulana Abu Faiyaz of

the LeT (Pakistan) met Maulana Abdul Rauf and Mufti Nizamul Qadir (both leaders of HuJI-B) and formulated plans for launching suicide attacks on Indian security forces.⁴⁸

On 12 October 2005, Hyderabad Police Special Task Force revealed a massive network of subversion, recruitment and radicalisation in Andhra Pradesh as investigators discovered that as many as 500 Hyderabad youth had undergone arms training in Bangladesh and Baluchistan through HuJI-Bangladesh network. Other prominent joint operations involving Bangladeshi cadres included the serial bombings at Varanasi on 7 March 2006 executed by HuJI-B and *Students Islamic Movement of India* (SIMI) conspirators; the Delhi blasts of 29 October 2005, involving HuJI-B and LeT cadres; and the 28 December 2005 attack at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore attributed to HuJI-B and *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM) cadres. While investigations are still going on to establish the linkages in the Mumbai blasts of 11 July 2006, preliminary investigations suggest that Bangladesh was used for transit and facilitation operations.⁴⁹

According to the Indian intelligence reports, leaders of various militant outfits in India's North East are based in Chittagong and Sylhet, both these regions having international airports which can be used to flee at short notice. Some of the insurgent group leaders have been living with their families in Bangladesh. These include Paresh Barua (Commander-in-Chief of ULFA), Ranjan Daimary (President NDFB), Julius Dorphang (Chairman, HNLC), Dilesh Mark (Chairman, ANVC), Bishwamohan Debbarma (President, NLFT), and Ranjit Debbarma (President, ATTF).⁵⁰ It is reported that Paresh Baruah and Arabinda Rajkhowa, are having fake Bangladeshi passports and travel documents and have been working under Bangladesh's direct 'diktat'. However, Bangladesh has maintained a policy of complete denial without verifying the details given to them. In fact, Dhaka counter alleges that anti-Bangladesh elements have been operating out of India.

NSCN (IM) had its camps in Jorhar near Cox's Bazar with the strength of 250 cadres; Vaital camp near Rangamati with a strength of 300 cadres; Galilee camp near Alikadam with a strength of 50 cadres; and Headquarter of NSCN (IM) at Dhaka, in a four storey building near New Market. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) as well as an intelligence agency in the Cachar district stated that there are approximately 25 training camps in the area with full knowledge of Bangladeshi authorities. Outfits operating in these camps are *United Liberation Front of Assam* (ULFA), *National Democratic Front of Bodoland* (NDFB), *National Liberation Front of Tripura*

(NLFT), *All Tripura Tiger Force* (ATTF), *Peoples Liberation Army* (PLA) etc.⁵¹ It is believed that the ULFA is a constituent of the *Bangladesh Islamic Manch*, a united council under HuJI's leadership.

In 1995, a consignment of arms, AK-47, AK-56 and RPD 7.62 LMG and ammunition arranged from China was delivered from a Chinese naval ship off the coast of Cox's Bazar and transshipped in the hired vessel. The goods were meant for the insurgent groups in North East India. In 1998, it was reported that "the ISI had set up a training camp about 30 km from the Indo-Bangladesh border, between the hamlets of Chattak and Jaintipura in Bangladesh. About 315 militants from different outfits of the North Eastern states divided into 14 batches were undergoing three months of intensive training under the Camp Commander Major Meer Muammar Mushtaqeen."⁵²

There was a massive arms seizure at Chittagong port on 2 April 2004. It included rocket launchers - 150; rockets - 840; ammunition rounds - over a million; grenades - 2,500 and assorted assault rifles - over 1,700. According to Subhash Kapila, "The unloading of this over-sized arms consignment at a Bangladesh government owned jetty indicates that the Bangladesh government, its intelligence agencies and administrative machinery would be in the know of it. The arms consignment loaded on dozen trucks or so was headed for Maulvi Bazar in proximity to the Indian border and where Bangladesh permissively tolerates the anti-Indian insurgents safe havens and training camps. The type of weapons like rocket launchers and grenade launchers and hundreds of rockets and thousands of grenades indicate that they were intended for anti-Indian insurgents being hosted in Bangladesh and equip them to launch devastating fire-power attacks on Indian Army regular forces posts, camps etc."⁵³ He further writes that there was significant proof to suggest that the then Bangladesh's ruling party BNP was involved in this arms haul as "Salauddin Qader Chowdhury figures as the biggest name not only in the present seizure, but also in his involvement in such activities in the past; Chowdhury is a Special Adviser to the Bangladesh Prime Minister and a leading BNP MP from Chittagong; Chowdhury owns a shipping line and the shipping vessel that brought the arms consignment to the Chittagong outer anchorage is either owned by him or facilitated by him; The two trawlers which off-loaded the arms consignment from the outer anchorage and brought to the fertilizer factory jetty are reported to be owned by Haji Abdul Sobhan, a local BNP leader with proximate links to Chowdhury. Local BNP leaders and party functionaries along with the

