

**BANGLADESH-MYANMAR RELATIONS (2009-2013):  
A POLITICO-STRATEGIC STUDY**

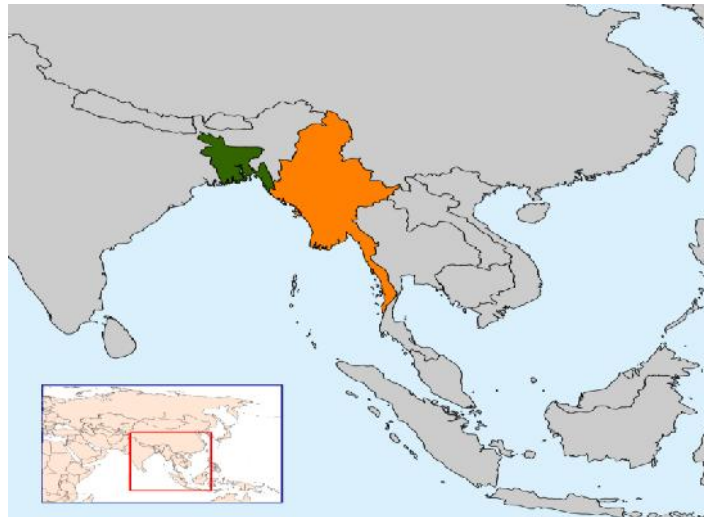


**A Thesis submitted as a requirement for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Political Science  
University of Dhaka**

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M.Phil. Registration No: 266  
Session: 2013-14  
Department of Political Science  
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**September 2022**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations (2009-2013): A Politico-Strategic Study**” submitted by Ajmira Sultana has been submitted to obtain the degree of Master of Philosophy in Political Science. It can be certified that the candidate has fulfilled all the requirements as per the directions of the Dhaka University. I endorse that the thesis may be considered to award the degree.

.....

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## DECLARATION

I, Ajmira Sultana, do declare that this thesis does not include any material previously submitted for a degree in any university without acknowledgment and proclaim that it does not contain any published material of another person except references.

The thesis is being submitted to the University of Dhaka for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Political Science.

**Ajmira Sultana**

M.Phil. Registration No: 266  
Session: 2013-14  
Department of Political Science  
University of Dhaka

## **DEDICATION**

*Dedicated to my beloved Father and Mother*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**



I would like to express my earnest gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. GobindaChakraborty, Department of Political Science, Dhaka University, for his enduring supervision and duteous competency that helped me to complete the research. I generously owe my gratitude to him. I am also grateful to my M.Phil.course teachers who provided valuable suggestions and comments that helped me in developing my knowledge. I also gratefully acknowledge the help of the officers of different libraries and national research institutes like Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) for their support in supplying the required materials for the research.

I also convey my thankfulness and gratitude to all the experts who expend their valuable time to provide information for the study.

I am thankful to my family members for their encouragement and mental support in completing my research. At last, I deferentially succumb to the Almighty God and ever be grateful to him.

**Ajmira Sultana**

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis intends to understand the nature and extent of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations focusing on the strategic importance of the countries. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar are close neighbors having geographical proximity, historical legacy, commercial and cultural ties. In terms of geo-strategic, political and economic point of view, the countries are significant to each other. But the bilateral relationship of the countries is not meaningful as bordering neighbors. Furthermore, it has been complicated day by day due regarding some factors that are delineated in the study. In this connection, the research attempts to examine the nature and extent of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations along with exploring the strategic significance of the countries. The study is qualitative in nature based on analytical and narrative methods. It assembles data from both primary and secondary sources. The study takes realism as a theoretical tool of the study. The major findings of the study illustrate that Bangladesh-Myanmar political relations could not reach at satisfactory level. The bilateral relationship of the countries has passed through ups and down that is termed as cooperative and conflictive. The study also reveals that both the countries are significant to each other in terms of strategic perspective albeit the countries have failed to grab the strategic opportunities. The study suggests that to strengthen the bilateral relation both the countries should reciprocate in the same way through operative diplomatic ties and intensive cooperation. Additionally, the research recommends that both the countries should venture the geo-strategic opportunities through enhancing connectivity, trade and investment following India and China. The study is very significant in the academic and policy area. The academicians and the policy makers can have valuable insights from the thesis to revisit their course of action and policy regarding Bangladesh-Myanmar relationship.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Bangladesh is an independent and sovereign country of South Asia. It acquired independence on December 16, 1971 through nine-month bloody struggle with Pakistan. Just after independence the country gained parliamentary democracy for a brief period which ended in 1975 through the assassination of Sheikh MujiburRahman, the father of new nation. After that the country experienced 15 years military rule and restored democracy in 1990. Geographically, it is a small country with 147,570 square kilometers. India and Myanmar are the closest neighbors of Bangladesh. Both the countries share both land and maritime border with Bangladesh whereas India is situated to the north, east and west and Myanmar to the southeast. Bangladesh is open to the Bay of Bengal. Nepal and Bhutan are also neighboring countries but they do not share border with Bangladesh. Bangladesh is geo-strategically important because it is located between South and Southeast Asia. Besides, it provides an important transit route to the land-locked northern states of India from the west Bengal.

Myanmar is the second largest country of Southeast Asia adjoining the Andaman Sea and the Bay of-Bengal. Geo-strategically, it is located among three regions- South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia. It was a part of British India until 1937. It became independent from the British rule in January 1948 and followed parliamentary form of government which lasted for 14 years (Fink, 2001: 10). After that the country was ruled by many military rulers. In 2011, the country gained civil-political transition through the general election of 2010 and military backed civilian government was established. In the 2015 election, the party of Aung San

Suu Kyi secured majority in both the houses and formed government. Htin Kyaw led by NLD was elected as the ninth president of Myanmar in March 2016 and Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed as the State Counselor in April 2016. However, the military of Myanmar is still influential force in politics. Countries with international borders to Myanmar are Bangladesh, China, India, and Thailand. Bangladesh is one of the bordering countries of Myanmar which is situated to the west of Myanmar. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar have a common border of 271 kilometers. The border shares the common Naaf River between the countries. But Bangladesh-Myanmar relations didn't develop like India though Myanmar is also bordering neighbor of Bangladesh. Bangladesh-Myanmar official relations began on 13 January 1972 following Myanmar's recognition to Bangladesh. Myanmar is the 7<sup>th</sup> country to recognize Bangladesh as a sovereign nation (Rashid, 2015:331). In May 1972, Abdus Samad Azad, the then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh visited Myanmar for the first time. Following the visit a joint statement, emphasizing on intimate and augmented bilateral relation, was delivered concurrently from Bangladesh and Myanmar. Consequently, many high level political visits took place between the countries which consolidated the bi-lateral relations. However, historically the bilateral relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh was not promising enough due to some disputes, e.g. locked economy of Myanmar, military rule, maritime dispute, and long decades Rohingya conflict and ethnic violence. After five decades of isolation, Myanmar has come to the global attention for the country's reformist steps taken by the forthwith elected civilian government. Myanmar has opened the door to work with all investors and development partners. So, there is an opportunity for Bangladesh to deepen bilateral relations between them. Specially, the recent

peaceful maritime settlement in the Bay of Bengal as well as the victory of Aung Sang SuuKyi has opened up a prospect of further cooperation between the two countries. After the victory of Aung San SuuKyi, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina visited Myanmar for boosting old border trade with Myanmar. It evolved a fresh era in the bilateral relations with the southeastern neighbor Myanmar. At the same time the recent massive influx of Rohingya refugees following military operation of Myanmar has strained the bilateral relations. From this perspective, the study will attempt to analyze the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar from politico-strategic perspectives and to explore how both countries can have greater co-operation and smooth diplomatic relations in future.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Myanmar is one of the bordering countries of Bangladesh with whom Bangladesh shares both land and maritime boundary and enjoys same history and culture. Though Bangladesh and Myanmar have British colonial experience and bears the status of developing countries, the historical bilateral relationship was not satisfactory enough due to Myanmar's isolation policy, border and maritime dispute and Rohingya conflict etc. At present, Myanmar's inclusion policy, democratic transition, economic up-gradation, close links to china and submission to ASEAN and BIMSTEC have added new strength to the country in the region. Besides, the country is enriched with natural resources like minerals, gas, oil and agricultural surplus. Therefore, Bangladesh has come forward to enhancing cooperation with this country to improve trade, commerce and diplomatic ties. Specially, the peaceful

settlement of maritime dispute in 2012 as well as the victory of Aung Sang SuuKy in 2015 general election has opened up a prospect of further cooperation between the two countries. But, it is also mentionable that some bilateral issues like Rohingya problem, border conflict, and transnational crimes are impeding the smooth bilateral relations. Many bilateral agreements and MOUs didn't come into force. The long awaited Rohingya conflict is yet unresolved. A total of about 11 lakh Rohingyas are living in Bangladesh who entered Bangladesh in different times to escape them from the oppression of Burmese military (*The Daily Star*, 2018, February 17). Notably, last year following the border incident of 25 August about 7 lakh Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh. Though an agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar was installed on 23 November 2017 regarding Rohingya repatriation but the repatriation process is not yet started. From this perspective, it is imperative to focus on the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar from politico-strategic perspective. It is also mentionable that in recent times many studies were conducted on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations but a comprehensive study is yet understudied. So, the study is an attempt to provide a comprehensive study on Bangladesh- Myanmar relations.

## **1.2. Objectives of the Research**

The study is aimed to understand the nature and extent of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations from politico-strategic perspective.

The other specific objectives are:

- To figure out how the relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar evolved over the years;

- To explore the key bilateral issues and challenges of Bangladesh- Myanmar relations;
- To examine the nature of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relation;
- To highlight the strategic importance of bilateral relations exploring the essence of Bangladesh and Myanmar to regional powers ;
- To unearth how both countries can have greater co-operation and smooth diplomatic relations in future.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The research paper is conducted to give answer to the following questions:

- a. What is the nature and extent of the bilateral relationship of Bangladesh and Myanmar?
- b. Why is Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations strategically significant?

### **1.4. Methodology of the Study**

The study is qualitative in nature based on both primary and secondary data. Content analysis of secondary literature is utilized to collect information from available sources. As data from primary source is limited; related books, journals, research papers, newspapers and other scholarly written publications are studied and analyzed to collect data from secondary sources. Moreover, official documents, statement, websites and policy papers are also systematically analyzed. This study also conducted expert interview. Interview of academicians, government officials and researcher are conducted to fill the gaps and they are purposively selected based on study aim and area. As it is difficult to interview Myanmar officials, experts on this are interviewed to extract relevant information. Interview has been taken through



semi-structured questionnaire containing both close and open-ended questions. After collecting data, those are systematically analyzed to understand the complex issue of the study.

**Table 1: Introduction of the Interviewees**

No	Identity	Affiliation
1	Professor of International Relations	Dhaka University
2	Professor of History	Bangabandhu Chair, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)
3	Professor of International Relations	University of Chittagong
4	Government official	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh
5	Government official	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh
6	Research Fellow	Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

### 1.5. Theoretical Framework

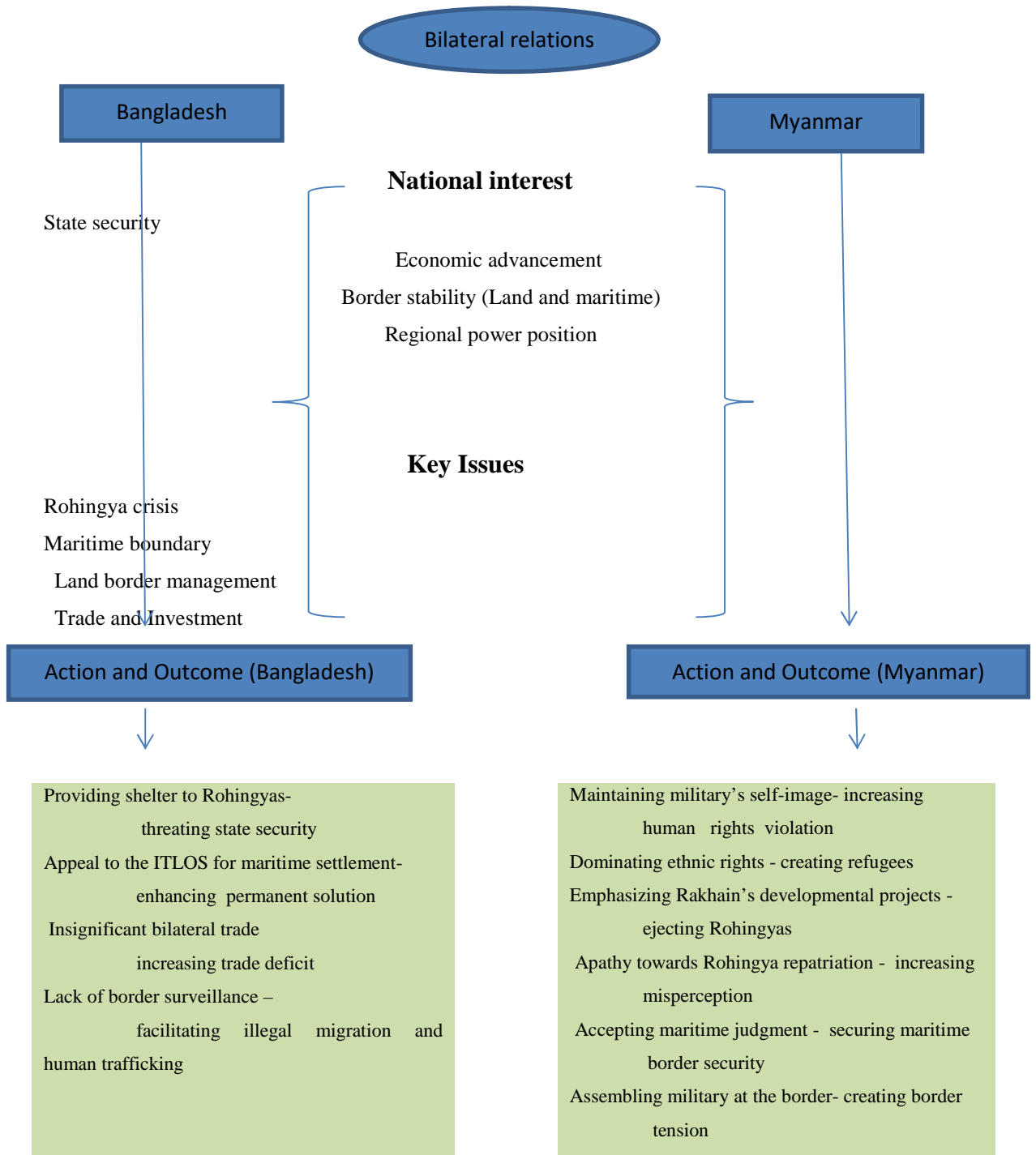
The study takes realism as a theoretical tool of the study. The realists are of the opinion that naturally the people are self-interested and power-hungry (Morgenthau, 2005:13). In international politics the state pursue power because it is the only means to protect national interest. In words, the pursuit of power and the national interest are the driving force in shaping foreign relations. All states conduct foreign relations to realize national interest. National interest is the key concept that shapes a state's behavior to others. Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations are no exception of that. Although Bangladesh and Myanmar share geographical contiguity and cultural symmetry, the bilateral relations are not encouraging enough. It is the

national interest for which the bilateral relations take different moods at different times.

National interest consists of some components like national security or state security, economic security, land and maritime security, trade expansion and status of a nation. The bilateral relation of the countries is being revolved around based on the components that preserve national interest. In Myanmar state security is given the top priority by the military. There are many ethnic groups in Myanmar who are involved in conflict for the pursuit of power and wealth. The Myanmar's military never consider them as a part of national community which creates insecurity among them. The Rohingya ethnic community is one of the vulnerable groups in Myanmar who are fleeing the country to escape violence in Myanmar. Thousands of Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh at different times which pose national security threat to Bangladesh. At present about 11 lakh Rohingys are living in Bangladesh which is serious burden for our small economy. Bangladesh is trying to repatriate Rohingyas but Myanmar is reluctant to return them. Both the countries emphasize on national security in terms of Rohingya crisis. Along with the Rohingya crisis there are also some other issues like border mismanagement, illegal trade and human trafficking which all are the causes and effects of national interest.

On the other side, following political and economic reforms in Myanmar and maritime boundary solution the bilateral relation get a new turn to secure mutual benefit. Bangladesh Prime minister visited Myanmar and made many agreements to enhance cooperation. Both the countries moved forward to secure their national interest. In words, all policies and actions of the countries are guided by national interest which is the main object of realist theory.

**Figure 1: Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations Based on National Interest**



Source: Made by the Author

## **1.6. Rationale of the Study**

The thesis bears great significance in the sense that it will provide a comprehensive study on Bangladesh-Myanmar relationship from politico-strategic perspective. It will help the academics to do better understanding the bilateral relations of the countries as well as the policy makers to revisit the policy regarding Bangladesh – Myanmar relations. The study will contribute to the existing literatures through exploring the current nature and extent of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations. Although there are a few literatures covering Bangladesh-Myanmar relations, they were silent on the nature and extent of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Most of the scholars like Tun (2016), Banik (2015), JashimUddin (2014), Morshed (2011) have identified the challenges of developing the bilateral relations of the countries. Some scholars like Yesmin (2015), Bhattacharya (2012), Rahman (2011) examined Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from economic perspective emphasizing on the potential areas of economic cooperation. Actually, none of the literatures have focused on the nature and extent of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relationship that will be filled by the research. Besides, no comprehensive study based on political and strategic dimension is yet found in the existing literatures. From this point of view, the research work is unique that analyzes the key bilateral issues through the prism of national interests of the countries. It examines in what issues the bilateral relations of the countries have become sluggish along with in what issues the relations have become sound. Moreover, the study attempts to discover the strategic significance of the countries as well as highlights how India and China are being benefitted through enhancing connectivity with Myanmar. The study argues that both from geo-political and economic point of view, Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral

relations is very imperative. Hence, both the countries should reciprocate in the same way to grab the strategic opportunities through which they can be benefitted more following India and China. Besides, by upholding cooperative relations both the countries can attain the peaceful solution of the long decade Rohingya crisis and other transnational crimes.

### **1.7. Limitations of the Study**

The study is not beyond of limitations. The researcher has faced some problems to maintain the research properly. Firstly, it was hard to collect data from government organizations and related authorities. Secondly, the number of interviewee was small and they have ignored some questions in case of secrecy. Finally, there was a lack of logistic facilities to conduct the research.

### **1.8. Chapter Outline**

The Study is divided into seven chapters.

**Chapter: 1** Introduction: The chapter contains the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions, methodology and theory adopted for the study.

**Chapter: 2** Literature Review: The chapter examines the existing literatures that are studied by different researchers. It highlights on different perceptions and ideas among the scholars regarding Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

**Chapter: 3** Historical Evolution of Bangladesh and Myanmar: This chapter includes the early history, pre-colonial period and colonial period of the countries- Bangladesh and Myanmar.

