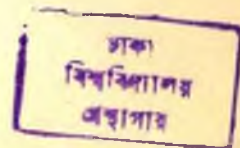


INDIA-BANGLADESH POLITICAL RELATIONS  
DURING THE AWAMI LEAGUE GOVERNMENT, 1972-75

382527

by  
Shaukat Hassan



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at the Australian National University  
April 1987

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Declaration

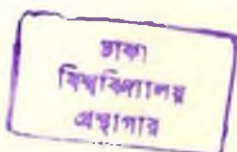
Except where otherwise indicated  
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*Shaukat Hassan*

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Acknowledgements

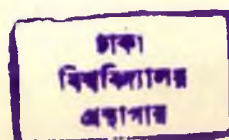
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## ABSTRACT

This study deals with the nature and content of India-Bangladesh political relations during the period 1972-75, when the Awami League Government was in power in Bangladesh. The Government of India had assisted the League, first, in bringing about the secession of East Pakistan and, subsequently, in consolidating its political power in the new State. This gave rise to a number of allegations in Bangladesh against the League Government, namely, that in seeking Indian military assistance to rid Bangladesh of the Pakistan Army, it had reached secret understandings with India which were inimical to Bangladesh's interests; that it subsequently became a subaltern to Indian interests; and that Bangladesh's sovereignty was undermined by its political intimacy with New Delhi. In the process of assessing the validity of these allegations, the thesis has sought to answer a larger and a more important question: What were the causes behind the deterioration of political relations between India and Bangladesh by 1975, after an euphoric start in 1972?

As a theoretical tool the concept of influence relationship has been used in this study, where influence has been defined as follows: influence is manifested when A (the Indian leadership) affects, through non-coercive means, directly or indirectly, the behaviour of B (the Bangladesh leadership) in the hope that it redounds to the policy advantage of A, and *vice versa*. Such a theoretical tool has necessitated the treatment of only selective instances of bilateral relations between them; only those issues



where influence could have operated in either direction have been chosen for examination.

The thesis comprises nine chapters in which are discussed, *inter alia*, the following issues: the Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty; the Bangladesh Army; the *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini*; the border trade agreement; land border and maritime boundary delimitation talks; oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal; and the Ganges waters dispute.

The findings of this study do not support any of the allegations stated above. While the Tajuddin Government did accommodate the Indira Government during the crisis period, and was also willing to kowtow to it subsequently, Mujib was generally steadfast in his unwillingness to compromise on Bangladesh's national interests. The study also finds that the gradual collapse in Indo-Bangladesh political relations was a direct corollary of the League leadership's political myopia, administrative ineptitude and its proprietary attitude that characterized its rule in Bangladesh. While India does not stand exonerated, the League must bear the lion's share of the blame for the deterioration in that relationship.

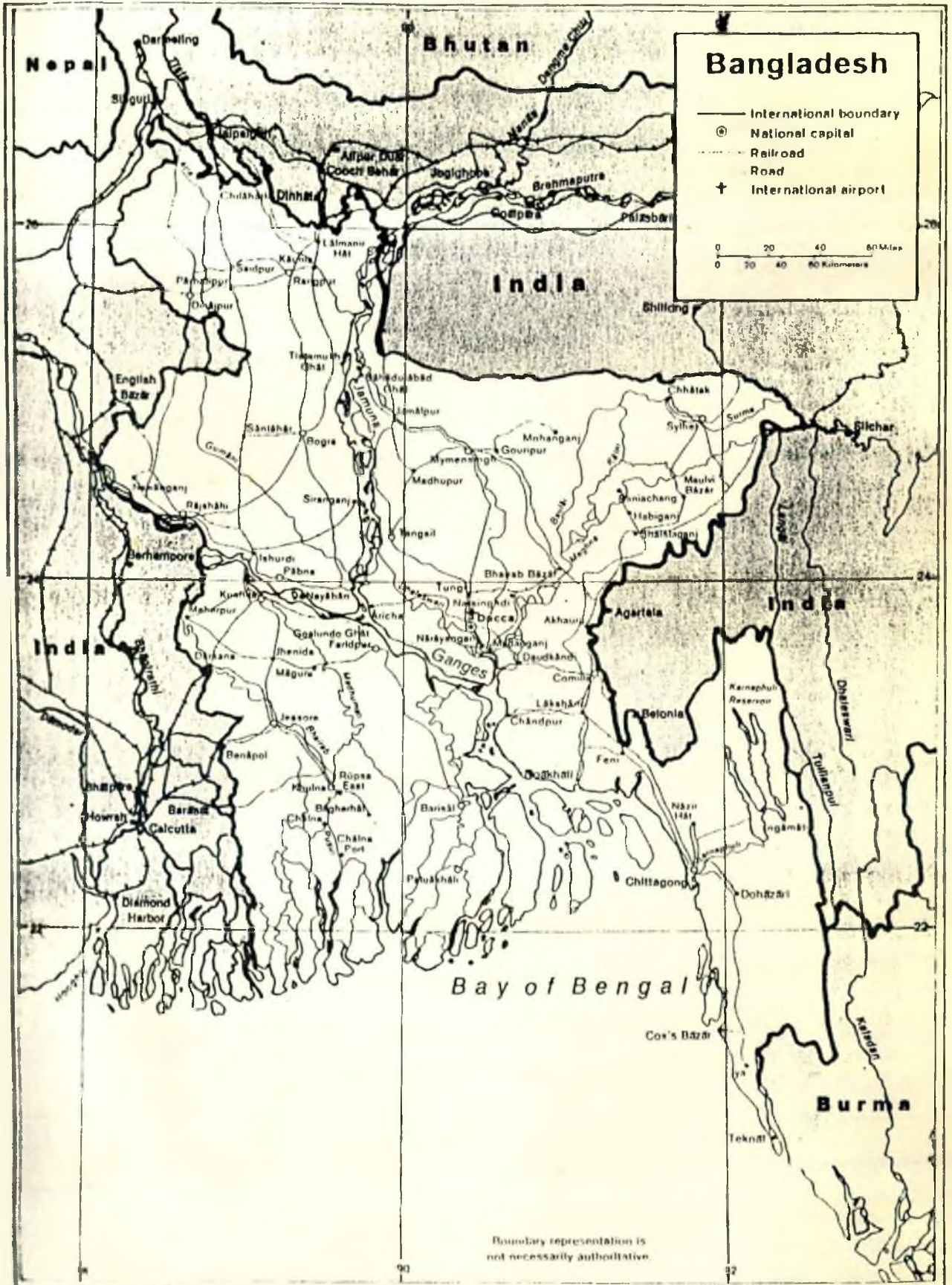
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BANGLADESH





## INTRODUCTION

India has an overwhelming presence in the minds of the Bangladeshi elites because of the historical experiences between the peoples of the two countries, as well as the 'tyranny of geography' which leaves Bangladesh surrounded by India on three sides. Therefore, perceptions of India among the Bangladeshi elites range from concern to paranoia. There is also a false notion among a significant section that Bangladesh is a preoccupation in the minds of the Indian leaders. The truth, however, is that while it may be a constant worry in the minds of the West Bengalis, and perhaps also in the minds of the Assamese in the North, it certainly is not in the minds of the decision makers in New Delhi. This exaggerated self-importance has contributed to the distortions inherent in Indo-Bangla relations.

The desire to study the nature of Indo-Bangladesh relations originated with my brief association with the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies in Dhaka. As a working member of the Institute, I was confronted with the belief among influential sections of the Bangladeshi elites that the causes of much of the adverse developments in the country can be traced back to the first four years after independence, 1972-75, when the Awami League was in power, and when Indo-Bangla relations were at their best. It was believed that during the latter part of the 1971 crisis, the Awami League had made secret arrangements with India to enable it to come to power with Indian military assistance; that it had allowed India to influence political developments within Bangladesh;

and that Bangladesh's sovereignty was somehow shortchanged by the Awami League's professed friendship with India. In short, Indo-Bangla relations as articulated by the Mujib and Indira Governments lie at the root of political instability in Bangladesh. These were serious allegations against the League Government, and had a pernicious effect on relations with India.

The credibility of those who condemned the Awami League was, however, suspect. One could not be sure that it was not a well-orchestrated propaganda by vested interests which were either part of, or in league with, the forces that removed the League Government from power unconstitutionally. The military coup of 15 August 1975 had decimated much of the top leadership of the Awami League, and those still alive, whether inside the country or outside it, maintained their silence. No Awami League leader, so far, has come forward with a public defence of the League Government and its policies. It was therefore difficult to assess whether, and to what degree, the League Government had become a subaltern to Indian interests. These charges required a close scrutiny. This, then, is the motivating factor for choosing such a topic of study.

But the utility of such a study certainly goes beyond that. For instance, in spite of a plethora of political writings on sub-continent affairs by specialists both within the region and without, there is a surprising paucity of literature dealing with Indo-Bangla bilateral relations. This is also true of India's bilateral relations with each of its other neighbours, excepting Pakistan. Scholarly analyses of India's political relations with its neighbours

are so scanty that it may give one the impression that such studies are either intellectually less stimulating or politically unimportant. While most of the literature deals with India's role in the subcontinent from a regional point of view, or with the changing balance of forces in the region owing to the fluidity of the international political order, the nature and content of India's bilateral relations with its neighbours have hardly been dealt with in any systematic manner, and what literature exists treats the subject only tangentially.

Given India's massive involvement in Bangladesh's independence struggle, it makes for a very challenging, if difficult, study as to why the cordial and potentially beneficial relationship deteriorated in such a short span of time. Did religious sentiments re-emerge as the deciding factor? Or was the nature of economic relations the cause of the disruptions in bilateral relations? Or was India impatient, overbearing and therefore 'over-present' in disregard of the sensibilities of the Bangladeshis? Or perhaps there was no common ground, only false perceptions and expectations between the two countries? The study undertaken here tries to identify the underlying causes in the deterioration of Indo-Bangla relations, and may provide clues to decision makers in both countries in understanding the limitations inherent in the perception and psychology of the two peoples. The findings of the dynamics of Indo-Bangladesh relations may also offer valuable insights to the understanding of India's often tumultuous relations with Nepal and Sri Lanka and *vice versa*.



## III

A common assumption among India's detractors in Bangladesh has been that it was the nature of Indo-Bangla relations that *influenced* much of the developments within Bangladesh during the Mujib period. A primary task of this study, therefore, is to examine to what extent India *influenced* Bangladesh's internal and external policies, and in what form and by what means. Accordingly, the concept of influence relationship has been used as an analytical tool. While the literature on the concept of influence relationship is directed mainly to the study of bilateral relations between superpowers and their client states, the concept has been revised to suit the requirements of this study. The literature assumes that influence relationship, as defined in Chapter One, would operate only between two countries with active bilateral relations. Thus, this thesis concerns itself only with the period of the Awami League Government, when Indo-Bangladesh relations were at their most intense.

## IV

A word on the difficulties experienced while conducting research on this topic is also in order. It was hoped that there would be access to the archival files of the period in India and Pakistan. But, the application for a research visa to India was rejected because the topic was considered sensitive by the authorities in New Delhi, even ten years later. A similar application to the Pakistan Government did not elicit an official response. It was learned later, through confidential sources, that the relevant authorities in India were wary of the use of the concept of influence relationship as the theoretical tool in the study of Indo-Bangla relations during the



Mujib period; they feared that India's image would be maligned.

The Pakistan authorities were no less suspicious. Since interviews with Government officials and leaders of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party - in power at the time - were an essential aspect of the research programme, the current martial law government, which forcibly removed Bhutto from power and put in jail most of his party leaders, considered the request a security risk. The research trip to Pakistan was cancelled.

Since research in India was imperative, entry was obtained by means of a tourist visa. Though access to archival material and current official sources was not possible, a vast amount of information was gathered from newspapers, Hansard and interviews with primary actors of that period, many of whom are now in retirement. Thus, lack of access to the archives of the Indian Government did not significantly hinder completion of this study.

#### V

A further note is to be made of the problem of terminology used in the thesis. This is a study of Bangladesh's relations with India and its effects on Bangladesh's internal politics, and *vice versa*. Therefore, it concerns only the elites of the country, who number perhaps less than five percent of the population. It is their conflicting interests and claims that have shaped the country's internal and external policies. It has little to do with the remaining ninety-five percent of the population which comprises the poor and illiterate, who have no influence or control over the events that shape their lives. Therefore, such phrases as 'Bangladesh's policy'

or 'national interest' actually refer to the policy of the dominant faction of the governing party and the interests of the dominant elite group at the time.

Also, the inability to resort to a proper typology of elite groupings is complicated by continuous political fragmentation among them, which has resulted in so many types of - and so frequent changes in - political affiliation and allegiance. Any attempt to categorize the elites neatly - who were represented by one hundred and sixty-two parties in the May 1986 Parliamentary elections - is a frustrating experience. Yet, for the benefit of readers less familiar with Indo-Bangla affairs, an attempt is made below to classify loosely the Bangladeshi elites of that period into several broad categories, on the basis of their attitude towards India.

One group comprised the pro-Chinese and the pro-Islamic. Members of this group, though opposed to each other in their political beliefs and orientation, nonetheless, shared an underlying assumption that Indian foreign policy was aimed basically at undermining the sovereignty of its neighbours. This group inevitably saw an 'Indian hand' in any untoward development in Bangladesh and, thus, prescribed a policy of close friendship, if not security alliance, with China or the United States as the best defence against the alleged ulterior motives of the hostile neighbour.

Another group comprised a tiny minority that held exactly opposite views. Its members considered India a benign power and saw great merit in establishing and maintaining the most cordial relations with the giant neighbour. A third group, which may be termed

loosely as the centrists, fell somewhere in between these two extremes. While members of this group did not see India as a necessarily adversary power, they had to contend with Bangladesh's growing dependence on the West and, accordingly, were obliged to adopt an attitude which increasingly de-emphasized the crucial nature of Indo-Bangla relations. A fourth group could be identified which comprised people who tended to believe in political isolation and rejected dependence on any external source, regional or extra-regional. These four groups and their political interactions may be said to have dictated the state of relations between India and Bangladesh during the period in review. To repeat, these categorizations are only a crude attempt to identify the various forces impacting on Indo-Bangladesh relations, and, as such, should be treated with caution.

## VI

This thesis is not a comprehensive examination of all aspects of Indo-Bangladesh relations during the Mujib period. The nature of the analytical tool used in this study has required the treatment of only selective instances of bilateral relations between them; only those issues where influence could have operated *in either direction* have been chosen for examination.

The study is divided into nine chapters. Chapter One deals with the framework of enquiry. It provides the rationale for choosing the Influence theory as the preferred analytical tool. Next it discusses the salient works on influence theory, and then proceeds to highlight the underlying assumptions, characteristics, determinants, and finally criteria for identifying instances of influence.



Chapter Two discusses the historical background of the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal from 1757 - the year of the eclipse of Muslim rule in Bengal - to 1947, when British rule yielded to the creation of two independent homelands on the basis of religion. This chapter discusses the British colonial administration of Bengal, and how that shaped the perceptions of the Hindu and Muslim communities towards each other. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the historical context, which would provide the reader the perspective with which to judge subsequent relations between the two communities.

Chapter Three discusses the various forces within Pakistan which gradually shaped the attitudes of the people of East Pakistan towards India. It details the political complexities of the East Pakistan crisis, the armed struggle leading to the independence of Bangladesh, and the political concerns of the Mujib and Indira Governments in the immediate aftermath of the struggle. The perceptions and expectations of the two peoples and the realities of the period are also discussed.

The attempt to formalize the political relations between the two Governments by signing a friendship treaty, and the repercussions thereof, form the subject of the fourth chapter. Also discussed are the reasons for, and the nature of, the secret wartime agreement between the Provisional Government of Bangladesh and the Indira Government; the rationale for the subsequent treaty; its effects on the internal politics of Bangladesh; and its implications for Bangladesh's external relations with other countries.

Chapter Five deals with the economic dimension of that



relationship, and is of major importance in understanding the alienation between the two peoples in such a short time. It discusses the conflict of interest between the Indian financial bourgeoisie and the rising new entrepreneurial class in Bangladesh, and the positions of the two Governments in reference to it.

Chapter Six is concerned with the differing perceptions of security in Dhaka and New Delhi. Bangladesh's significance to regional security and its role in India's defence strategy is discussed, as also, the issues of the necessity for a Bangladesh Army and for the *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini* (national security force) as the security arm of Mujib's governing party. The issue of Bangladesh's membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference and India's reaction to it are also discussed.

The negotiations on land and maritime border delimitation and on oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal form the subject matter of the seventh chapter. Perceptual differences of the two leaderships are discussed, as also the nature and content of the talks between them. Chapter Eight deals with the conflict over the sharing of the waters of the Ganges River. It discusses the Joint Rivers Commission and ministerial meetings and their results, examines the merits of the two proposals on the augmentation of the Ganges flow during the lean period, and explains the reasons behind the refusal of each Government to consider the other's proposal. It also examines the reasons for not giving the issue the priority it deserved and for choosing as Bangladesh's chief negotiators known hardliners on India.

The conclusion in Chapter Nine is divided into two parts. The first part provides a summary of findings in this study, and the

second part discusses the validity of influence theory for this type of study.

## Chapter I

## FRAMEWORK OF ENQUIRY

To decide on the conceptual tool that would be most appropriate in investigating the issues comprising the type of study proposed here is not easy, since there will always be some sound argument for the theoretical models not chosen. Therefore one helpful way of getting around this problem might be to state at the outset what this study is not about. It is not a study of foreign policies as such of India and Bangladesh during the period 1972-75. A full treatment of the foreign policies of these two countries is not only beyond the scope of this work, it would also be of very little help to the present purpose, if at all. Nor is it a study of the full range of relations that India and Bangladesh entered into at this period; for instance, the scientific and cultural aspects will not be discussed here. Nor will there be any comprehensive examination of the total range of economic relations between the two countries.

The central question this thesis proposes to examine is: What were the causes behind the deterioration of political relations between India and Bangladesh by 1975, after an euphoric start in 1972? If it is assumed that the elites are the deciding factor, then it is necessary to concentrate on those specific issues that are directly responsible for the changes in their perceptions of India over the four year period.

The treatment of only selective instances of bilateral relations is however not without its drawbacks. For one thing, it introduces

some arbitrariness on the part of the author in choosing those issues which he feels relevant to his study. Also, such an approach would seem to be a 'mixed bag' since it would cut across the fields of both comparative politics and international relations. The examination of selected issues and the specific instances when they were manifest would require both the consideration of inputs from the external environment and the analysis of the processes which made them salient within the respective polities. In some cases, the proper understanding of the issues in consideration would require the state to be seen as a closed system, impervious to its external environment, and the particular event to be wholly understood in the context of the idiosyncratic nature of its leaders, the ruling party, or in reference to the internal dynamics of the state. While in other cases, external inputs may be the key to understanding the nature of the specific issue of concern, and therefore, a better understanding of the forces - regional and extra-regional - that affect bilateral relations between two contiguous and asymmetric states such as India and Bangladesh would be essential. What this means is that the author should choose a conceptual tool that holds the greatest promise of edifying the problem and providing reasonably acceptable conclusions.

Initially two conceptual tools might be considered: the concept of 'dependency relations' and that of 'power relations'. The intention here is not to comment on the relative virtues of these two models by going into detailed discussions of both, but to explore briefly their adequacy in providing a convenient framework for ordering the discussions that would follow. What applicability have these models to the study of political relations between India and Bangladesh?



Dependency relationship as that between the United States and Pakistan, for instance, and power relationship as exemplified by Soviet Union-East Bloc state relations or in some sense by USSR-Finland relations have existed as political phenomena most prominently since the conclusion of the Second World War, and the reasons are not difficult to assess. The advent of the post-1945 period has seen the proliferation of de-colonized countries and with that cross-cultural and cross-national exchanges have increased manifoldly; transactions whether in trade, verbal communication or human visits have simply become limitless. This has produced what Rosenau calls the "penetrated political society". He argues that due to "increasing obscuration of the boundaries between national political systems and their international environments...even the last stronghold of sovereignty - the power to decide the personnel, practices and policies of government - has become subject to internationalization".<sup>1</sup> No developed or developing country is so self-sufficient as to be immune from internationalization. Thus, as another scholar observed, "What happens in India or Iran is no longer intelligible in terms of parochial Indian or Iranian events and forces, but must be seen as part of a world transformation in which these particular pockets of semiautonomy are working out their distinctive and yet somehow parallel destinies".<sup>2</sup> The penetrated political system is therefore one in which "nonmembers of a national society participate directly and authoritatively, through actions

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1. James N. Rosenau, "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy", in R. Barry Farrell ed. Approaches to Comparative and International Politics, Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1966, pp. 53-54.
  2. Fred W. Riggs, "The Theory of Developing Politics" World Politics vol. xvi, no. 1, October 1963, p. 171, cited ibid., p. 55

taken jointly with the society's members in either the allocation of its values or the mobilization of support on behalf of its goals".<sup>3</sup>

In these instances, the concept of interdependence would seem, arguably, to be adequate as a tool for examining and understanding the political relations among states. However, in the particular instances cited above, the regimes in the weaker countries have had to align themselves with the stronger ally not necessarily so much to protect their countries' interests as to consolidate and aggrandize their own hold over the national political system. In these cases, dependency relationship or power relationship might prove adequate as conceptual tools in the understanding of the nature of relationship existing between them.