local police were present at the Chittagong Port to oversee and facilitate the transfer of this large consignment of illicit arms consignment and its onward movement. In a country where police and intelligence surveillance are as intense as that of the ISI in Pakistan, it is inconceivable that the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia would be unaware of the involvement of ruling party MPs in such anti-Indian activities. More so when the kingpin is happened to be her political Special Advisor. On 10 April 2004, the Mayor of Chittagong, Mohiuddin Ahmad Chowdhury (AL) made the following observations: Arms shipment was sent by USA and Pakistan. It was intended for anti-Indian insurgent groups operating from Bangladesh."⁵⁴

Lintner cites an internal document from HuJI which lists "no less than 19 'training establishments' all over Bangladesh, but it is uncertain how many of them actually offer military training. What is certain, however, is that since a new coalition government led by the *Bangladesh National Party* (BNP) took over in October 2001, Bangladesh Islamist militants became more vocal and active."⁵⁵ The training included both indoctrination and handling of weapons and explosives.⁵⁶

Earlier in November 1999, former Director of the CBI, S. K. Datta, wrote: "Abu Nasir, a Bangladeshi Lashkar who was arrested in West Bengal revealed names of many Lashkar who were operating in the country. The Siliguri corridor has been targeted by the ISI through Lashkar for establishing bases. [Chief of *Lashkar-e-Tayyeba* (LeT)] Hafiz Saeed visited Bangladesh in 1998 and managed to recruit Bengali Lashkars. Incidentally, Bangladesh in 1998 has been the favorite shelter for ISI operatives, ULFA activists and other militants of the North East."⁵⁷ It was reported in April 2000 that Mohammad Nasim, Home Minister in Sheikh Hasina's government, admitted that with the help of an unnamed foreign intelligence agency Indian separatists had long been provided training on Bangladeshi soil. He also accused India of encouraging and training the Chakmas. Islamist militants in Bangladesh have established bases in India and are provided sanctuary by their counterparts as well as Indian rebels they help.⁵⁸ However, Nasim declared that after Sheikh Hasina came to power in 1996 both countries agreed not to co-operate with each other's separatist groups. Sheikh Hasina government also signed a peace accord with the CHT insurgents to contain insurgency in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Details obtained by Assam police on the activities of the ISI and different Muslim groups, were laid on the table of the Assam Legislative Assembly by the Chief Minister of Assam on 6 April 2000.⁵⁹ This document

detailed the regular movement of ULFA leaders to Pakistan from Bangladesh and training imparted to them in *mujahideen* camps in Peshawar. Prior to this the Assam police had arrested four persons on suspicion on 10 August 1999 in Gauhati. The role of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), the military intelligence agency of Bangladesh, in all these transactions remains shadowy, as they have been the go-betweens or intermediaries in the operations of the ISI with the North Eastern militant groups.

Madrassas: The Breeding Ground for Terrorist Activities

The *madrassas* play an important role in an impoverished country such as Bangladesh, where basic education is available only to a few. Today, there are an estimated 64,000 *madrassas* in Bangladesh, divided into two kinds. The *Aliya madrassas* are run with government support and control, while the *Dars-e-Nizami* or Deoband-style *madrassas* are totally independent. *Aliya* students study for 15-16 years and are taught Arabic, religious theory and other Islamic subjects as well as English, mathematics, science and history. They prepare themselves for employment in government service, or for jobs in the private sector like any other college or university student. In 1999, there were 7,122 such registered *madrassas* in Bangladesh.⁶⁰ These are also the main recruiting centres for the terrorist outfits. The Bangladeshi intelligence agencies, in their initial assessment, identified 323 *madrassas* where training was imparted to the terrorists.⁶¹ The investigation by the Bangladeshi intelligence agencies zeroed down on 323 *Quomi madrassas*, where militants were being trained.⁶²

There are 5,230 *Quomi madrassas* with about 1.4 million students⁶³ and the assembled clerics, mainly belong to IOJ. It was given official recognition in 2006 by the Zia government. Official recognition of these educational establishments was resisted due to fears that it would lead to a spurt in religious extremism in the Muslim-dominated country endangering its already fragile democracy.⁶⁴ The education in these *madrassas* is restricted to the teaching of Holy Quran, Arabic and little else. According to Samina Ahmed, South Asia Project Director for the International Crisis Group, the education of *Quomi madrassas* is not well equipped to fit in the modern learning, but to training of clerics. However, Bangladesh does not need so many clerics. According to *Communist Party* leader Mujahidul Islam Selim, "They create an unemployed youth who have no capacity to be employed in the productive sector of the economy."