**Chapter: 4** Bangladesh- Myanmar Relations (2009-2013): Political Dimension: This chapter presents Bangladesh-Myanmar political relations identifying issues and challenges from the period 2009-2013.

**Chapter: 5** Bangladesh- Myanmar Relations (2009-2013): Strategic Dimension: This chapter examines Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from strategic point of view highlighting the geo-strategic interests of India and China in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

**Chapter: 6** Discussion on Results: The chapter presents the major findings of the study and represents the nature of the bilateral relations of the countries.

**Chapter: 7** Conclusion and Recommendations: It summarizes the full discussions and concludes with recommendations to develop relations of the countries.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Myanmar is a substantial country of South-east Asia which gained liberation from the British on 4 January 1948 (Maung, 1989: 23). Myanmar is not only neighbor of Bangladesh but also a great competitor in the area of trade and business. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar share about 271 kilometers common border. But the bilateral relations of the countries are not developed like India though Myanmar is Bangladesh's other bordering neighbor. Bangladesh-Myanmar official relations commence on 13 January 1972 following Myanmar's recognition which is the 7<sup>th</sup> country to recognize Bangladesh (Rashid, 2015:180). Though Bangladesh and Myanmar have British colonial experience with commercial and cultural ties, the historical bilateral relationship was not satisfactory enough due to closed economy of Myanmar, military rule, maritime dispute, and long decades Rohingya conflict and ethnic violence. However, in recent years Bangladesh-Myanmar relations has gained attention to many academics and researchers following Myanmar's democratic reforms. But different scholars have examined Bangladesh-Myanmar relations in different ways. There are some differences on perceptions and ideas among the scholars regarding Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

One stream of scholars like Banik (2015), Kabir (2014), Sheikh (1998) considers that Bangladesh-Myanmar relations are not explored in such way as Bangladesh-India relations are explored in spite of being close neighbors. They also add that the relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar is understudied and it seems that the

countries don't have enough knowledge about each other. The perceptions and ideas of those scholars are explained below-

Banik (2015) in the article "*Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: Strategic Imperatives*" mentioned that during the last 40 years, Bangladesh- Myanmar relations could not reach dominant position despite of having opportunities. He also mentioned that still both the countries could not take effective approach to develop bilateral relations and for that situation he raised the following reasons -Military rule for long time, closed economy of Myanmar, incuriosity towards Bangladesh, reluctance to solve bilateral disputes, preference to India and China to cement bilateral relations. The writer also proposed that as Myanmar has been transformed from the "policy of isolation" to "policy of engagement" so it is high time to strengthen bilateral relations with Myanmar. He argued that after assuming power by military dominated Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), Myanmar is changing its foreign direction. The recent political and economic reforms have lifted up its position in international politics which gives indication to develop relations with that country. And in the present context, Bangladesh should take some important steps to reinforce the bilateral relations of the countries. The future of this relation depends on how Bangladesh can grasp the opportunities to develop relations. Kabirs (2014) argument is that the relationship of the countries is not durable enough in spite of being bordering country. As a reason he noted that in the 1970s and 1980s, Myanmar's international image was contentious. So, Bangladesh was not interested to warm up its relation with its neighbors in the fear of losing international support. He mentioned that both the countries have failed to explore viable bilateral relations. As the challenges to cooperation the author pointed out that the lack of connectivity,



Rohingya issue, terrorism, internal ethnic conflict and military rule had been major hindrances to bilateral cooperation. The author also highlighted on the importance of enhancing bilateral cooperation of the countries considering the geopolitics of the region. He notes that both the countries should try to remove conflicts and engage more in future which will benefit them impressively. Sheikh (1998) marked Bangladesh-Myanmar relations as ambiguous or fuzzy. He notes that the overall political relations are yet subtle and “full-blown economic cooperation” is yet unfeasible. The author noted that the political relations of the countries had been started with positive mood. The two countries have exchanged top level visits for many times and signed about 10 agreements on different subjects including border trade, boundary demarcation, Rohingya repatriation etc. But the Rohingya issue and land mine issue were the vexing issues in Bangladesh- Myanmar relations.

The writers of the stream have explored the hidden causes of not developing bilateral relations of the countries as well as bilateral issues those are affecting bilateral cooperation. They have also highlighted the importance of developing bilateral relations and mentioned that the future relation depends on how both the countries can utilize the opportunities to strengthen cooperation. But, the above studies have failed to assess some developments in Bangladesh- Myanmar relations. Since independence, the two countries have exchanged a lot of high profile visits between them. Besides, the two countries have completed about 10 agreements on different subjects which were absent in their explanations. They were silent about the matrix of geo-politics in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Moreover, no comprehensive study on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from political and strategic point of view was found in their studies which will be filled by this research.

Another stream of scholars like Tun (2016), Jashimuddin (2014), Morshed (2011) consider that both the countries are historically linked but the bilateral relations are not good, sound or meaningful. They also mentioned that before independence both the countries had close relations by commercially and culturally but after independence they lost their smooth relations.

Tun (2016) in the article “*Myanmar-Bangladesh Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*” identified that historically Bangladesh and Myanmar had close relations but after the independence the bilateral relations of the countries became poor. Still there is no direct connection with Myanmar through air, land and water. He also mentioned that both the countries started official relations on 13 January 1972 following Myanmar’s acknowledgement on Bangladesh as a sovereign state. Just after independence, many top level visit took place but the bilateral relations of the countries remained poor. As the reasons of meager relations, Tun focused on the issues like-military rule of Myanmar, closed economy, the 8888 uprising in Myanmar, ignoring Bangladesh as a trade partner, maritime disagreement and the Rohingya conflict. Though the maritime dispute was resolved by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in March 2012, the Rohingya issue is still unresolved which is hindering Bangladesh-Myanmar relations since the 1970’s. He also expressed that both the countries can work in the following areas like – combating insurgencies, drug trafficking and climate change. JashimUddin (2014) remarked that despite of having close geo-graphical proximity and historical ties, both the countries had failed to utilize their proximity and historical ties for economic and strategic achievements. He mentioned that since the independence the relations had not been pleasant due to some factors- absence of political will of

Myanmar government, absence of mutual trust and confidence. He also added that Rohingya Refugee issue, border mismanagement and transnational crimes had been the basic obstacles to cordial bilateral relations. He opined that these impediments should be removed through various channels and first of all he mentioned that establishing mutual trust and confidence is essential to remove the existing challenges as well as to build friendly relations. Morshed (2011) emphasized on examining the policies of Bangladesh toward Myanmar. He described the present phase of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations but did not mention the impediments of the relations. He summed up in this way that during the past decades, Bangladesh-Myanmar relations were not good which he termed as silent and at present the relations are emerging from that dormancy.

The writers of the stream gave explanation of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations in the historical context. They explored the causes of meager bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar but they didn't explain elaborately how they had been affecting bilateral relations. They have explored the potential areas of cooperation but failed to examine how they can utilize their geo-political and strategic position to benefit themselves. They were also silent about the role of China and India which greatly affect Myanmar's foreign policy. In a word, the sub-regional politics in the BCIM region is not analyzed in their study which is imperative to discuss Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

Other stream of scholars like Ahmed (2008), Mahmud (2014) and Rashid (2015) assumed that Bangladesh-Myanmar relations are relatively friendly and amiable. Ahmed (2008) in his book entitled "*Bangladesh and its Neighbours*" pointed out analytical study of Bangladesh's bilateral relations with the countries- India,

Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan. The chapter four of the book was dealt with Bangladesh-Myanmar relations titled “*Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: The Politico- Economic Study*”. He examined the bilateral relations from 1972-2007. He claimed that after the independence of Bangladesh both the countries developed bilateral relations based on “peaceful coexistence” and “mutual respect for sovereignty and national dignity”. And after that many top level visit took place which had a number of positive results like-

- Refugee Repatriation agreement (1978)
- Land Boundary agreement (1979)
- Agreement to expand and develop trade relations (1994).

He mentioned that though some border incidents and refugee crisis strained the bilateral relations, the recent developments and top level visit indicate that the bilateral relations are cooperative and friendly. Mahmud (2014) in his short article “*Bangladesh-Myanmar 40 years of Diplomatic Relations*” mentioned that in spite of emerging some complications like land and maritime boundary demarcation, refugee issue and small trade volume, the bilateral relations of the two countries remained sound. He expressed that all unresolved issues are in a process of resolution either bilaterally or UN involvement. Besides, he also emphasized that both the countries have many potentialities to enhance their ties which will increase connectivity of both countries at sub-regional and regional levels.

Rashid (2015) perceived that the bilateral relations of the countries are good and cooperative. He mentioned that many top level visits especially in 2009 the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister and other ministerial level visits between Bangladesh

and Myanmar have consolidated the bilateral relations. Though the Rohingya issue sometimes causes misunderstanding between the countries, but both the countries seek cooperative efforts to solve it. He also stated that as both the countries are 'natural partners', so the countries should build 'comprehensive partnership'.

The writers have highlighted some achievements in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. They didn't address the bilateral disputes in detail that had been hindering Bangladesh-Myanmar cooperation. They were silent about some pending agreements and proposals like agreement signed in 2007 for road connectivity, renewal of cultural agreement which are not being implemented due to non-cooperation of Myanmar government. They were also silent to explore the potential areas of cooperation from which both the countries can be benefitted economically and strategically. Besides, they have elided to discuss the matrix of geo-politics in Bangladesh – Myanmar relations.

Moreover, some scholars like Yesmin (2015), Bhattacharya (2012), Rahman (2011) examined Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from economic perspective. They mentioned the obstacles in developing Bangladesh-Myanmar economic relations as well as the potential areas of economic cooperation through which both the countries can develop bilateral trade relations.

In the article "*Bangladesh-Myanmar Economic Relations: Searching for New Opportunities*" Yesmin (2015) explores the keyfields of financial relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar along with policy recommendations to enhance bilateral economic relations of the countries. Bhattacharya (2012), renowned fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), wrote a very operational article named "*Recent*

*Developments in Myanmar and New Opportunities for Sub-regional Cooperation: A Bangladesh Perspective”.*

In the paper the author identified Myanmar’s role of economy in the South and South-east Asia regions especially in the BCIM sub-region. He also identifies the opportunities of developing bilateral economic relations and presented a ‘forward looking strategy’ based on theoretical analysis from Bangladesh and Myanmar perspective. Rahman (2011) in his short article “*Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations-The Economic Dimension*” pointed out that both the countries have failed to build a worthwhile economic relation between them. Despite of having immense possibilities in the sector, both the countries had failed to take advantage of those great potentials. He also mentioned the obstacles in developing Bangladesh-Myanmar economic relations as well as the areas of cooperation through which both the countries can develop economic relations.

Here, it is mentionable that the writers didn’t present a detailed discussion on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations; they only examined Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from economic point of view. They have elided political and strategic dimensions of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

Again some scholars like Parnini (2013), Ahmed (2010) identified Rohingya issue as the main impediment towards Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. SyedaNaushinParnini, who are the author of several articles like “*Non-traditional Security and problems of Rohingya across the Bangladesh-Myanmar Borders*”, “*The Crisis of the Rohingya as a Muslim minority in Myanmar and Bilateral Relations with Bangladesh*”. She wrote another article with two co-authors M.

Redzuan Othman and AmerSaifudeGhazali titled “*The Rohingya Refugee Crisis and Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations*”. In her writings Parnini (2013) have focused on Rohingya refugee crisis conceptualizing historical exclusion of the Rohingyas, statelessness and refugeehood, border tension and non-traditional security dilemma in the host country, Bangladesh. She highlighted the local and international response to the refugee crisis which is impeding the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar. She argues that recent democratization in Myanmar can encourage the local and international community to take concerted efforts for durable solution to the crisis. Ahmed (2010) in his article named “*Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations and the Stateless Rohingyas*” addressed the Rohingya issue as barrier between Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations. He also wrote another article titled “*Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations from a post-realist Perspective*” in which he emphasized on economic interests, non-state actors of both countries. He emphasized that globalization has increased the non-state economic interactions and analyzed it in the context of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

Though some authors like Ahmed (2008) and Rashid (2015) explained that Bangladesh- Myanmar relations are friendly and cooperative demanding many top level visits of the countries, peaceful maritime settlement and other agreements on land boundary and Rohingya repatriation. But most of the authors like Banik (2015), Morshed (2011), Tun (2016) termed this advancements as opportunities of developing bilateral relations. They claimed that still Bangladesh- Myanmar relations couldn't attain satisfactory level due to some issues like Rohingya issue and border conflict. From the above discussion it can be mentioned that most of the articles and papers represent the impediments of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations and

emphasized on establishing viable relations between the countries. Some authors like Parnini, Ahmed highlighted Rohingya issue as the main impediments that creates dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Other stream of Scholars like Rahman (2011) and Bhattacharya (2012) explained Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from economic perspective. In this respect the paper of Bhattacharya is mentionable in which he discusses the role of Myanmar's economy in the BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar ) sub- region and identified opportunities in the area of trade & business for promoting Bangladesh-Myanmar economic relations.

From the above studies it is apparent that no comprehensive study on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations is yet found. The existing studies have elides to examine Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from politico-strategic perspective which will be analyzed by the research. The study will provide a comprehensive study on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations from politico-strategic perspective. It will analyze the bilateral issues of the countries and find out the national interests of the countries. The study will analyze in what issues Bangladesh-Myanmar relations have become meager and in what issues the relations have become sound or meaningful. The study will also highlight the engagement of China and India on Myanmar's foreign policy from strategic point of view which has a great impact on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Besides, the research will also highlight how china and India are being benefitted through enhancing connectivity with Bangladesh and Myanmar. In a word, the study will be a comprehensive study on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations which will examine the relations from political and strategic point of view.



## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF BANGLADESH AND MYANMAR

#### 3.1. PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL PHASE

The chapter is aimed to highlight the historical evolution of Bangladesh and Myanmar from their colonial period to the independence. It also discusses the early history of Bangladesh and Myanmar when the countries were divided into various small kingdoms.

**Map: 1 - Bangladesh and Myanmar in the world map**






**Source:** <http://www.quora.com>. Accessed on 10 September 2017.

### **3.1.1. History of Burma**

Myanmar's old history went back about thousands years ago from the present-day when the Tibeto-Burman-speaking people started settlement establishing the Pyu city-states and adopting Theravada Buddhism. In the early 9th century another group, the Bamar people arrived at the upper Irrawaddy valley and established the Bagan Kingdom (1044–1287) combining the Irrawaddy valley and its periphery. During this period, Pyu norms are replaced by the Burmese language and Bamar culture. After the First Mongol incursion of Burma in 1287, some small kingdoms like the Kingdom of Ava, the Hanthawaddy Kingdom, the Kingdom of Mrauk U and the Shan States became dominant through coalitions and confrontations. In the mid of the 16th century, the Taungoo Dynasty (1510–1752) reconciled the country as Burma and established the largest empire for a short period. Later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Taungoo kings inaugurated some major administrative and financial reforms for prosperous kingdom. In the 18th century, the Konbaung Dynasty (1752–1885) restored the kingdom and continued the Taungoo reforms with a view to establishing central rule in outlying regions. The dynasty also continued war with all its neighbours. And the Anglo-Burmese wars (1824–85) eventually led to British colonial rule in the region.

**Table 2: Different Kingdoms in Ancient Burma**

<b>Pyean Bhama Kingdoms</b>		<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Taguang Era and Dynasty</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tha-re-kheat-tara-Era, Pyu Dynasty</td> <td>(483 Bc to 95 A.D.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Vishno of Pyu</td> <td>(6th Century A.D.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pagan, BhamaDynastics</td> <td>AD 108 to AD 1291</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Myin-Saing, Pin-ya and Sa-gaing Era, Shan Dynasties</td> <td>AD 1298 to 1364</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ava Era, Shan-Bhama Dynasty</td> <td>AD 1364 to 1554</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TaungaEra,Bhama Dynasty</td> <td>AD 1540 to 1599</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ava,Second era</td> <td>AD 1599 to 1751</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Alaung-phra Dynasty</td> <td>AD 1753-1885</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(End of Bhama dynasty and British rule)</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Taguang Era and Dynasty		Tha-re-kheat-tara-Era, Pyu Dynasty	(483 Bc to 95 A.D.	Vishno of Pyu	(6th Century A.D.)	Pagan, BhamaDynastics	AD 108 to AD 1291	Myin-Saing, Pin-ya and Sa-gaing Era, Shan Dynasties	AD 1298 to 1364	Ava Era, Shan-Bhama Dynasty	AD 1364 to 1554	TaungaEra,Bhama Dynasty	AD 1540 to 1599	Ava,Second era	AD 1599 to 1751	Alaung-phra Dynasty	AD 1753-1885	(End of Bhama dynasty and British rule)	
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**Source:** Adapted from Maung ,S.L.(1989).*Burma Nationalism and Ideology: An Analysis of Society culture and Politics*, UPL, P.15.

## **British Colonial period**

British occupation in Burma introduced through the victory of British in the Anglo-Burmese wars. Many parts of Burmese zones were captured by the British through the victory in the consecutive three wars. The conflict between Myanmar and the British began following the decision of the Konbaung Dynasty to enlarge Arakan into the state of Assam, adjacent to the British belongings in India. This annexation led to the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824.

## **Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-1885)**

### ***The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–26)***

Although the Dhannyawadi Kingdom had fallen in 1784 through the domination of King BadwaMaungWyne of Alaungphara Dynasty, the Arakanese continued fighting. Many Arakanese entered East Bengal and the Arakanese army led by King Bering continued fighting against the Bhama attackers from across the border. So, the Bhama Army entered the British East Bengal to displace King Bering's bases which incited the war in 1824 (Maung, 1989:18). The war ended in 1826 with a peace treaty signed in Randapo. As per the peace treaty, the victor British occupied RakhineDhannyawadi and Mon Tanessarim.

### ***The Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-1853)***

In 1852, the Second Anglo-Burmese War was motivated by the British based on dispute between the British officers and Bhama officials. Actually, the inclination of the British to the natural resources of Burma and its intention to occupy the entire was the main causes of the war. The war ended in 1853 with the victory of the

British who conquered the entire lower Burma. The lower Burma was rich in producing rice which later became the “rice bowl of the British India” (Maung,1989:19).

***The Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885)***

After Second Anglo-Burmese War, Mandalay placed trade restriction to the British. The Bombay Burma Trading Corporation (British project in Burma) was accused of evading the Royal taxation and stealing of the timber especially teak which led to the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. In the war the British received victory and the whole territory of Burma went under the British rule which was ruled as a province of British India.

Map- 2 British Occupation in Myanmar through Anglo- Burmese Wars (1824-1885)



Source: Encyclopedia of Britannica, 2011.