But India and Bangladesh seem to fall in a special category. They both profess nonalignment towards the blocs, and yet between them they are unable to develop relations of interdependence. At least three factors are to be noted here for a better understanding of this complexity. First, prior to the advent of the British in the South Asian subcontinent, the historical relationship between the peoples of what is now Bangladesh and those of the rest of India was one of coexistence. While there were the usual fluctuations in the sizes of kingdoms in the region due to conquest and defeat, there is no evidence of overt and sustained hostility between the particular peoples of Bengal and those in the surrounding region. Indeed, the people of Bengal did not have a distinct national identity in the modern sense.

Second, after the British control of India, Bengal and other

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3. Rosenau, op.cit. (1), p. 65

regions began to develop separate political and administrative identities. The British colonialists promulgated economic laws that favoured the Hindus, and allowed religious differences to come to the fore. Thus, during the British rule, Hindu-Muslim religious differences gradually developed into noxious rivalry, which took its extreme form subsequently in the separate religious homelands in the subcontinent. Finally, with the creation of Bangladesh, new hopes were nourished on both sides of the border that bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh would develop into something more than just the coexistence of the past.

This new feeling was reinforced by India's assistance to the East Pakistanis during their armed struggle to secede from Pakistan. At the height of the East Pakistan crisis, it was India that had borne the burden of the millions of East Bengali refugees, albeit with UN aid. It was India that had given shelter to the Awami League leadership and allowed it to function as an exile government on its soil. It was India that had given arms, sanctuary and sustenance to Bangladesh's freedom fighters. Finally, it was the Indian Army which had brought about the swift surrender of the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan, thereby foreclosing the debilitating effects of an attritional civil war.

These conflicting historical occurrences at least serve to crystallize the inherent contradictions and confusions in the region. And if on the basis of these observations, we reject the concepts of dependency relationship and power relationship as wholly inadequate for our needs, then we must find one that would measure up closer to our requirement.



One possibility would be to employ Keohane and Nye's notions of 'mutual sensitivity' and 'relative vulnerability'.<sup>4</sup> While both are aspects of interdependence, the former takes note of "the extent to which change in one state affects change in others", that is, the susceptibility of the international actors to each other's conduct, and the latter describes the "relative costs of alternatives for the parties", the less dependent state having the greater flexibility.<sup>5</sup> It is argued here that these two aspects of interdependence would provide us the necessary context in which to identify the conceptual tool which would be appropriate to our study.

A good measure of the relevance of these two notions is to be gained from an examination of the South Asian scene immediately after the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971. From the political point of view, the South Asian landscape was admittedly different after the birth of Bangladesh. As if at one brilliant stroke of political legerdemain, Indira Gandhi's Government was able to convert the South Asian political and security environment from one of inherent insecurity to one of tolerable security for India. The post-1962 three-front military threat to India was reduced to two fronts and the friendship treaty with the Soviet Union had considerably allayed India's fear of China. Thus, with a truncated Pakistan and a friendly Bangladesh, India, by 1972, had become the 'hub power' of South Asia.<sup>6</sup> Theoretically, it was in a position

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4. "Power and Interdependence", Survival, vol. xv, no. 4, July/August 1973, p. 160

5. Ibid.

6. The phrase 'hub power' is borrowed from Arnold Wolfers' Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962, where the United States was first described as the hub power of the West.

to exercise influence over its neighbours if it chose to.

From the economic point of view, newly independent Bangladesh held a great promise to Indian industry, commerce and trade. There was a potentially high market for Indian technology, expertise and machinery. Indian and Bangladeshi industrialists dreamt of Indian credit and investments and of joint industrial ventures in Bangladesh. There were even hopes in certain circles in West Bengal that the port of Calcutta would find an additional lease on life with Bangladesh as the great hinterland.

From the security point of view, the independence of Bangladesh had converted an erstwhile official foe in East Pakistan to a dependable ally, thus considerably easing tension and anxiety particularly in India's Eastern command. Additionally, a friendly Bangladesh could also be counted on not to have a cordial relationship, or at least one at the expense of India, with the latter's arch-enemies, China and Pakistan. That China had sided with Pakistan during the East Pakistan crisis, and had cast its first veto in the Security Council on Bangladesh's application for membership in the United Nations, were not lost on either Bangladesh or India.

Theoretically, these arguments would seem to provide a strong case for India and Bangladesh to appreciate their relative vulnerability to each other's internal and external policies. This was even more so given the nature of the contemporary international system, which provides virtually no safeguard for the welfare of the member states. Security being the scarcest commodity in contemporary existence,<sup>7</sup> anxiety over security, combined with a very poor

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7. J. David Singer, "Inter-Nation Influence: A Formal Model" The American Political Science Review, vol. 57, no. 2, June 1963, p. 422

ability to predict the future state of affairs, impels governments to sue for coexistence. Since, in the case of India and Bangladesh, years of official hostility - and religious and economic rivalry prior to that - formed the immediate background, any attempt at a full-blooded interdependence in their political relations was bound to be an unpredictable undertaking. On the other hand, dependency relationship was also politically infeasible. The most realistic approach that each Government could perhaps hope for was to pursue a policy of coexistence and, in times of friendship between regimes as in the case of the Indira Congress and the Awami League, a policy of frequent resort to attempts to bring about desired policy changes in the other. It is from these considerations that, as a theoretical framework, I propose to use the concept of 'influence relationship' to study Indo-Bangladesh relations in the period 1972-75.

The foregoing observations do not provide us with anything in the way of formulating an influence theory; they merely argue for the relative importance that should be attached to influence relationship as a conceptual tool in the study of Indo-Bangladesh relations. There are, however, two shortcomings which need to be recognized at the outset. First, its use as a conceptual tool is fairly recent in the social science discipline. Preliminary writings on a theoretical model for influence relationship in the context of international relations first appeared in the sixties; hardly any new ground has been broken in terms of its conceptual understanding in the last ten years.

Second, it has had a very limited application in the past. The reason perhaps does not rest on its applicability as a theoretical



tool as such, but is perhaps to be found in reference to power studies. Starting with Hans Morgenthau's seminal work in 1948 on the relationship between international politics and the struggle for power, the next two decades have witnessed an overwhelming devotion to the study of the role of power in international relations,<sup>8</sup> and although the concept of influence finds its pedigree in power, it is quite likely that it could not make its own distinct and lasting mark in such an ambience of power studies. Whatever may be the case, influence as a political phenomenon is no less important than that of power in the study of international relations; what is to be noted is that its degree, frequency and subtlety may vary with time and changes in the political environment.

Though its ubiquity did not lead to a theory of influence as one might wish, we are still left to grapple with it at least as a model to suit our present purpose. Admittedly, theorizing is a difficult task; as Talcott Parsons described it: "the development of effective concepts of wide applicability, like establishing a formal garden in the wilderness, necessarily involves a great struggle to

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8. See for instance, Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, Power and Society, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950; Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power", Behavioural Science 2 (July 1957), pp. 201-15; and his Modern Political Analysis, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963; H.A. Simon, "Notes on Observations and Measurement of Political Power" Journal of Politics, 15, (November 1953), pp. 500-16; Maurice A. Ash, "An Analysis of Power, with Special Reference to International Politics", World Politics, vol.3, no. 2, (January 1951), pp. 218-37; Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power" The American Political Science Review, vol. 56, no. 4, (December 1962), pp. 947-52; W.H. Riker, "Some Ambiguities in the Notion of Power", The American Political Science Review, vol. 58, no. 2, (June 1964), pp. 341-49; Dorwin Cartwright ed. Studies in Social Power, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Social Research, 1958; K.J. Holsti, "Concept of Power in the Study of International Relations" Background, 7, (February 1964), pp. 179-94; J.H. Nagel, "Some Questions about the Concept of Power" Behavioural Science, 13, (March 1968), pp. 129-37; Talcott Parsons, "On the Concept of Political Power" Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 107, (June 1963), pp. 232-62; to name only a few.

bring order out of obscurity and chaos, and a great deal of systematic planting and cultivation after the initial clearing and pruning has been done".<sup>9</sup> In our case, the struggle is to separate it as a concept distinct from that of power. This is complicated by two drawbacks. First, because of a lack of a universally accepted terms and definitions, political scientists often employ a variety of terms: power, influence, force, coercion, control, might, persuasion, authority. Second, when they concentrate on the term 'power', it is used interchangeably with the term 'influence', as if these two terms were one and the same.<sup>10</sup> The aim here is to distinguish between the two.

Lasswell and Kaplan were perhaps the earliest international political theorists to make a formal distinction between the concepts of power and influence in a manner that is helpful to the student of international politics. They pointed out that "it is the threat of sanctions which differentiates power from influence in general", arguing that power "is a special case of the exercise of influence". They defined power as "the process of affecting policies of others with the help of (actual or threatened) severe deprivations for non-conformity with the policies intended".<sup>11</sup> Thus influence may become power whenever the effect on policy is enforced through sanctions, mild or severe. And the exercise of influence is transformed into

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9. "On the Concept of Influence" Public Opinion Quarterly, 27, (Spring 1963), p. 37

10. See, for instance K.J. Holsti, International Politics: A Framework for Analysis, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967, chapter vii; David Baldwin, "Inter-nation Influence Revisited", Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol. 15, no. 4, (December 1971), pp. 471-86

11. Op.cit. (8), p. 76

a power relationship "if the deprivations imposed by the influential are important enough to those over whom influence is being exercised".<sup>12</sup>

This important distinction was missing in the earlier writings on power. Bertrand Russell, for instance, defined power as "the production of intended effects".<sup>13</sup> This definition of power leaves a lot to be desired if it is to be employed in the political sense or, specifically, in terms of decision-making, since "the production of intended effects" is meaningful in the political context only as it directly or indirectly involves other persons. Carl Friedrich took note of this human dimension by suggesting that power "is a certain kind of human relationship" and proceeded to pen the 'rule of anticipated reaction': policies are determined by expectations of the resulting conduct of those to be influenced.<sup>14</sup> A few years earlier, R.H. Tawney defined power as "the capacity of an individual or a group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner which he desires...", leaving open the availability of sanctions when the intended effects are not forthcoming.<sup>15</sup> Thus most of these early authors seem to echo Locke's conception of power when he stated that "political power, then, I take to be a right of making laws, with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties..."<sup>16</sup>

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12. Ibid., p. 84

13. Power: A New Social Analysis, New York: W.W. Norton, 1938, p. 35

14. Constitutional Government and Politics, New York: Harper, 1937, pp. 12-14

15. Equality, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931, p. 75

16. Two Treatises of Government, New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1947, p. 122



Writings of the sixties continued to display this trend of defining power in terms of sanctions. Karl Deutsch, for instance, writing in the early sixties, defined power as the "ability of an individual or an organization to impose extrapolations or projections of their inner structure upon their environment". He further argued that "to have power means not to have to give in, and to force the environment of the other person to do so. Power is therefore the priority of output over intake".<sup>17</sup> Carrying forward the same theme in a later study, he stated that "power is the ability to prevail in conflict and to overcome obstacles".<sup>18</sup> Yet another scholar defined power in the international scene as "the capacity of a political unit to impose its will upon other units".<sup>19</sup> Thus all these definitions bear the hallmark of Morgenthau's critical observation that power is the motive force in international politics, and therefore, most nations face essentially three fundamental policy choices - to maintain power, to increase power, or to demonstrate power;<sup>20</sup> and the notion of influence as a distinct and separate category went unrecognized.

It was in 1950 when Lasswell and Kaplan identified influence as a category distinct from power. This was followed by Robert Dahl's separation of the concept of power - "a special case of influence involving severe losses for noncompliance" - from that of

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17. Nerves of Government, London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963, p. 111

18. Analysis of International Relations, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978, p. 23

19. Raymond Aron, Peace and War, London: Doubleday and Company Ltd., 1966, p. 45

20. Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948, p. 21

influence - "a relation among actors [such as individuals, groups, associations, states] in which one actor induces other actors to act in some way they would not otherwise act".<sup>21</sup> While Dahl's definition of influence will require further refinement to suit our need, what is important here is the distinction made between power and influence.

A more detailed study made to date on the concepts of power and influence is by the team of Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz. According to them, influence relations and power relations are not the same. "A power relationship exists when (a) there is a conflict over values or courses of action between A and B; (b) B complies with A's wishes; and (c) he does so because he is fearful that A will deprive him of a value or values which he, B, regards more highly than those which would have been achieved by noncompliance".<sup>22</sup> They stress, however, that the availability of a sanction endows A with power over B only if four conditions are fulfilled:<sup>23</sup> (a) the person threatened is aware of what is expected of him; (b) the threatened sanction is actually regarded as a deprivation by the person who is threatened; (c) the person threatened has greater esteem for the value which would be sacrificed should he disobey than for another value which would be foregone should he comply; and (d) the person threatened is persuaded that the threat against him is not idle.

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21. Analysis, op.cit.(8), pp. 32 and 17

22. "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework", The American Political Science Review, vol. 57, no. 3, (September 1963), p. 635

23. Ibid., p. 634

They argue that the condition that distinguishes power from influence is the threat to apply sanctions and therefore the presence of a power relationship is characterized by the occurrence of threats. An influence relationship, on the other hand, is manifested without the application of threatened sanctions. "One person has *influence* over another...to the extent that the first, without resorting to either a tacit or an overt threat of severe deprivations, causes the second to change his course of action". Thus, power and influence are different "in that the exercise of power depends upon potential sanctions, while the exercise of influence does not".<sup>24</sup> Further, they reject the statement that "influence is persuasive while power is coercive [and that] we submit voluntarily to influence while power requires submission", arguing that if submission is voluntary it is not influence but power that operates, and if submission is under duress then force operates.<sup>25</sup> They admit, however, that sharp and clear distinctions between power and influence are exacerbated by the fact that power and influence often occur simultaneously and that one frequently leads to the other.

Having briefly discussed above some of the more salient works on power and influence,<sup>26</sup> let us now turn to the concept of influence itself.

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24. ibid., p. 637

25. Robert Bierstedt, "An Analysis of Social Power", American Sociological Review, vol. 15 (December 1950), p. 731, quoted in ibid., p. 637, fn. 26

26. For studies that raise different aspects of power and influence and not referred to above, see, Robert W. Cox and Harold K. Jacobson, The Anatomy of Influence, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973, particularly chapters 1, 2, and 11; and Kjell Goldmann and Gunnar Sjostedt ed. Power, Capabilities, Interdependence: Problems in the Study of International Influence, London: Sage Publications, 1977



Any study of influence relationship necessitates certain underlying *assumptions* that need to be elaborated for the purposes of this study. First, it is an accepted fact that every nation engages in influence building - the process whereby the ruling elite of one country seeks to advance that country's national aims *vis-a-vis* another country without recourse to coercive means. Second, to be operationally useful, the concept of influence should be used in a very precise and restricted sense. This is all the more important in view of the fact that the term 'influence' is generally used by political scientists quite loosely and often interchangeably with such terms as power, coercion, force, etc. Attempts have already been made in the preceding pages to distinguish 'influence' from 'power'; continued attempts should be made to maintain a 'clean' terminology.

Third, it is assumed that one way of assessing influence is by studying the responses of those involved in the influence relationship. Thus, the nature of interaction between India and Bangladesh and the specific issue areas directly relevant to their national interests would be crucial to our study. Fourth, although the spectrum of Indian interests in Bangladesh's internal and external affairs is understandably large, it does not follow that instances of influence are equally large because the actual number of issue areas critical to both countries' interests is, in reality, rather limited. Fifth, the higher the stakes perceived by India or Bangladesh, the more likely each would try to influence the other's policies. Sixth, the lower the costs and the higher the probability of success perceived, the more would be the disposition towards making an influence

attempt. Finally, it is reasonable to assume that each country "will undertake an influence attempt if...the expected benefits from the attempt are larger than the expected costs".<sup>27</sup>

The above assumptions are made with the understanding that the working definition of influence would be as follows: influence is manifested when A (the Indian leadership) affects, through non-coercive means, directly or indirectly, the behaviour of B (Bangladeshi ruling elite) in the hope that it redounds to the policy advantage of A, and *vice versa*.<sup>28</sup> This is a qualitative improvement in our context, over other definitions of influence put forth.

James March has defined influence as "that which induces behaviour on the part of the individual at time  $t_1$  different from that which might be predicted on the basis of a knowledge of the individual...at time  $t_0$ ".<sup>29</sup> The key word appears to be 'different'; if the behaviour is not 'different' from what is normally expected then there is no influence. The deficiency in this definition lies in the fact that it does not take into account sustained predictable behaviour that may be due to the application of influence.

Robert Dahl's definition that influence is manifest when A "can

27. The ellipsis stands for the phrase "and only if" which I have deleted from Baldwin's assertion on the grounds that in a situation where a nation-state is desperate to influence a particular outcome, it could very well overlook this calculation. See, Baldwin, op.cit. (10) pp. 482-3
28. I have revised the definition offered by Alvin Z. Rubinstein to suit my particular need. See his Red Star on the Nile, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. xiv
29. "An Introduction to the Theory and Measurement of Influence", The American Political Science Review, vol. 49, no. 2, (June 1955), p. 438

get B to do something that B would not otherwise do", suffers from similar inadequacy in that it fails to accommodate the type of influence called perpetuation or reinforcement.<sup>30</sup> It is quite likely that B is already pursuing policies desired by A but, nevertheless, A resorts to influence attempts to ensure that B will continue to do so.<sup>31</sup> It may be recalled here that Bachrach and Baratz' definition of influence given earlier is also based on a change in behaviour, and overlooks the operation of influence to effect a continuation of a particular behaviour pattern. These definitions, therefore, smack of power rather than influence. Rubinstein's definition is conceptually clearer because it distinguishes influence from other words such as power and force, by its emphasis on 'non-coercive means', and the operation of the influence process is not necessarily predicated on any actual modification of behaviour of the actor to be influenced.

There are several *characteristics* of influence that should be noted. First, influence may or may not imply a modification of B's policy; as noted earlier, it may only reinforce or perpetuate existing policy. Second, it is generally issue-specific and situation-specific: when a particular policy of B has, or is anticipated to have, certain discernible connotations for A, it is likely that A will have recourse to influence attempts on B. The duration of influence will depend on the nature of the issue, and on the context

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30. "The Concept of Power", op.cit. (8), though in his later book, Analysis, op.cit. (8), p. 40, he claims that "Of course this definition also includes instances in which actor A induces actor B to go on doing something he is now doing, though B would stop it except for A's inducement".

31. This argument is sustained in Singer, op.cit. (7), p. 421, and in Holsti, op.cit. (10), p. 195



in which the particular issue is generated; when these change, the nature of the influence relationship is likely to change.

Third, it is future-oriented, and the actual outcome of influence may not be evident until a later time. The decision, however, to engage in an influence attempt may be conditioned by experiences in the part of oneself or of others, or it may be a preemptive move to foreclose a certain eventuality. Fourth, it may be either a short-term or a long-term phenomenon depending on the importance, urgency or prevalence of an issue or a situation; it does not presuppose any time limit. Fifth, it is an asymmetrical interaction process; since it is non-coercive in content, there is no direct correlation between influence capability and successful outcome; the only exception being that an endowed state may have more incentives to offer to the state to be influenced, though that does not presuppose a particular outcome.

Sixth, it usually involves costs but there is no fixed pattern. The influencer will *usually* make a rational choice regarding the cost (say, for instance, in prestige, image, authority, friendship) of an influence attempt and its benefits, and this estimate is likely to depend also on his perceptions of the probability of success.<sup>32</sup> Seventh, while the influence *attempt* may be issue-specific or situation-specific, the influence *outcome* may be multidimensional, manifesting itself in different spheres.<sup>33</sup> Finally, it is usually a

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32. Baldwin, op.cit. (10), p. 481

33. The distinction here is between influence as a verb (process/attempt) and influence as a noun (product/outcome). Rubinstein's definition portrays influence as a process and yet what is to be observed and assessed are outcomes. Rubinstein and others have recognised that this semantic confusion cannot be eliminated. See, Rubinstein, op.cit. (28), p. xiv

two-way phenomenon; while A may initiate an influence attempt on B, once the goal is realized or is in the process of being realized, A may be influenced into amending its previous attitude or posture towards B; thus a one-way phenomenon may give rise to a feedback.

There are, however, a number of limiting factors which require that the above be accepted with caution. One cannot always assume that basic national preferences will remain constant no matter which political party is in power. Not only successive parties and factions bring their own political preferences and electoral commitments into office, these same power holders may undergo value changes in the course of their exercise of power. This was the case, for instance, in Bangladesh when the ruling party, the Awami League, in January 1975, after three years in power, suddenly abandoned its lifelong pursuit of instituting a parliamentary democracy and implemented a one-party presidential system instead.