They are being lured into becoming carriers of bombs.”⁶⁵ By 2006, at the end of the BNP’s regime, *madrassas* supplied nearly 35 percent of the Army recruits.⁶⁶

International Links

The end of Soviet occupation in Afghanistan led to the unemployment of many *mujahideen*. Their Pakistani leaders motivated them to move to Bangladesh to operate against India.⁶⁷ The BSF Director General Ajai Raj Sharma stated in 2002 that there were “firm reports” that Pakistan’s ISI had set up new training centres for terrorists in Bangladesh. “The terrorist groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir are also being trained there. It [ISI] is now fully concentrating in Bangladesh,” Pakistani President General Musharraf’s visit to Dhaka in 2002 led to the strengthening its links with Bangladesh army, the BDR, the DGFI, the NSI, important bureaucrats and political leaders including anti-Indian leaders and extremist parties. It also led to the increase in the strength of Pak High Commission in Dhaka which included some additional ISI personnel.⁶⁸ It is reported that India views the Pakistani High Commission in Dhaka as the ‘nerve centre’ of ISI activities in promoting terrorism and insurgency in India.⁶⁹

Institutionalisation of terrorism in India’s eastern neighbourhood has facilitated India’s North Eastern insurgent groups to incessantly misuse Bangladesh’s territory as headquarters, sanctuaries, training camps, arms procurement and storage facilities, and transit route. In fact, “since 1950s, erstwhile East Pakistan has been facilitating, encouraging and supporting various North East insurgent groups. In *The Myth of Independence*, former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto laid claims to Assam and suggested that he wanted some areas of India’s North East to be included in Pakistan.” In 2005, India’s Ministry of External Affairs prepared a list of 307 North East insurgents⁷⁰ that were supported by Bangladeshi extremist outfits sponsored by ISI, with money coming from the Gulf. The list was handed over to the BDR. In fact, these insurgent groups, who have been using Bangladesh’s territory, are said to be cooperating closely with the erstwhile BDR, DGFI and ISI for their anti-Indian activity.⁷¹

It is important to note that it was after 31 years that the military dictator of Pakistan visited Bangladesh in 2001 after a few months of 9/11 and almost immediately after the US operation in Afghanistan. Links between Pakistani ISI and DGFI, became evident in late 2001 after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan when a ship carrying several hundred Taliban and Al Qaeda cadres along with arms and ammunitions arrived

at the Chittagong port.⁷² This was made possible by the Islamist extremist friendly government at Dhaka. They were moved to the southeastern border area of Bangladesh. This could not have been possible without the knowledge and support of the security agencies within Bangladesh. According to Colonel Anil Bhat, almost all groups of India's North East were reported to have met the Al Qaeda seniors, who pledged their support to them.⁷³

Sayed Abu Nasir, a Bangladeshi national who had worked for the international Islamist charity outfit established by Osama bin Laden, was picked by the ISI and posted to Dhaka and he worked with DGFI. According to the Indian intelligence sources, he was also involved in coordination and providing assistance to India's North Eastern secessionists and sending them to training camps in Pakistan.⁷⁴ It is also believed that there are as many, if not more, terrorist training camps in Bangladesh territory as there are in Pakistan and that more Indian fugitives wanted for their involvement in acts of terrorism in Indian territory have been given shelter in Bangladesh than in Pakistan.

"Three ATTF undergrounds, who surrendered before the Security Forces on 2 October 2002, revealed that the ISI had arranged a six-month training for eight ATTF undergrounds at Kandahar (Afghanistan) and that they were flown to Kandahar from Dhaka. Two senior leaders of the NDFB, Dhiren Boro (Vice-President, arrested on 1 December 2003) and Gobinda Basumatary, General Secretary (arrested on 5 December 2002) revealed the involvement and role of the ISI in training NDFB cadres in Pakistan. A number of ULFA leaders including Pradip Gogoi (Vice-Chairman) and Lohit Deori revealed that several batches of ULFA cadres were flown from Dhaka to Pakistan for training, which was arranged by the ISI."⁷⁵ Nazir Ahmed Sodozey, a Pakistani terrorist, disclosed the hidden facts of Bangladeshis undergoing training in the HuA camps in Afghanistan, provision of shelter to HuA cadres in Bangladesh, involvement of Bangladeshis in terrorist activities/kidnappings of foreign tourists etc. Abu Baker Siddiqui, another terrorist, revealed that he had motivated and assisted recruitment of Bihari Muslims to undergo arms training at the RIF Training Centre in Arakan hills near Chittagong.⁷⁶ Thus, the rogue elements of Afghanistan and Pakistan seek to use Bangladesh as an important base, if not headquarters and a staging center of their globalised terrorist activities.