### Province of British India (1886–1937) and Colony of the British (1937–1948)

In November 1885 Burma had been declared as a province of India through the decree of Lord Randolph Churchill, the Secretary of State for India. Rangoon was made the capital of Burma. The British started direct rule through changing the former governance system. The monarchy was eradicated which drastically altered the traditional Burmese society. The British occupation dismissed Bhamadomination

and gave an opportunity to smaller ethnic groups to revive their social, cultural, educational and economic institutions. But the British followed divide and rule policy which divided Burma into-Burma proper and Frontier areas (Dautremer, 1913:111). The British followed direct rule in the Burma proper where the majority Mon and Burmese speakers lived whereas in the Frontiers areas they followed the common “British colonial model of indirect rule” by local traditional rulers (South, 2008:10). As a result, the Frontier areas and Burma proper were never integrated administratively which reduced the scope for low land politicians to organize in the hills and to foster a sense of pan-Burmese identity among the colonized (Anderson, 1991:118). The Chin, Kachin, Shan were happy to the division but the Mon and Arakanese were angry with the British due to including with Burma proper. However, throughout their rule, the British had to face the armed rebellions posed by all ethnic groups in Burma. Many historians claim that this divides and rule policy of the British is responsible for the existing distrust among the Burmans and the minorities (Steinberg, 2010:20).

### **Independence of Burma**

Burma was ruled by the British for about 122 years from 1826-1947. In the early twentieth century the uprising of a new generation from the educated classes started ruminating to liberate the country and they believed that the situation could be developed through reforms. In the early 1920s the Progressive constitutional reform led a legislature with limited powers for Burma within the supervision of British India. In December 1930, a local tax protest under the leadership of Saya San in Tharrawaddy twisted nationwide uprising against the government (Smith, 1991:49).

After Saya San, Ba Maw and U Saw came into prominence (Smith, 1991:49). In 1937, the British detached Burma as a province of British India and approved a new constitution endorsed with full elected assembly for Burma. Ba Maw was the first prime minister of British Burma who was driven out by U Saw in 1939. U Saw performed as a prime minister for only two years (1940-1942). In 1942, the Empire of Japan attacked Burma and on 19 January 1942 U Saw was arrested by the British for collaborating with the Japanese (MyintU, 2001:56). During the Japanese occupation General Aung San failed to gain independence and Burma formed the Anti-Facist and People Freedom League (AFPFL). Aung San was the president whereas Thakin Nu (U Nu) was the vice-president and Thakin Than Tun was the secretary general of AFPFL. By 1945, the British recaptured the colony and after the Second World War (1941-1945), the British Governor Dorman-Smith was replaced by Sir Hubert Rance as the new Governor of Burma. Following the appointment in September 1946, the Rangoon police went on strike which rapidly propagated from the police department to government staffs and turned into a general strike (Myint, 2001:56). The situation became moderate while Aung San along with other members of the AFPFL were convinced to attend the Governor's Executive Council. The new executive council started negotiation regarding Burmese independence and the council concluded the Aung San-Attlee Agreement successfully on 27 January 1947 in London (Maung, 1989:22). On 12 February 1947, Aung San concluded a treaty with ethnic minorities at the Pin-Lon Conference with a view to forming united Burma (Maung, 1989:23). Since then February 12 is celebrated as Union Day. This treaty was approved in the Constitution of Burma and it was conceded by the Constituent Assembly on



September 14, 1947(Maung, 1989:23). After the London visit, Aung San formed the provisional government and avoided the communist in his cabinets which created conflict between AFPFL and Burmese Communist Party (BCP). Unfortunately, On July 19, 1947, Aung San with some of his cabinet members were assassinated which was engineered by U Saw, a former Prime minister of British Burma. Later, U Nu formed the new government and declared independence on 4 January 1948 based on Nu-Attlee Treaty (Maung, 1989:22).

### **3.1.2.History of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh emerged as a nation state in 1971 but the country has a long historical backdrop. Some records say that the word Bengal has derived from a tribe known as the Vanga, one of several Stone Age Indo-Aryan and Mongol groups that have migrated into the Indus and upper Ganges valet areas close to 1000 B.C. that is now West Bengal, Bihar and Assam (Lewis, 2011: 42). In ancient period, Bengal was divided into various kingdoms.Bangladesh was part of the Bengal province of India which was ruled by the same emperors from the Maurya to the Mughal era (Lewis, 2011:43).

**Table 3: Kingdoms and Dynasties in Ancient Bengal**

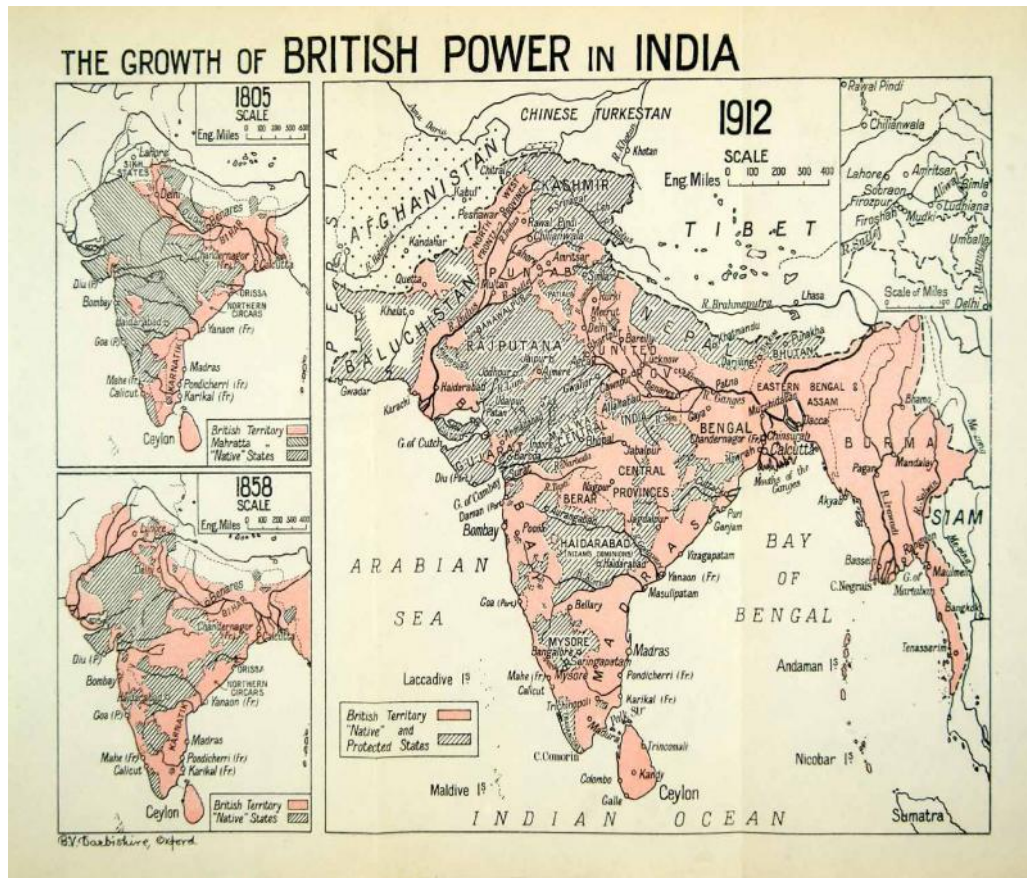
<b>Kingdoms and Dynasties</b>	<b>Ruling Age</b>
Maurya Dynasty	3rd century B.C.
Sunga	70 B.C.
Gupta	320-510
Pala Dynasty	750-1159
Sena Dynasty	1095-1245
Turkey Rule	1204-1324
Bengal Sultanate	1338-1538
Mughal Rule	1576-1757

**Source:**Compiled with the help of Lewis,D. (2011). Bangladesh: Politics, Economy and Civil Society, Cambridge University Press

### **Colonial phase of Bangladesh**

During the British Raj, the territory of India was expanded that propagated into Pakistan, upper Burma, and Singapore for a brief period of time. The map highlights British territory with pink and the Native States in Black spotted colour from 1805-1912.

**Map: 3 The Growth of British Power in India**



**Source:** Davies, C.(1959). An Historical Atlas of the Indian Peninsula, Oxford: UP, 2nd edition.

### Arrival of the British

The Portuguese were the first Europeans who reached Bengal for the purpose of trade during the fifteenth century. But it was British East India Company, founded in 1600, was given trading monopoly over India by the emperor. To make more profit the company began to abuse the right of free trade. In 1756, Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula assumed the throne and cancelled the right of the company to trade without taxation. In return Clive conspired with Mir Jafar and at the battle of Polashi on 23 June 1757 Mir Jafar gave way to the Company forces. Thus the defeat of Nawab at the Battle of Plassey facilitated the British rule in 1757. The British East India Company

pursued an “Indirect rule” based on local patronage and instigating one against other.

### **Direct British Rule**

The Mutiny of 1857<sup>1</sup> influenced the British government to take control of India from the Company. The first step of the British government was the 1861 Indian Councils Act which established a new executive council for the State of Bengal. Due to large territory, the British partitioned Bengal in 1905 and created two administrative units: East Bengal and Assam with capital Dhaka, on the other, West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The hidden aim was to curb resistance to British rule devising divide and rule policy. The All India Muslim League was formed in Dacca in 1906 aiming at preserving Muslim political interests in British India. The partitioning of Bengal irritated nationalist Hindus and anti-British Muslim which led to the Swadeshi movement by the Indian National Congress. At last, the partition of Bengal was abandoned in 1911.

In 1937, Huq became the Prime Minister of Bengal and allied with the Muslim League amid Hindu-Muslim disarray in British India. Huq presented the Lahore Resolution in 1940 proposing independent states in the eastern and northwestern subcontinent based on religious grounds. In 1943, the Muslim League formed a parliamentary government in Bengal with Sir Khawaja Nazimuddin and later H. S. Suhrawardy as its premier.

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<sup>1</sup>The Mutiny of 1857 also called Sepoy Mutiny was the first war of Independence against the rule of the British East India Company in India. The rebellion began on 10 May 1857 from Meerut by Indian Sepoys which rapidly spread to Delhi, Agra, Kanpur and Lucknow. But the revolt was unsuccessful which was suppressed by the British. It lasted for about 1 year and 6 months.

In 1946, the British authorities tried to keep British India united through a 'Cabinet Mission Plan'. But the Plan was doomed through the rejection of the Muslim league. In 1947, the British Government divided British India into two states - India and Pakistan (Lewis. 2011:42-57)

### **3.1.3. Colonial Relationship of then British India and Burma**

From the above discussion it can be said that both the countries were ruled by the British for a substantial period of time. And before that the Arakan province that is separated from the mainland Myanmar by the ArakanYoma mountain range had more collaboration with the west that covers Bangladesh now. There were trade routes and free movement of peoples before the British era (Morshed, 2011). Abrar (2018) says that "Over the last thousand years the expanse of land that now covers Chittagong has changed hands a good number of times between the feuding warlords and kings of adjoining regions of Bengal, Tripura and Arakan"(Abrar, Repatriation of Rohingyas). Actually, between 10 century AD to 1580 Chittagong, Sandip and Ramu were ruled by the Muslim Sultans of Bengal and the Arakanese Kings (Abrar, 2018). The power remained between the Sultans of Bengal and the Arakanese King. When Bengal was powerful the Arakan had been Bengal's superintendence. Again when Arakan became powerful Bengal was made its vassal state. Thus shifting of power had increased interaction between the peoples of the region including merchants and religious missionaries. So it can be said that Bengalis relationship with Myanmar especially with Arakan region went back to ancient times which has been fluctuated at different times.

**Map: 4 - Partition of India and Pakistan after the British Raj**



**Source:** [http://thebritishraj.weebly.com/uploads/2/7/4/27471501/4978109/\\_orig.png?293](http://thebritishraj.weebly.com/uploads/2/7/4/27471501/4978109/_orig.png?293)

The British annexed Burma (present-day Myanmar) through three Anglo-Burmese wars and Arakan (present Rakhine State) had been conceded to the British after the first Anglo-Burmese war. With the arrival of the British, the Burmese economy becomes a part of global market and also a part of the colonial economy. Many Burmese migrated from the northern heartland to the delta with a view to increasing rice production. At the same time, thousands of Indian laborers from Chittagong division and western India migrated to Burma and competed with the local Burmese for jobs. Thus most of the jobs went to indentured Indian laborers because of their

willingness to work with less money comparing the Burmese farmers. These patterns of seasonal migration increased after 1937 when Burma had become the province of British India. Thus the British created economic and social interaction between British Bengal and Burma (Morshed,2011). Besides, the Anglo-Burmese and Indians were also included in the civil service and the ethnic Burmese were almost barred from military service. As a result, the Burmese felt bitter about the British and the Indian migrants which instigated guerilla warfare against the British army of occupation.

#### **3.1.4. The Pakistan Period and the Emergence of Bangladesh**

The new Pakistani federation led by Governor General Muhammad Ali Jinnah was comprised with East Bengal as its eastern wing including Dhaka as the provincial capital. The two regions were separated from each other by more than a thousand miles. But soon after independence, the people of East Pakistan became disheartened with the policies of west Pakistani leaders. The first argument between the two provinces began in 1948 when Jinnah announced that Urdu should be the state language of Pakistan and in 1952 the Bengali Language Movement was the first collision with West Pakistan. The Awami League arose as the leading political power of the Bengali nation with its leader H. S. Suhrawardy. After nine years of establishment Pakistan promulgated the constitution in 1956 and the 1956 Constitution recognized Bengali as the State language and concluded dominion status of the country. However, Due to instability of Pakistani central government, the Pakistani military intervened in politics and Pakistan experienced military dictatorship from 1958 to 1969. During this time, Pakistani military applied severe political, economic and cultural discrimination against the East Pakistan including

imposing bans on Bengali literature, transferring money from East to West and the use of the East's foreign exchange surpluses to finance the West's imports. In 1966, Awami League President Sheikh MujiburRahman asserted the Six point Demand which is called the charter of Bengali's emancipation. Sheikh MujiburRahman was arrested but in 1969 he was released following 1969 mass uprising which ousted President Ayub Khan from power. After assuming power Yahya Khan gave election in December 1970. In the election, the Awami League secured an absolute majority winning 160 seats out of 162 from East Pakistan. And Bhutto's People's Party gained 81 out of 138 from West Pakistan ((Maniruzzaman.2009). But Yahya Khan was not interested to accept a Bengali-dominated Pakistan government and denied to transfer the power. In March 1971, negotiation took place but by this time the Pakistan government started military crackdown on March 25, 1971. In the violence about 30 lakh people died and millions fled to India as refugees. However, after nine month bloody struggle the Pakistani military surrendered and Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state in the world map on 16 December 1971(Lewis, 2011:69-73). After independence, Bangladesh took parliamentary democracy through the promulgation of 1972 constitution. Bangladesh, official name-the People's Republic of Bangladesh forms the largest and eastern part of the Bengal region. It shares land borders with India and Myanmar.

### **3.1.5. Relations between Pakistan and then Burma**

After the independence, the relationship between Burma and Pakistan were friendly and cooperative. Mohammad Ali Bogra, prominent Bengali politician was appointed



as Pakistan's first representative to Burma. In January 1950, Pakistan postponed recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the request of Burma so that Burma could be the first country to recognize the PRC. But in the late 1950's the so called Mujahid Movement strained the bilateral relations of the countries. It is claimed that prior to the Partition, the British forces left surplus arms and ammunition with Kassem Raja who provoked separatist tendencies among the Arakan Muslims and this led to numerous movements across the border between East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Burma (Morshed,2011,p.58). At that time, it is believed by then Burmese leadership that the Pakistan Government had secretly supported the movement through the district authorities of Chittagong and the Pakistan Embassy in Akyab (Sittwe). Although the Pakistan Government took steps to suppress the movement and finally jailed Kassem Raja, mistrust remained between the countries.

During the reign of Ayub khan in Pakistan and the regime of Ne win in Burma, the bilateral relations had improved significantly. The Burmese president visited the then East Pakistan in mid-February 1965. Ayub khan also visited Myanmar in 1965 and initiated a process that led to the agreement on the Naaf river border in the year 1966.

### **3.2. THE POST-COLONIAL PHASE**

Myanmar is the bordering neighbor of Bangladesh with whom it shares a common border of 271 kilometers. Just after independence, Bangladesh set up diplomatic relations with Myanmar at the highest level as the government and people of Myanmar had extended support for Bangladesh during the liberation war. As Myanmar was the 2<sup>nd</sup> bordering country of Bangladesh after India, the relationship with Myanmar was vital for Bangladesh. Bangladesh-Myanmar official relations began from 13 January 1972 following Myanmar's acknowledgment toward Bangladesh as a sovereign state. The Bangladesh government appointed senior diplomat K.M. Kaiser as its ambassador to Myanmar. After that many high level visit took place to cement bilateral ties of the countries having common borders and strict obedience to the policy of non-alignment.

#### **3.2.1. Sheikh Mujib Regime (1972-1975)**

After independence political support that means the recognition of Bangladesh as an independent state by other sovereign countries and economic assistance were urgent for the war-torn country Bangladesh. Myanmar was one of the first countries which recognized Bangladesh on 13 January 1972.<sup>2</sup> Following recognition Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mr. AbdusSamad made three day visit to Myanmar on 23 May 1972 for the first time. After the visit to Burma Foreign Minister Mr. AbdusSamad expressed that Burma had agreed to establish diplomatic ties at the embassy level and both the leaders had discussed on different areas including “trade,

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<sup>2</sup>Burma is the 7<sup>th</sup> nation to recognize Bangladesh after Bhutan, India, East Germany, Bulgaria, Poland and Mongollia. Source: Burma Recognizes Bangladesh. (1972 January 14), *The Bangladesh Observer*, p.1 and 6.

telecommunication, air link and port facilities” (Samad Back Home, 1972). Besides, Burmese Government had agreed to handover the cargoes those were off-loaded at the Burmese port during the liberation war. He also hoped that there was a vast opportunities of trade between the two countries. On 28 May 1972 a joint Communiqué issued concurrently from Dhaka and Yangon emphasizing on closer ties and development of bilateral relations based on “peaceful co-existence, non-alignment, and mutual respect for sovereignty and national dignity” (Sheikh,1998).

Besides, Bangladesh imported rice from Myanmar to meet occasional food deficits. Bangladesh Foreign minister visited Myanmar in July 1972 and Foreign Secretary in 1973 to finalize the dealings of rice (Ahmed, 2008:97). Sheikh Mujib also sent a special representative, ShamsulHaque, to gather support of the Myanmar government in favor of the Indo-Bangladesh joint Declaration to resolve the humanitarian issues resulting from the war with Pakistan (Ahmed, 2008:97). Again, Bangladesh Commerce and Foreign Trade Minister, Mr.A.H.M. Kamruzzaman visited Myanmar on 3 August 1973 to consult with several Burmese Ministers on bilateral trade and on 4 August both the countries signed a general trade agreement to develop economic relations between the two countries (“Bangladesh-Burma Trade Pact”,1973). The agreement was signed by Burma’s Trade Minister Dr.MaungLwin and his Bangladesh counterpart Mr.Kamruzzaman(“Bangladesh-Burma Trade Pact”,1973). Moreover, the visit of Burmese President Ne Win to Bangladesh had strengthened the growing friendly relations of the countries. President Ne Win made three-day visit to Bangladesh on 26 April 1974 who was accompanied by Foreign Minister U HLA Phon, members of the council of State Dr. Hla Han and Dr. Maung. Ne Win highlighted that Bangladesh and Myanmar were

“close neighbours” linked with topography, history and culture and the relationship would be interminable (Ahmed, 2008:97). These exchange of visits and border trade pact indicated warm political relations of the countries during Sheikh Mujib regime from 1972-1975.