Another factor to be noted is the internal unity or cohesiveness in carrying out policy. Where this is missing, the party or coalition in power can be severely hampered in its ability to conduct foreign policy. Finally, the flow of information between the parties in the influence relationship is also important, specially with respect to A's preferences regarding what policies B should adopt so as not to harm A's interests and *vice versa*, and also the availability of alternatives to each party to accommodate the other's desires. Thus, it is necessary to note the impermanence of elite values or structures, the unity and cohesiveness of the elite in power, and the proper flow of information between the countries engaged in the influence relationship, since these may vitiate the calculations

made above.<sup>34</sup>

It now remains to be seen under what conditions influence attempts are likely to be initiated. An understanding of the *determinants* of influence attempts would help us identify the contexts in which the influence process is likely to operate. On a general level at least six cases may be considered:

- (1) "the first prerequisite for an influence attempt is the *perception* on the part of A's decision-makers that A and B are, or will be, in a relationship of significant interdependence, and that B's future behaviour consequently could well be such as to exercise either a harmful or beneficial impact on A";<sup>35</sup>
- (2) "the second determinant is that of the *predictions* which A's decision-makers reach regarding the nature of B's future behaviour: What is B likely to do in the absence of any conscious influence attempt by A?";<sup>36</sup>
- (3) influence attempt will result only when A develops certain preferences regarding B's current or future behaviour;
- (4) the number of times a state becomes involved in acts of influence depends upon the general level of interaction with another state; that is, the frequency of influence attempts will be directly related to the level of interaction between the states concerned;
- (5) influence attempts are more likely where there is willingness to be influenced; that is, influence is contingent upon the degree and quality of responsiveness of state B;
- (6) finally, there is Carl Friedrich's 'rule of anticipated reaction'. B wishes C to do x, but will not try to get C to do it because it fears that A will do y which is unfavourable to B's interests. Example: In pursuit of its desire to make the Indian Ocean a zone of peace,

34. Singer, *op.cit.* (7), pp. 425 and 430

35. *Ibid.*, p. 423

36. *Ibid.*



Bangladesh, B, would prefer that the navies of the major powers (USA, USSR, UK, France), C, withdraw, x, from the Indian Ocean; but Bangladesh does not pursue this course of action because it fears that in the absence of the navies of the major powers, the Indian Navy, A, will play an hegemonic role, y, in the Indian Ocean which might not be beneficial to Bangladesh's long-term interests.

A very difficult hurdle, however, in any study of influence relationship between two countries is to identify accurately instances of influence without which no assessment is possible. The following *criteria* for identifying instances of influence may be considered.<sup>37</sup> First, shifts or changes in the position of the actor influenced would be a criterion. We may try to identify the concrete instances in which Bangladesh or India modifies its behaviour or stand in a manner congenial to the other's interests. From the degree, speed, frequency and implications of these modifications inferences can be made about the other's influence. Also, in order to influence, say, Bangladesh, into adopting a particular stance, India may have to adopt a certain posture too, and this shift from its original position could be a measurement of Bangladesh's indirect influence over India. The difficulty here would be to determine who influenced whom.

A second criterion for identifying instances of influence may be a sharp improvement in India's ability to carry out transactions in Bangladesh. The increase or expansion in India's diplomatic presence in Bangladesh, the greater access of Indian diplomats to the highest echelons of decision-making in Bangladesh, the frequency and

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37. The first, second, fifth and sixth criteria have been borrowed from Rubinstein, op.cit. (28), pp. xv-xvi

level of inter-state visits, all these may serve as useful indicators in identifying influence acts.

A third criterion may be the nature and content of the general level of involvement between the two Governments. For instance, a decision by the Bangladesh Government to send its military officers to India for special training instead of Britain or the United States, or the decision to replace other trading partners with India would constitute a certain acquiescence in Indian influence. Even if the trade pacts are logical in the context of price and proximity, in the case of India and Bangladesh, it would be the state of political relations that would be the persuasive factor in determining these outcomes.

Fourth, the level of responsiveness of one country to the needs of the other, and *vice versa*, would be another criterion. For instance, a willingness to 'concede' aspects of national interests for the sake of bilateral harmony, or the decision to 'lower the ante' so that negotiations will conclude successfully may be viewed as part and parcel of an influence relationship. Of course, where an influence relationship is inoperative, states may still 'concede' to influence a particular outcome, as was the case at the Simla Talks in 1972 between India and Pakistan, when India decided not to cash in on its military advantages *vis-a-vis* the latter in the hope that Bhutto's civilian government would be able to consolidate itself against the army's attempts to return to power.

Fifth, any sudden and significant increase in the quantity, quality and variety of resources committed by India to Bangladesh would suggest a change in the political relations between the two

countries. This could even be such a non-tangible resource as India's diplomatic spearheading of Bangladesh's entry to the United Nations and other bodies. In its role as a mentor, India was quite easily persuaded to speak for Bangladesh's case in various world bodies. One could perhaps argue that the special understanding between Mrs. Gandhi and Tajuddin Ahmed, leader of the Bangladesh Provisional Government in Calcutta, provided the scope for influence relationship to operate, enabling Bangladesh to seek the assistance of India's very capable political and diplomatic establishments.

Sixth, and a very important criterion, is the extent to which India's strategic position in South Asia improves. For instance, the signing of the Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty immediately after Bangladesh's independence, containing security clauses that prohibit entering into security or defence arrangements with third parties that might be injurious to one of the signatories, or entering into mutual consultations should there be a security threat to either of the signatories from any quarter, could certainly be seen as improving India's strategic and tactical options in the sub-continent. Also, the friendly relations between India and Bangladesh during the League Government were viewed by the People's Republic of China with suspicion, and China refused to recognize Bangladesh. This of course redounded to Indian interests, since the absence of Chinese diplomatic presence in Dhaka also meant the absence of the possibility of Chinese machinations against India through Bangladesh.

These six criteria will be employed in the concluding chapter to ascertain whether influence relationship operated between the two countries during the period of this study.



## Chapter 2

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: 1757 - 1947

There was a tremendous amount of fraternal feeling towards India after the Indo-Bangladesh victory over Pakistan in December 1971, arising from gratitude for India's all-out support for the people of Bangladesh in their struggle for independence. There was much promise and hope that this relationship would endure many years to come; but it petered out within five years.

To explain why this happened so quickly requires an examination of the underlying currents that shaped this relationship. It would appear that historical perceptions of the Bengali Muslims of Bangladesh may have been partly responsible for the collapse of this relationship. If that is true, what were these historical perceptions?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the British colonial administration of Bengal, what effect it had on the Muslim community, and how that shaped the perceptions of the Hindu and Muslim communities towards each other.

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Historians assign 1757 as the year of the eclipse of Muslim rule in Bengal. In that year, in the battle of Plassey, Nawab Sirajudoula was defeated by the British and colonial rule was informally established. Shortly thereafter, a series of administrative measures pertaining to colonial rule were introduced, radically changing the Hindu-Muslim relationship in the society. These were:

1) revision of the land system; 2) dropping of Persian as the language of government; 3) introduction of the New Administrative Policy; and 4) change in army recruitment policy. These four measures went a long way in consolidating and formalizing colonial rule in India and in dethroning the Muslims from all seats of power. In the course of time, a deep sense of alienation developed between the two religious communities, giving scope for separatist tendencies to develop among the Muslims.

1) Revision of the land system: The principal source of income of the Moghul Government and the Muslim aristocracy was land revenue. The Muslim rulers of Bengal were not indigenious to the land where Hindus were in the majority and therefore thought it politically expedient to keep themselves aloof from the actual collection of the revenue. It was also politically expedient for them to allow some Hindus to be associated with the revenue collection process and to allow them to keep a percentage for themselves.<sup>1</sup> After collecting the revenue, the Hindu bailiffs would keep their share of the profits and pass on the rest to their Muslim superiors who monopolized the higher posts in the revenue administration.<sup>2</sup> The Muslim superiors would, in turn, keep their share and forward the rest to the imperial coffers.

After the battles of Plassey and Buxer, this set-up was completely revised. The East India Company, having extracted from the

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1. A.R. Mallick, British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 1757-1856, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961, p. 32

2. Ibid., p. 33

Moghul ruler in Delhi the grant of *diwani* (revenue collection) of Bengal, devised a new plan to ensure, quicken and increase the collection of revenue -- a system of farming out the revenue collection to the highest bidder. These bidders were Calcutta merchants, dealers and money-lenders, a class of Hindu speculators who had made their fortunes by trading with the Europeans or serving as local agents of European companies.

The effects of this new farming system (introduced in 1772 and abolished in 1779) on most of the society of Bengal - the Nawab, the aristocracy and the peasantry - were most telling. After the Nawab's defeat, he became "a tool, a cipher in the hands of the foreigners" who "was allowed to govern, never to rule".<sup>3</sup> His allowance was drastically reduced, which left him politically and financially impoverished. The aristocracy fared no better. The system of farming out revenue through auction ousted many of these landlords who could not compete against the Hindu merchants and bankers of Calcutta. The Muslim superiors who held the position between the landlord and the Hindu collectors were also replaced by English collectors.

Under this system, corruption, fraud and exploitation had become so rampant that the India Act of 1784 commanded the Company "to enquire into the alleged grievances of the landholders and if founded in truth to afford them redress and to establish permanent rules for the settlement and collection of the revenue and for administration of justice, founded in the ancient laws and local

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3. G.B. Malleson, The Decisive Battles of India, London, 1883, p. 70



usages of the country."<sup>4</sup> The upshot was the Permanent Settlement of 1793, which made over the lands of Bengal to a new class of *zamindars* (holders of large estates). The new revenue system comprised the state, the Hindu bailiffs who collected the revenue from the peasants, and the peasantry itself. The Muslim aristocracy had no role to play,<sup>5</sup> and by 1793 it was displaced by the Hindus and the British.<sup>6</sup>

The final blow to the Muslim upper class came as a result of Resumption proceedings of the Government. Under Muslim rule, persons of scholastic distinction or religious merit were granted lands by the state in lieu of salary or stipends;<sup>7</sup> but the Resumption Law denied the continuation of rent-free grants to the Muslim aristocracy.

The peasants and weavers forming the majority represented the lower order of Muslim society. When the system of farming out the revenue to the highest bidder was introduced, it left the peasants utterly vulnerable to the rapacity and extortion of the revenue farmers. The *zamindar*-peasant relationship deteriorated further with the Permanent Settlement. The new *zamindar*, having won the *zamindari* in auction, in turn, farmed out his estate to the farmer who offered him the highest profit over and above the revenue fixed by the Government. The farmer, in turn, auctioned it off to others "till farm within farm became the order of the day each resembling

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4. Quoted in N.K. Sinha, The Economic History of Bengal, vol. II, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962, p. 23

5. W.W. Hunter, The Indian Musalmans, London, 1872, p. 162

6. Ibid., p. 163; also see, J.W. Kaye, Selections from the Papers of Lord Metcalfe, London, 1855, p. 253

7. F.J. Shore, Notes on Indian Affairs, vol. I, p. 414

a screw upon a screw, the last coming down on the tenant with the pressure of them all".<sup>8</sup> As the peasant was totally dependent on the land, for him there was no way out.<sup>9</sup> To this must be added the harassment of the peasants by the Indigo planters, who were mostly English and took advantage of the distress of the peasants to induce them into entering disadvantageous contracts, thereby binding them to the planters "as a bond slave to the factory".<sup>10</sup>

The weavers were no match for the owners of the Dundee mills. Arbitrary price fixing, disincentives for finished products from India, and unfair trading regulations went hand in hand in undermining the economic viability of this section of Muslim society.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the impact of the new land system in Bengal was to create a new Hindu exploiting class, and, simultaneously, greatly impoverish the Muslim aristocracy and the Muslim peasants; the end result was growing Muslim hatred of the Hindus.

2) Replacement of Persian as the language of government: Persian was the language of the Muslim court. The East India Company, trading being its primary interest, thought it advisable at first to retain Persian as the official language. Gradually, however, Persian was replaced by Bengali, which opened up government services to the Bengali-speaking Hindus. It must be noted that while the language

8. W.H. Sleeman, Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official, vol. 1, London, 1893, p. 83, cited in Mallick, op.cit. p. 52

9. Ibid., pp. 52-53

10. Ibid., p. 54

11. Report of the Indigo Commission, Parliamentary Papers XLIV, 1861, cited ibid., pp. 53-56

of the Muslim masses of Bengal - peasants and weavers - was Bengali, the aristocracy spoke Persian, Arabic or Urdu. With Bengali becoming the official language, a large section of the Muslim aristocracy was automatically disqualified from state employment.

As the Company's territorial acquisitions increased and its military and financial control expanded, its administrators realized that the current standard of education was woefully inadequate. Thus with the renewal of the Company's Charter in 1813, an educational clause sanctioning Government assistance in the education of the natives was approved. Two decades later, in 1835, the Government of William Bentinck passed a resolution to the effect that "all the funds at the disposal of the Government would henceforth be spent in imparting to the Indians a knowledge of English literature and science".<sup>12</sup>

The idea of Western education with its secular emphasis struck fear in the hearts of the Muslim aristocracy, who saw in this a new attempt by the British to undermine their religion and render their community susceptible to the preachings of the missionaries.<sup>13</sup> They reacted by remaining aloof to these developments.

The Hindus, on the other hand, saw in these developments the opportunity to bring themselves abreast of the rulers. In the course of time they acquired proficiency in English and were easily employed in mercantile and banking establishments as well as in administrative services.<sup>14</sup>

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12. Quoted in Ram Gopal, Indian Muslims: A Political History (1858-1947), London: Asia Publishing House, 1959, p. 18

13. Ibid., pp. 18-19

14. Nirmal Kumar Bose, A Social History, Calcutta, 1964, pp. 30-31



A series of measures passed in subsequent years pushed the Muslims further into oblivion. In 1837 English was made the official language of the Government, and in 1844 examination in English was required for official employment. By 1859 the posts of Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector were reserved for candidates with a good knowledge of English. In 1864 English alone became "the language of examination for the more coveted appointments in the Civil Service", and in the same year all law examinations were conducted in English.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the replacement of Persian by Bengali and later by English increased the isolation of the Muslim community in the Bengal society and further heightened its alienation from the Hindus.

3) Introduction of the New Administrative Policy: Most of the important offices of state were the monopoly of the Muslim aristocracy in the Moghul period, with the fiscal and accounting posts generally going to Hindus. This administrative set-up continued for several decades under the Company's rule.<sup>16</sup> By the 1830s, however, things had changed. With the introduction of Bengali, the lower appointments in government were opened to Hindus, while the introduction of English ousted the Muslim aristocracy from the senior administrative services. They were replaced by English officers. This depletion of Muslims from the government services continued unabated, as a result of which by 1871 Muslims held one post for every seven posts held by Hindus, or one post for every

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15. Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism, Cambridge, 1968, p. 302

16. Hunter, op.cit., p. 167

fourteen posts held by Europeans. In the whole administrative body, the ratio of jobs held by Muslims to the total jobs available fell to one-twenty-third. A telling summary of all this is to be found in Hunter's observation of 1871: "there is now scarcely a Government office in Calcutta in which a Mohammadan can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of ink pots, and mender of pens".<sup>17</sup>

Though remedial measures were subsequently taken by the Bengal Government to increase the prospects of employment for their Muslim subjects, it was not before the feeling of antagonism had developed among the Muslims towards the British and the Hindus.

4) Change in army recruitment policy: For a fair majority of the Muslim aristocracy, military service was a vocation. The early settlers had been conquerors first; the tradition of military service had remained with them.

After the Muslim defeat at the hands of the British, the fate of those in the army was more or less sealed. The Nawabs of Bengal were allowed to maintain only a token force.<sup>18</sup> Neither the Muslim generals nor the lower ranks found service in the Company's army; for security reasons<sup>19</sup> preference was given to the Telingas of South India to man the lower ranks.<sup>20</sup> Those military chiefs fortunate enough to have grants of land settled down as landlords with their followers and soldiers doing the work of peasants.<sup>21</sup> Others,

17. Ibid., p. 170

18. J.C. Sinha, Economic Annals of Bengal, London, 1927, pp. 95-96

19. Hunter, op.cit., p. 165

20. Mallick, op.cit., p. 32

21. Ibid.

who had no such grants, became military colonists and headed great land reclamation projects in the dense jungles of the deltaic Eastern districts.<sup>22</sup> On reclaimed land they settled down as landlords, and apportioned out the land to their soldiers, relatives and followers who cultivated it and paid tax to their chief. According to Rubbi, this process was partly responsible for the disproportionately large dependence on the soil of the Muslim population of Bengal.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, as we have seen, "three distinct streams of wealth ran perennially into the coffers of a noble Mussalman House - Military Command, the Collection of Revenue, and Judicial or Political Employment";<sup>24</sup> none were available to it now. The series of measures adopted by the British struck at the very source of a Muslim household's livelihood, thereby undermining its economic moorings in Bengal society.

## II

It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that the Muslims began awakening from the torpor into which they had fallen and this seems to have been due to four factors: 1) the influence of Hunter's work; 2) the issue of the origin of the Bengali Muslims; 3) demographic changes; and 4) Hindu revivalism.

1) Influence of Hunter's work: In 1871 Sir William Wilson Hunter, a senior British civil servant, wrote a book, *The Indian*

22. Hunter, op.cit. p. 154

23. Fazli Rubbi, Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal, Calcutta, 1895, pp. 78-79

24. Hunter, op.cit., p. 159



*Muslims: Are they bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen?*

in which he gave a detailed account of the plight of the Muslims under English rule. He argued that the Faraizi and Wahhabi movements, which were launched in the early nineteenth century to purify Islam from Hindu practices, later became anti-British agitations because of the mounting grievances of the Muslims under British rule; until such grievances were removed, peaceful coexistence between the British and the Muslims would be hampered. Pointing out the fact that the vast majority of the Muslims had in fact acquiesced in British rule in India, Hunter, in his final chapter, detailed the legitimate Muslim grievances against the English rulers.

His work had an electric effect on the mentally depressed Muslim community and left a lasting impression not only on the minds of the educated Muslims but also on the minds of the colonial rulers. The influence of this book was manifested in the various reform commissions that the British subsequently instituted to ascertain the best means of rehabilitating the Muslims.

2) The issue of the origin of the Bengali Muslims: With Hunter's work already stimulating discussions in the literate circles of Bengal society, the Census Report of 1872 inspired a new debate on the true origin of the Bengali Muslims. The standard view held at the time was that the Muslims of Bengal "were recruited from the dregs of the Hindu Community, and embraced Islam as a short cut to social promotion".<sup>25</sup> Not only were the upper class Hindus

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25. Sir Herbert Risley, The People of India, 2nd edition, New Delhi: W. Cooke, 1969, p. 144

convinced of it, eminent British authorities on the subject seemed to confirm it.<sup>26</sup>

This observation was, however, controverted by Fazli Rubbi, in charge of the finances of the Nawab of Murshidabad, who argued that the Muslims were not converts of the lower orders of the Hindu community but the descendents of settlers from Turkey, Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan. To support his claim, he cited the Arabic and Persian contents of the Bengali spoken by the Muslims as opposed to the Sanskritized Bengali of the Hindus.<sup>27</sup> Whether Rubbi's arguments were scientifically valid or not is unimportant here; what is important is that this claim stirred the imaginations of the educated Muslims of Bengal who began to see themselves as the scions of non-Bengali Muslims. These educated Bengali Muslims began to consider themselves as a separate entity and sought to preserve it by infusing into their language more words from Persian and Arabic.<sup>28</sup>

3) Demographic changes: By the end of the nineteenth century, important demographic changes were taking place in Bengal, with the Muslims coming into the majority. Analysing this increase, O'Donnell, in 1891, observed that "it appears that nineteen years ago in Bengal Proper Hindus numbered nearly half a million more than Musalmans did,

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26. See for instance, James Wise, Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal, London, 1883; Francis Buchanan, An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10, Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928; E.A. Gait, Census of India, 1901, vol. VI, Part I, Report, pp. 165-181

27. Rubbi, op.cit. (23)

28. Amelendu De, Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal, Calcutta: Ratna Prakashan, 1974, p. 30

and that in the space of less than two decades, the Musalmans have not only overtaken the Hindus but have surpassed them by a million-and-a-half".<sup>29</sup> This increase gave the educated Muslims the psychological confidence of being in the majority, thus providing them the political strength to articulate their demands and secure their rights and privileges in the subsequent years.

4) Hindu revivalism: Introspection of the Hindu religion and culture was a dominant theme in the Bengal society of the nineteenth century. After Muslim dominance of Bengal for about six centuries, the advent of British colonial rule provided the Bengali Hindus with the opportunity to reassert their religious views and practices.

The first reformist movement was Raja Rammohun Roy's *Brahma Samaj* which, although open to members of all other religions, could not attract non-Hindus because of its emphasis on the cult of Hinduism. The reformists believed in a more secular interpretation of their religion.