The recruits of the terrorist outfits are taken to Pakistan mostly via Nepal. In Pakistan these recruits are trained and subsequently sent to

military camps in Afghanistan. It is not known how many people from Bangladesh, including Rohingyas, have fought in Afghanistan. *Prothom Alo*, a Bangla daily newspaper, reported in December 2004 that 3,000 Bangladeshis fought along with the Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. They have even served in Kashmir and Chechnya.

In certain quarters it is believed that entire ULFA leadership has shifted its base to China. In 1960s, China was providing training facilities to the insurgent groups mostly in the Sajek range of Hills of CHT in late 1960s.⁷⁷ According to the recent investigation in Bangladesh, Hafiz Rehman, one of the accused of March 2004 weapons offloading consignment from China for ULFA, confessed before the Metropolitan Magistrate that Paresh Barua was helped by Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited, Coast Guard, the then chiefs of the Directorate General Forces Intelligence and National Security Intelligence to offload weapons and ammunitions which were enough to arm a whole military division.⁷⁸

Financial Sources

With huge funds coming from Pakistan,⁷⁹ Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Jeddah, Qatar, Kuwait⁸⁰, and United Arab Emirates the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and a group of related extremist organisations turned into a formidable political force and became strong in the countryside as a result of being instrumental in setting up Deobandi *madrassas* and *Shariat* courts. Deobandi *madrassas* are the main recruiting centres for the terrorist outfits.

Other sources of funds include huge revenues and profits from investments and enterprises; institutionalised extortion; regular contributions of the members and associate members; *Zakat* (religious tax); profit from the sales proceeds of its literature. *Jamaat* has also set up a dozen of trusts, welfare and financial organisations like Islamic banks throughout the country. According to Professor Abul Barakat “the net profit from fundamentalist economy in Bangladesh is approximately Taka 12,000 crore.”⁸¹ These organisations are almost entirely manned by *Jamaat* and *Shibir* members.

The terrorist groups of Bangladesh have reportedly been receiving financial assistance from *madrassas* and several Muslim Non-Governmental Organisations in West Asia⁸² and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, *Adarsha Kutir*, *Servants of Suffering Humanity International* (SSGI), *Al Faruk Islamic Foundation*, *Hatadin*, *Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islam*, *The World Assembly of Muslim Youth*, *Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation*, *The International Islamic Relief Organisation*, *The Revival of Islamic Heritage Society* (RIHS), and *The Ishra*

*Islamic Foundation, International Islamic Relief Organisation and Revival of Islamic Heritage Society*⁸³ are the main financing NGOs. Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan also provide the *jihadis* with logistic support. The DGFI revealed that the militants were involved in arms-trafficking and arms training at a *madrassa* in Dhaka sponsored by a Saudi organization called *Al-Haramin*, which is known to have links with Osama's money distributing infrastructure, operating in 37 branches in different parts of Bangladesh.⁸⁴

Conclusion

India has regularly been taking up its security concerns with Bangladesh at different levels through diplomatic channels and institutional mechanisms existing between the two countries without much success. In fact, in March 2004, while speaking to the media in Dhaka, Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan ruled out the possibility of handing over ULFA leader Anup Chetia to Indian authorities,⁸⁵ as India and Bangladesh had then no Extradition Treaty signed between them.⁸⁶ It should be noted that in May 1998, within six months of Chetia's arrest, Khalida Zia had told during an interview at the BNP headquarters in Dhaka that her party would like to regard the ULFA cadres as 'freedom fighters' just as the *Mukti Bahini* were freedom fighters.⁸⁷

Ali Reza suggests that to curb militancy it is important to improve law and order situation, round up the known militants, dismantle their support infrastructure, investigate any links with the local administration, identify the sources of weapons of the militants, commitment to education, balanced social and economic development and human rights. International pressure, particularly from the investors or developmental partners, can also check the militancy in Bangladesh.⁸⁸ According to E. N. Rammohan, a former Director General of the BSF, for counter-insurgency there are certain lessons that need to be taken into account: first is to find the cause, analyse it and take drastic steps to effect remedial measures. Secondly, it is important to ensure that in operations, the people are not alienated. In a situation where there has been economic discrimination and corrupt governance, it is important to ensure that there is good clean governance, which can wean the people away from the insurgents.