### **3.2.2. Military Regimes (1976-1990)**

***ZiaurRahman’s Regime (1976-1981)***: In 1976 President ZiaurRahman came to power and subsequently many high level visits took place between the countries which consolidated bilateral relations. President ZiaurRahman visited Myanmar in July 1977 and this was the first visit of Bangladesh Head of State to Myanmar. Both the leaders had agreed to cooperate on various bilateral issues and to develop trade relations. But the relations with Burma had become multifaceted and distressed when The Burmese Intelligence claimed that a conspiracy had been made to assassinate the two leaders of Myanmar and Bangladesh. They also claimed that the Military of Bangladesh had been engaged in the plot with Muslim discontented peoples in the Arakan. The incident generated unrest and mutinies in the Bangladesh Armed Forces where a group of some officers opposed to President ZiaurRahman (Morshed, 2011). Besides, in the years 1977-1978, during the reign of Burmese military ruler Ne Win, Bangladesh for the first time experienced the refugee crisis due to Nagamin operation of Burma which is also known as Dragon King operation. Actually, it was a military operation conducted by the armed forces and immigration officials of then Burma to register citizens in northern Arakan (the present Rakhine state of Myanmar) and oust alleged immigrants from the area before national census. As a result, in the year 1978 about 200,000 Rohingya entered Bangladesh, although the Myanmar government claimed that the number was 150,000 (Ahmed, 2008:99).

So, at the time the political relations of the two countries came under strain. Subsequently many high level visits took place to solve the crisis. The Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh and Burma met in Dhaka from April 13 to 16 to talk on the crisis. Again Bangladesh Foreign Secretary TabarakHussain with nine members of delegation visited Rangoon for five days from 7 June to 11 June (“Team in Rangoon”,1978) During the visit, four rounds of talks had been held with the Burmese authorities led by Deputy Foreign Minister U Tin Ohn. They agreed to continue negotiation on the influx of refugees into Bangladesh (“Team in Rangoon”, 1978). The Bangladesh delegation had also meetings with Burmese president Ne win and Foreign Minister MyintMaung. After the visit the Foreign Secretary said that they had “extremely useful exchange of information and views with Burmese Leaders (“Dacca-Rangoon talks”, 1978). He also said that the Burmese government was interested to maintain good relation with Bangladesh and emphasized on settlement of the refugees. But the visit couldn’t make any progress to the refugee crisis. The Burmese delegation expressed hope to visit Bangladesh in the next month. Moreover, President Zia launched a campaign both in the UN and the Muslim countries to gather support for Bangladesh to repatriate these persons. On 7 July 1978 the 11-member Burmese delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister U Tin Ohn arrived in Dhaka to find amicable solution to the refugee problem (“Refugee Repatriation Begins”,1978).Three committees were formed to a) investigate the repatriation of refugees b) delimit land river boundaries c) articulate Border ground rules respectively. After two round of summit level talks the repatriation agreement was concluded on 9 July 1978 which was an important landmark in the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar (“Refugee Repatriation Begins”,1978).The

then Foreign secretary of Bangladesh Tabarak Hussain and Burmese delegation Deputy Foreign Minister U Tin Ohn signed the agreement in Dhaka. Under the agreement it was covered 'all the refugees' and expressed their repatriation would start by the end of next month August 1978 ("Refugee Repatriation Begins", 1978).

However, on 22 May 1979 Myanmar president Ne-win again made three-day state visit to Dhaka city and he was assisted by two members of the council of state Mr. Thaug Kyi and Dr. Hla Han, Foreign minister Mr. Myint Maung and Burmese ambassador in Bangladesh Mr. Thein Win. After a summit level talks between President Ne Win and Ziaur Rahman on 23 May Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an agreement on demarcation of the 123-mile land boundary between them ("Ne Win's Visit", 1979). Bangladesh Foreign Minister Professor Shamsul Huq and his Burmese counterpart Mr. Myint Maung signed the agreement on behalf of their respective countries. Both the leaders of the countries marked the agreement as another milestone in the friendly relations of the countries. Besides, mutual interest in trade and commerce were also reviewed during the exclusive meetings of the presidents ("Ne Win's Visit", 1979).

During the reign of Ziaur Rahman the first exodus of Rohingyas to Bangladesh had strained bilateral relations of the countries. But the government handled it successfully through the repatriation agreement on 9 July 1978. Moreover, the visit of Burmese President Ne Win had deepened the bilateral relations through the Land Boundary Agreement (1979) and Agreement to expand and develop trade relations.

***Ershad Regime (1982-1990):*** In 1981 after the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman, General Ershad assumed power in March 1982. He tried to take back

a resemblance of order in the Bangladesh Army. In the meantime, in February 1982, President AbdusSattar visited Myanmar and laid emphasis on enhancing and varying trade and developing economic co-operation between the two countries. On 19 May 1983, President H.M. Ershad also visited Yangon and both the leaders agreed to increase cooperation in the arenas of trade and commerce. On 12 August 1985, Dhaka and Yangon strengthened their ties with the authentication of clear-cut delineation of 123 miles of shared land boundary which was mutually settled by the Survey Departments of the two countries (“Ne Win’s Visit”, 1979). The final demarcation with 53 boundary pillars was completed following Land Boundary Demarcation Treaty signed by the two countries on 23 may 1979 (“Ne Win’s Visit”,1979). Actually, the implementation of land boundary agreement was a positive step in strengthening Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations. In November 1985, the foreign minister of Bangladesh paid an official visit to Burma to reoccupy the negotiations on the delimitation of the maritime boundary but there was no substantive progress (Tun, 2016). Moreover in 1988, President Ershad paid official visit to Burma but the visit was not able to make breakthrough on maritime boundary talks and commercial breakthrough (Tun, 2016). However, on 1 June 1989 three Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) were signed providing for joint project (government to government, government to private and private to private and cooperation within the private sector (FBCCI and UMCCI) (Tun,2016:5).

### **3.2.3. Democratic Regime (1991-2006)**

***Khaleda Zia regime (1991-1996):*** During the period the second massive Rohingya refugee influx to Bangladesh strained the bi-lateral relationship. In 1991-92, about 250,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution for the second time.

Bangladesh tried to resolve the issue diplomatically with the help of the international community but the refugee problem could not be resolved due to Myanmar's arrogance. On 21 November 1991, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mustafizur Rahman visited Myanmar to meet his Myanmar counterpart U Ohn Gyan ("Talks on Return of Myanmar", 1991). They held talks covering regional and bilateral issues. Especially the Foreign minister raised the Rohingya issue and pressed the Myanmar Government to arrange repatriation for the refugees. During the meetings it was decided that Bangladesh would provide the list of the refugees and Myanmar had agreed to repatriate the genuine Myanmar people after examining the list ("Talks on Return of Myanmar", 1991).

Besides, during the time the bilateral relation deteriorated severely following Myanmar border forces attack on BDR camp at Rijupara under Naikhongchhari upazila in Bandarban district on 21 December 1991 ("Myanmar Envoy Summoned", 1991). Myanmar Border Forces killed BDR Lance Naik Mosharraf Hossain, injured seven members of Bangladesh Rifles and looted arms and ammunition from the camp. Bangladesh foreign office summoned the Myanmar diplomat to protest against aggressive military actions and warned the envoy that "the incident was a violation of Border Arrangements Agreement 1978" ("Myanmar Envoy Summoned", 1991). Bangladesh urged Myanmar to stop such militant acts along the border and to take immediate action to restore peace along the border.

Eventually, the UNHCR came to prominence and negotiated with the Myanmar and Bangladesh Government to resolve the crisis and finally both the countries made an agreement for repatriation of the refugees on 28 April 1992 ("Myanmar Assures



peaceful”,1992). Myanmar Foreign Minister U OhnGyaw signed the agreement with his Bangladesh counterpart Mr.A.S.M.MostafizurRahman. Under the agreement Myanmar had agreed to take back those refugees who hold identity cards or other documents issued by Myanmar authorities. It had been mentioned that the repatriation of the Rohingyas would be begin on May 15 and about 5000 refugees from ten transit camps would be repatriated everyday aimed at completing in six months (“Myanmar Assures peaceful”,1992). At the time another agreement was signed between Bangladesh Ambassador in Myanmar Mr. MostafaFaruque Mohammad and the Myanmar Ambassador in Dhaka SoeMyint to work for the repatriation (“Myanmar Assures Peaceful”, 1992).The delegations of both the countries expressed satisfaction due to resolving the crisis amicably. Besides, the Bilateral Trade Agreement was concluded in 1994 which was remarkable event of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations (Rashid, 2015:332).

***Sheikh Hasina Period (1996-2000):*** During the regime the government emphasized on close link with neighboring countries. The government made a plan to extend the southern railway from Darshana border to Myanmar based on the scheme of ESCAP and Trans Asian Railway(“Darshana-Myanmar Rail Road”, 1996).

During the period the major success of Bangladesh government was the reintroduce of the repatriation process due to continuing pressure on Myanmar government by the Bangladesh government. In December 1999 about 200,000 Rohingya’s were returned to their motherland and another 21,000 were remained in Bangladesh (Ahmed,2008:98).This reflects Bangladesh government’s matured and effective handing of a large crisis with a neighbor. The another successful event was the Land Boundary Treaty with Myanmar which was signed on 12 November 1998 in

Myanmar ( “Land Boundary Treaty”,1998).The long-awaited treaty was signed by Bangladesh Foreign Minister AbdusSamad Azad and Myanmar Foreign Minister U OhnGyaw. Before the treaty on 17 January 1997 a meeting was held between the survey delegations of Bangladesh and Myanmar at the Survey department of Myanmar. In the meeting it has been decided that a joint survey team would visit the bordering Taungbro and would demarcate the seven undermined pillars (no.31, 34,35,36,38 and 39) (“Dhaka-Yangon Survey”, 1997). Actually, the treaty was the product of a series of consultations between the officials of both the countries since 1979.

***Khaleda Zia Regime (2001-2006):*** At the period the bilateral relations were strengthened by many Ministerial level visits between the two countries. The chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) of the Union of Myanmar visited Bangladesh on 17-18 December 2002(Ahmed, 2008). Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia also visited Myanmar on 19-21 March 2003 to reinforce trade, economic and cultural relations between the two neighbors (Rashid, 2015:332). During the visit, both the countries approved the signing of three Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) on Account Trade, formation of Joint Trade Commission and Coastal Shipping to reinforce bilateral economic cooperation(“Khaleda-Thaw Shwe Talks”, 2003).The visit was also fruitful to accelerate bilateral trade through avoiding double taxation. Besides, both the countries agreed to establish direct road link named “Myanmar- Bangladesh Friendship Road” between Dhaka and Yangon (Rashid, 2015:332). In all, there were 10 agreements between the two countries, but the Boundary Agreement delineating the borders of the two countries was significant. And many of the rest

had remained only as paper exercise. During the visit, Bangladesh trade fair took place in Myanmar on 20 March 2003 which was inaugurated by Bangladesh Prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia (Rashid, 2015:332). A Bangladeshi cultural group comprised of 116 members performed their cultural show for four days. The Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and Bangladesh–Myanmar Business Promotion Council (BMBPC) arranged the program and hosted luncheon for Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. The visit was fruitful to accelerate bilateral trade through avoiding double taxation. Besides, both the countries agreed to establish direct road link named “Myanmar- Bangladesh Friendship Road” between Dhaka and Yangoon ((“Khaleda-Thaw Shwe Talks”,2003). Furthermore, on February 24, the Foreign minister of Myanmar, U Nyan Win, visited Dhaka for three days to discuss with the Foreign minister of Bangladesh, Morshed Khan with a view to expanding bilateral collaboration. They discussed trade and commerce issues and both the governments decided to construct a 133-kilometer highway connecting Buthidaung of Rakhine State with Ramu in Bangladesh’s Chittagong district (Ahmed, 2008:106). Again on May 19-20, 2006 Bangladesh and Myanmar held foreign ministry level official consultation in Yangoon covering the issues-Border trade, cross-border communications, Rohingya Repatriation and easing Visa regime (Rashid,2015:332). Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin led the consultation with his Myanmar counterpart U Kyaw Thu. At the meeting Bangladesh side focused on strengthening border trade ensuring all facilities and launching swift repatriation of the remaining 21,172 Rohingya refugees who were staying in Cox’s Bazar camp since 1990’s(Dhaka-Yangon FM-level talk, 2006).

#### **3.2.4. Civil-Military Regime (2007-2008)**

During the Caretaker government of Bangladesh, many important high official visits took place between the countries. At the invitation of head of the Bangladesh Caretaker Government, Maung Aye, Commander- in-Chief of the Army visited Bangladesh with 55 members of the delegation (Rashid, 2015:333). They dealt with strengthening bilateral relations in various sectors. At the time the road link agreement was concluded on 27 July 2007 after two years of intense negotiations demonstrating explicit warmth of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations (Rashid, 2015:333). The caretaker government's adviser for communication Major M.A. Matin and the Myanmar construction minister Major Gen. Saw Tun signed the agreement on behalf of their respective governments. Besides, the Myanmar government shipped approximately one thousand metric tons of rice for the 'Sidr' affected people which hit Bangladesh southeastern coastal areas on November 15, 2007 (Ahmed, 2008:106). Moreover, during the time the exploration of gas and oil in the disputed area of Bay of Bengal by the naval forces of Myanmar have raised tension in the bilateral relation of the countries. On November 1, 2008 Myanmar started exploration for oil and gas within 50 nautical miles south west of St. Martin Island, in Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Navy challenged the counterpart for intruding in the area which escalated the maritime dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar (Ahmed, 2008:106). Bangladesh Government summoned the Myanmar envoy in Bangladesh to protest thus activities and sent a high level delegation to Myanmar.

### **3.3. Concluding Remarks**

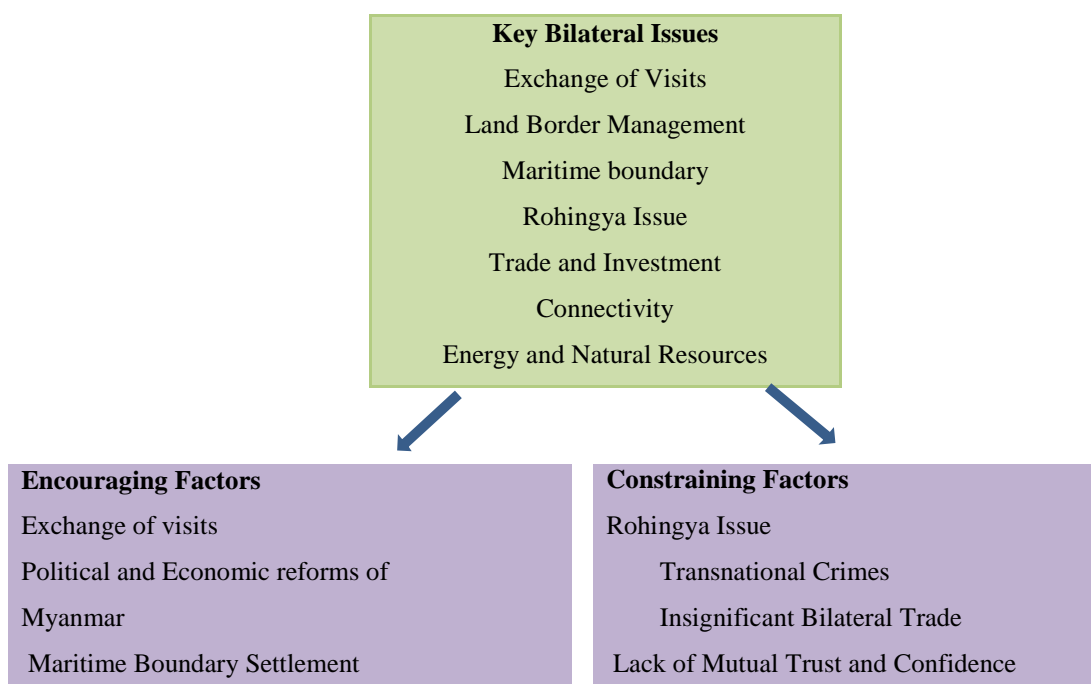
In sum, it can be said that Bangladesh and Myanmar share age-old common history, culture and economic ties. The Arakan province that is separated from the mainland Myanmar by the Arakan Yoma mountain range had more collaboration with the west that covers Bangladesh now. There were trade routes and free movement of peoples before the British era. During British period, both the countries were ruled by the British for a considerable period of time. At the time, thousands of Indian laborers from Chittagong division and western India migrated to Burma which quickly displaced the Burmese farmers. After the independence of Bangladesh, Burma recognized Bangladesh and embassy level relations were established soon. After that numerous high profile visits took place to cement bilateral ties. Especially Burmese president Ne Win's visit to Bangladesh for two times in the years 1974 and 1979 had strengthened the bilateral relations of the countries. But the bilateral relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh was not encouraging enough due to primarily some disputes, e.g. closed economy of Myanmar, military rule, maritime dispute, and long decades Rohingya conflict and ethnic violence. However, after independence Bangladesh-Burma Trade pact (1973), Refugees Repatriation Agreement (1978), Land Boundary Agreement (1979) and Bilateral Border Trade Agreement (1994) were significant in the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BANGLADESH- MYANMAR RELATIONS (2009-2013): POLITICAL DIMENSION

This chapter discovers the dynamics of contemporary bilateral political relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar from the period 2009 to 2013. This period is vital because during this time Myanmar gained major political reforms that bear significance in the context of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Besides, In 2009 Bangladesh regained democracy through the victory of civilian leader, Sheikh Hasina. Moreover, at the time some bilateral issues like the peaceful settlement of maritime dispute in 2012, Myanmar’s democratic movement have created optimism for developing bilateral relations of the countries. But at the same time, the sectarian violence of 2012 in Rakhine state has raised tension between the countries. So this chapter examines in what issues Bangladesh-Myanmar political relations were developed and in what issues the relations were threatened.

**Figure 2: Conceptual Clarity of the Study**



**Source:** Developed by the Author

## **4.1. Bangladesh-Myanmar Political Relations: Key Issues and Challenges**

### **4.1.1. Exchange of Visits**

Exchange of visits is very significant for strengthening bilateral relations of the countries. After the independence of Bangladesh, Bangladesh set up diplomatic relations with Myanmar in January 1972 following Myanmar's recognition to Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government appointed eldest diplomat K.M. Kaiser as its ambassador to Myanmar. After that numerous high official visits took place between Bangladesh and Myanmar which consolidated Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Bangladesh started political relations with Myanmar based on 'peaceful co-existence, non-alignment and mutual respect for sovereignty and national dignity' (Rashid, 2015:334). In 2009 after assuming power by Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh-Myanmar political relations started with positive mood following two high profile visits to Myanmar.