The revivalists, however, asserted the superiority of Hinduism over all other religions and demanded the blind acceptance of all the social manifestations of Hinduism, such as child marriage, prohibition of widow marriage, and the caste system. Rajnarayan Basu's movement of 1871, *Hindu Dharmar Sreshtata* (Superiority of the Hindu Religion), and the *Arya Samaj* movement of 1875 are two such examples.<sup>30</sup> The latter gave rise to the *Suddhi* movement whose aim was the conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism and the re-conversion of converted

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29. C.J. O'Donnell, Census of India, vol. III, The Report, 1891, p. 147, quoted in ibid., p. 32

30. De, op.cit., p. 71



Hindus. The *Gorakshini* (cow protection) movement to stop the slaughter of cows by Muslims during religious festivals caused considerable animosity between the two religious groups.<sup>31</sup>

But what created the worst feelings of separatism between them was the effects of an impressive amount of Hindu literature whose theme was anti-Muslim. Historical facts were distorted to show fictional victories in battles against Muslims; Muslim women observing *pardah* were shown to be secretly hankering after Hindu generals; Muslim notables were portrayed as cruel, lecherous and villainous; and Muslim rule in general was cast in a poor light.<sup>32</sup> Some, like Bankim Chatterjee, used profane language to denigrate Islam's prophet, Mohammad. A major effect of the writings of this period was, therefore, to sow the seeds of separatism.

Thus the influence of Hunter's work, the debates on the origin of the Bengali Muslims, the demographic changes which brought the Muslims into the majority and the various Hindu movements, all served to create an unmistakable awareness among the Hindus and the Muslims that they were two different peoples with contrasting religious and social systems.

### III

Communal tension and conflict in Bengal was further exacerbated by the Muslims who engaged in a number of activities in order to purify their religious and social systems, regain their self-esteem

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31. Gopal, op.cit., pp. 86-87

32. M. Maniruzzaman, Hindu-Muslim Relations in Modern Bengali Poetry, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1970

and counter the increasing Hindu dominance. These were: 1) the Faraizi and Wahhabi movements; 2) the Mohammadan Literary Society; 3) the Central National Mohammadan Association; 4) *anjumans*; and 5) publishing.

1) The Faraizi and Wahhabi movements: The Faraizi (1818) and the Wahhabi (1827) movements started as religious reformist movements whose initial objective was to purify Islam in Bengal by removing Hindu practices and influences. But the official dethronement of Islam and the socio-political and economic changes in Bengal that began to affect the Muslim community adversely, gave these movements an increasingly political character. "In the agrarian sphere these movements stood for defending the socio-economic interests of the Muslim peasants against the Hindu *zamindars* and European indigo planters. When the British government came forward to protect the *zamindars* and the planters as well as to maintain law and order in the country", these became anti-British agitations.<sup>33</sup>

These movements alleviated some of the sufferings of the Muslim peasantry by bringing to the notice of the British the economic oppressions of the *zamindars* and the indigo planters. This led to enquiry commissions and reform laws. The British were reminded that they would have to come to terms with the Bengali Muslims, and the latter realized that the path of confrontation would yield very little in terms of their betterment. In effect, Bengali Muslims experienced a quasi-renaissance which strengthened their identity as a separate religio-social community and laid the foundation for

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33. De, op.cit., p. 19

a separate political movement along religious lines.<sup>34</sup>

2) The Mohammadan Literary Society: Founded in Calcutta in 1863 by Nawab Abdul Latif of Faridpur in East Bengal, its membership comprised mostly the Muslim aristocracy and the rich middle class, and its deliberations were in Persian, Arabic or Urdu. The Society argued for an increased share of higher education for the Muslims. It suggested Bengali as the language of primary education for the lower orders of the Muslim society, who were ethnically linked to the Hindus, and Urdu for the upper and middle classes descended from the Moghuls. The Society was also of the opinion that Sanskrit words in the Bengali spoken by the Muslims should be replaced by Arabic and Persian words.<sup>35</sup>

3) The Central National Mohammadan Association: This association was founded in Calcutta in 1877 by Syed Amir Ali. Its professed loyalty to the British Crown placed it in good stead with the Government, which often consulted it on important "legislative, administrative and educational questions". In 1883 the association submitted a Memorial to the Government "fully describing the disabilities under which the Muslims laboured", which resulted in a Government resolution allowing for the establishment of scholarships in Bengal for the promotion of primary education among Muslims.<sup>36</sup>

Side by side with promoting English education, this association also upheld the need for *madrasa* (religious school) education, and much of its efforts were devoted towards harmonizing these seemingly

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34. Kazi Abdul Wadud, Banglar Jagaran (Bengal's Awakening), Calcutta, 1363 (Bengali year), pp. 125, 128

35. De, op.cit., p. 33

36. Ibid., p. 34



contradictory approaches to education. From the political point of view, the association was to the Muslims what the Congress was to the Hindus because much of the Muslim correspondence with the Government was channelled through it. In this way, the Association was able to remove some of the anti-British prejudice of the Muslims.

4) Anjumanans: *Anjumanans* or "associations" came into being as a consequence of the Faraizi and Wahhabi movements, which had, in their most virulent phases, become indistinguishable from an anti-British jihad. The educated section of Muslim society was concerned about the consequences of these agitations, and of the need to redefine Islam's place in the new political and administrative set-up. It was to the credit of Syed Amir Ali that *anjumanans* were formed throughout the country to provide the forum where Muslim thought and opinion could be re-directed away from the British towards the question of Islam and its role in society and statecraft. It was hoped that such introspection among the Muslims would lead to a greater unity within the community and provide a new fillip to the process of Islamization.<sup>37</sup>

5) Publishing: Two types of literary work by Bengali Muslims appeared in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. One devoted itself to religious issues, expounding and upholding the essential tenets of Islam,<sup>38</sup> while the second sought to portray the

37. T.W. Arnold, The Preaching of Islam, London, 1896, p. 235

38. For instance, Mohammad Naimuddin's Zobdatal Masael, Calcutta, 1873; Sheikh Abdur Rahim's Hazrat Mohammadar Jiban Charitra O Dharmaniti, Calcutta, 1888; Mir Musharraf Hossain's Bishadha Sindhu, Calcutta, 1885; and a number of Bengali monthlies, such as, Akbare Eslamia published from 1883 to 1893.

socio-economic and political malaise in which Muslims found themselves. The general thrust of the latter was to highlight the injustices suffered by the Muslims and to call upon the community to rise from its indolence and backwardness.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV

The imperatives of colonial rule had pushed the Muslims into political oblivion, and by the time they realized the need to bring themselves abreast of the rulers, the Hindus had already registered giant strides in all walks of colonial life. By the middle of the nineteenth century, they clearly enjoyed a superior social position which found expression in communal terms; the Muslims were also quick to engage in communal activities. Henceforth, most activities in the two communities tended to be mutually exclusive and separatist, and this was helped in no small measure by the role of religion as a barrier to intermarriage, and hence as a self-perpetuating mechanism for division.

The twentieth century began in a climate of political distrust, social hostility and religious bigotry, giving rise to riots in Bengal in 1907, 1918, 1926, 1930, 1941 and 1946. The Indian National Congress, formed in 1885, became primarily a forum for Hindu agitation against the British. While many Muslims joined it, the majority abstained, preferring the Central National Mohammadan Association as their conduit to the colonial Government. However, the need for a political forum parallel to the Congress was gradually felt by the Muslim leaders in Bengal. In 1906, they, with support from

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39. For instance, Sheikh Abdus Sobhan's Hindu-Musalman, Calcutta, 1888

Muslim leaders in other parts of India and with the blessings of the British,<sup>40</sup> founded the Muslim League in Dhaka. From then on, the majority Muslim view was articulated through the League, although certain prominent Muslim leaders chose to stay with the Congress.

In 1905 Bengal was partitioned into a Muslim-majority East Bengal and a Hindu-majority West Bengal - that is, on the basis of community - though the British publicly insisted it was for administrative convenience.<sup>41</sup> This aroused Muslim political consciousness in Bengal and at the same time caused panic among its economically dominant Hindus. Though Bengal had to be re-united in 1911 in the face of massive agitations by the Hindus, its re-unification reinforced rather than curbed the separatist feeling among the Muslims.<sup>42</sup>

In the following years demands for the British withdrawal from India became widespread. The Congress, professing a secular platform argued that India should not be divided communally, while the Muslim League emphasized its 'Two Nation' theory that called for a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. Though in the late 1920s and early 1930s League resolutions only demanded 'safeguards' for the Muslim minority within India, by the late 1930s the Muslims were portrayed as a nation, not as a minority. The basis of

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40. Mary Minto, India, Minto and Morley, pp. 28-29, cited in Gopal, op.cit., p. 92

41. Leonard A. Gordon, "Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition" Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, vol. xvi, no. 2, July 1978, pp. 139-140

42. J.R. McLane, "The Decision to Partition Bengal in 1905" Indian Social and Economic History Review, vol. 2, no. 3, (1966), pp. 221-237



nationality was the community identity; territorial identity was of secondary importance.<sup>43</sup>

In 1940, a Bengali Muslim leader, Fazlul Haq, moved the famous Lahore Resolution that called upon the British to divide India on the basis of the Two Nation theory and establish two Muslim states of Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> However, the legitimacy of the claims and counter-claims of the Congress and the Muslim League continued to be debated until 1946, during which year general elections were held all over India to ascertain the support for the positions held by the two parties. The Muslims, who formed the majority of the rural population of undivided Bengal, gave an overwhelming mandate (116 out of 119 seats) in favour of Pakistan,<sup>45</sup> thus forcing the Congress to concede and the British Government to recognize that India had to be divided on a communal basis. But it must be noted that the primary motive behind the Bengali Muslim's support for Pakistan was their economic emancipation, though this was misread by the non-Bengali Muslims of Pakistan.<sup>46</sup>

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43. G. Allana (ed.) Pakistan Movement: Historical Documents, Karachi, 1968, p. 90

44. The resolution read: "No constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz., the geographical constituent units are demarcated in two regions which should be so constituted with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary that the area in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the north-western and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign". See D.R. Mankekar, Colonialism in East Bengal, Bombay: Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1971, p. 48

45. Ibid., p. 47; see also Ian Stephens, Pakistan, London: Ernest Bern Ltd., 1963 (Chapters I and IV)

46. Had the non-Bengali Muslims of Pakistan fully appreciated this fact, it is debatable whether East Pakistan would have been economically exploited to such an extent.

Conclusion: Moghul rule in India was an overlordship of an invading Muslim minority over an indigenous Hindu majority. When the British captured power in India, the Hindus were able to release their pent-up frustrations and bitterness against the Muslims, whose initial reaction seemed to be one of sullen withdrawal. But increasing Hindu assertiveness from the mid-1850s onwards triggered the Bengali Muslims into seeking a legitimate existence of their own. The growing exclusive and separatist tendencies in the two communities that marked the third quarter of the nineteenth century gave rise to social hostility and religious bigotry, culminating in a number of race riots in this century. The two communities sought to realize their competing interests through two separate political parties. Among the Bengali Muslims, while the upper classes desired political control of a territory of their own, the underprivileged majority primarily desired economic emancipation. By the late 1940s the British were in a position to relinquish their power in India, and in 1947 India and Pakistan became two separate independent states. The bloodbath that followed in the wake of the Partition of Bengal left bitter memories in the two communities, but the Bengali Muslims were secure in the knowledge that they no longer had to suffer economic deprivation at the hands of Bengali Hindus.

## Chapter 3

## THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1971 - 1972

The previous chapter dealt with the background to the Hindu-Muslim rivalry in Bengal. We saw how the Hindus, displaced from power and status during the six centuries of Muslim rule, were able to make a considerable comeback *vis-a-vis* the Muslims under colonial rule and how the resulting incompatibility between the two had led to the partition of British India in August 1947.

This chapter is specifically concerned with the period of the armed struggle for the independence of East Pakistan and its immediate aftermath. The images, perceptions and expectations that the Indians and the East Bengalis had of each other will be discussed. Equally important, the realities and perceptions current in the two countries in this period will be examined in order that the context in which the Indo-Bangladesh relations developed can be properly understood.

## I

By the end of the sixties, there were discernible changes in the attitudes of the East Bengalis (East Pakistanis) towards the Indians and *vice versa*. Broadly speaking, at least three explanatory factors may be offered: the growing alienation of the East Bengalis from West Pakistan; unsuccessful attempts by the Pakistani rulers to infuse anti-Indianism among the East Bengalis; and India's sensitivity to the political aspirations of the East Bengalis.



What the East Bengalis thought they secured through partition, namely, the promise of economic wellbeing, they soon stood to lose in Pakistan. What followed in the next twenty-four years was massive economic exploitation of the East Pakistanis by the military-industrial oligarchy based in West Pakistan and controlled by the Muslim League. The economic relations between the two provinces transformed East Pakistan into a veritable colony of West Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> The feeling of neglect that the East Bengalis experienced had a double effect; memories of their pre-partition experiences began to recede into the background as the exploitation by West Pakistan came into sharper relief. Not only were the attention of the East Bengalis focussed on how to contain this economic exploitation, they also had to contend with the Muslim League's effort to arabicize their language and Islamize their culture.

This alienation had started even before 1947. The East Bengalis had anticipated their special needs within the framework of Pakistan at least as early as 1940. That year, the Lahore Resolution moved by East Bengal's Fazlul Haq had visualized two independent sovereign states for the Muslims of India, but in April 1946 at the Muslim League Legislators' Convention in Delhi, this was amended to establish one Pakistan with East-West partnership.<sup>2</sup> Thus East Bengal's

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1. Government of East Pakistan, Planning Department, Economic Disparities Between East and West Pakistan, 1963; Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Central Statistical Office, Twenty Years of Pakistan in Statistics, 1947-67; Planning Commission, The Mid-Plan Review of the Third Five Year Plan, 1965-70 and Final Evaluation of the Second Five Year Plan; Ministry of Finance, Economic Survey of Pakistan, 1961-68. For some excellent studies of the economic relations between the two provinces, see Rounaq Jahan, Pakistan: Failure in National Integration, New York: Columbia University Press, 1972; Edward S. Mason et.al., Conflict in East Pakistan: Background and Prospects in Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Documents, vol. 1, pp. 9-14
  2. M.A. Zaman, "Emergence of Bangladesh: Its Historical Perspective", Civilization, vol. 25 (1975), p. 273, fn. 3

attempt at autonomous statehood was nullified by the Muslim League leadership with the argument that the amendment would serve the greater national interest. In the subsequent years, inter-wing politics was wholly dominated by the continuous attempts of the East Bengalis to secure a fair deal from the Pakistan Government and by the latter's suppression of all such attempts.

In 1948, within a year after independence, there were already grumblings of discontent in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan as East Bengalis complained of "being neglected and treated merely as a 'Colony' of Western Pakistan".<sup>3</sup> During his first visit to East Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the first Governor General of Pakistan, in a public meeting dismissed Bengali - spoken by 56 percent of the population of Pakistan - as a state language and asserted that Urdu - spoken by less than 6 percent - would be the state language.<sup>4</sup> This precipitated a province-wide language movement which climaxed in the police firing on students on 21 February 1952, and with that the floodgate of a new nationalism in East Pakistan opened up; since then, the East Bengalis have observed 21 February as the 'Day of Martyrs' (*Shaheed Dibosh*).

After the Indo-Pakistan war of September 1965, the Pakistan Government's decision to sever all trade and communication links between East Pakistan and the neighbouring Indian states adversely affected the East Bengalis' trading interests. The loss in trade

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3. Khalid B. Sayeed, The Political System of Pakistan, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967, p. 64

4. For the details on the arguments and counter-arguments between Jinnah and the East Bengali students on the language issue, see Kamruddin Ahmed, A Socio Political History of Bengal and the Birth of Bangladesh, 4th ed., Dhaka 1975, pp. 100-101

was supplanted by greater inter-wing trade, to East Bengal's economic detriment.<sup>5</sup> Indian music, movies and literature, particularly Bengali Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's works, were also banned. Years later Sheikh Mujib summed up the East Bengali sentiments:

These upstarts [West Pakistanis] were completely oblivious of the fact that Tagore's contribution was something which the Bengali literature could not do without.<sup>6</sup>

In 1968 charges of secessionist activities with Indian collusion were brought against Mujib, some of his close colleagues and a few Bengali officers in the armed services.<sup>7</sup> The Agartala Conspiracy Case, as it came to be known, was finally withdrawn for lack of sufficient evidence. And in 1971 when the Awami League won an absolute majority in the National Assembly in the first national elections in the country's history, Pakistan's then Chief Martial Law Administrator, General Yahya Khan, having publicly declared Mujib as the next Prime Minister of Pakistan,<sup>8</sup> two and a half months later condemned him as a traitor.<sup>9</sup> These incidents, though they provide only a partial picture, do serve to indicate some sense of the alienation the East Bengalis experienced in Pakistan.

The second factor that seemed to have contributed to the changes in the attitudes of the East Bengalis towards India was the ceaseless, though unsuccessful, attempts by the Pakistani rulers to infuse

5. Jahan, op.cit. (1)

6. The Hindu (Madras), 12 January 1971, p. 5

7. Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Information Press Note, dated 5 January 1968, in The Pakistan Observer (Dhaka) 6 January 1968.

8. Bangladesh Documents, op.cit., p. 144; Far Eastern Economic Review, 18 December 1971, p. 6

9. Ibid., p. 276



anti-Indian sentiments among them. Pre-partition experiences would suggest that East Bengalis should have been more anti-Hindu and anti-Indian than West Pakistanis. Indeed, East Bengalis were much more enthusiastic about a Muslim Pakistan than the rest of the Muslims in the subcontinent. As noted in the previous chapter, it was the decisive mandate in favour of the division of India into two states given by the Muslims of undivided Bengal in the general election of 1946 in British India that had clinched the issue for the Muslim League, and to which both the Congress and the British Raj had to concede. In 1947 when Pakistan came into being East Pakistan was more pro-Pakistani than the Western wing possibly because "it had greater bitter experiences of communal discrimination".<sup>10</sup>

But economic reasons were in the forefront. Before 1947, West Bengal, comprising merely one-third the territory of Bengal, completely dominated Bengal politically and economically. This was possible because East Bengal served as its hinterland. After 1947, West Bengal became a dwarfed state in the Indian Union because its hinterland had become a part of Pakistan. The relative importance of the two Bengals thus changed. Psychologically, for the Bengali Muslims, separate statehood removed many of the causes for bitterness and hatred towards the Bengali Hindus and therefore towards India. There was little scope for continued adversary relations between the two Bengals, and whatever contact there was between them was regulated at the Union level. The leaders of East Bengal, now East Pakistan, were primarily concerned with defining the political and economic role their province would play in the new-born Pakistan

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10. Zaman, op.cit., p. 275

state and "did not share the passionate anti-Indian and anti-Hindu feelings of the principally non-Bengali Pakistani establishment".<sup>11</sup>

But the leaders of West Pakistan, who now constituted the Muslim League leadership, were still preoccupied with the two-nation theory, the fundamental premise of which was the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy.<sup>12</sup> They were unable to overcome their differences with Hindu India so long as territorial disputes arising out of partition, such as the Kashmir problem, were not resolved to their satisfaction. For them, it was necessary that the communal identity be prolonged.

In the March 1954 provincial elections in East Pakistan, the governing party, the Muslim League with its communal orientation, was routed by the secular-oriented United Front, composed of Haq's Krishak Sramik Party and Suhrawardy's Awami League.<sup>13</sup> The newly-elected Chief Minister of East Pakistan, Fazlul Haq, paid an official visit to Calcutta where, on 30 April 1954, he publicly declared: "I do not believe that the political division of a country could by itself necessarily remove the bases of contact, friendship and mutual dependence [between East Bengal and West Bengal]".<sup>14</sup>

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11. Mizanur Rahman Shelly, Emergence of a New Nation in a Multipolar World: Bangladesh, Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1977, p. 53
  12. However, having got Pakistan, Jinnah, as the first President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, made a policy declaration that suggested that the communal approach to politics would henceforth be downplayed. But within six months of this policy statement, he began to speak of Islamic socialism and democracy. Ahmed, op.cit., p. 102
  13. Ibid., pp. 113-114
  14. Morning News (Dhaka), 10 May 1954; The Statesman (Calcutta), 3 May 1954

Within weeks Haq's Government was dismissed.<sup>15</sup>

In 1965 when, under Soviet mediation, the Tashkent Declaration was signed to end the Indo-Pakistan war, in West Pakistan there were cries of sell-out to the 'enemy' whereas in East Pakistan it was hailed and accepted.<sup>16</sup> These and other incidents made East Pakistani leaders suspect in the eyes of the West Pakistan-based non-Bengali central leadership, and this divergence in their perceptions of India increased the alienation between the two.