According to Yashwant Sinha, formerly Indian Minister of External Affairs, the irritants between India and Bangladesh can not be resolved overnight but by being patient as the issues are complex and there is no

clear road ahead. But India should make it clear to Bangladesh that while we are willing to resolve the irritants, we will not be able to tolerate any threats emanating from Bangladesh.⁸⁹

The present government at Dhaka, however, seems committed to work with Delhi in its efforts to drive out the militant groups from its soil. In this regard, Bangladesh has recently accepted India's proposal to set up a Joint Task Force to deal with militancy and other anti-national elements. As of now, India will mainly be assisting Bangladesh with intelligence inputs. But Indian troops will not be involved in any joint military operations to flush out militants taking shelter in Bangladesh.

Dhaka is also showing its desire to sign several agreements with India and the US on the formation of a "South Asian Anti-Terrorism Taskforce" (SAAT).⁹⁰ Also the recent arrest of the Chairman of ULFA, Arabinda Rajkhowa, coincided with the three-day talks between Home Secretaries of India and Bangladesh. After the talks, the two sides announced that they finalised three crucial accords, including one for combating terrorism and the transfer of prisoners. They also agreed to resolve the issues relating to their land boundary.⁹¹ Further, efforts towards joint anti-terrorist or security operations between India and Bangladesh started soon after Sheikh Hasina came to power. In this regard, a joint counter terrorist military exercise took place in Jorhat, Assam and West Bengal's Jalpaiguri in February-March 2009 despite the February 2009 Mutiny by the BDR. Moreover, there has always been joint patrolling by border security personnel on both sides of the border. These developments are stepping stones for re-building strong regional ties and trust between the two countries.

However, Bangladesh's opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia has strongly opposed the setting up of the task force to combat terrorism, alleging that Prime Minister Hasina was using it as an excuse to bring foreign troops into the country. Begum Zia asserted at a May rally that "There is no militancy in Bangladesh" and claimed that her government (2001-06) had successfully eliminated it.⁹²

The decision to establish Joint Task Force came at a very appropriate time for India particularly when Delhi is becoming increasingly concerned about its security from its eastern border ever since the attacks in major cities of India in 2008 as most of these terrorist attacks were having their links in Bangladesh. Islamist and extremist forces in Bangladesh have been on the rise. According to a foreign diplomat in Dhaka, "In the 1960s and 1970s, it was the leftists who were seen as incorruptible purists. Today,

the role model for many young men in rural areas is the dedicated Islamic cleric with his skull cap, flowing robes and beards."⁹³ The *Jamaat* and fundamentalists have been successful in managing the support of the people in their acts against the secular intellectuals; Non Government Organisations (NGOs); and in their aggressive policies against women's emancipation, which forced many women to commit suicide. However, despite organised efforts of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* against women's emancipation, it is important to note that amongst Bangladesh's most powerful people include two women who became the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, i.e., Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed. Additionally, due to a long history of moderate Islamic culture, there is a large section of population that is not inclined towards fundamentalist bigotry. Nevertheless, if the works of *Jamaat* and the terrorist groups are not checked and links with Pakistani ISI are not contained, the day is not far when Bangladesh will become next Pakistan or even Afghanistan (a launch pad and base for the Islamist militants).

Also, the recent mutiny in Bangladesh has made border security on India's eastern border vulnerable for infiltration, illegal migration and smuggling of contraband due to absence of the security forces on Bangladesh side. Thus, it becomes necessary for India to guard its eastern borders. This will require issuing temporary permit for the migrants on humanitarian grounds and complete fencing of the border. It is important to give clear directions to the BSF to stop infiltration. Above all there is need to take appropriate steps to contain illegal immigration from Bangladesh that has not only changed the demography in the North East India but has also evoked strong reaction from the people of the North East, who have even taken to arms. It is also important to check mushrooming of Deobandi *madrassas* that are the main recruiting centre of the militant groups. The future of Islamist militant groups is linked to the overall political and economic environment of Bangladesh and the role of political actors and other international Islamist organizations. Joint Task Force can help contain and finally eliminate the militant groups in the country by sharing of intelligence and, if possible, conducting joint anti-insurgency operations. Such endeavors can be a major development to facilitate both countries in dealing with insurgency and militancy as well as building strong bilateral relations.

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