### **Foreign Minister's Visit to Myanmar**

After assuming power by Sheikh Hasina on 6 January 2009, Bangladesh Foreign Minister DipuMoni visited Myanmar and held official talks with Myanmar Foreign Minister U HyanWinz on 14-17 May 2009 (Rashid, 2015:334). Both the Foreign Minister debated a lot of issues including – The repatriation of Rohingya refugees, Relaxation of visa requirement, Demarcation of the maritime boundary, Acceleration of the banking services, Increasing border trade, Road link between the two countries up to china, Direct air link, Exporting surplus power to Bangladesh

and Border fencing etc. (Rashid, 2015:334). Bangladesh Foreign Minister again visited Myanmar in January 2011 to attend 13<sup>th</sup> ministerial level meeting of BIMSTEC and she conversed with a private company in Myanmar to purchase hydropower from adjacent Rakhine state (Rashid, 2015:335).

### **Prime Minister's Visit to Myanmar**

On 5-7 December 2011, the official visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Myanmar began a new era in bi-lateral relations. The visit took place at a time when the Myanmar government had been transforming toward democracy. The Prime Minister met with the President of Myanmar on 6 December 2011 and both the leaders agreed to enhance collaboration in the arenas of trade and investment, defense, energy, agriculture and border supervision (Rashid, 2015:335).

Bangladesh Prime Minister also met with Myanmar Foreign Minister U WunnaMaungLwin. During the visit, many agreements were signed to enhance connectivity and other areas. Both the countries reached an agreement to form Joint Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers and an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish Joint Business Council between the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) and Union of Myanmar Chambers of Commerce and Industries (UMFCCI) (Foreign office briefing notes, 2011, December, Issue, 4, web: <http://www.mofa.gov.bd>.)

### **Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) between Bangladesh and Myanmar**

On 14-15 June 2013, the 7<sup>th</sup> round of Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) between Bangladesh and Myanmar took place at Nay Pyi of Myanmar aiming at strengthening bilateral relations, minimizing differences and exploring potential



areas for further cooperation. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mr. Md. Shahidulhaque led the delegation which was comprised of 14 senior officials from different ministries. The key agenda of the FOC were - immigration matters, border management, energy cooperation, connectivity and transportation, bilateral trade, cultural cooperation, defense cooperation, control of illicit drug trafficking and cooperation under sub-regional forums.

**Table4: The Outcome of 7<sup>th</sup> Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) between Bangladesh and Myanmar**

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Immigration Matters</b>	Myanmar assured to start the repatriation process and Bangladesh proposed to establish a Joint Committee regarding the repatriation process.
<b>Border Management</b>	Both the countries agreed to work together against trans-boundary crimes, illegal drugs and arms trade and money-laundering. Besides, both the countries agreed to increase regular interaction between the two border forces and civil administrations of bordering districts.
<b>Connectivity and Transportation</b>	Both the countries agreed to sign the revised air service agreement and to conclude the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). They also emphasized on establishing direct coastal shipping link and tri-national road link matters.

<b>Bilateral Trade</b>	Myanmar asked to reduce tax and addressed issues relating difficulties in the port. The meeting of Joint Working Group on Border trade had been fixed on 22 June 2013. Both countries expected to raise bilateral trade up to 500 million.
<b>Defence Cooperation</b>	Both the countries expressed satisfaction with the present level of defence cooperation and agreed to extend joint initiative to strengthen cooperation.
<b>Energy Cooperation</b>	Myanmar assured to give priority to Bangladesh after meeting domestic demand.
<b>Cultural Cooperation</b>	Both the countries agreed to renew the agreement on cultural cooperation which was expired in 2012 and to conclude an MOU on cultural Exchange program.
<b>Control of Illicit Drug Trafficking</b>	Bangladesh invited Myanmar's narcotics department to Bangladesh and proposed Myanmar to held security dialogue under FOC.

<sup>1</sup>**Source:** Adapted from Rahman, M. (2013). A Brief Presentation on 7<sup>th</sup> Foreign Office Consultation between Bangladesh and Myanmar, BISS Journal.

In the context, in response to the significant outcomes of that visits this study interviewed experts. Expert 1 in this regard argued that “Bilateral relations had improved after the visit, but the Rohingya crisis and Myanmar’s attitude and policy position deteriorated bilateral ties again”.<sup>3</sup> He also mentioned that “both the

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<sup>3</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.

countries have failed to maintain the regular visits which is linked with multiple factors such as lack of trust and confidence, lack of political will and more importantly the Rohingya crisis. Besides, he identified long military (Tatmadaw) rule in Myanmar is a major barrier to develop friendly relations between the two neighbors”.<sup>4</sup> However, some experts argued that hardly few outcome has attained through the visits. For example, Experts 2,3 and 6 argued that “There were no visible outcomes of that visits. The visits were limited to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding’s (MOUs)”.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Experts 4 and 5 opine that “the visits launched collaboration in the arenas of trade and investment, defense, energy and border management. Both the countries agreed to work together against trans-boundary crimes, illegal drugs and arms trade and money-laundering”.<sup>6</sup> Besides, both the countries agreed to increase regular interaction between the two border forces and civil administrations of bordering districts.

From interview data and literature analysis, it is observed that during the period (2009-2013), the visit of high authority made a significant progress to the political relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar. The visit launched a new age of relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Through the visit both the leaders make consensus to increase collaboration in the fields of trade and investment, security, energy and border management. Besides, the foreign office consultation that took place in 2013 also made progress to develop the political relation of the countries. But the experts emphasize on maintaining regular visit to develop the bilateral relationship.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on April, June 2021.

<sup>6</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

## 4.2. Rohingya Refugee Issue

The long decade Rohingya<sup>7</sup> conflict is the dominant issue in the bilateral political relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar. The term “Rohingya” has been derived from the word “Rohang” which is the former name of the Arakan Province. But, the Burmese historians and academics deny the historical origin of Rohingyas and term these people as Bengali immigrants. They are not considered Myanmarese citizens as per the 1982 Citizenship Act.<sup>8</sup>Parnini pointed out that the origin of the Rohingyas went back to the early 7<sup>th</sup> century when Arab Muslim merchants started settlement in the area (Parnini, 2012). In fact, they have their own language, tradition, and culture that had been built up in Arakan by their long and historic settlements. But after independence in 1948, the Government of Burma has refused the Rohingya’s historical claims and denied their recognition as ethnic group by 1982 Burma citizenship Law.<sup>9</sup>After the independence of Bangladesh, Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar in 1978 following the ‘Nagamin’ (Dragon King) operation of the Myanmar army. During the 1970’s Naga-min operation pushed about 250,000 Rohingyas into Bangladesh. Later in 1991-1992 about 250,000

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<sup>7</sup>The term “Rohingya” refers to a distinct ethnic group who lives in Rakhine state of Myanmar and speaks Rohingya or Ruaingga, a dialect that is different from others in Myanmar. The majority of Rohingyas are Muslims and the rest are Hindus.

<sup>8</sup>This act defines that according to the treaty of Yandabo, signed on 24 February 1826 which brought to an end the First Anglo Burmese war(1824-1826), anyone who was not a part of Burmese Kingdom, he/she and his/her descendants would not be provided the citizenship of Myanmar (Desai,1939,P.1).

<sup>9</sup>Section (2) of the 1982 Burma citizenship law has defined a national as a person belonging to the Burmese race such as Kachine, Karen, Kayah, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan of the state and persons belonging to such racial groups who have settled in territories now included the state as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1824 AD. The Rohingyas do not belong to any ethnic race as described by Section (2) of the 1982 Burma citizenship law.

Rohingyas entered Bangladesh to escape persecution (Yesmin, 2016, pp.78-80).The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) sheltered them with the support of United Nations.

In June 2012 another Rohingya exodus occurred following a new wave of communal violence in Myanmar which left 57 Rohingyas dead and about 100,000 Rohingyas displaced (*The Daily Star*, 2012,November 16). Many Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh though the Government of Bangladesh took hard position to receive Rohingyas. At the time Rohingya issue has strained Bangladesh-Myanmar relations which created tension in the border area of Bangladesh. Moreover, human smuggling was rambling through the sea route. Hundreds of boats with Rohingya were found for Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Myanmar was criticized by the international community but no differences were demonstrated on the issue.Myanmar established an investigation committee but the committee failed to recognize the Rohingya community or to ensure their rights.

In terms of Rohingya repatriation, both the countries signed the repatriation agreement on 9 July 1978. Under the repatriation agreement the operation started on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1978 and ended on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1979 involving a total of 187,250 refugees repatriation to Arakan (Abrar,2011:8). Following the 1991-1992 Rohingya influx, the first repatriation took place without the involvement of UNHCR on 22 September 1992. On 8 October 1992 both the UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh reached an agreement allowing the UN agency in the repatriation process. Under the agreement two rounds of repatriation took place on 12 and 31 October1992 with UNHCR's supervision. After that several rounds of repatriation took place in the years 1994 and 1995 but many of the repatriated

Rohingyas returned to Bangladesh from 1996 to 1998 with thousands of new Rohingyas. From the year 1992 to 2005, it is assumed that approximately 2,36,599 Rohingyas were repatriated to their motherland (Ahmed, 2010,p.101). After that many ministerial level talks took place but therepatriation process didn't commence.

**Table 5: Number of Repatriated Rohingya Refugees**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
1978-1979	187,250
1992-2005	236,599

**Source:** Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission

In Bangladesh, there are two permanent camps residing 32,979 Rohingya refugees namely 'Kutupalong' and 'Nayapara' camps in Ukhia and TeknafUpazila respectively.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there is no official statistics of illegal or undocumented Rohingyas who are living illegally outside the refugee camps. In the last year, following 25 August attack on Border Guard Police of Myanmar by ArakanRohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the Myanmar army has carried out a bloody crackdown in Rakhine which caused a major influx of Rohingyas to Bangladesh. It is estimated that about 700,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh following the brutal military campaign of Myanmar since 25 August 2017 and at present about 10 lakh Rohingyas are living in Bangladesh including 300,000 other Rohingyas who entered Bangladesh in the previous years (*The Daily Star*, 2018, February 17).

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<sup>10</sup>Data collected from public relations department of Bangladesh Police Headquarters in 2016.

The settlement of the vast number of Rohingya refugees is burden for the small economy country, Bangladesh. Moreover, they are posing security dilemmas for the host country, Bangladesh. The following table shows the security threats emanated from Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

**Table 6: Security Threats Emanating from Rohingyas in Bangladesh**

<b>Security Issues</b>	<b>Particulars</b>
<b>Demographic Issue</b>	The continuous arrival and the high birth rate of Rohingyas in the camps are causing demographic change particularly in Cox's bazar which is adding extra pressure on the existing population problem of Bangladesh.
<b>Economic Concern</b>	Rohingyas are occupying local job market. They are working in local hotels, motels and ports. Besides, some Rohingya refugees are threatening the countries overseas labour market. They are going to Middle east countries by using fake Bangladeshi passports that are causing humiliations to the foreign Bangladeshi nationals following their arrests of troublesome and unethical behavior and actions.
<b>Organized Crimes</b>	Many Rohingyas are involved in illegal trade, drug and human trafficking. There is a trafficking network between undocumented Rohingyas and some

	Myanmar people to conduct the crimes.
<b>Environmental Threats</b>	Deforestation is the main environmental threats in the Cox's Bazar region. Bangladesh has lost significant area of reserve forest about 2000 hectares of forest at the purpose of sheltering the Rohingyas( <i>The Daily Star</i> , 2019, April 19). Besides, the refugees are habitually cutting off trees and destroying forests to compensate fuel demand in the Bandar ban and Cox's Bazaar areas which are causing severe damage to Bangladesh's environment and bio-diversity.
<b>Societal Problems</b>	Rohingyas are engaged in various crimes like killing, stealing, robbery, using drug that are decaying social values, law and order situation of the country.

**Source:** Compiled with the help of Sultana, 2017 and Uddin, 2014

In the context, the study interviewed the experts. Expert 2 in this regard remarked that "It is the Rohingya issue which is affecting border security and stability in the border areas of Bangladesh and Myanmar".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.



Besides, expert 1 remarked that “The Rohingya crisis has become a security threat for Bangladesh. The Rohingyas are not only involved with criminal activities but also they are engaged with different terrorist groups. That’s why they are perceived as radical groups by the host neighbors”.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of Rohingya repatriation, all the experts claimed that in spite of the accomplishment of many bilateral agreements on Rohingya repatriation, the repatriation is not yet commenced due to the lack of commitment of Myanmar government.

Expert 3 in this regard remarked that “Both the countries have signed many agreements regarding Rohingya crisis but due to the nature of not keeping promises of Myanmar authority the crisis is still prevalent.”<sup>13</sup>

Expert 4 in this regard emphasized that “A strong political will of the Myanmar authority is essential to resolve the Rohingya refugee crisis”.<sup>14</sup>

Expert 5 also added that “the Bangladesh government is trying her best to resolve the bilateral disputes but the response from Myanmar government is very sluggish”.<sup>15</sup>

All of the experts suggested that the cooperation of Myanmar government along with effective regional and global pressure on Myanmar is inevitable to resolve

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<sup>12</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.

<sup>13</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on April 2021.

<sup>14</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

the Rohingya crisis. In addition, Expert 6 emphasized that “democracy and political stability in Myanmar is imperative for resolving the Rohingya crisis”.<sup>16</sup>

From the interview data and content analysis it is apparent that the Rohingya issue is one of the vexing issues between Bangladesh and Myanmar that is impeding the bilateral relations since the 1970s. The refugees are being involved in criminal activities including terrorism, drug and human trafficking, smuggling, robbery and other organized crimes which threaten security and stability of the country. Moreover, Rohingya refugees are going to third country through fraud Bangladeshi passport and their illegal activities in that countries are affecting the image of Bangladesh (Haque, 2010: 13).

#### **4.3. Maritime Boundary**

Bangladesh and Myanmar are doorstep neighbors sharing both land and sea boundary. The Maritime zones of the countries in the Bay of Bengal were not delimited and the longstanding debate over maritime dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar had been affecting bilateral relations for many years. The first initiative to resolve the dispute was taken by Bangladesh and Myanmar in July 1974 which takes several years till 1986. From 1974 to 1986, eight series of bilateral dialogues were held to demarcate territorial water, exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and continental shelf. The situation became deteriorated when both the countries were inviting foreign companies to explore natural resources in the Maritime area in November 2008. Again from the year 2008 to 2010, the second period of six rounds of consultations had taken place but ended with no solution. Bangladesh demanded equitable solution taken into account the unique geographical and geological factors

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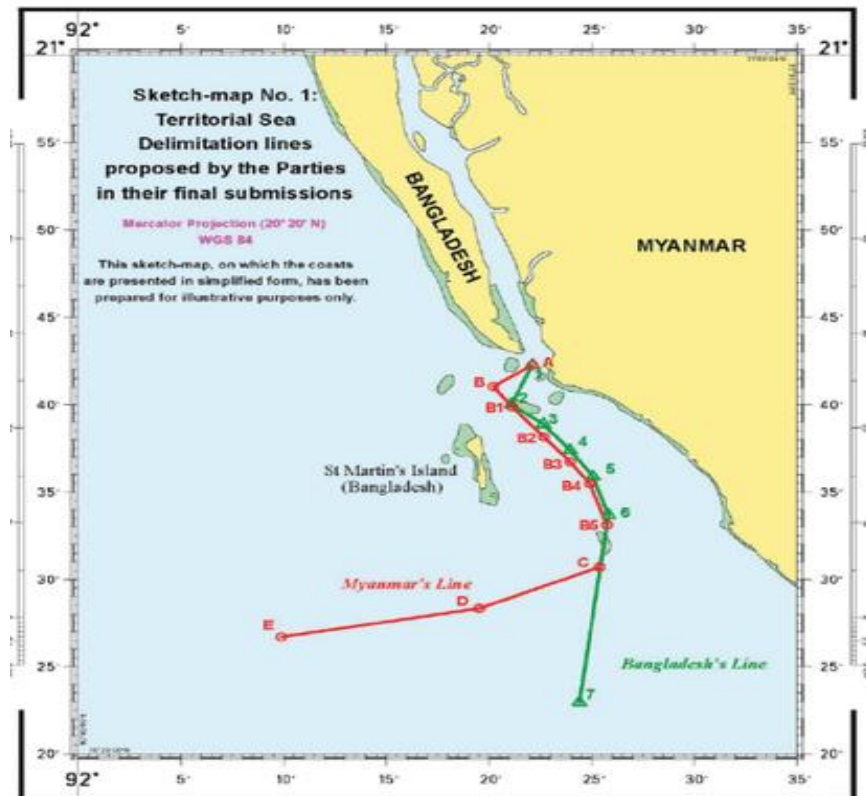
<sup>16</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on April 2021.

of Bay of Bengal. On the other hand, Myanmar proposed equidistance method which allows Bangladesh to have access to 130 nm sea area out of its legal entitlements of 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone and more than 400 nautical miles continental shelf (Alam, 2013:5) This disagreement regarding the demarcation of maritime boundary created tension between the countries.

**Maritime Judgement:** After the failure of resolving the issue bilaterally the Government of Bangladesh decided to settle the issue through compulsory dispute settlement procedures under UNCLOS. On 08 October 2009, Myanmar was issued the notice of arbitration under part XV of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea for delimitation of territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in accordance with international law (Ibid). After that, the case was conferred to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) with the consent of both parties. On 14 December 2009, the case was acknowledged by the tribunal as 16<sup>th</sup> case. Two ad-hoc judges were employed by the parties: Judge Thomas Mensah from Bangladesh and Judge Bernard Oxman by Myanmar including the 21 members of the tribunal (Alam 2013:6). Following the rules of the tribunal, both the parties submitted their written pleadings before the tribunal and the oral hearing commenced from 08-24 September 2011 (Ibid).

## Map 5: Joint Submission of Maritime Boundaries on behalf of Bangladesh and Myanmar

Figure 1: Joint Submission of Maritime Boundaries for Adjudication



**Source:** Adapted from Balaram, R.A. (2012). Case Study: The Myanmar and Bangladesh Maritime Boundary Dispute in the Bay of Bengal and Its Implications for South China Sea Claims, *Journal of current Southeast Asian Affairs*.