Political leaders in India were aware of these differing attitudes of the peoples of the two provinces towards India. Unless issues of vital national interest were at stake, such as the sharing

15. The reason for this dismissal is unclear. According to Shelly, Haq's 'pro-India' leanings might have been the reason. But Ahmed suggests that the United Front's leftist leanings and its stand on the question of autonomy for East Pakistan caused its dismissal. It should be remembered that during this period Pakistan had joined SEATO and was considering the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with the USA and also the Baghdad Pact. After the Front's victory, its elected members and those outside the Assembly had signed a joint statement calling upon the central Government to stay clear of military pacts. In any case, two months after the election there were planned labour riots and thousands of workers were killed in Dhaka and in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The central Government immediately dismissed the United Front ministry and declared an emergency in East Pakistan. See, Shelly, *op.cit.*, p. 55; Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 115-117; and Pran Chopra ed. The Challenge of Bangladesh Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1971, pp. 25-25.
16. The primary reason for East Pakistan's support for the Tashkent Declaration may have been the feeling of insecurity that pervaded the East Bengalis because East Pakistan had been left totally undefended against possible Indian attack. It may also be recalled that Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto subsequently resigned from the Ayub cabinet and publicly condemned the Government for betraying the country's interests. Bhutto also launched his People's Party of Pakistan with an eye on capitalizing on the anti-Indian hysteria of the West Pakistanis, to which he had personally contributed by declaring a thousand years' war on India. See, Far Eastern Economic Review, 25 December 1971, p. 5; 8 January 1972, p. 3.



of the Ganges waters with East Pakistan, India's disposition towards East Pakistan seemed on the whole to be non-antagonistic.<sup>17</sup> In fact, when occasion permitted, West Bengalis sympathized with the East Bengalis in their grievances against West Pakistan. For instance, in 1948 when the language movement was launched in East Pakistan in response to Jinnah's insensitive anti-Bengali remarks, the literate circle in West Bengal gave its full sympathy and support to the East Bengali demand that Bengali be made one of the national languages of Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> While this could not have been entirely a matter of altruism or Bengali solidarity, it did create if not a fellow feeling between the two Bengals a rift between the two Pakistans. This was of course viewed by Jinnah as a "sinister phenomenon", a machination of the "political agencies and organs of the Indian Press".<sup>19</sup> What annoyed the East Bengalis further was that Jinnah chose only to comment on the Indian reaction, remaining silent in the face of the genuine concerns expressed by the East Pakistanis.<sup>20</sup>

When the Pakistan Government declared after the 1965 war that the defence of East Pakistan was left to the Chinese, East Bengalis were shocked. Citing the above, General Fazal Muqueem Khan wrote:

For the first time since independence in 1947 they [East Pakistanis] felt insecure and helpless. The bonafides and efficacy of a strong Centre became suspect in their eyes.<sup>21</sup>

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17. This could have been due to the presence of a large Hindu minority in East Bengal.
18. Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), 27 February 1948; Ananda Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), 27 February 1948.
19. Jinnah's radio broadcast from Dhaka on 28 March 1948, cited in Z.A. Bhutto, The Great Tragedy, Karachi: People's Party Publications, 1971, p. 4; Shelly, op.cit., p. 54.
20. For details, see Ahmed, op.cit., pp. 99-101
21. Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership, Lahore: National Book Foundation, 1973, p.7

Fortunately for the East Pakistanis, the Indian leadership was of the opinion that East Bengal was a 'separate entity' with which India had no quarrel.<sup>22</sup> It appears that this particular view was based on an informed assessment of a growing secular territorial nationalism in East Pakistan which, to the Indian leaders, promised to be an effective counter to the religion-based anti-Indianism of West Pakistan. Thus Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri decided not to invade East Pakistan in September 1965 on the advice of the then Indian Chief of Army Staff, General J. Choudhury, who, being a Bengali himself, was 'more sensitive to the political advantages of making the gesture'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, this gesture would seem to have paid dividends in 1971 when the dissident political leaders of East Pakistan appealed for and secured Indian assistance to create Bangladesh.

The Pakistani leadership had failed to instil any fanatic anti-Indianism among the East Bengalis primarily because of the latter's pre-deposition towards a secular approach to politics and because of what appears to be the Indian leaderships' deft handling of the people of East Bengal. The socio-economic and political discrimination suffered by the East Pakistanis at the hands of the West Pakistani military-industrial-bureaucratic oligarchy remained the dominant issue in their minds and, in some sense, this contributed to the lessening of reservations towards India.

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22. Pran Chopra, India's Second Liberation, Delhi: Vikas, 1973, pp. 66-67

23. Ibid.

Events in East Pakistan took a turn for the worse after the Awami League's victory in the December 1970 elections in which it secured 167 of the 169 seats in East Pakistan, giving it an absolute majority in the Pakistan National Assembly. With the Pakistan Army standing to lose the most, the League's autonomy platform, on the basis of which it won the election, was now seen to be a threat to the country's unity, and the Martial Law Authority postponed the opening of the National Assembly.

The growing internal disorder took an ominous turn when an Indian plane was hijacked to Lahore and blown up, with the hijackers receiving a hero's welcome at the airport from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the new majority party leader in West Pakistan. An influential Dhaka daily, *The People*, strongly supported India's demand for compensation and accused the Government of "unpardonable neglect" in permitting the "mad action of the two hijackers".<sup>24</sup> Another prominent Bengali daily, *Purbodesh* stated that "isolated incidents like hijacking will not serve any purpose except to complicate India-Pakistan relations further".<sup>25</sup>

On 1 March 1971, Indira Gandhi and the 'progressive' wing of the ruling Congress Party were returned to power with a strong mandate (an increment of her party's seats in Parliament from 228 to 350) in a snap national election in India. There was jubilation

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24. The Hindu, 13 February 1971, p. 9

25. Ibid.



in East Pakistan as, in numerous public meetings, hopes were expressed that "better days for India and Bangladesh are not far off, and that border trade between the two countries will resume again".<sup>26</sup> Trade between the two countries had been suspended in the aftermath of the 1965 war.<sup>27</sup> During his December campaign, Mujib himself had talked of the need to restore Indo-Pakistani trade and to establish mutually beneficial relations.<sup>28</sup>

On the same day, the East Pakistanis launched a movement of civil disobedience to protest the postponement of the opening of the National Assembly. The Calcutta station of the state-owned All India Radio began regular, sympathetic coverage of the developments, resulting in a growing pro-East Bengal sentiment in West Bengal.<sup>29</sup> On the night of 25 March 1971 the Pakistan Army formally took over the authority to govern in East Pakistan.

It is not clear whether there were any contacts between Mujib and the Indian Government during the very tense Mujib-Yahya negotiations immediately prior to the Army takeover in East Pakistan.<sup>30</sup> But the subsequent nine months provided ample opportunity for the

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26. Ibid., 16 March 1971, p. 6

27. Bangladesh, Washington D.C.: Embassy of Bangladesh, vol. 2, no. 23, 17 November 1972, p. 4

28. The Hindu, 16 March 1971.

29. Ibid., 12 March 1971, p. 8

30. There have been official denials of any such contact. But according to Captain (Rtd) M.S. Ali, an Awami League Member of Parliament who served as a courier between Mujib and the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka, in March 1971, Mujib received a message from Indira Gandhi that read: "If you are for total independence, we shall be with you all the way". This could not be corroborated. Interview in Dhaka in July 1985.

Indira Government and the Bangladesh Provisional Government in Calcutta to identify their respective positions and interests and coordinate their activities.

Initially the Indira Government was anxious to ascertain the political orientation of the leadership behind the East Bengali armed struggle. When by the second week of April it was learned that the resistance was under the command of the Awami League and that most of the party's senior leaders had fled to India, Mrs. Gandhi acquiesced in the formation of a Provisional Government in Calcutta.<sup>31</sup>

The die was cast. Not only was there no turning back for the Indira Government, Mrs. Gandhi also had to make sure that the League was victorious. Should the Pakistan Army succeed in its policies in East Pakistan, her Government would be permanently saddled with the politically embarrassing presence of the Provisional Government, and the large number of refugees who would complicate West Bengal politics. Not only would any hope of political reconciliation with the East Bengalis be denied, relations with Pakistan would be permanently damaged, thus adversely affecting India's image in the Muslim Middle East, in the Nonaligned Movement and in the Commonwealth. Worst of all, continuation of the crisis would result in greater regional instability and in an increased scope for external interference.

For the Provisional Government and its supporters defeat would mean permanent exile, and a struggle of attrition would mean the loss of leadership and transfer of control of the resistance to the

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31. Shelly, op.cit., pp. 60-61

leftist forces. In either case, India was their only hope. Out of this political contretemps was born an *entente cordiale* committing both Governments to the same goal.

But, in India, outside the ruling circle there was a feeling that not enough was being done to aid the East Bengalis. It was suggested in the *Lok Sabha* that India should invoke the Genocide Convention and mobilize support for the East Bengalis in the United Nations and in the international community.<sup>32</sup> Mr. Hiren Mukherjee of the Communist Party of India stated:

Bangla Desh, to which so many of us here in this House also belong, is bleeding from a thousand wounds, because the people have risen in a revolution, almost without precedent in history and are now being sought to be punished by those who do not know anything but the law of the jungle.<sup>33</sup>

Mr. Samar Guha of the Praja Socialist Party said that the declaration of independence of Bangladesh "had given an opportunity to undo the misery from the partition of Bengal".<sup>34</sup> And the Jan Sangh Parliamentary Group voted to sponsor an adjournment motion in the *Lok Sabha* to censure the Government for its failure to recognize Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup> The Bangladesh Provisional Government also requested recognition by the Indian Government on three occasions. The fourth request was made on 4 December 1971:

Our joint stand against military machinations of Pakistan would be further facilitated if we entered into formal diplomatic relations with

32. The Hindu, 28 March 1971, p. 9

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 23 May 1971, p. 9



each other. May we, therefore, repeat our request to Your Excellency that the Government of India accord immediate recognition to our country and our Government.<sup>36</sup>

On 18 April 1971 the Pakistani Deputy High Commission in Calcutta was taken over by the mission's Bengali members, who swore allegiance to the Provisional Government.<sup>37</sup> India disregarded Pakistan's protestations and demand to hand over the Bengali staff, thus putting its own representation in Dhaka at risk. On the contrary, the West Bengal Government provided the Provisional Government with official quarters. The Union Government provided sanctuary, training and weapons to the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Force). India also provided finances, diplomatic assistance to mobilize international opinion in favour of the East Bengalis and political advice and guidance. India's ambassador to the Soviet Union and confidant to Indira Gandhi, D.P. Dhar, was appointed as liaison man with an office in Calcutta.

But these were not without irritations, and tense moments occasionally surfaced. Dhar's actions were at times found to be pompous. According to Ambassador Abul Fateh, a liaison officer in the Provisional Government:

He was a bit imposing. Dhar called a meeting of all secretaries in the Provisional Government around December 1971 [without approval from the Provisional Government]. I personally found it irksome and did not attend it.<sup>38</sup>

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36. *Ibid.*, 7 December 1971, p. 12; for the contents of the letters from the Provisional Government to the Indian Government urging Indian recognition, see Bangladesh Documents, pp. 578-587
37. Financial Times (London), 19 April 1971
38. Interview in Dhaka on 5 June 1985

Perhaps the greatest irritation was India's role in the formation and training of the *Mujib Bahini* (Mujib Force). The issue of creating such a force was discussed and rejected by the Provisional Government perhaps because of its fear that this force led by the militant wing of the party could pose a challenge to its authority, particularly since the latter saw itself as the true bearer of Mujib's ideology. But India gave full support to its creation and provided it with arms and special training.<sup>39</sup> The Indira Government allegedly viewed the *Mujib Bahini* as an auxiliary force to maintain control over the situation should the *Mukti Bahini* get out of control.<sup>40</sup> It would seem logical that the Indira Government would wish to make sure that the leadership of the resistance remained in the Mujib fold, but this was not appreciated by the Provisional Government, particularly since the two *Bahinis* found themselves on a few occasions pitched against each other.<sup>41</sup>

There was also some difficulty at the political level. In May 1971 the Central Committee of the pro-Moscow East Bengal Communist Party suggested the formation of a National Liberation Front comprising all the parties fighting in the struggle. It was argued that formation of such a front would unite all the political parties and their followers in a common cause, and that the picture of unity would help to secure the support of all the progressive forces in the world, including the socialist bloc.<sup>42</sup> The Indian Government,

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39. For details see Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan, Emergence of Bangladesh and Role of Awami League, New Delhi: Vikas, 1982, pp. 248-249

40. Ibid., Also Far Eastern Economic Review, 19 February 1972, p. 18

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 250

though committed to the League, found the proposal attractive and useful and strongly recommended it to the Provisional Government. But the Awami League was adamant, perhaps out of fear of creating precedents for similar claims on the Government after independence. On 9 September 1971, a compromise was reached and a Consultative Committee was formed that included the chiefs of four pro-independence parties.<sup>43</sup>

If the Provisional Government had any doubts about the Indian Government, Indians too, it appears, had doubts about the Provisional Government. According to Inder Malhotra, editor of the *Times of India*:

A large segment of the informed public thought it was basically a phony government, but after liberation Bangladesh will sort out its problems ...One could see there were internal strains... Its weaknesses became evident to me on the day of liberation and a few days later. We got reports that this government was reluctant to go to Dhaka. Dhar needed a lot of persuasion. That is when the imperfection surfaced. It became evident that this government's ability to govern was poor. Only Mujib's prestige was high.<sup>44</sup>

It appears that even the *Mukti Bahini* had doubts about the Provisional Government's leadership capability,<sup>45</sup> and the people in Dhaka shared in that doubt.<sup>46</sup>

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43. They were Maulana Bhashani of the pro-China National Awami Party, Moni Singh of the East Pakistan Communist Party, Muzaffar Ahmed of the pro-Moscow National Awami Party and Monoranjan Dhar of the newly founded Bangladesh Congress Party.

44. Interview in New Delhi on 26 April 1985

45. Bhuiyan, op.cit., p. 248

46. Across-the-board random interviews with people in Dhaka who recall the events of late 1971 reveal that a surprisingly large number believed at the time that the members of the Provisional Government mainly gourmandized and womanized in Calcutta while the *Mukti Bahini* boys were actually fighting for their country. These interviews were conducted in May-August 1985.



The Indian support for the East Bengali struggle was based on a number of expectations. One was that the League after it came to power would establish a secular democratic government, and India would no longer have to contend with another military dictatorship on its borders. This was a logical expectation on the part of the Indian leaders, given the political evolution undergone by the East Bengalis and the Awami League. It was also one rationale for the Congress (I) to throw its support behind the League.

The diversity in religious systems and beliefs in India had forced the Congress Party to adopt a secular platform at its inception in 1885; this secular orientation of the Congress continued and, at times, was even externalized. After 1947 one important "consequence of this underlying, pervasive psychology of the Indian elite was the tendency to sympathize with and, if possible, encourage those political forces within Pakistan which stood for secularism in politics and underplayed the Islamic theme".<sup>47</sup>

The League had opted for the secular path in 1955.<sup>48</sup> By the mid-1960s the League was in the vanguard of the East Bengali nationalist movement that challenged the state ideology of Muslim nationalism. As the party attracted followers and became, like the pre-1947 Congress, an umbrella party, its values and ideals came to be subsumed

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47. Shelly, op.cit., p. 52

48. M. Rashiduzzaman, "The Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan", Asian Survey, vol. 10, no. 7, July 1970, pp. 575-576

under the rubric of secularism, socialism and democracy;<sup>49</sup> by 1971 it had the proper credentials to seek and secure Indian assistance.

However, it must be noted here that secularism as understood and practised in India was quite different from the secularism practised in Bangladesh. In India, the concept of secularism has come to mean the equal right of all religious groups to voice their political beliefs.<sup>50</sup> This interpretation of secularism took after the Gandhian belief that all human endeavour should be directed to the quest for truth, which has no prescribed path.<sup>51</sup> Different communities would take to different paths in search of the truth, and in the modern state structure that would be reflected in the various political orientations and organisations of the communities. The religion-based political parties in India, such as the *Jan Sangh*, the *Jama'at i Islam*, and the *Akali Dal* were such manifestations.

In East Pakistan, secularism as practised by the Awami League was similar to that of the Congress. But after independence the concept of secularism underwent a qualitative change; it was given a more literal interpretation: separation of religion from all worldly matters. The League leadership believed that the communalist approach to the practice of statecraft, as in Pakistan from 1947 to 1971, was a primary cause of alienation within the society,

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49. The drift towards socialism and secularism was aided by the presence of members of leftist parties, including the Communist Party which had penetrated the Awami League in the fifties. Thus in the Provisional Government, excepting Mujib, the top two were formerly of leftist parties.

50. Imtiaz Ahmed, Class, Underlying Values and Indian Foreign Policy, Seminar paper, Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, 1985, p. 21

51. Judith M. Brown, Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922, Cambridge: University Press, 1972, p. 7, cited in ibid.

and therefore took an early stand against it by banning all religion-based parties in the future Bangladesh.<sup>52</sup>

This was no doubt reinforced by the tactical necessity of the period. A public espousal of its secularist ideology in the period before independence brought for the League Government-in-Exile instant support from all political parties in India; and after independence, India's continued support was assured.

In the first official reaction to the events in East Pakistan, Prime Minister Gandhi told the *Lok Sabha*:

Something new had happened in East Bengal - democratic elections in which an entire people had spoken with almost one voice. We had welcomed this...because the values for which the victorious Awami League stood were the values...for which we have always stood and for which we have always spoken out.<sup>53</sup>

She underscored the ideological affinity between the two Governments once again in her statement in the *Rajya Sabha* the same day:

We are interested in this matter...because Mujibur Rahman has stood for the values which we ourselves cherish - the values of democracy, the values of secularism, and the values of socialism.<sup>54</sup>

Thus the East Bengali struggle was of special significance to India because it appeared to vindicate India's secularist philosophy.

52. The Hindu, 12 December 1971, p. 9

53. Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh Contemporary Events and Documents, vol. 1, 1971, p. 669. Interestingly, the Indian version is different:

Something new had happened in East Bengal - democratic action where an entire people had spoken with almost one voice. We had welcomed this, not because we wanted any interference in another country's affairs, but because these were the values...for which we have always stood and for which we have always spoken out.

Bangladesh Documents, op.cit. p. 670

54. Ibid., p. 670.



According to one Indian scholar, "the struggle for Bangladesh dramatically exposed the inherent fallacy of the so-called two-nation theory (that the Hindus and Muslims of undivided India were two different nations)" and "has delivered, one hopes, a death blow to the creation of theocratic states in the middle of the Twentieth Century".<sup>55</sup> According to another:

Bangladesh is an eloquent testimony against all such narrow definitions of national identity and citizenship. It clearly shows that the bond of religious unity is at best a tenuous one; and, in today's changing world, citizenship and nationhood are political concepts and not religious ones.<sup>56</sup>

The fact that the majority of Pakistan's Muslim population had sought India's assistance against fellow Muslims of West Pakistan and had also promised eternal friendship with India was of powerful propaganda value to India as it could be used to weaken the psychological attachment some Indian Muslims purportedly still felt for Pakistan,<sup>57</sup> and to vitiate the forces of Hindu and Muslim communalism.

Statements by members of the Bangladesh Provisional Government added substance to the Indian leadership's expectations that Bangladesh when independent would pursue a secularist policy. At the height of the war, on 12 December 1971, before a gathering of over one hundred Indian and foreign press and media people, Syed Nazrul Islam, Acting President of the Provisional Government, announced the banning of four political parties in East Bengal for their

55. M.S. Rajan, "Bangladesh and After" Pacific Affairs, vol. 45, no. 2, (Summer 1972), p. 191

56. Imtiaz Ahmed, "Psychological Repercussions" Seminar #150, February 1972, p. 20

57. Ibid., p. 21

"anti-people and communal activities". He asserted that "no party with a communal outlook would be allowed to function in Bangladesh" and that "there would be absolute religious freedom in Bangladesh".<sup>58</sup> The next day, he and Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister, both reaffirmed that "religion would have no place in politics in the new-born republic" and that "Bangladesh would show to the world that all religions enjoyed equal respect in this country".<sup>59</sup>

Such statements of assurance not only allayed whatever lingering fear there was in the minds of East Bengal's Hindu minority, they also served to 'de-sensitize' the West Bengalis who have always been particularly sensitive to the treatment East Bengali Hindus received in the Muslim state of Pakistan. They demonstrated to the Indian public that their Government's support for the Bangladesh movement did not go in vain; and the chances of an electoral victory for Congress (I) in the CPI-controlled West Bengal increased.

But for the Provisional Government a secular policy was more easily declared than implemented. Once the party came to power there was confusion among both its top leadership, including Mujib himself, and the rank and file as to what secularism was all about. In retrospect, it appears that within the party secularism meant different things to different members and, in fact, to those members with an Islamic bent, secularism could very well have been a mere lip-service to the Hindu members.