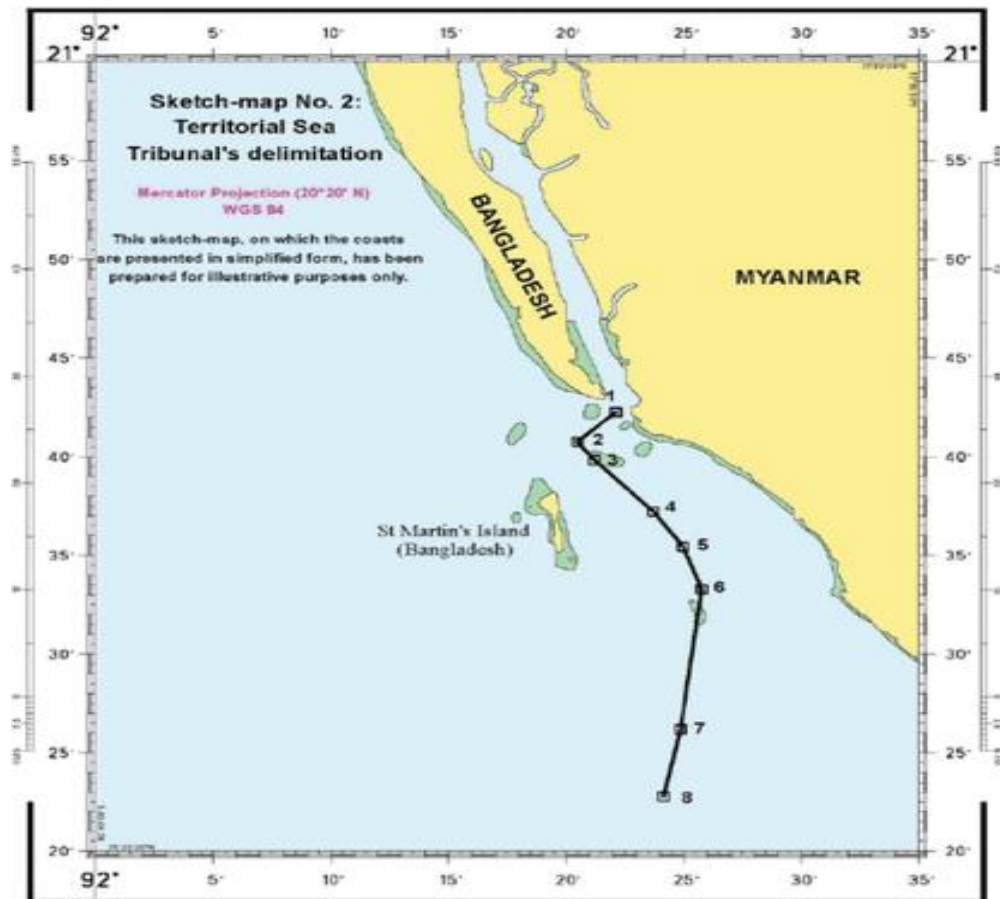
<https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341203100304>

After reviewing all historical and relevant documents, the tribunal finally announced its judgement on 14 March 2012. The Tribunal made a judgement on the principle of equity which was the demand of Bangladesh. The Judgement awarded Bangladesh 200 miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) following the natural extension of the demarcation line on a 215 degree angle. It also provided a significant share of the

outward continental shelf beyond 200 miles. The Tribunal also granted 12 mile territorial sea (TS) around St Martins Island in Cox's Bazaar district.

**Map 6:International Tribunal Final Delimitation of Territorial Sea**

Figure 2: International Tribunal Final Delimitation of Territorial Sea



**Source:** Adapted from Balam, R.A. (2012). Case Study: The Myanmar and Bangladesh Maritime Boundary Dispute in the Bay of Bengal and Its Implications for South China Sea Claims, *Journal of current Southeast Asian Affairs*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341203100304>

Actually, the Tribunal has awarded Bangladesh over 1,11,000 square kilometers of sea area and 1,71,832 square kilometers to Myanmar(Rashid,2015:339). The ITLOS drew lines over the water and allocated Territorial Sea incorporating 12 nautical miles (22.2 Km) from the St Martins Island, 200 nautical miles (370 kms) of

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (about 486 kms from Chittagong) and also Continental Shelf beyond 200 nautical miles to Bangladesh (Alam, 2013:1).

In the context, Experts 4 and 5 remarked that “The peaceful settlement of Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime dispute in the Bay of Bengal in 2012 is marked as a great achievement in the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar. The solution has opened new opportunities for both the countries to start coastal shipping and maritime trade”.<sup>17</sup>

In the same perspective, Expert 1 explained that “To accelerate maritime cooperation both the countries should emphasize on joint maritime exploration that depends on the resolution of Rohingya and the political will of Myanmar government”.<sup>18</sup>

In this regard Experts 2,3 and 6 mentioned that “It is true that the maritime boundary settlement is a great achievement for the countries that facilitates maritime cooperation. But, to accelerate maritime cooperation both the countries should work together through enabling blue economy”.<sup>19</sup>

It is obvious from the analysis that the maritime boundary settlement of 2012 has created potential areas of maritime cooperation. But in the respect joint maritime exploration is essential to enhance cooperation along with the resolution of the Rohingya crisis.

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<sup>17</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

<sup>18</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.

<sup>19</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on April, June 2021.

#### **4.4. Political and Economic Reforms in Myanmar**

After having independence from the British in January 1948, Myanmar's journey towards establishing a new democratic government was not smooth. Soon after independence the country faced rebellion from different ethnic minority such as Karrens, Kachins and Shans who wanted to secede from the Union and internal conflict within its political leaders. In 1962 following a military coup by General Ne Win, the country has undergone through some forms of military dictatorship like Revolutionary Council and later Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) which led the country to a 26 years-era of isolation and that was called 'Burmese way to Socialism'. In 1988 Ne Win's military regime was replaced by General Than Shwe who named his military government as 'State Law and Order Restoration Council'. In 1997 Than Shwe renamed it as 'State Peace and Development Council' (SPDC) which continued military rule till 2010.

In 2010, after the replacement of military rule by civilian government, Myanmar has undergone through major changes. Actually, the foundation of reform can be traced back to the 'Seven-point roadmap to democracy'<sup>20</sup> declared by SPDC in 2003. The actual democratic reforms were launched by the new government since March 2011 including –The release of Aung San SuuKyι, Establishment of the National Human Rights Commission and Relaxation of press control etc.

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<sup>20</sup>The steps of the roadmap involved- Reconvening the National Convention to finalise the principles for the new constitution, drafting a new constitution, organizing national referendum on the constitution, conducting free and fair election for parliaments, convening parliament under the new constitution and finally a modern and Democratic nation. (Yousuf.A.2009) Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: The Context of Political and Economic Reforms in Myanmar, BISS Journal, Vol.30.Number,3).

The key political developments are shown in the following table

**Table 7: Remarkable Political Reforms in Myanmar from 2010-2013**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Remarkable Democratic Reforms</b>
<b>2010</b>	<p><b>November:</b> The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) came to power through the election replacing military rule. And after the election, Aung San SuuKyi was released from house arrest.</p>
<b>2011</b>	<p><b>March:</b> TheinSein took oath as president of the civilian government.</p> <p><b>August:</b> Aung San SuuKyi got permission to leave Rangoon for the purpose of political visit and she met President TheinSein in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital city.</p> <p><b>November:</b> Myanmar was allowed to chair the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) group in 2014.</p> <p><b>December:</b> Hillary Clinton, State secretary of United States visited Myanmar and met President TheinSein and Aung San SuuKyi. Besides, for the first time President TheinSein approved law permitting peaceful demonstrations. Burmese authorities also signed a peace treaty with Shan insurgents and stopped military operation against Kachininsurgents. The NLD party re-registered as a political party to participate in parliamentary by-elections.</p>
	<p><b>April:</b> The NLD took part in parliamentary by-elections for the first time which gained 43 seats out of 45 seats in the elections. The United States</p>



<p><b>2012</b></p>	<p>and the European Union responds by Myanmar to suspend sanction and the EU opened an office in Rangoon.</p> <p><b>September:</b> President TheinSein visited the US and after a few days Aung San SuuKyi also visited the country to collect a Congressional Medal of Honour.</p> <p><b>November:</b> For the first time Barack Obama, President of US visited Myanmar. <b>December:</b> For the first time the government allowed the private newspapers in almost 50 years from April 2013.</p>
<p><b>2013</b></p>	<p><b>January:</b> The government removed prohibition on public meetings of more than five people. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recommenced loans to Myanmar for its socio-economic development.</p> <p><b>February:</b> TheinSein as head of state first visited the European Countries.</p> <p><b>April:</b> The European Union removed its embargo on trade and economy except arms selling following Myanmar's political reforms.</p>

**Source:** Compiled with the help of Daily Newspapers – The New York Times

(American Newspaper) and The Daily Star ( Bangladeshi Newspaper).

These political reforms in Myanmar create a new opportunity for Bangladesh to establish a cooperative relation. Through political development like holding parliamentary election on 9 July 2012 and the presidential election on 08 November 2015, Myanmar has reached prominent position in international politics. Though it is claimed that such reforms are not enough to undermine the supremacy of the

military in the political and economic sphere of the country but it is an opportunity to break the army's long-term supremacy on governing process of Myanmar.

In the context the study interviewed the experts. In response to the question following the political and economic reforms of Myanmar, what kind of steps Bangladesh has taken to develop cooperation with Myanmar-Experts 4 and 5 opined that "Following the political and economic reforms in Myanmar, government to government diplomacy and negotiation had strengthened but it has been threatened due to the Rohingya crisis".<sup>21</sup>

In the context, Experts 1,2,3 and 6 remarked that "It is true that the military with veto power is still dominant force in the politics of Myanmar but the new democratic government is trying to reshape its external outlook towards neighboring countries. Being a close neighbor, Bangladesh can utilize the chance to develop political and economic relations with Myanmar".<sup>22</sup>

Actually, in spite of having the tremendous influence of military the new democratic governance has enhanced the chance to improve bilateral relations with Myanmar. During the military regime, the country was not interested to share its natural resources with others. But now through the economic reforms like opening market and encouraging foreign direct investment, the country is going to be connected to the global economy and also interested to share its natural resources. Being a close neighbor, Bangladesh can utilize the chance to develop economic relations with Myanmar.

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<sup>21</sup> The Interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

<sup>22</sup> The Interview was conducted in Dhaka on April, June 2021.

#### 4.5. Bilateral Trade and Investment

In spite of being close neighbors, the trade volume between Bangladesh and Myanmar are not satisfactory due to low volume of trade, lack of diversification etc. Trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar reached around \$100 million in the financial year 2012-13(Uddin, 2014:7). At the year Bangladesh's exports to Myanmar remained worth of US\$13.67 million whereas imports US\$ 84 million (Uddin, 2014:7). Actually, as the neighboring country, the bilateral trade figure between Bangladesh and Myanmar is insignificant. The following figure shows that the volume of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral trade from the Fiscal year (2008-2009) to (2012-2013).

**Table: 8 Bilateral Trade Figures of Bangladesh and Myanmar**

**Value in million US \$**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Export to Myanmar (US \$ Million)</b>	<b>Import from Myanmar(US \$ Million)</b>
2008-2009	9.17	66.65
2009-2010	10.24	57.00
2010-2011	9.00	166.9
2011-2012	13.45	65.25
2012-2013	13.67	84.00

**Source:** Ministry of Trade and Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Government, 2015.

The above figure indicates that bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar is very low. Regarding the bilateral trade, the study interviewed experts. Experts 4 and

5 in this regard commented that “Although the trade volume is low but the potentiality is very high. During the 7<sup>th</sup> foreign office consultation between Bangladesh and Myanmar both the countries have agreed to increase bilateral trade and to deal border businesses through the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) payment system which can accelerate bilateral trade”.<sup>23</sup>

Expert 2 in this regard expressed that “It is a matter of great regret that the countries have no direct road and sea links for trade and people’s movement between the countries He added that connectivity through road, rail and sea is imperative for increasing bilateral trade.”<sup>24</sup>

In the same context, Expert 1 commented that “Trade is a promising area of cooperation but it remains neglected due to bilateral disputes and Rohingya crisis. He recommended that only Myanmar’s change of policy and attitude can help accelerating bilateral trade nonetheless Bangladesh should try to engage Myanmar considering geopolitical and geo-economic factors”.<sup>25</sup>

From the analysis it can be noted that to accelerate the bilateral trade volume, it needs bilateral trade negotiation with implementation. Tax benefits can be provided in this regard. Besides, both the countries should emphasize on encouraging investors in both the countries along with promoting people to people connectivity. At last but not least the countries should find the resolution of the Rohingya crisis and other bilateral disputes

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<sup>23</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

<sup>24</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.

<sup>25</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.

#### **4.6. Border Management**

The frequent border conflict between Bangladesh and Myanmar is also impediment to the development of Bangladesh- Myanmar relations. Both the countries shares about 275 kilometers land border including the Naf River (Uddin, 2014:9). To resolve the outstanding problem on border demarcation both the countries made border agreement in 1979. But the Myanmar border guard members frequently violate the 1979 Bangladesh-Myanmar Border Agreement while Bangladesh wants a peaceful border to continue friendly relations with Myanmar. After a long year, on 17 January 1997 a meeting was held between the survey delegations of Bangladesh and Myanmar at the Survey department of Myanmar. In the meeting it has been decided that a joint survey team would visit the bordering Taungbro and would demarcate the seven undermined pillars (no.31, 34,35,36,38 and 39). After a series of negotiation Bangladesh and Myanmar signed the Land Boundary Treaty on 12 November 1998. The long-awaited treaty was signed by Bangladesh Foreign Minister AbdusSamad Azad and Myanmar Foreign Minister U OhnGyaw (Land Boundary Treaty,1998).

In terms of border killings Bangladesh-Myanmar border has been peaceful comparing to Bangladesh-India border. Nevertheless, tensions erupted in different times, e.g., in 2009 tensions erupted in the border area when Myanmar started fencing 40 kilometers of Bangladesh-Myanmar border. The Bangladesh government expressed concern regarding such construction. When The Myanmar government assured that the fence will prevent illicit network in the border area and it will not affect bilateral relations, Bangladesh allowed Myanmar to construct the

fence. Moreover, The Myanmar government often amass soldiers along its border with Bangladesh without any valid reason which create pressure in the border area. For example, in 2012 following the verdict of Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime boundary the Myanmar government deployed soldiers in the border area. Besides, separate border irregularities are observed at Bangladesh- Myanmar border including shooting, killing and abduction of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members. Such incidents always pose challenge to a sustainable relation of the two countries. Along with border dispute land mine issue is considered as another vexing issue in the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar. The Myanmar Army put the landmines in no-man's land of hilly areas particularly in Naikhincharithana under Bandarban district. The people who went to collect wood and bamboo were killed and many were injured due to the land mines. Myanmar postulated in several flag meetings about the existence of land mines. Bangladesh protested against the laying of land mines demanding that this evasive attitude of Myanmar was against the violation of border accord. From Myanmar side it is claimed that the land mines is planted to detain the anti-state activities of various insurgent groups. In January 1997 both the countries signed an agreement to remove the landmines in the border areas (Sheikh, 1998:482). But Myanmar is showing indifference to the agreement. On September 5, 2017, Myanmar has planted landmines in their territory along the barbed-wire fence between a series of border pillars to prevent the return of the Rohingya refugees in Myanmar (Krisna,2017). A Bangladesh Border Guard officer informed that two blasts were heard on the Myanmar side and he confirmed that it was mine explosion which hurted two boys near the border. Bangladesh formally

protested against the laying of land mine but the Myanmar army didn't make any comment regarding the land mine (Ibid).

In the respect the study interviewed some experts. Expert 1 in this regard commented that “Although some irregularities like shooting, planting land mine, abduction of border guard members exist at the border Bangladesh-Myanmar border is peaceful comparing to India. He mentioned that to establish peaceful border, it is mandatory to increase collaboration between border forces and remove trust deficit between the forces of the countries”.<sup>26</sup>

In this regard Expert 4 and 5 pointed that “Myanmar is showing indifference to the border accord. They are violating international law. Several flag meetings were held between the countries on the issue of free firing, land mines but the insensitive attitude of Myanmar government in not changing. To establish peaceful border they put emphasize on removing trust deficit of the countries”.<sup>27</sup>

From the analysis it is obvious that peaceful border is essential to develop friendly relations of the countries. But some border irregularities are still prevalent on Bangladesh-Myanmar border. The Myanmar government often amass soldier at the border and they make firing without any reason which creates tension at the bordering people of Bangladesh. In this regard Myanmar should respect the agreement of border accord. It is also explored from the interview that both the countries should emphasize on increasing collaboration between the

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<sup>26</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.

<sup>27</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

countries, launching joint ventures along with removing trust deficit to establish peaceful border.

#### **4.7. Illegal Migration, Illegal Trade, Drugs and Arms Smuggling**

In spite of having skilled border forces illegal trade, human trafficking, drugs and arms smuggling are very common in the border areas of Bangladesh and Myanmar. Actually, the southern part of Bangladesh and north-western part of Myanmar have become a suitable place for that. In Bangladesh, the people of coastal areas are mainly poor and they are convinced to migrate to Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore or Malaysia with a very cheap rate and the route is water based sea route. This is very risky and in this way every year a large number of ignorant and poor people of Bangladesh and Myanmar are being victims of human trafficking. Moreover, Many Rohingya refugees are involved in illegal trade, drugs and arms smuggling. On 16 February 2018, at the ministerial level meeting between the Home-minister of Bangladesh and Myanmar, Bangladesh handed over a list of 49 Yaba factories of Myanmar and requested Myanmar to close down the factories (*The Daily Star*, 2018, February 17). Smuggling network are active at Maungdaw and Sittwe of Arakan state and Teknaf, Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong of Bangladesh where the smugglers face little resistance for arms and drug smuggling. Almost every day Bangladeshi authorities- the BGB, the police and other concerned authorities are seizing large quantity of Yaba. Department of Narcotics Control said that Yaba inhabits half of the drug business in Bangladesh and Teknaf is the only smuggling route of Yaba from Myanmar.



In the context, the study interviewed experts. Expert 1 in this regard mentioned that “To stop such transnational crimes both the countries should continue dialogue and cooperation between the states”.<sup>28</sup> Experts 4 and 5 in the perspective emphasized on “increasing collaboration and cooperation among both governments and border forces”.<sup>29</sup> The other experts 2,3 and 6 in this regard remarked that “joint collaborative efforts is badly need to stop such transnational crimes”.<sup>30</sup>

It is obvious from the study that transnational crimes are one of the vexing issues between the countries. It is explored from the interview that to stop such transnational crimes the countries need joint collaborative efforts and constant dialogue and cooperation between the states.

**Table 9:A Brief Summery on Bangladesh-Myanmar Bilateral Relations**

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<b>Exchange of Visits</b>	Foreign minister and Prime minister’s visits to Myanmar respectively in 2009 and 2011.	Lack of visits of Myanmar’s delegation and regular exchange of visits
<b>Land Border Management</b>	Land boundary Agreement in 1979 and Fencing by Myanmar in 2009. Agreement on removing land mine in the border.	Lack of Joint border management and no ratification of 1998 land boundary agreement and indifference to land mine agreement.

<sup>28</sup> The Interview was conducted in Dhaka on June 2021.