Nevertheless, in the new state of Bangladesh secularism was

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58. The Hindu, 12 December 1971, p. 9

59. Ibid., 13 December 1971, p. 6

considered a necessary governing policy. As Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain recalled:

We did not want to carry over into our state this kind of communalism which we saw being fomented in the last days of Pakistan. We also thought that for the whole of the subcontinent this might represent a new start because Pakistan in a sense had as its rationale the solving of the communal question. All of the communal riots, the communal bitterness that had characterized the Indian polity before 1947, we thought 1947 would solve that problem. Looking back thirty years we found that it had not...We did not want religion to be obtruding into political affairs in a way which would be divisive and we wanted that communalism as an element should be exorcised from our national life. This was the main aspiration which led us to include secularism in our Constitution.<sup>60</sup>

Though the party's secular philosophy was only tolerable to its minority rightist members, the Government's decision to incorporate secularism in the Constitution was, to some rightists, rather intolerable. Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed, a senior member of the Mujib Cabinet, argued:

If you are a socialist democracy, is it not self-evident that such a democracy ensuring equal rights to everybody should be secular as well? Then why this separate, unnecessary emphasis?<sup>61</sup>

A preliminary draft of the Bangladesh Constitution mentioned that Islam was the religion of the majority in Bangladesh, but that people belonging to other faiths would be free to practise their religion without hindrance. When it was placed on the floor for debate, there were loud protests from numerous Constituent Assembly members who wanted the declaration on secularism to be a positive formulation and not a grudging concession.<sup>62</sup>

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60. Interview in Dhaka in July 1985

61. The Hindu, 11 January 1972, p. 6

62. Ibid., 16 April 1972, p. 6



Even with its inclusion in the Constitution as one of the four state pillars (others being socialism, nationalism and democracy), there remained a number of unanswered questions: do you invoke Allah in public speeches? Do you remain true to Islamic ideals and practices? Should religion have any role in public and political life? The Government was not able to give any clear direction.

In practice, the confusion increased. When the Constituent Assembly met for the first time in April 1972, the Speaker Shah Abdul Hamid, in keeping with "the wishes of the country's leaders that secularism should be one of the four pillars of the Constitution", ruled out the suggestion of a member that the Quran be read as an invocation.<sup>63</sup> This went against the sentiments of some members. The conflict between secular policy and Islamic sentiment was finally resolved by introducing readings from the Quran and also from the Gita, the latter in deference to the Hindu members of Parliament.<sup>64</sup> Later, at the eighteenth sitting of the Second Session of the Assembly on 14 December 1972, Tripitak reading was also introduced so as not to offend the Buddhist minorities of the country.

But difficulties continued. When the resolution of condolence for the martyrs of the war was being adopted, the Speaker requested the members to stand for a minute in silence. Prime Minister Mujib intervened to request a *monajat*, the traditional Islamic form of prayer.<sup>65</sup> But at a conference of the Bangla Students' Union where Mujib was present, a secular minute of silence was observed at the

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63. Ibid.

64. Jatiyo Sangsad, Official Proceedings, 2nd Session, 1st Sitting, 12 October 1972

65. Ibid.

insistence of a student leader.<sup>66</sup>

It was obvious that the Government was not sure how to implement its secular policy, thus causing doubts in the public mind about its secular conviction. As a result many people thought that secularism was a manifestation of Indian influence, while a few actually believed it to be an Indian imposition. As Foreign Secretary Abu! Fateh observed:

Secularism came by compulsion because Mujibnagar government [the Provisional Government] was in India and heavily dependent on India for moral, material and diplomatic support. Its secular policy existed only to the extent that the party opened its doors to the Hindus.<sup>67</sup>

To what extent it benefited the Hindus of Bangladesh is also uncertain. An Hindu minister of the Cabinet remained unconvinced that secularism would benefit the Hindus. According to this minister the days of Pakistan were far better because the Hindus were treated as a minority and given special privileges by law. But now in independent secular Bangladesh, special privileges were abolished and the Hindus had to compete with the Muslims in all walks of life.<sup>68</sup>

Obviously Fateh's and the Hindu minister's idea of secularism was rather limited, but that in fact seems to have been the general case. Only a few, like Dr. Kamal Hossain, could properly articulate it:

66. Ibid.

67. Interview in Dhaka on 5 June 1985

68. This was narrated to the author by Kuldip Nayar during an interview in New Delhi in May 1985. Mr. Nayar had interviewed the Hindu minister in 1972.

Secularism was a principle which had this very wide and liberal vision and it had nothing to do with trying to either keep the Hindus happy or giving some minorities some special privileges. That was not the concept. The concept was to build a political order which would be free from these communal overtones.<sup>69</sup>

## IV

A second expectation was that assistance to Bangladesh would bring an economic windfall to India. It was assumed that Bangladesh would readily engage in joint economic activities because the geographic reality of the Eastern region made it desirable and imperative.

A free Bangla Desh will make possible mutually beneficial trade and economic relations between Bangla Desh and India. The restoration of the transport and trade links that geography dictates will reduce production costs all over the eastern region of the subcontinent. The ensuing vast and unified market would attract capital and industry. The dying economy of Bengal will be revitalized and its politics transformed in the long run.<sup>70</sup>

India's strategic interest in oil exploration in Tripura would also be served. Instead of transporting the crude through pipelines via Assam to West Bengal, it could be transported to Bangladesh's coastal port of Chittagong by pipeline and from there by coastal vessels to India, with substantial savings in transportation costs.<sup>71</sup>

But what was most emphasized both in and outside government was the economic complementarity between the two countries:

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69. Interview in Dhaka in July 1985

70. Ashok Sanjay Guha, "Bangla Desh and Indian Self-Interest" Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay), vol. vi, 15 May 1971, p. 983

71. The Hindu, 11 January 1972, p. 8



A friendly Bangla Desh will provide a natural market for Indian goods. Economically it will be a complementary system to West Bengal and give a substantial fillip to the sagging economy of West Bengal in particular and eastern India in general.<sup>72</sup>

Proponents of this theory argued that "a collaborationist psychosis must govern India's chief financial decision makers" and that the Bangladesh currency would have to remain tied to the vicissitudes of the Indian rupee for quite some time because India would remain Bangladesh's "chief and dominant trading partner". Further, Bangladesh could get most of its required manufactured goods from India.<sup>73</sup>

It was assumed that Indian capital and business interests would forge suitable links with indigenous interests in Bangladesh because "are not labour costs in Bangla Desh lower than in Eastern India?" The resulting joint venture activities would "pave the way for a genuine integration of the economy of Bangla Desh with the economy of Eastern India".<sup>74</sup> An independent East Bengal would therefore "confer immense benefits on the people of Bangladesh and those of the Indian states surrounding Bangladesh, which had for centuries, and until 1947, an integrated economy".<sup>75</sup>

Thus the literature of the period is replete with suggestions of how Bangladesh's independence would be an economic boom for the entire eastern region of the subcontinent. But much of these

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72. J. Bhattacharjee, "Case for Indian Military Intervention" Economic and Political Weekly, vol. vi, no. 27, 3 July 1971, p. 1323

73. Boudhayan Chattopadhyay, "Impact of Bangladesh: Economic Dimensions", Seminar # 150, February 1972, pp. 22-28

74. Ibid., pp. 25-27

75. Rajan, op.cit., p. 201

expectations were belied by political realities. With the exception of Mrs. Gandhi and perhaps a few others, neither in government nor outside it was there any recognition that with the very fact of Bangladesh becoming independent, it would have to emphasize its national priorities over the regional priorities. It was simply assumed that Bangladesh would have no objection to becoming part of a regional integrative economic arrangement. That such an 'integrated economy' had once made East Bengal the hinterland of the Calcutta metropolis, and that the social, economic and political ramifications thereof had caused much disaffection between the Bengali Hindus and Muslims, were overlooked.

The year 1972 started with the trip of the country's first Foreign Minister, Abdus Samad Azad, to New Delhi in order to lay the groundwork for an Indo-Bangladesh economic accord. The result was a trade agreement signed on 28 March 1972 immediately after Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Dhaka. Article 4 of that agreement -

In order to meet the day to day requirements of the people living within a sixteen kilometre belt of the border between West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram on the one hand and Bangla Desh on the other, and with a view to providing facilities to these peoples to dispose of their goods, border trade shall be allowed in specified commodities...<sup>76</sup>

- fulfilled the campaign promises of both leaders.<sup>77</sup>

Previously, during Mujib's visit to Calcutta, it had been agreed by the two Prime Ministers that regular talks, consultations and visits of delegations would take place between the two countries to facilitate

76. Bangladesh Documents, op.cit., vol. 11, p. 649

77. Ibid., pp. 643-644

cooperation in the fields of development and trade; that interstate trade would be on a state-to-state basis; and that representatives of Bangladesh and Indian Planning Commissions should meet periodically to identify areas of mutual cooperation in the development processes of the two countries.<sup>78</sup>

In the Joint Declaration of the two Prime Ministers during Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Dhaka, it was further decided that

in order to strengthen cooperation between the two countries, regular consultations shall be held between the officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Planning Commissions and the Ministries and Departments dealing with economic, commercial, cultural and technical affairs of the two Governments. Such consultation will take place periodically, at least once every six months.<sup>79</sup>

Thus from the outset the two countries seemed to lay down the basis for an 'integrated' economic plan for the region. Though Mujib never spoke of the 'complementary' nature of the Bangladesh and Indian economies, the left-oriented former Prime Minister and current Finance and Planning Minister, Tajuddin Ahmed, frequently stressed the complementary nature of the two economies and the unqualified benefits to be had from an integrated approach to the economic issues affecting the two countries.<sup>80</sup> Within three months, however, the border trade agreement ran into difficulty. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Three specific expectations of the Indian trade and financial

78. Bangladesh Documents, vol. II, op.cit. p. 637

79. Ibid., pp. 643-644

80. The Hindu, 10 June 1972, p. 1. He also rejected aid from the US; see, Far Eastern Economic Review 19 February 1972, p. 18; 15 November 1974, p. 34



circles went unfulfilled, however. The Indian jute industry had been unable to compete with the Pakistan jute industry because the export of jute from East Bengal had been at a heavily subsidized price and without export duty. The jute industry circle in West Bengal expressed the hope that the "Bangladesh government will take early steps towards the fixation of fair price for its jute exports in the international market, to ensure mutually beneficial collaboration in jute industry between the two countries".<sup>81</sup>

There was also the hope that India and Bangladesh would make joint efforts in regard to exports of jute and tea, the two products in which Pakistan and India competed for international markets. Foreign Minister Swaran Singh downplayed it, saying that the question of joint endeavour "would rise only after the Bangladesh government has evolved trade and development plans in the light of its requirements".<sup>82</sup>

The third expectation was that Indian private capital would have access to the Bangladesh market. But the Deputy Minister for External Affairs told the *Rajya Sabha* that Indian private capital would not be allowed initially into Bangladesh at the latter's express wish and Indian economic aid would be channelled through state agencies.<sup>83</sup> Dissenting voices, however, felt that "it would be impractical, given the character of the two economies, to ban trade through private channels".<sup>84</sup> This did not dampen the enthusiasm

81. Ibid., 30 December 1971, p. 10

82. Ibid., 25 March 1972, p. 7

83. Ibid., 19 March 1972, p. 7

84. Nachiketa, "India-Bangladesh Trade Treaty" Economic and Political Weekly, vol. vii, no. 15, 8 April 1972, p. 746

of Indian businessmen who continued to dream of lucrative economic cooperation between the two countries. There was even the suggestion of a free trade area or a customs union comprising the two countries. But solitary voices advised caution:

Talk about either a 'free trade area' or a 'customs union' at this time is certainly unrealistic and may even prove detrimental to Bangladesh which is still industrially very much less developed as compared to its neighbouring regions of West Bengal. Such an arrangement would perpetuate [the] industrial backwardness of Bangladesh leading to possible misunderstanding between the two countries ... In the interest of maintaining better relations, it may be more worthwhile thinking in terms of evolving an area of preferential tariff arrangements conducive to the industrial development of Bangladesh.<sup>85</sup>

## V

Besides the expected economic windfall, there was also the hope that once Bangladesh became independent, India's defence and security problems in the east would be considerably reduced.

Territorial division of British India had resulted in a grave security problem for the Indian Union. "Moth-eaten" Pakistan, as Jinnah described it, flanked India on two sides, doubling India's defence needs. Since 1948 Pakistan had invaded India four times. The 1962 Sino-Indian border incident had caught India unawares and considerably heightened its sense of insecurity. To all this must be added the secessionist activities in its eastern states bordering Burma and China.

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85. Ibid.

The independence of Bangladesh with Indian assistance would, it was expected, bring the League to power, thus ensuring a friendly government with professed secular democratic values. Besides, the East Bengalis who had suffered the odium of military dictatorship would ensure that the military never gained the upper hand in the country's politics. In any case, Bangladesh surrounded by friendly India would not require a strong military, thus considerably alleviating the Eastern Command's previous preoccupation with the East Pakistan border.

A friendly Bangladesh would also mean little or no Chinese or American influence in Bangladesh's politics and certainly not as much as in Pakistan, where this influence contributed to its anti-Indian posture. It was also expected that the secessionists and terrorists in its rebellious eastern states would no longer get sanctuary, training and arms as they used to from the Pakistan Government.

Thus, India stood to gain a lot by assisting the League to come to power in a free Bangladesh. Whether these expectations were realized will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

## VI

The Indira Government's recognition of Bangladesh on 6 December 1971 was hailed by Indian opposition leaders as a "bold and courageous" decision that would open a "golden chapter in the history of the Indian sub-continent". While Jyotirmoy Basu of CPI(M) called it "the day of days since 1947", Jan Sangh leader, Vajpayee, spoke of



"a relationship which will not yield to pressure of any diplomacy".<sup>86</sup>

Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed, Foreign Minister in the Provisional Government, hoped that "the great nation of India and the emerging nation of Bangladesh can supplement and complement each other according to their capabilities to put up the monumental example of peaceful co-existence under the principle of Panch Sheel".<sup>87</sup> Abdus Samad Azad, the first Foreign Minister of Bangladesh said:

Mrs. Gandhi's name will be written in golden letters in the history of Bangla Desh. Every word, every commitment she has given to Bangla Desh including her commitment as to the recognition of Bangla Desh and its timing has been honoured by her.<sup>88</sup>

After Bangladesh's independence the fund of gratitude and goodwill for India seemed almost inexhaustible. On Mujib's return home, Mrs. Gandhi's portrait was carried alongside Mujib during the motorcade. Bangladeshis made numerous requests to Indian visitors for portraits of Mrs. Gandhi to adorn their houses as a token of gratitude.<sup>89</sup>

On his way home after his release from Pakistan, Mujib stopped in New Delhi to thank the people and the Government of India for helping Bangladesh make the journey from "darkness to light, captivity to freedom, desolation to hope". He also declared:

I am aware that the people in India are not very rich. Yet they gave food, shelter, succour and fed millions of our people, which

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86. The Hindu, 7 December 1971, p. 12

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid., 9 January 1972, p. 1

89. Ibid., 13 January 1972, pp. 1 and 7

could not but be by sacrificing their own needs. We will never forget this...The kindness, sympathy and consideration shown by the people of India, the armed forces of India and the Indian leaders we will never forget...The people of my country will be eternally grateful to the people and Government of India for having stood by us in our darkest hour.<sup>90</sup>

In the first week of February 1972, on his first state visit to India, Mujib thanked the Indian Press "for projecting the truth about Bangla Desh at a time when it was difficult to get it from within the country". He also expressed his "profound gratitude to the Indian Army because they not only...contributed directly to the freedom struggle, but they also showed exemplary behaviour in public".<sup>91</sup>

Mrs. Gandhi returned the compliment during her first state visit to Bangladesh in the second week of March 1972 by describing the *Mukti Bahini* as "a saga of courage...the flame of truth, the flame of justice". During this visit, the eternal friendship professed by both sides was sealed in a twenty-five year Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace.<sup>92</sup>

While the expressions of gratitude and goodwill continued unabated,<sup>93</sup> Indian economic and technical assistance also flowed in. Two engineers from the Indian railways were sent to assist the Bangladesh Railway in the re-laying of damaged rails. Their salaries were paid by the Indian High Commission in Dhaka.<sup>94</sup> The Corps of Signals

90. Ibid., 11 January 1972, p. 7

91. Bangladesh Documents, vol. 11, op.cit., p. 635

92. For full text see ibid., pp. 638-648

93. See Jatiyo Sangsad, Session Debates, Official Proceedings, particularly 10 April 1972, p. 14; 12 October 1972, p. 18; 9 April 1973, p. 45.

94. Ibid., 2 July 1973, p. 1143

of the Indian Army restored telecommunication links within Bangladesh and between Bangladesh and India; all the special equipment necessary was supplied by India. A special consignment of sixty tank wagons of kerosene was sent to meet the acute shortage in Bangladesh. The Shipping Corporation of India placed at Bangladesh's disposal two ocean-going ships to export the accumulated jute and jute goods in the Chalna port. The Indian Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals sent its senior officials to re-start production at the Chittagong Refinery and to explore the possibility of feeding it with Indian crude. The Bangladesh Assistance Committee in India announced that it would place a fleet of twenty ambulances at the disposal of the Bangladesh Health Ministry. The Committee also collected Rupees 23 million (then US\$ 3.2 million) and a large quantity of clothing for Bangladesh. The Indian drug industry set up a working group to formulate a plan to increase production to meet requirements in Bangladesh. The President of the Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce declared that the Federation was prepared to assist the Bangladesh Government in the reconstruction and development of its economy. And in May, India rushed 400,000 tons of foodgrain to Bangladesh to meet the acute food shortage; this was out of the 764,500 tons pledged by India.<sup>95</sup>

India also selected twenty-eight IAS (Indian Administrative Service) and IPS (Indian Police Service) officers to help establish civil administration in Bangladesh at the request of the Bangladesh

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95. For details of the above assistance see The Hindu, 23 December 1971; 1,2,8,11,23,29 January 1972; 5 May 1972; and Bangladesh Observer, 25 January 1972. All US dollar amounts given in parentheses throughout this study are calculated at the then exchange rates.



Government, according to Indian sources.<sup>96</sup> But according to Foreign Secretary S.A. Karim:

When our government was to be established in Dhaka, the Indians had already prepared a list of advisors for various ministries and were ready to fly them to Dhaka. This is why the Chinese government said later that Bangladesh was the Manchukuo government of India because the Manchukuo was theoretically independent after 1931 but the Japanese officials manned almost all administrative departments. They were the policy makers. But I understand that was quashed in Calcutta itself, in Mujibnagar. Nobody actually came, but they had thought of this.<sup>97</sup>

And according to a member of the Provisional Government, the Indian Army had also offered officers to assist in the initial administration of the country:

By November-December we got information that a large number of Bengali administrative officers were killed. We also knew that a fairly large contingent of Bengali administrative officers was stranded in Pakistan. So in December 1971, Generals Aurora and Sarkar offered Indian officers from the army to administratively assist the new government.<sup>98</sup>

But the offer was not accepted.<sup>99</sup>

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96. The Hindu, 11 December 1971, p. 9

97. Interview in New York on 24 March 1985

98. Interview with Ruhul Quddus in Dhaka on 7 July 1985

99. Kamal Siddiqui, the then Deputy Commissioner of Khulna, maintains that "a large number of Indian civil servants" initially "wielded the power of decision making" in Bangladesh. The Political Economy of Indo-Bangladesh Relations M.A. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1975, p. 15. But according to S.M. Ali, the idea of administrative assistance to Bangladesh was dropped at the insistence of Mrs. Gandhi who felt that "the move was likely to do more harm than good to the morale of the Dacca administration, and possibly hurt the sensitive Bengalis of the new-born state". After the Dark Night: Problems of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Ltd., 1973, p. 142

Thus in those initial months after independence when Western and United Nations aid was yet to pour in, India became the sole guarantor of the survival of the new state. Emotions and sentiments flowed across the border, and in the euphoria of that moment there was no dearth of fellow feeling. The song *Amar Shonar Bangla* ("My Golden Bengal"), written by Tagore, a Bengali Hindu, was chosen as the country's national anthem; that the song serenaded the whole of Bengal was of little concern.

The hope for the future blanketed out past history as India magnanimously gave and Bangladesh eagerly took whatever came forth.

As Karim recalls:

Whatever happened, whether it was petroleum shortage or food shortage here and there, we would pick up the telephone and ring up our counterpart in India requesting him to please help us, and India tried to help us. 100

And according to Ruhul Quddus, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister:

A program was chalked out to send essentials such as kerosene, petroleum, salt, foodstuff etc., to the various districts from India... India gave us almost everything we needed and wanted. Indian economic aid saved us initially. 101

Thus Indo-Bangladesh relations were set well on the friendship track and no one thought that they could become derailed.

## VII

Throughout the period of the struggle (March-December 1971) and into the first year of independence, both the Indira Government and the

100. Interview, op.cit., fn. 97

101. Interview, op.cit., fn. 98

two successive Bangladesh Governments (Tajuddin Cabinet and the Mujib Cabinet) had to tackle a number of sensitive issues with mixed results.

One such issue was the selection of the commander of the joint Indo-Bangladesh Force. Since the *Mukti Bahini* was fighting for the independence of its country and had been fighting the Pakistan Army much before the Indian Army came onto the scene, there was obvious emotional appeal for a Bangladeshi commander. But the expectation on the other side was that since the bulk of the professional fighting force and arsenal was Indian, the commander would have to be an Indian. The issue was finally resolved by both Governments settling for an officer with the rank of a corps commander. The highest ranking officer available on the Bangladesh side at the time was Colonel M.A.G. Osmani, the commander-in-chief of the *Mukti Bahini*. So, India's Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora became the commander of the joint force. But in order to appease Colonel Osmani, the Indians gave him a brigadier, Brigadier Gupta, as his personal staff officer.<sup>102</sup> The Indian Prime Minister also provided Osmani with a Dakota aircraft for his war-time travel.<sup>103</sup>

But this was not without some bitterness in the *Mukti Bahini*, where the prevailing sentiment was that Osmani could have been promoted to the rank of a general by the Provisional Government and given command of the joint force.<sup>104</sup> While this may have been a

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102. Interview with General Aurora in New Delhi on 1 May 1985

103. Interview with General Osmani in Dhaka in May 1985

104. Confidential interview with one of Mujib's private secretaries, Dhaka, 15 July 1985



legitimate expectation since the *Mukti Bahini* absorbed the brunt of the war, it did not take into account the political limitations of a Provisional Government that was at the mercy of the host Government.

After Bangladesh's independence, Prime Minister Mujib invited Mrs. Gandhi to visit Bangladesh. Though Mrs. Gandhi was keen, she was also sensitive to the Chinese charge that Bangladesh was a "creation of India" and the Indian Army in Dhaka was an occupation force.<sup>105</sup> To avoid adverse international propaganda, she did not wish to visit Bangladesh while Indian troops were still there. Consequently, though an agreement was signed to pull out all Indian troops by 25 March, they were withdrawn two weeks early and Mrs. Gandhi started her state visit in the third week of March. Upon her return to New Delhi, she declared in the *Rajya Sabha*:

No group or individuals in India should make the mistake of imagining that the freedom of Bangladesh is a gift from India. It is an achievement of the people of Bangladesh and a fruit of their sacrifices.<sup>106</sup>

This was not only to check post-war Indian hubris in certain quarters, but also to deflate Chinese propaganda by officially setting the record straight.

Prime Minister Mujib also demonstrated good sense in handling sensitive issues. With East Bengal's independence, certain sections in West Bengal had entertained nostalgia for a greater Bengal. Prior to Mujib's first official visit to Calcutta, he was asked by a foreign correspondent whether there was any possibility of forming

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105. Ali, *op.cit.*, p. 168

106. The Hindu, 21 March 1972, p. 8

a greater Bengal. The Prime Minister replied:

My dream of Bangladesh has been fulfilled. I do not want an inch more of territory. You have seen the map of Bangladesh in our flag. I am happy with that much of territory. Our intention is that West Bengal should remain in India and that we should have the friendliest of relationships with the people of West Bengal, for that matter, [the] whole of India. 107

This declaration certainly undermined any secessionism there might have been. In addition, in his first public address in Calcutta, he reaffirmed his party's commitment to the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy, and added 'nationalism' as the fourth principle.<sup>108</sup> This pointed implication was not lost on those who had entertained hopes of a greater Bengal, and the Indira Government could not but be pleased.

There were, however, several *faux pas* that displeased the Bangladeshis. One was the way the surrender ceremony was handled. The Pakistan Army in East Pakistan was to surrender to the joint command of the Indo-Bangladesh Force. During the surrender ceremony on 16 December 1971 in Dhaka, Colonel Osmani was absent; the lone representative of the Provisional Government was brushed aside by a group of Indian generals "so that the world received a very different impression regarding the nature of the 'joint command' ". The *Mukti Bahini* which had fought for eight months the worst battles against the Pakistan Army was reduced to an inconsequential force. Not only did its sacrifices for its motherland go unrecognised, it was also denied any official presence on the day of final victory.

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107. Bangladesh Observer, 15 January 1972. Incidentally, the map of Bangladesh was dropped from the flag by the third week of January 1972. Far Eastern Economic Review 22 January 1972, p. 5

108. Review, ibid., 1 April 1972, p. 14

The Indian Army had come at the eleventh hour and seized the victory that belonged to it. To add insult to injury, the whole crisis was dubbed both in India and abroad as an Indo-Pakistan war, reducing, in one sweep, the eight-month long *Mukti Bahini*-Pakistan war to an eleven-day Indo-Pakistan struggle.

This had devastating political consequences for the League Government. Even before the conclusion of the war, the Provisional Government had lost its credibility in the eyes of the *Mukti Bahini* for failing to display proper leadership in various war-related issues. These events, together with the surrender ceremony, alienated most of the Army officers in the *Bahini*, who later became the senior leadership in the Bangladesh Army, from the League Government. Worse yet, the seeds of anti-Indianism were planted within the nascent army, with fatal consequences five years later.

The second blunder was the looting of mills, factories, offices and hospitals by the Indian Army in the first few days after the surrender of the Pakistan Army.<sup>109</sup> Hospital equipment, especially of the Combined Military Hospital in the Dhaka cantonment, was removed to India.<sup>110</sup> In April 1974 Mujib had to go to the Soviet Union for a lung operation, since he could not be operated on in Bangladesh for lack of the normal facilities at the CMH.<sup>111</sup>

But what reinforced the *Mukti Bahini*'s hostility towards the Indians was the taking away by the Indian Army of all the armaments

109. Guardian (London), 21 June 1972

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110. Interview with General Wasiuddin in New York, 29 March 1985

111. Interview with Shamsur Rahman, Mujib's ambassador to the Soviet Union, in Dhaka on 9 July 1985



surrendered by the Pakistan Army. While much of it was not heavy armament, it was sufficiently modern and enough in quantity to equip the nascent Bangladesh Army.<sup>112</sup> The Bangladeshi military officers, including Colonel Osmani who became Mujib's defence advisor upon the latter's return, felt that Bangladesh had a right to its share of the booty and that the arsenal should not have been removed without the Bangladesh Government's prior approval. But as General Aurora explained:

We brought out a certain number of weapons from Bangladesh. We rightly or wrongly felt that they would not be of much use to Bangladesh. With the situation in Bangladesh as it was, more weapons lying around would make it chaotic.<sup>113</sup>

With hindsight, the Indian General was probably right, since certain unrecovered weapons have greatly contributed to the lawlessness that permeates the country even to this day; but it did very little for Bangladeshi nationalist pride. The primary motive of the Indira Government perhaps was to prevent this arsenal from falling into extremist hands that could mount a direct challenge to the League leadership.<sup>114</sup> Whatever its justification, it was not appreciated by the Bangladeshis; one Bangladeshi officer, Major Jalil, was imprisoned allegedly for resisting the transfer of the surrendered weapons to India.

112. Confidential interview with a senior Bangladesh Army officer, Dhaka, 9 July 1985. For some idea of the quantity surrendered, see The Hindu, 24 December 1971, p. 9

113. Interview, op.cit., fn. 102

114. Incidentally, the Far Eastern Economic Review (18 December 1971, p. 6) points out that the "Indian army wasted time with minor towns and garrisons instead of going to Dacca directly because they wanted to take possession of Pakistani arms and ammunitions and prevent them falling into hands of extremists who could some day subvert the new state".

The other eye-brow raising incident was India's insistence that its High Commissioner become the doyen of the diplomatic corps. In diplomatic practice, the first ambassador to present his credentials is considered the senior-most ambassador, becoming the doyen. According to Foreign Secretary Karim:

India was not the first country to appoint an ambassador to Dhaka. I think it was the East German ambassador who was the first one ready to present his credentials. The date had already been fixed...When the Indians realized it...they insisted that this had to be changed. So Subimal Dutt was the first High Commissioner to present his credentials and become the dean of the diplomatic corps. 115

On occasions, however, the Indian leadership made allowances for Bangladeshi sentiment. According to Mr. Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, the Provisional Government's most respected roving ambassador at the time and later Bangladesh's first President, during his meeting with Mrs. Gandhi in London in late October 1971 he pressed her for an early recognition of Bangladesh by India, adding:

After all, what can I offer you by way of reward. Bangladesh will never be a vassel kingdom of India, but Bangladesh will be a friend of India if that is of any value to you.

Mrs Gandhi is said to have replied:

It has been good of you Justice Chowdhury to talk of a reward and you have offered friendship. I think even that should be left to the people of Bangladesh to decide. My reward would be if I find democracy functioning in a neighbouring country. I do not want military dictatorship either in Bangladesh or in Pakistan. 116

115. Interview, op.cit., fn. 97

116. Interview in Dhaka on 2 June 1985

The future President recalls being overcome by the sincerity of the Prime Minister's remarks and remains convinced that "India did not want to colonize Bangladesh because India wanted to project the image of a benefactor, both in the region and internationally too".<sup>117</sup>

After the country's independence, Mrs. Gandhi posted to Bangladesh one of her most capable and senior ambassadors - a Bengali. Mr. Subimal Dutt, India's ambassador to the Soviet Union, was the first High Commissioner to Bangladesh. Born in the district of Chittagong in Bangladesh, he had been an administrative officer in East Bengal before partition. His successor, Samar Sen, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations at the time, was also a Bengali. This trend was changed only after General Ziaur Rahman, who came to power after Mujib, expressed his displeasure at having a Bengali-speaking Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka.<sup>118</sup>

On India's Republic Day celebrations in late January 1972, a special 'Bangladesh Spectacle' was presented by 1,000 persons. It depicted the horrors perpetrated by the Pakistan Army on innocent East Bengalis, the influx of refugees into India, the rise of the *Mukti Bahini* and the role of the Indian armed forces. It was presented with Bengali songs as background music.<sup>119</sup> On the Bangladesh independence day celebrations on 26 March, Mrs. Gandhi, who normally did not attend diplomatic receptions, made an exception and attended the reception given by the Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi.<sup>120</sup>

117. Ibid.

118. Interview with Ambassador Samar Sen in New Delhi on 24 April 1985

119. The Hindu, 27 January 1972, p. 7

120. Ibid., 27 March 1972, p. 1



Conclusion: In 1947 East Bengalis voted to secede from India in order to give the fullest expression to their culture, religion and economic freedom. But the chauvinism of the West Pakistani leaders belied that expectation, providing the rationale for the 1971 war.

Had the East Bengalis not been economically and politically exploited by the Western wing, East Bengal would have probably remained with Pakistan. Its fight for survival was universally held in India as proof of the failure of religion-based statehood, the failure of the two-nation theory. This was not so. Admittedly, the two-nation theory was a political ploy by the Indian Muslims to carve out a separate territory over which they could rule, but the validity of the theory remains unchallenged. What was not foreseen was that economic and political discrimination could still take place within a state whose peoples had elected to unite under one flag and solely on the basis of religion.

East Bengal's independence neither invalidated the justification for theocratic states, nor validated secular statehood. Secularism was adopted by Bangladesh not as a rejection of religion, but as a conscious attempt to institute a new political order in which the pursuit of statecraft would be least hampered by religious pandering. But to most Indians, it was as though the East Bengalis had finally rectified an historical error. Moreover, it was assumed that Bangladesh would be eternally pro-Indian.

This flaw in perception lay in the inability of most Indians to understand the East Bengali personality. The political character of the Bangladeshi could be understood only by recognizing the

importance to him of his religion and culture. Muslimness and Bengali-ness are two equally important aspects of his character, and both are inseparably linked to each other. Though East Bengalis were economically exploited equally in United Bengal and in Pakistan, prior to 1947 their Muslimness was under threat, and therefore they seceded from India. But after 1947 their Bengali-ness was under threat, and therefore they seceded from Pakistan. The East Bengalis realized their total emancipation in two stages.

But psychological contradictions remained. Tagore's song, *Amar Shonar Bangla*, written in the emotionally charged atmosphere of Bengal in the first decade of this century to inspire the Bengali Hindus to launch their successful anti-partition movement in 1905, was chosen as the national anthem, suggesting perhaps the Bengali Muslims' desire for a certain unity of Bengali culture and spirit. But the adoption of a flag initially with a map of Bangladesh at the center defined, according to Mujib, the geographical limitations of Bangladeshi nationalism. West Bengal would not be part of that nationalism. Thus there were complex dimensions in the Bangladeshi character that remain latent and unexplored.

Bengal, once the vanguard state of undivided India, slipped into irrelevance after 1947. The independence of East Bengal was like a spiritual renaissance for West Bengal, with great hopes for the future. This perhaps explains West Bengal's intense preoccupation with East Bengal's independence. For the Indian Union, however, it was pure reason of state that led India to assist the East Bengal independence movement.

But in the process there were tremendous changes in the expectations of the participants in this political drama. The Provisional Government, preoccupied with the exigencies of the period, did not realize the consequences for Bangladesh of its collusion with India. The subsequent Mujib Government also had little freedom of choice or action. Saddled with the extraordinary task of reconstructing the war-torn economy and rehabilitating its dislocated people, it had only India to assist it during its gargantuan endeavours. The policies and statements of the Government formulated in the exigency of the period later became suspect in the eyes of the people and were exploited by vested interests. The promise of eternal friendship with India became a political liability soon thereafter.

The Indian Government also endeavoured to take a realistic view of the new situation and attempted to formulate policies and statements keeping in mind the possible reactions of the people of Bangladesh. But its response to the latent fears in Bangladesh of Indian economic dominance remained inadequate. Despite the sincere efforts on both sides, the tactical failures and political complexities of the period threatened to undo a promising relationship.

In the context of influence relationship, each country was able to influence certain outcomes in the other, both before and after the war. By providing sanctuary and diplomatic and military assistance, Mrs. Gandhi reinforced the indebtedness of the Provisional Government to India. The compromised position the Provisional Government found itself in influenced it to accept the formation of the Consultative Committee that included four other parties. It could perhaps also be argued that the prevailing situation influenced the



Provisional Government to desist from demanding Colonel Osmani's presence in the surrender ceremony, or from preventing the transfer to India of the weapons surrendered by the Pakistani Army. After the war, the Indian Government was able to prevail upon the Mujib Government to make its High Commissioner the dean of the diplomatic corps. No doubt, Indian assistance to Bangladesh was responsible for influencing this concession from the League Government.

On the other hand, the Provisional Government's announcement banning all religion-based parties in independent Bangladesh did in no small measure reinforce total Indian support for the East Bengalis. Following independence, raising secularism to the status of a state principle also served to reinforce India's continued commitment to Bangladesh. Thus each country successfully influenced the other when the occasion demanded so.

## Chapter 4

FORMALIZING THE POLITICAL RELATIONS:  
THE INDO-BANGLADESH TREATY

The Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty was seen by the Bangladesh and Indian leaders as one concrete manifestation of their public commitment to eternal friendship between the two countries. But neither of the two Governments fully realized at the time the adverse repercussions the treaty would generate for Indo-Bangladesh relations. Perhaps only in retrospect is it possible to explain why the treaty, instead of cementing the professed bond of friendship between the two countries, actually alienated the Bangladeshi elite from a promising relationship with India.

For nine months in 1971 destiny had forced the Indian Government and the Bangladesh Provisional Government in Calcutta to collaborate to bring about a particular political outcome in East Pakistan. Much energy, planning, arsenal and blood had gone into that collaboration, so that by December 1971 their shared endeavour had brought forth the desired result. In the euphoria of those days the new relationship between the two countries was described by the two Governments in hyperbolic terms: many superlatives were uttered, promises made and commitments given. The friendship treaty was one such commitment.

But the signing of the treaty led to condemnation of the League Government from important quarters. Many of the opposition parties<sup>1</sup>

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1. For statements from the opposition benches, see Jatiyo Sangsad, Official Proceedings, 1st Session, 1st Sitting, 9 and 13 April 1973; also 2nd Session, 29th Sitting, 7 July 1973.

as well as influential sections of the Bangladesh Army<sup>2</sup> saw it as a blatant attempt by India to undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty. The League Government itself became suspect in their eyes. Not only were these sentiments fostered through the media,<sup>3</sup> they also crept into what would otherwise be considered scholarly writings.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore important that the friendship treaty be studied and analyzed in order to examine the validity of the many charges labelled against it. Through such an approach, one hopes, it would be possible to explore to what extent this treaty damaged the evolution of positive relations between the Indira-Mujib Governments and, in the broader context, between India and Bangladesh.

Treaty Provisions: At Mujib's invitation, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi paid her first state visit to Bangladesh from 17 to 19 March 1972. At the conclusion of the visit the two Prime Ministers signed a Joint Declaration, the most significant aspect of which was the decision to enter into a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace. As a "concrete expression to the similarity of views, ideals and interests between India and Bangladesh", the

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2. Confidential interviews with senior and mid-ranked Army officers who served during the League Government. Even as late as 1985, General Ershad, the current strongman in Bangladesh, expressed similar sentiments. Interviews in Dhaka in July-August 1985.
  3. See, for instance, Holiday, 26 March 1972; 4 November 1973
  4. For instance, Kamal Siddiqui, The Political Economy of Indo-Bangladesh Relations, unpublished MA thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, September 1975, pp. 17-18; also, Talukdar Maniruzzaman, The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath, Dhaka: Books International Ltd., 1980, pp. 163-164; Moudud Ahmed, Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy, Dhaka: The University Press Ltd., 1979, p. 276, fn. 4



treaty was signed in Dhaka on 19 March 1972, valid for twenty-five years and with the provision to renew by mutual agreement.

The treaty contained ten objectives in the Preamble and twelve articles in the main body. The Preamble highlighted the "common ideals of peace, secularism, democracy, socialism and nationalism" and pledged adherence to "the basic tenets of nonalignment, peaceful coexistence, mutual cooperation, non-interference in internal affairs and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty". The Preamble also expressed the determination of the two countries "to maintain fraternal and good neighbourly relations and transform their border into a border of eternal peace and friendship". The two sides agreed that in order to strengthen world peace and security and to bring about a relaxation of international tension, the best approach was "through cooperation and not through conflict or confrontation".

Article 1 solemnly declared that there would be lasting peace and friendship between the two countries and their peoples and that each side would respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from interfering in its internal affairs. Article 2 was more global in thrust as it condemned "colonialism and racialism in all forms and manifestations" and pledged support for national liberation struggles. Article 3 reaffirmed the two countries' faith in the policy of nonalignment and peaceful coexistence as important contributing factors in detente and the securing of global peace.

The necessity of maintaining regular contacts between the two

Governments was laid down in Article 4. It was agreed that there would be regular "meetings and exchanges of views at all levels" to keep either party informed of the other's stand on major international problems affecting the interests of both states.

Under the provisions of Articles 5 and 7 the two parties pledged to promote relations in the areas of sports, culture and health and also to cooperate in economic, scientific and technical fields. It was further agreed that they would cooperate in the development of trade, transport and communications between them "on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the most-favoured-nation principle".

Article 6 was crucial to both the countries, perhaps more so to Bangladesh, as it addressed the perennial problem of sharing the waters of the major rivers that flowed through both countries. It was agreed that joint studies and actions would be undertaken "in the fields of flood control, river basin development and the development of hydro-electric power and irrigation".

Articles 8,9 and 10 are generally assumed to be the operative clauses of the treaty as they laid down the parameters of the security and defence relations between the two countries. Article 8 stipulated that neither country shall "enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party", and each party was treaty bound to "refrain from any aggression against the other party". Each country also pledged not to allow "the use of its territory for committing any act that may cause military damage to or constitute a threat to the security of the other High

Contracting Party". This security concern was carried into Article 9 which pledged both parties to "refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an armed conflict against the other party", and should there be any attack or threat of attack on either party, they "shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate affective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure peace and security of their countries". Article 10 sealed the security understanding with the declaration that neither party shall "undertake any commitment, secret or open, toward one or more States which may be incompatible with the present Treaty".

Reactions to the Treaty: On the Indian side there was no discernible negative reaction to the treaty perhaps because it was obvious that as far as Indian self-interest was concerned India would not be disadvantaged in any way from a friendship treaty with Bangladesh. In her statement in Parliament on 20 March 1972 Mrs. Gandhi declared that

the Treaty embodies the Will of the two Governments to pursue common policies in matters of interest to both countries and solemnizes the close ties of friendship between our two countries and peoples cemented through blood and sacrifice. The Treaty...will guide us in our journey into the future in quest of peace, good neighbourliness and the well-being of our two peoples.<sup>5</sup>

There was no adverse comment in or out of Parliament on the treaty.