<sup>29</sup> The Interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

<sup>30</sup> The Interview was conducted in Dhaka on April and June 2021.

<b>Maritime Boundary</b>	Peaceful settlement through the verdict of ITLOS in 2012	Implementation of verdict, challenges to explore natural resources and maritime cooperation
<b>Rohingya Issue</b>	Formation of Annan commission and agreements on repatriation of Rohingyas	No implementation of the recommendations of the Commission and Myanmar's indifference to repatriation agreement, security concern for Bangladesh
<b>Trade and Investment</b>	Agreement for establishing direct banking arrangement and transaction through Asian Clearing Union (ACU)	Low trade, lack of diversification and security in the border
<b>Connectivity</b>	Agreement in 2007 for road connectivity and rail connectivity in 2010 through Trans-Asian railway	No air and coastal shipping link
<b>Energy and Natural Resources</b>	Signing a MOU to build two dams in Arakan in 2010	Lack of cooperation and investment

Source: Developed by the Author

#### **4.8. Concluding Remarks**

In sum, the above analysis indicates that Bangladesh-Myanmar political relations couldn't reach at the satisfactory level. But the bilateral relation is not hostile. Both the countries are trying to maintain friendly and cooperative relations in spite of having some vexing issues in their relations. The recent political and economic reforms of Myanmar prove that the country has changed its policy from realist to liberalism. The long decade maritime boundary conflict has been solved through the verdict of ITLOS. Myanmar has accepted the verdict with no sound. Besides, Bangladesh and Myanmar have negotiated about 10 agreements on various issues like land boundary, border trade etc. But in the matter of Rohingya repatriation issue Bangladesh expresses depression following Myanmar's negligence to create proper localities for the Rohingyas. Although Myanmar has signed agreement with the UN Refugee agency and Bangladesh, but Myanmar is not working as per the agreements to start the repatriation of Rohingyas. On the other hand, the Rohingyas are getting involved in different criminal activities and they are also trying to go abroad by fake Bangladeshi passport which is undermining our security and image in the global stage. Bangladesh has been trying to solve the problem diplomatically. But in this respect Myanmar's interest and commitment are necessary to solve the longstanding bilateral dispute.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **BANGLADESH- MYANMAR RELATIONS (2009-2013): STRATEGIC DIMENSION**

The chapter deals with Bangladesh- Myanmar relations from strategic point of view. In the analysis of contemporary international relations, the strategic framework of analysis is very important. Bangladesh –Myanmar relation bears geo-strategic and geo-economic significance for both the countries. The geo-strategic location of Bangladesh and Myanmar and the geo-politics of South Asia bear great importance in the context of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Myanmar is located at the tri-junction of East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. Both China and Myanmar share 2200 km border with easy access to each other's territory and share an unfenced 1640 km border (Zhao,2018). In the case of India and Myanmar both the countries share an unfenced 1640 km border and Myanmar has a long coastline of 2,276 km that shares parts of the Bay of Bengal particularly the Coco Island and the Andaman Sea which is very significant to India (Zhao,2018). Besides, China's connectivity with Myanmar and the recent democratization of Myanmar has enhanced the connectivity of South Asia and South-East Asia. Bangladesh also bears significance to Myanmar and other regional powers China and India. Geographically, Bangladesh stands between South and Southeast Asia. It has two bordering states- India and Myanmar. Besides, the state's proximity to the Bay of Bengal which is one of the crucial wings of the Indian Ocean has enhanced the importance of Bangladesh from geo-strategic and geo-economic point of view.

### **5.1.Strategic Importance of Bangladesh-Myanmar Bilateral Relations**

Bangladesh and Myanmar are linked by history, culture and geography. After India, Myanmar occupies the second most important position for Bangladesh. Any incident in one country greatly influence the others country, e.g. the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar are severely distressing Bangladesh. Actually, from both geo-strategic and economic point of view both the countries are significant to each other. Myanmar is the largest country of Southeast Asia which lies at the point of three regions-East, Southeast and South Asia. It occupies a critical geostrategic position where the spheres of influence of China and India overlap. Myanmar is of special importance to Bangladesh's 'Look East policy' which can offer an alternative land route opening towards China and Asian led countries.

Moreover, Myanmar is rich in oil, natural gas, coal, zinc, copper, precious stones, timber and hydropower which have the potentiality to be a major Southeast Asian player. Myanmar has become an attraction of foreign direct investment following the current political and economic reforms in Myanmar which brings opportunities for Bangladeshi investors too. Besides, Bangladesh is a food-deficit and natural disaster prone country. The demand for foodstuffs is increasing due to its population growth and in this respect Myanmar can be the main source of importing food for Bangladesh.

Conversely, Bangladesh is also significant to Myanmar. The topographical areas, actual contiguity to India, helpful work and region to the Bay of Bengal have impressive ramifications for local international relations. Bangladesh is the lone topographical way to associate South Asia with Southeast Asia which can be source

for Myanmar to interface eastern India and different pieces of South Asia. As far as geo-monetary point of view the geostrategic area of Bangladesh gives the occasion to assume the predominant job in trans-provincial financial activity for example the Chittagong-Kunming availability could bring advantage for Myanmar through procuring parcel charges from the nations of three sub-locales of Asia. Bangladesh has gained notoriety for peacekeeping and microcredit exercises and in these zones Myanmar can look for collaboration from Bangladesh that will assist Myanmar with advancing human asset advancement in the regressive regions like the Rakhine state.

In the context, the study interviewed some experts. Experts 1,2 and 3 in this regard mentioned that “Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relationship is of immense significance. It deserves special attention for Bangladesh’s look east policy”.<sup>31</sup>

In the same perspective, Expert 6 pointed that “At the present context the bilateral relationship is significant to maintain peace, security and stability in Bangladesh and the region so on”.<sup>32</sup>

In this regard, the other Experts 4 and 5 remarked that “the geographical location bears the necessity of the cordial bilateral relationship of the countries”.<sup>33</sup>

In the same context all the Experts approved that there is the influence of China and India regarding Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. They emphasize on conflicting interests and power politics of the countries that greatly influence to interfere in the domestic matters of other countries –Bangladesh and Myanmar. They added both

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<sup>31</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on April and June 2021.

<sup>32</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on April 2021.

<sup>33</sup> The interview was conducted in Dhaka on March 2021.

Bangladesh and Myanmar should venture the geo-strategic opportunities through enhancing connectivity following India and China.

**Map 7: Geographical Location of Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and India**



Source: [www.altapedia.com](http://www.altapedia.com)

## 5.2. Factors for Consideration

### 5.2.1. Essence of Myanmar to Regional Powers

Major Powers of the region comprising of India and China have direct impact on peace, stability and economic development of Myanmar. Each country has undertaken many strategies to strengthen ties with Myanmar.

### **5.2.2. Overview of China-Myanmar Connectivity**

Myanmar is strategically important for China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to arrive at the Pacific and the Indian Oceans through the Myanmar - controlled Coco Islands, which are around 30 km north of the Indian Andaman Islands. Myanmar's location at China's southwest will make it easy to arrive at the Indian Ocean by the use of Myanmar controlled Islands. Regarding transportation, Myanmar is the unique route for China to arrive at South Asia and Indian Ocean. Through accessing the Indian Oceans the PLAN would have the option to abbreviate the distance and reliance on South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca.

In terms of geo-economic interest, Myanmar is significant for China to recover its 'Southwest silk street' from Yunnan territory to Myanmar and toward the west to Bangladesh, India and the West. The linkage with Myanmar could assist China to expand trade with the developing economies of South Asia and India. Besides, Myanmar is significant for China to improve its western advancement methodology. Since 1990s China dispatched its arrangement to build up the western district through the two sub-territorial improvement plans named Greater Mekong Sub-area (GMS) advancement devise and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) regional economic cooperation. Specially, Kunming will be benefitted economically through trade and investments by linking up with Myanmar (Mallick, 1997:53).

Regarding energy security Myanmar is an essential turn to China. Myanmar isn't just a supply route bypassing the Malacca Strait, additionally an essential organizing point for controlling entrance to Malacca Strait's western practices. The Strait of Malacca is the essential chokepoint in Asia. It is supposed that recently around 85%



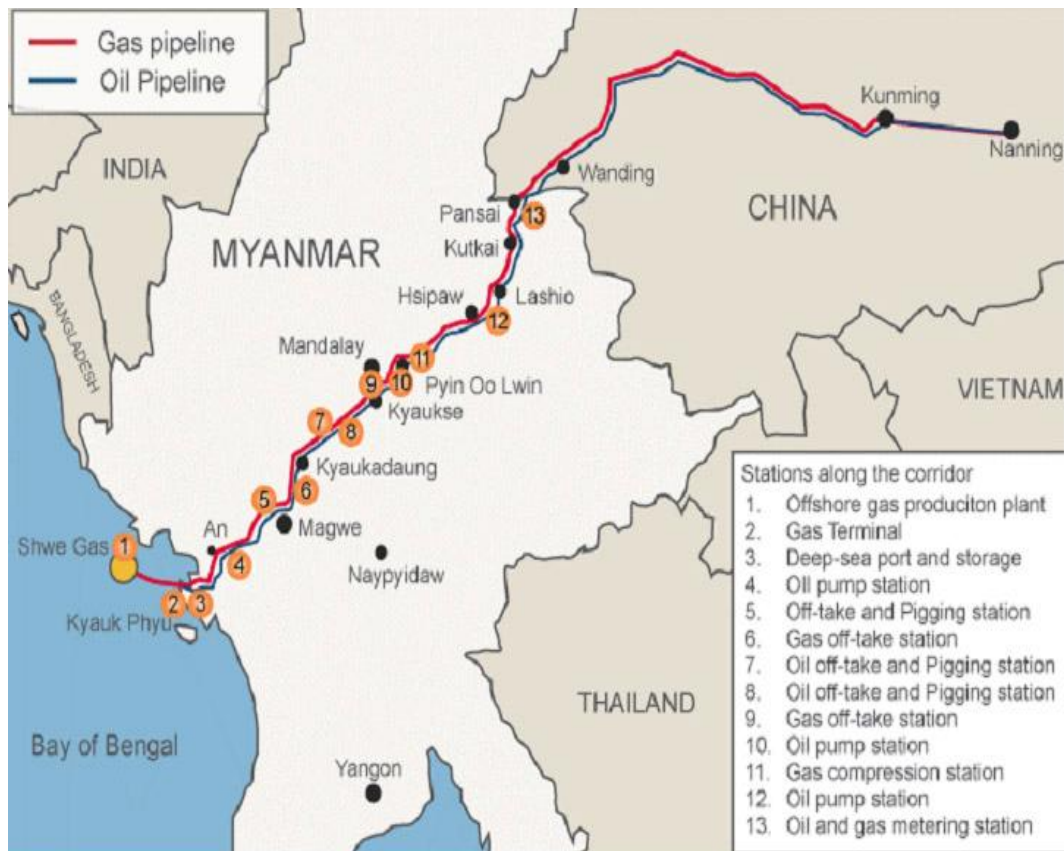
and 90% of yearly oil moves through this chokepoint.<sup>34</sup> To build bypass alternatives through the Strait of Malacca, China and Myanmar exceptionally made the Myanmar-China gas pipeline in 2013 that extends from Myanmar's ports in the Bay of Bengal to the Yunnan area of China.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Myanmar is affluent in oil, gas, wood and gemstones. China is putting vigorously in foundation, mining ventures, hydropower dams and oil and-gas pipelines to meet up its growing energy needs. Many Chinese organizations have begun oil and gas investigation ventures in Myanmar and major Chinese investments contain the Sino-Myanmar oil pipeline and the \$ 3.6 billion questionable Myitsone dam (Smith, 2018). China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), Sinopec and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) have also begun oil investigation schemes in Myanmar to access new gas fields. In November 2008, CNPC and the Ministry of Energy of Myanmar consented to an arrangement to construct a USD 2.3 billion raw oil pipeline and USD 2 billion natural gas pipelines and the development began in October 2009 and enclosed with 2015 (Zaho,2011). Myanmar is substantial for China particularly with regards to its Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese organizations are building a profound water business seaport at Kyaukpyu's normal harbor and furthermore creating extraordinary financial zones and energy plants. This would fulfill China's requirement for energy security with connection to Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. KyaukPhyu is significant for China in light of the fact that the port is the passage point for a Chinese oil and gas pipeline which gives it an alternate track for energy imports from the Middle East evading the Malacca Strait.

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<sup>34</sup>U.S. Energy Information Administration  
(EIA)<https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32452>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

**Map- 8 China-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipeline**



**Source:**Hilton (2013).China in Myanmar: Implications for the Future, Norwegian Peace Building Resource Centre,Oslo,p.6.

Furthermore, border security, arms and drug smuggling, money laundering are vital issues for both countries. China is playing a major role in managing internal ethnic conflicts of Myanmar which greatly influence the border security of China.

In sum, Myanmar and China are maintaining close diplomatic, political and security ties since 1988.Myanmar’s geostrategic position at the tri-junction of East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia is imperative for China that offers marvelous advantages for the countries of the region. Myanmar is substantial to meet up China’s energy needs and to develop its western region.

### **5.2.3. Overview of Indo- Myanmar Connectivity**

Myanmar shares around 1331 km land border with India and it contains around 2276 km long coastline that offers certain portions of the Bay of Bengal, the adjoining areas of the Coco Islands and the Andaman ocean, which is vital for India's strategic considerations (Routary, 2011: 300). Besides, the four north-eastern states of India named Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram are topographically touching to Myanmar and Myanmar's ports offer India the short and easy route to India's several north-eastern states. Additionally, Myanmar, being China's neighbor, also offers India a travel course to southern China. Indian policy makers termed Myanmar as "near-neighbor" which represents great opportunity for India.

For India, Myanmar is important to strengthen New Delhi's geopolitical position in Southeast Asia. Myanmar is central to India's "Look East policy" which looks for to develop political, financial and security bonds with ASEAN. India's ambitious for land connectivity to Southeast Asia will be filled through Myanmar. India's most significant connectivity projects are the improvement of Sittwe harbor of Myanmar and Kaladan Multi-Modal scheme to develop bilateral highway. Besides, India, Myanmar and Thailand are jointly developing a 1,360 km highway with a view to linking the three countries and improving connectivity between India and ASEAN states (Slanki, 2018). India's connectivity projects with Myanmar also include the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor. All the countries have agreed to enhance economic cooperation through the BCIM corridor.

India is one of the largest markets for Burmese exports. In 2010 India was Myanmar's third-largest export market after Thailand and China. Myanmar's

exports to India are largely agricultural products and India exports Myanmar steel products and pharmaceuticals. Both the governments of India and Myanmar aimed to achieve \$1 billion and bilateral trade touched USD 1.3 billion by 2017. In terms of foreign investment Indian FDI into Myanmar was \$192 million from the year 1996-2013, 98 percent of which was invested within the oil and Gas segment (Lee,2014:2992).The government of India is working sincerely to reinforce trade dealings with Myanmar and set up a gas pipeline. They are continuing cooperation to develop mutual aid in horticulture, broadcast communications, information technology, steel, oil, natural gas and hydrocarbons . Moreover,India may be a net energy dealer due to its disproportion between oil generation and utilization. Myanmar's oil and gas reservation bear great significance for Myanmar for India's future energy requirement. India has been undermined in its endeavors to attain direct entrance to Myanmar due to India's sharp relations with Bangladesh and China's capacity to move more quickly. The national Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Ltd.(OVL) and Gas Authority of India Ltd. attained a combined 30 percent stake in the A-1 and A-3blocks off Myanmar's Rakhine coast in 2002 and 2005 respectively. In December 2005, Myanmar rather than India committed to transport gas from these arenas to Petro China under a 30 year contract. In June 2013, Myanmar restored India's trusts with a proposition for a pipeline utilizing the same course as the to-be completed Kaladan Multi-modal Transport Project, from Sittwe port to India's northeast (Lee,2014:299). Actually,India seeks to balance the role of China in Asia-pacific region. The main objective of India is to reduce China's growing presence and influence in Myanmar and South Asia. To gain that strategic objective, India shifted its policy from liberal to realist policy based on

strategic interests. From India's perspective, India's engagement with Myanmar will benefit in combating insurgency and instability in its northeast. Besides, closer ties with Myanmar may persuade Naypyidaw to revoke permission for suspected Chinese electronic listening posts on its Bay of Bengal coastline. In spite of improving political ties and bilateral trade between China and India, India still perceives China as a threat to regional supremacy.

### **5.3. Significance for Bangladesh**

Myanmar is the major competitor of Bangladesh in utilizing the benefit of geo-strategic location which also offers transit facilities to India, China and other Southeast Asian countries. After the present political reconciliation and economic revisions, Myanmar has become the attraction of foreign investment and attained remarkable economic growth. China has been reinforcing its relations with Myanmar through infrastructural development and politico-military support. The country is being benefited through expanding economic links with Myanmar. China is the biggest investor in Myanmar which has significant contribution in all sectors like energy, mining, tourism, agriculture, communication, trade and commerce etc. If Bangladesh can be integrated into the Sino-Myanmar connectivity, it will improve relations with Myanmar as well as South-east Asian countries. At the same time, India with its "look East policy" is strengthening her relations with Myanmar. In 2008 India and Myanmar signed Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTT) which will link India's north-eastern Mizoram state with the Sittwe Seaport of Myanmar (Alam, 2018).

**Map 9:Kaladan Gateway Project of India in Myanmar**



**Source:** Regemortel, H.V.(6 March 2019). The Geostrategic location of Myanmar and its Influence on the RohingyaConflics, *International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS)*<http://iics.blog.nctu.edu.tw/the-geostrategic-location-of-myanmar-and-its-influence-on-the-rohingya-conflict/>

Bangladesh should venture the opportunities with Myanmar following India and China for the sake of national interest. Keeping this in mind Bangladesh should devise a strategy that allows Myanmar to cooperate economically with her.

#### **5.4. Strategic Importance of Bangladesh to Regional Powers**

In terms of geography Bangladesh is surrounded by India to the east, west and north and by the Bay of Bengal to the south. There is also a slight strip of border with Myanmar on the southeastern portion. Though Bangladesh does not share border with Nepal and Bhutan, both are very close neighbors of Bangladesh. Around 20-mile wide Indian domain separates Bangladesh's northern border from the nations.

Moreover, China is only about 100 miles away from the northwest frontier of Bangladesh. This unique geostrategic location provides opportunity for Bangladesh to play the central role in the region.

Geographically, Bangladesh overlaps between South and Southeast Asia. It has two neighboring states, India and Myanmar. However, the state envisions the Bay of Bengal as the third neighbor, which is one of the crucial wings of the Indian Ocean. As Bangladesh shares the world's fifth-longest land border with India and provides geographic proximity with the economic giant China, it has the vast range of potential to be one of the Asian tigers. In addition, through the maritime victory against Myanmar in 2012 and against India in 2014, the country has attractively restructured her geopolitical landscape.

For India, Bangladesh is vital for its national security as well as political reasons. Bangladesh plays crucial role to enhance the connection between mainland India and its northeast region. India has the only small corridor named Siliguri corridor to communicate with the northeastern part of India. From the period of independence, Bangladesh is being utilized as a transit track by rail and inland waterways between India's two portions which benefits India in terms of fast

Movement of goods and less shipping cost. As a result, India's main strategic aim is to take corridor facilities through land and using Chittagong port of Bangladesh. Moreover, for the fulfillment of Asian highway, Bangladesh plays noteworthy part as it connects India with southeastern states.

In terms of China, China's energy quest has increased the strategic importance of Bangladesh. Bangladesh, due to its geographic position in the Bay of Bengal, has been the beneficiary to China. Bangladesh is imperative for China's 'string of pearls'

theory, which simplifies how China aims to wield dominance in the region of the Malacca Strait and Indian Ocean through developmental investment and infrastructural projects around Indian Ocean brim states.

At present China has diverted its attention towards South Asia, a region including one-fourth of the world's population which denotes a profitable market for Chinese products. Bangladesh is the suitable way for China to reach South Asian market and the mainland India. Besides, to motivate the Bangladesh-China-India Myanmar (BCIM) sub-regional corridor, it is crucial to bring Bangladesh on board. In this regard, China plans to attract Bangladesh through substantial infrastructural investment and developmental projects that has been advertised by experts as China's 'checkbook diplomacy.'

In this context, China seeks to develop the Chittagong port with a view to constructing a parallel pipeline connecting Chittagong-Kyakpiu-Kunming. If India, with US backing, encompasses the Malacca chokepoint through the Andaman Sea, it will impede Chinese assembling base. Subsequently, it is critical for China to acquire impact in the Indian Ocean district through financing infrastructural interest in the waterfront countries. Additionally, China is so determinedly pushing for super ventures, for example, the One Belt One Road (OBOR). Bangladesh is midway arranged along the BCIM Economic Corridor and keeps an essential situation along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road with Chittagong port as a significant sea turn through the Indian Ocean. Besides, Bangladesh is the largest recipient of Chinese arms which will make Bangladesh more reliant on China. It is estimated that between 2011 and 2015, 71 percent of Chinese arms exports were to Pakistan,



Myanmar, and Bangladesh – states proximate to both India and China. For China, the largest market of selling armaments proximate to India will fulfill two purposes –one is collecting revenue and checking Indian dominance in the region. In words, In terms of commerce and connectivity Bangladesh is one of the most vital countries for China and India which has great influence in the region.

### **5.5. Significance for Myanmar**

Bangladesh has become an important player in the South Asian region. Bangladesh bears an significant geopolitical strategic position in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China and key transit route for India's backward northeastern part. Keeping the geo-political significance in mind both China and India are making alliance with Bangladesh. Myanmar should undertake the opportunities with Bangladesh following China and India. Myanmar may utilize the Chittagong port and upcoming deep-sea port for her imported products which will reduce cargo cost. In recent times Bangladesh has experienced remarkable economic growth and amazing development in agro-economic sector that may attract Myanmar to flourish her agro-economic sector. Bangladesh can encourage Myanmar on issues like microcredit, women empowerment and vocational training which can play substantial role in supporting human resource development in the distant areas of Myanmar (Alam, 2018). Both the countries can cooperate for developing maritime infrastructure and the construction of deep sea ports which will benefit them to integrate into the sub-region.

## **5.6. Concluding Remarks**

At the end, it can be said that in terms of geo-political and geo-economic point of view, both Bangladesh and Myanmar hold strategic location in the Asia-pacific region. Myanmar is situated at the tri-conjuncture of East Asia, South-east Asia and South Asia and Bangladesh also acts as a gateway between South and South-east Asia. As a result, the strategic policy of India and China overlap in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. Connectivity is the top priority of the countries for their land locked provinces. Although China and India are competing in terms of gaining benefits from Myanmar; there is no conflict or threat to national interest of the countries. Both the countries have paying attention to strengthen relation with the coastal countries- Bangladesh and Myanmar. In this perspective, Bangladesh-Myanmar relations have great opportunities to reinforce the bilateral relations following China and India. In terms of enhancing connectivity between them, Myanmar will be able to connect with eastern India and other parts of South Asia through Bangladesh. Similarly, Bangladesh will be able to connect itself with China and other South-east Asian countries through using the territory of Myanmar.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION ON RESULTS**

Any bilateral relation of the countries is built based on politics, diplomacy, economy and security. In terms of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations the study finds that the bilateral relationship of the countries has been developed based on politics, diplomacy and security.

Bangladesh and Myanmar are bordering neighbors having historical, commercial and cultural ties. The Arakan province that is separated from the mainland Myanmar by the ArakanYoma mountain range had more collaboration with the west that covers Bangladesh now. There were trade routes and free movement of peoples before the British era (Morshed, 2011). During British period, both the countries were ruled by the British for a considerable period of time. At the time, thousands of Indian laborers from Chittagong division and western India migrated to Burma that created social interaction between British Bengal and Burma (Desai,1939).

After the independence of Bangladesh, Burma recognized Bangladesh and embassy level relations were established soon. After that numerous high profile visits took place to cement bilateral ties. Especially Burmese president Ne Win's visit to Bangladesh for two times in the years 1974 and 1979 had strengthened the bilateral relations of the countries. But the bilateral relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh was not encouraging enough due to primarily some disputes, e.g. closed economy of Myanmar, military rule, maritime dispute, and long decades Rohingya conflict and ethnic violence. However,after independence Bangladesh-Burma Trade pact (1973), Refugees Repatriation Agreement (1978), Land Boundary Agreement (1979) and Bilateral Border Trade Agreement (1994) were significant in the bilateral

relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar(Rashid,2015).From both geo-strategic and economic point of view, the countries bear the necessity of strong bilateral relations. Keeping this in mind both the countries started their journey with cooperation. Bangladesh set up diplomatic relations just after its independence following Myanmar's recognition. Since 1970s except the caretaker governments all the heads or governments of Bangladesh visited Myanmar. After assuming power by Sheikh Hasina in 2009, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh made a visit to Myanmar in May 2009. Again in 2011, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Myanmar which labels the priority of making robust political and diplomatic relationship with Myanmar.

Furthermore, both Bangladesh and Myanmar share land and maritime boundary. Any incident in one country greatly influence the others country, e.g. the Rohingya refugee crisis is distressing Bangladesh for many decades which has been turned into security threat to Bangladesh. Again, due to geographical contiguity both the countries are burdened with transnational crimes-illegal migration, arms and drug smuggling etc. which probes the relationship based on security related concerns.

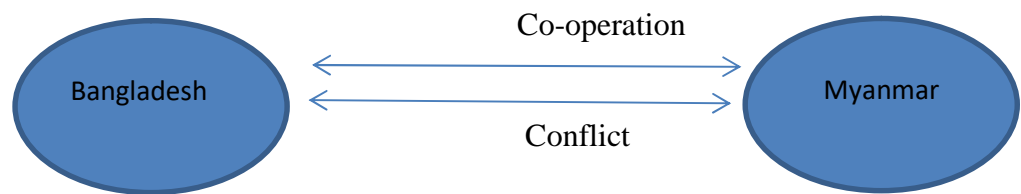
### **6.1. Nature of the Bilateral Relationship**

At the age of globalization, no state can live in isolation. Every state interacts with each other based on its own national interest that governs the nature of relationship between states. There can be four types of relationships based on national interest.

- Cooperative relations
- Conflictive relations
- Competitive relations
- Compulsive relationship

The research finds that during the period (2009-2013), the bilateral relationship of the countries has been passed through ups and down that is termed as cooperation and conflict.

Bangladesh and Myanmar have two-dimensional relationship based on cooperation and conflict.



Source: Developed by the author

To examine the nature and extent of the relationship, the research discovered the key bilateral issues of the countries that are delineated in the chapter four. The study explored some encouraging factors like exchange of visits, maritime boundary settlement and constraining factors like Rohingya issue, transnational crimes etc. in the developing of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relationship.

In the cooperative point of view, the study finds that some factors like Myanmar's political reconciliation and economic openness to neighbors, high profile visits of Bangladesh's delegation to Myanmar, maritime boundary settlement of the countries launched a new era in the bilateral relationship of Bangladesh and Myanmar which labels the cooperative relations between the countries.

Actually, in 2009 Foreign minister's visit to Myanmar and in 2011 Prime Minister's visit to Myanmar have consolidated the bilateral relationship (Rashid, 2015: 334-335). The visit launched a new epoch of relations between Bangladesh and

Myanmar. Through the visit both the leaders make consensus to increase collaboration in the fields of trade and investment, security, energy and border management. Besides, the foreign office consultation that took place in 2013 also made progress to develop the political relation of the countries (Uddin:2014).It is explored from the interview that the visits launched collaboration in the arenas of trade and investment, defense, energy and border management. Additionally, both the countries agreed to work together against trans-boundary crimes like illegal migration, illegal drugs and arms smuggling.

In the same perspective, the study illustrates that political and economic reforms in Myanmar create a new opportunity for Bangladesh. In 2010, after the replacement of military rule by civilian government, Myanmar has undergone through major changes. Through political development like holding parliamentary election in 2012 and economic reforms like opening market and encouraging foreign direct investment the country was going to be connected to the global economy and shared its natural resources. It is explored by the expert's interview that following the political and economic reforms in Myanmar, government to government diplomacy and negotiation had strengthened. In addition, maritime boundary settlement in 2012 is a great achievement of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relationship that creates potential areas of maritime cooperation.

On the other side, in terms of conflictive point of view, the study illustrates Rohingya crisis, border tension, transnational crimes and lack of connectivity as the constraining factors that are impeding the bilateral relationship.

In 2012, sectarian violence in Myanmar displaced thousands of Rohingyas who tried to enter Bangladesh which created tension in the border areas of Bangladesh and Myanmar. At that time Bangladesh took hard position against Rohingya's influx to Bangladesh because after 2005 no repatriation took place in spite of giving words for many times on behalf of Myanmar. Now the unresolved Rohingya refugee crisis has become one of the vexing issues between Bangladesh and Myanmar which is influencing others bilateral concerns like illegal migration, arms and drug smuggling. It is also explored from the expert's interview that the Rohingya crisis is the biggest hurdle for developing bilateral relations in every sector like bilateral trade, border management. Additionally, in spite of having geo-strategic and economic opportunities, both the countries have failed to attain such opportunities due to lack of Myanmar's government political will and mutual trust and confidence of the countries.

## **6.2. Concluding Remarks**

Finally, it can be termed that Bangladesh and Myanmar are engaged with two-dimensional relationship which is based on politics and diplomacy as well as security related concerns. And the bilateral relationship of the countries is neither cooperative nor conflictive, and neither competitive nor compulsive. It is passing through both cooperation and constraints that can be termed as cooperative and conflictive.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Bangladesh-Myanmar political relations started with a happy note. Just after four weeks of Bangladesh's independence Myanmar recognized Bangladesh on 13 January 1972. After that numerous chief level visits took place between the countries. Both the countries issued a joint statement emphasizing on closer ties and development of bilateral relations based on peaceful co-existence, non-alignment, and mutual respect for sovereignty and national dignity. In 1973 both the countries signed a general trade agreement with a view to promoting economic relations between the two countries. Especially Burmese president Ne Win's visit to Bangladesh for two times in the years 1974 and 1979 had strengthened the bilateral relations of the countries. But the bilateral relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh was not encouraging enough due to primarily some issues, e.g. Military rule and the closed economy of Myanmar, maritime dispute, and long decades Rohingya conflict.

In the twenty first century Myanmar has been undergoing through histrionic changes. In 2008 the military government of Myanmar unveiled a new constitution for the country and declared for holding a new election in the year 2010. Through the election the military rule was replaced by semi-civilian government and in 2012 through by-election Myanmar started the process of democratization. Following Myanmar's transition to democracy the western power relaxed economic embargo and Myanmar reshaped its external orientation including opening its own market and integration with the global economy. These kinds of democratic and economic reforms created opportunity for Bangladesh to establish cooperative relation with Myanmar. During the period 2009-2013, Bangladesh –Myanmar relations started with positive mood. The Foreign minister and the Head of government of



Bangladesh visited Myanmar in 2009 and 2011 respectively which consolidated bilateral relations. Besides, at the period the long decade maritime boundary conflict has been solved through the verdict of ITLOS in March 2012. But in June 2012 the Rohingya exodus following a new wave of communal violence strained the bilateral relations of the countries. The Bangladesh government took hard position against the Rohingya influx in Bangladesh and the crisis created tension in the border area of Bangladesh. The study finds that Bangladesh-Myanmar political relations couldn't reach at the satisfactory level. Despite the high profile visits, agreements and maritime settlement, the bilateral relation was not smooth due to lack of Myanmar government's political will, mutual trust and confidence of the countries. Besides, some unresolved issues like Rohingya refugee crisis and border security issue have posed challenges to smooth bilateral relations. Although the countries have completed some agreements regarding Rohingya repatriation, the repatriation didn't launch due to the lack of Myanmar Government's enthusiasm. So it can be termed that the bilateral relations of the countries was neither cooperative nor hostile. The political relations of the countries have passed through both cooperation and constraints. In terms of strategic perspective both Bangladesh and Myanmar hold strategic position in the Asia-pacific region. But both the countries have failed to utilize the geo-strategic opportunities where as the regional powers- India and China are being benefitted through enhancing connectivity with them. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar should venture the geo-strategic opportunities through enhancing connectivity following India and China. Actually to strengthen the bilateral relationship, both the countries should reciprocate in the same way through strong diplomatic ties and intensive cooperation.

The study concludes with some recommendations. Firstly, both the countries should build mutual trust and confidence through enhancing exchange of high profile visits and regular table talks. Secondly, the Rohingya issue which is influencing the other bilateral issues should be resolved immediately considering the humanitarian and national security perspectives. In this respect Bangladesh should create diplomatic pressure on Myanmar through China, UN and other multinational organizations. As China and Myanmar are close allies, Bangladesh should exploit friendly relations from China in resolving the Rohingya crisis. Thirdly, in terms of border security both the countries can launch joint border management mechanism to remove arms and drug smuggling and to detect extremist groups along Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Fourthly, it is imperative to explore the possible field of cooperation where both the countries can be mutually benefitted like setting up exclusive fishing zone in the Bay of Bengal, establishing smooth channel for financial transactions. Along with land, air and sea connectivity, people to people connectivity may be increased through cultural exchange, sports and educations of trade fair. In this regard, the governments of the countries have to facilitate the banking services and ease the visa procedures of the countries. Fifthly, to pursue geo-strategic priorities Bangladesh needs strong diplomatic understanding with Myanmar which will in turn help Bangladesh to integrate into China-Myanmar connectivity and other South-east and East Asian countries. Finally, mistrust and misperception should be removed to strengthen the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

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## APPENDICES

### 1. List of Interviewees



<b>Name</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Interview date</b>
Dr. DelwarHossain	Professor, Department of International Relations, Dhaka University	16 June 2021
Dr.Syed Anwar Hussain	Bangabandu Chair Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals(BUP)	19 June 2021
Dr. Sujit Kumar Datta	Chairman and Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Chittagong University	24 April 2021
Mr. Mohammad AshiqueRahman	Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)	20 April 2021
Md.Rahmat Ali	Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh	8 March2021
Sonia Munni	Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh	8 March2021

## **2.A Sample of Questionnaire**

(The information collected through the questionnaire will be used for academic purpose only and the anonymity of the respondents will be maintained strictly in the course of the study.)

### **Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations (2009- 2013): A Politico-Strategic Study**

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The study is being conducted to explore the nature and extent of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations from the period 2009-2013. The study will also highlight the strategic importance of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations.

#### **Part-A**

##### 1. Background Information

1.1. Name:

1.2. Profession:

1.3. Institution :

#### **Part-B**

##### 2. Do you think that Bangladesh-Myanmar relations is enough developed as one of the bordering neighbor of Bangladesh?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Maybe

d) Never

2.1. If no what are the reasons of that?

- a) Apathy of Myanmar government
- b) Lack of interest of Bangladesh government
- c) Lack of mutual trust and confidence
- d) All of these
- e) Other

3. What are the dominant bilateral issues between the countries?  
.....

4. Do you think that the exchange of high profile visits between the countries is enough for smooth bilateral relations?

- a) Yes
- b) No

4.1. If no- why the countries have been failed to maintain the regular visits?  
.....

4.2. In December 2011, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Myanmar. Both the governments signed many agreements and MOUs in the areas of trade, business, energy and border supervision. What are the significant outcomes of that visit?  
.....

5. As neighboring countries Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral trade volume is not significant. How can we accelerate the bilateral trade volume?  
.....

6. Following the political and economic reforms of Myanmar, what kinds of steps has been taken by Bangladesh to develop cooperation with Myanmar?  
.....

7. Following communal violence in 2012, Bangladesh experienced Rohingya exodus and took hard position to receive Rohingya where as in 2017 Bangladesh sheltered a large segment of Rohingya. What is the motivational factor behind this changing policy?

.....

7.1. Do you think that the Myanmar authority is ejecting the Rohingyas to establish safe economic zone in Rakhaine's state?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Never

7.2. It is claimed that the Rohingya crisis has become a security threat for Bangladesh. How do they pose security threat to Bangladesh?

- a) Emerging Rohingya militant groups
- b) Recruiting by Islamic terrorist groups
- c) Involving with criminal activities
- d) Destroying environment and social harmony
- e) All of these
- f) Other

7.3. Why isn't the repatriation commencing inspite of the accomplishment of many bilateral agreements on Rohingya repatriation?

- a) Lack of commitment of Myanmar government
- b) Diplomatic incapability of Bangladesh government
- c) Lack of International concer
- d) Other

7.4. How can we resolve the Rohingya crisis?  
.....

8. In spite of being border neighbor, we have no direct air, road and sea connectivity with Myanmar. Why have we failed to establish direct network?  
.....

8.2. In 2012, maritime boundary settlement was a great achievement for the countries which has created potential areas of maritime cooperation. How can we accelerate that?  
.....

8.3. Though Bangladesh-Myanmar border is peaceful comparing to India, some border irregularities like shooting, killing, abduction of Border Guard member exist in the border. How can we establish peaceful border?

- a) Increasing collaboration between border forces
- b) Removing trust deficit
- c) Emphasizing joint ventures
- d) All of these
- e) Other

8.4. Transnational crimes are one of the vexing issues between the countries. Human trafficking, arms and drug smuggling are prevalent in the border. What are the necessary steps to stop such transnational crimes at the border?  
.....

9. What is your opinion about the nature of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations?

- a) Cooperative
- b) Conflictive
- c) Competitive
- d) Cooperative and Conflictive

10. What is the strategic significance of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations?

.....

10.1. Is there any influence of China and India regarding Bangladesh-Myanmar relations?

- a) Yes
- b) No

10.2. If yes- how do China and India influence Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations?

.....

10.3. At last, how can we develop Bangladesh-Myanmar relations in all respects?

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.....**O**.....