In fact, among the remarkably few commentaries, there was great hope and expectation that the foundation of perhaps an *entente cordiale* had been laid:

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5. Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Documents, vol. 11, 1972, p. 648



There are few examples in history of such a close treaty relationship that India and Bangladesh have established which extends almost to every sphere of life, ranging from defence and foreign affairs to transit and trade, economic and technical assistance, cultural cooperation and coordination of efforts to tame the rampaging rivers in the eastern region.<sup>6</sup>

Generally however, in India, little was said and much less written about the treaty or its possible consequences for the development of Indo-Bangladesh relations. The reason for what appears to be a rather muted response perhaps lies in the possibility that even as early as 1972 informed circles in India were fully aware of the dangers of wide publicity, since the banning of religion-based parties in Bangladesh certainly did not mean that anti-Indian sentiments were totally suppressed. It is conceivable that the Indian Government and elite establishment, mindful of possible anti-Indianism being generated by the treaty, desisted from any enthusiastic public articulation of its benefits. In the event, the treaty was seen as "the primary document, the firm base from which the two nations were to start the climb to the peaks of cooperation and political and economic progress",<sup>7</sup> and left at that. Mrs. Gandhi, however, did feel the need to assure the people of Bangladesh that while "India will stand by [the Bangladeshis] ..if there was any threat to their territorial integrity", the treaty *per se* was not a military pact between the two states, nor was there any secret understanding between the two Governments.<sup>8</sup>

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6. The Hindu, 20 March 1972, p. 1

7. K. Krishna Moorthy, "Progress of Indo-Bangla Relations" The Hindu, 26 January 1973, p. 8

8. At a press conference in Dhaka on 19 March 1972; The Hindu, 20 March 1972, p. 7

The reaction from the Bangladesh side was anything but muted. The Bangladesh Government had chosen not to give wide publicity to the treaty as well, perhaps because of similar considerations to those that weighed on the Indian Government's mind. Additionally, the Government was hampered by its inability to command the support of the entire rank and file in the party. An influential section of the Awami League - comprising the rightists led by Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed - was particularly concerned in addition to the security clauses, with the far-reaching consequences of Article 6, which stipulated joint endeavours in river basin development by harnessing the waters of the Brahmaputra, Meghna and the Ganges Rivers that, together with their tributaries, make up the lifeline of Bangladesh. As one informed source, who later became a minister in a subsequent government, explained:

Under any agreement or Treaty for cooperation and assistance between two unequal states, between a large and powerful country on the one hand and a small and weak country on the other, the benefit would generally go in favour of the powerful one. It is on this very point of view that a sizeable section of the Awami League was not in favour of such a treaty. But they were over-shadowed by the dominant Indian lobby inside the Government.<sup>9</sup>

Reactions among the opposition parties were much more vocal, as they unanimously demanded the treaty be rescinded. In late December 1972, Maulana Bhashani formed a 7-Party Action Committee whose primary demand was to rid the country of this treaty, which, it asserted, was meant to guarantee India's domination and influence over the future course of Bangladesh and thereby extend and establish its own sphere

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9. Moudud Ahmed, Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Dhaka: The University Press Ltd., 1983, p. 190

of influence over the subcontinent. According to the Committee, the treaty could not serve Bangladesh's interests as claimed by the Government.<sup>10</sup>

The most pungent comments came from the influential left-of-centre English-language weekly *Holiday*, and these were directed against Articles 9 and 10. Claiming that India was playing the Big Brother role, *Holiday* argued that Articles 9 and 10 "clearly give enough leeway to the Indian Government to infringe upon the sovereign right of the Bangladesh people" and that in fact "Indian defence and foreign policies have now become Bangladesh's policies as well". Therefore, "Bangladesh would have to hand over its defence and foreign ministries to Messrs Jagjivan Ram and Sardar Swaran Singh respectively". Article 9 was attacked also for its vagueness, which would allow it to be:

invoked any time to check so much as even a demonstration of popular discontent in Bangladesh. In other words, the Treaty is meant not to tolerate any opposition to the present government in Bangladesh - no matter how healthy and constructive it may be for the national interest.<sup>11</sup>

The debate in Parliament over the treaty was no less vocal, even though there were only a handful on the opposition benches. President Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, in his address to the Assembly, extolled India for standing by Bangladesh during the perilous days of the liberation struggle and described the treaty as "the practical expression" of the friendship between the two states".<sup>12</sup> But the opposition saw it

10. Ibid.

11. Holiday, 26 March 1972, p. 1

12. Jatiyo Sangsad, Official Proceedings, 1st Session, 1st Sitting, 9 April 1973, p. 45



differently. It interpreted the treaty as an infringement of Bangladesh's sovereign rights and appealed to the Assembly to reject it forthwith. According to one Member of Parliament:

this treaty denies me [*sic*] the right to enter into a treaty with someone else, to have friendship with someone else, to make unilateral decisions...New Delhi's influence over our foreign policy is inevitable...This treaty has denied us friends...We are not nonaligned...we have become entangled in a grand alliance and our sovereignty is very limited.<sup>13</sup>

According to another, the wording of the friendship treaty provided no scope to rescind it, thereby tying Bangladesh to the Indian security arrangement in the subcontinent. He enquired why Bangladesh, being a sovereign country, should be denied the right to negotiate for its own interests.<sup>14</sup>

The League Government was quite prepared to respond to these charges. Amirul Islam, a State Minister in the Cabinet, described the treaty as reflecting Bangladesh's sovereign status in that it was able to negotiate a treaty with India as an equal.<sup>15</sup> Tofael Ahmed, the Prime Minister's political secretary challenged the claim that the treaty had made Bangladesh friendless in the world:

I want to say that if that were true, then in the past 1 year 4 months 100 countries would not have recognized Bangladesh...it is not a military treaty...this is a treaty for peace and friendship...The Bengali nation will forever remember with deep gratitude the friendly forces of that friendly country who wrote part of Bengal's history with their blood.<sup>16</sup>

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13. Ibid., 13 April 1973, pp. 154-158

14. Ibid., 2nd Session, 29th Sitting, 7 July 1973, pp. 1817, 1820

15. Ibid., 1st Session, 6th Sitting, 18 April 1973, pp. 227-228. Also see Mr. Nure Alam Siddiqui's defence, pp. 251-253

16. Ibid., 1st Session, 7th Sitting, 19 April 1973, pp. 287-288

And Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain remarked:

I find it difficult to understand how the consolidation of friendly relations with the neighbouring country that has stood by our side during the difficult days of our freedom struggle, can go against the interest of our country. I fail to understand which aspect of this treaty is contrary to our interests...Every clause of the treaty is equally applicable to either country. Each of the signatory [*sic*] has committed itself not to adopt any means that would be contrary to the interests of the other...The treaty agreements have been based on the principles of our foreign policy, and by doing so our sovereignty and independence have been preserved.<sup>17</sup>

In short, Kamal Hossain's arguments were predicated on the premise that the friendship treaty did not obstruct Bangladesh from pursuing its declared policy of 'friendship for all, malice to none' and that no provision of the treaty prejudiced the interests of either country.

Outside the Parliament, the Government's reaction to the Opposition's charges was less measured. At least in one instance a senior Cabinet Minister, Syed Nazrul Islam, declared that neither India nor Bangladesh interfered in the other's internal affairs, and that the League would forcefully resist all attempts to drive a wedge into the friendship between India and Bangladesh. He then rounded off his public speech with a bitter attack on Beijing's policies towards Dhaka.<sup>18</sup>

It is significant that none of the other political parties in Bangladesh supported the League in its stand on the friendship treaty. Even Moni Singh's pro-Moscow Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Muzaffar Ahmed's pro-Moscow National Awami Party (NAP-M), both of

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17. Ibid., pp. 324-325; also The Hindu, 21 April 1973, p. 9

18. The Hindu, 6 March 1973, p. 6

which rode on the coattails of the Awami League, did not actively support it, perhaps because the treaty seemed to increase public apprehension rather than support. Since both the NAP-M and the CPB were pursuing a closed-door policy of making common cause with the League in the hope of being called to share power with it, they perhaps thought it best to maintain a neutral posture by abstaining from the public debate on the issue. That it was a successful strategy can be seen from the fact that by the beginning of 1975 both the NAP-M and the CPB joined the League in precipitating a 'constitutional coup' whereby the multi-party parliamentary system was replaced by a one-party presidential system, with the NAP-M and CPB leaders holding prominent positions within the new power structure.

Broadly speaking, the reaction against the friendship treaty seemed to emanate from three interest groups: those who wished to have intimate relations with China;<sup>19</sup> those wanting a revival of the Islamic connection, particularly with Pakistan;<sup>20</sup> and those who genuinely felt that Bangladesh's freedom to articulate its foreign policy in its own image was somehow shortchanged by the treaty agreement with India.<sup>21</sup> The pro-China group had a powerful instrument in *Holiday* whose editor, Enayetullah Khan, was a self-described "pathologically anti-Indian".<sup>22</sup> Mindful of the state of Sino-Indian relations,

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19. The pro-Chinese parties such as Mohammad Toaha's Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist), Maulana Bhashani's National Awami Party, and splinter groups that followed the Maoist line.
  20. The rightist parties such as the Muslim League, the *Jama'at i Islam*, the Bangladesh Democratic League, and the rightist wing of the Awami League led by Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed.
  21. The militant wing of the Awami League that split from the main body in 1972 to form the *Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal* (National Socialist Party) and preached scientific socialism.
  22. This is how Mr. Enayetullah Khan, currently Bangladesh's ambassador to China, described himself to the author during an interview in Beijing, China on 16 August 1985.



this group was sensitive to the intimate nature of the Indo-Bangladesh relationship. India was seen as a domineering, hegemonic power and Bangladesh's only effective counter to this, according to this group, was China. This was more so because among the superpowers the Soviet Union was seen as India's patron, and the United States as hostile to Bangladesh's interests on account of its rule during the 1971 war, as well as ideologically, because of its capitalistic mode of production. However, in those early years this group was considerably hampered in its public articulation of a pro-China policy because of the image Bangladeshis had of China owing to its public support of Pakistan and its veto in the Security Council against Bangladesh's membership in the United Nations.

The second interest group which strongly objected to the treaty was pro-Islamic in orientation. In fact, this group was a marriage of three sub-groups:<sup>23</sup> those who did not favour Bangladesh's independent statehood, and were ready even then to re-unite with Pakistan if possible; those who accepted the reality of Bangladesh but wished to maintain a strong link with Pakistan; and those who enthusiastically supported and even fought for Bangladesh's independence but also believed in the Islamic *Ummah* (community) and the need to maintain the 'umbilical' link with the Muslim Middle East. To all three sub-groups, a friendship treaty with India hampered the attainment of their respective and sometimes overlapping political goals.

The first sub-group was considerably emboldened by the declaration of President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan that Bangladesh was

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23. Fn. 20, but not in that order.

still an integral part of Pakistan except that hostile foreign troops had temporarily occupied it. To add substance to his Government's stand, the very first article of the new Constitution of Pakistan, adopted in the National Assembly, declared Bangladesh as its territory.<sup>24</sup> To the second sub-group, accepting the reality of Bangladesh was very hard indeed, but warm relations with India were psychologically unbearable; the solace seemed to lie in restoring emotional ties with Pakistan. To the third sub-group, unlike the others, being a Bengali was as important as being a Muslim, both these identities being equally necessary. Thus, independent statehood in which the Bengali language and culture could flourish was as necessary as the new state's umbilical link with the Muslim *Ummah* to keep vigorously alive its religious identity. This sub-group, like the two others, was concerned that the Government's stress on secularism would undermine the country's religious foundations and that the friendship treaty would play a significant role in that.

To the third group, an independent state of Bangladesh was of more concern than religion and culture. This group, which had the largest following of the three, was extremely concerned at the possible dilution and even weakening of Bangladesh's sovereignty. Articles 8,9 and 10 were its prime concern. The arguments against these

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24. The draft of Pakistan's new Islamic Constitution presented to the National Assembly on 31 December 1972 provided for the return of "East Pakistan" to the proposed Federal Republic "as and when foreign aggression in that province and its effects are eliminated". The first article of the new Constitution adopted in the National Assembly (fifth in its history) in April 1973 made a wishful reference to its lost territory. It said: "The Constitution shall be appropriately amended so as to enable the people of the province of East Pakistan, as and when foreign aggression in that province and its effects are eliminated, to be represented in the affairs of the federation". The Hindu, 1 January 1973 and 11 April 1973

military provisions in the treaty ran thus: the treaty binds Bangladesh to the regional and global security interests of India and, by extension, the Soviet Union; Bangladesh, surrounded by 'friendly' India, was shielded from the outside world and therefore no justification exists for a security arrangement with India against non-existent third parties; a security link with India would drag Bangladesh much against its will into conflagrations where no Bangladeshi national interest would be served; for instance given the geography of the Northeast, the Chinese, in any future military struggle against India, could easily block off strategic passages, whereupon India, by a liberal interpretation of the military clauses of the treaty, could send men and materiel through overland routes across Bangladesh's territory, thus dragging Bangladesh into India's war.<sup>25</sup> This group maintained that the treaty was actually prejudicial to Bangladesh's interests, and was not essential to Indo-Bangladesh relations.

Thus the friendship treaty helped to coalesce opposing opinion, and put the League Government on the defensive. But the Government made no attempt to reveal to the public or to those in opposition the background to the treaty, how it came about, or why. It is therefore necessary to throw light on the political circumstances that led to the signing of such a treaty.

Background to the friendship treaty: When the Yahya-Mujib talks failed and the Pakistan Army struck with full force in East Pakistan on the night of 25 March 1971, the Awami League leaders, with the exception of Mujib, fled to India, where they formed the Provisional

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25. Siddiqui, op.cit., pp. 17-18



Government of Bangladesh in Calcutta in April 1971 under the leadership of Tajuddin Ahmed.

One of the first concerns of this government was how to eject the Pakistan Army from East Pakistan so that the political control in Bangladesh could be secured by the Awami League, which had received an overwhelming public mandate to govern the whole of Pakistan in the December 1970 elections. The Provisional Government was painfully aware of its inadequate military capability to fight the extremely disciplined and well-armed Pakistan Army. The officers of the East Bengal Regiment (exclusively manned by Bengalis) stationed in Bangladesh, who established the initial rebel command and organized the armed struggles against the Pakistan Army, had done so spontaneously and without any directive from the Provisional Government.<sup>26</sup> They were professional military officers with no political affiliation. Under the circumstances, the Provisional Government had to consider ways and means by which its own legitimacy as the sole representative of the Bangladeshi people could remain unchallenged and at the same time the conclusion of the struggle in its favour could be expedited.

Thus the idea of a special treaty with India took root. The Provisional Government hoped to achieve several objectives through this treaty. First, since a treaty could only be entered into by

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26. In fact, at least on three occasions between 3 and 25 March 1971 when they, together with officers from the East Bengal Rifles, presented to Mujib detailed plans to counter the Pakistan Army, Mujib demurred. When war broke out, the *Mukti Bahini* initially took matters into its own hands. Anthony Mascarenhas, The Rape of Bangladesh, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1972, cited in S.M. Ali, After the Dark Night: Problems of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, New Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Ltd., 1973, pp. 25-26

independent sovereign governments, it would imply Indian recognition not only of Bangladesh but also of the Provisional Government as the genuine government of the Bangladeshi people. This would be a tremendous moral boost for the Awami League. Obversely, it would be a blow to Pakistan, particularly to its Army fighting in East Pakistan. The reality of Bangladesh becoming an independent state would also be a step closer.

Second, the treaty would provide the formal and legal bases to seek the assistance of the Indian Army to counter the Pakistan Army, and the entire military operation would be carried out while maintaining the independent character of Bangladesh. As the armed struggle inside East Pakistan intensified and official exchanges between the two Governments on the contingency of war increased, the special treaty appeared to the Provisional Government quite indispensable. Ambassador Abul Fateh, who had defected to the Bangladeshi cause and served in the Provisional Government, recalls:

In September 1971, I posed a question to [Acting President] Syed Nazrul Islam: Will you sign a friendship treaty? His answer was, "Right away". He wanted to sign the treaty then and there because it would mean India's recognition and it could bring Indian military help for Bangladesh.<sup>27</sup>

It is not clear whether the idea of the treaty was extensively discussed among all the members of the Provisional Government, or whether there was any unanimity of view on the issue. One might safely assume that the discussions must have been confined to the inner group led by Tajuddin Ahmed, since the pro-Islamic and the pro-US

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27. Interview with Ambassador Abul Fateh who served as Bangladesh's first Foreign Secretary. Dhaka, 5 June 1985

group of Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed, Taheruddin Thakur and Mahbub Alam Chashi was a pariah in the Provisional Government because of its 'secret' contact with the US Consulate in Calcutta.

In any event, a draft of the treaty was drawn up by Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed and Amirul Islam and they discussed it with D.P. Dhar, Mrs. Gandhi's liaison man in Calcutta. This was followed by another meeting between Tajuddin Ahmed, Dhar and Syed Nazrul Islam. As Amirul Islam recalled:

It was actually at the insistence of the Bangladesh Provisional Government, mainly Tajuddin Ahmed, that this treaty came about. A full forty-eight hours of exclusive discussion on this treaty took place in a separate apartment in Calcutta. The treaty was extensively discussed and in total secrecy. It was linked to the Indian Army participation and to India's recognition of our country.<sup>28</sup>

According to Islam, the Provisional Government had discussed with the Indian Government four essential points regarding the treaty:<sup>29</sup>

1. Indian recognition of Bangladesh;
2. Request for the Indian Army to participate directly in the struggle, in addition to assistance for the *Mukti Bahini* in training, sanctuary and arms;
3. Actual operation and stay of the Indian Army in Bangladesh: how the war was to be conducted, how destruction was to be minimized, and how to plan a short and quick victory; and
4. Withdrawal of the Indian Army as soon as the Bangladesh Government requested it.

India's main worry seems to have been whether its Army would face resistance from the Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan. To face this

28. Interview in Dhaka on 15 June 1985

29. Ibid.



possibility the Indian Army had with its civil advisors to maintain liaison with Bangladesh's civil officers; after the surrender of the Pakistan Army, these liaison officers were recalled.<sup>30</sup>

The secret negotiations, however, were never made public during the entire war period. On 16 November 1971, Indira Gandhi gave the international community an ultimatum of two weeks to resolve the East Pakistan crisis politically. A section of the Indian press speculated that should the crisis remain unresolved, the Indian Government would unilaterally "declare a state of emergency, extend recognition to the Bangladesh government-in-exile, enter into a defence treaty with the Bengali guerrillas and openly support the *Mukti Bahini*. It was believed that if India was forced into a war the defence clauses of the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship could be evoked by the Bengalis to invite Indian forces into Bangladesh. At the same time, the treaty would justify India's decision to meet the *Mukti Bahini's* demand for arms and military assistance".<sup>31</sup>

At 5:45 pm on 3 December 1971 Pakistan launched a pre-emptive air strike and several ground attacks in the Western sector.<sup>32</sup> On 6 December Mrs. Gandhi formally recognized Bangladesh and with that the Indian forces launched an all out attack in East Pakistan. On 16 December the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan surrendered to the Joint Indo-Bangla Command. On 22 December the Provisional Government

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30. M.A.W. Bhuiyan, Emergence of Bangladesh and Role of Awami League, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982, p. 255

31. The Hindu, 1 January 1972, p. 9

32. There were, however, military provocations across the East Pakistan border by Indian forces from as early as October. See The Times (London), 23 November 1971; The Daily Telegraph (London), 25 November 1971; and Far Eastern Economic Review, 4 December 1971, p. 7

took its seat in Dhaka. On 31 December 1971 the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh was asked by a member of the press if there would be a treaty of friendship between India and Bangladesh, to which he replied that there was no need for such a treaty.<sup>33</sup> When Mrs. Gandhi was asked a similar question in a press conference, she merely referred to the Bangladesh Foreign Minister's statement of the previous day.<sup>34</sup> If one assumes that a secret pact was signed during the war period, then it logically follows that no new treaty between the two countries would be necessary. But it is clear that both the Governments were committed to secrecy.

The issue did not die there, however, as there were numerous speculations in the Indian press about the possibility of a treaty. On 14 January 1972 at a press conference in Dhaka, Prime Minister Mujib was asked whether there would be a special treaty between India and Bangladesh. He replied:

We have a very special relationship. The relationship is the friendliest, Our treaty of friendship is in our hearts.<sup>35</sup>

On the invitation of the Government of India, Mujib paid an official visit to Calcutta from 6 to 8 February 1972. The Joint Statement on the talks between the two Prime Ministers at the conclusion of the visit made no reference to any friendship treaty. Yet at the conclusion of Indira Gandhi's visit to Dhaka from 17 to 19 March 1972 the much speculated Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace between the two countries was finally signed. The following

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33. The Hindu, 1 January 1972, p. 9

34. Bangladesh Documents, vol. 11, op.cit. p. 635

35. Ibid.

day *The Hindu* declared:

A draft of this treaty was discussed by the Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh at their meeting in Calcutta last month when they agreed in principle to sign, but preferred to defer it until Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Dacca so that the announcement could come as a fitting climax to the withdrawal of the Indian forces.<sup>36</sup>

Mujib Government's Tactical Failure: The Government seems to have erred in handling the treaty issue. It had not made public the existence of any pact with the Indian Government, though after independence it was widely suspected that a secret pact existed. It was not until mid-January 1973 that the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Abdus Samad Azad, grudgingly admitted to the existence of a secret understanding between the two Governments during the war.<sup>37</sup>

Immediately after independence, when pro-Indian feeling was at its peak, public support for the League was almost universal and Mujib himself was at full political ascendance, it would not have been difficult to explain the political circumstances and the exigency of the war period that necessitated entering into such an arrangement with India. A timely explanation would have taken the wind out of opposition sails, denying it any political mileage on this issue. But by failing to act decisively, the League found itself on the defensive. This reflected negatively on the credibility of the party and cast a shadow on Indo-Bangladesh relations. Labelling the Government's year-long silence as "a strange travesty of people's rights", *Holiday* warned that

the deadly pattern of distrust, subterfuge and dark motives which typified Pakistan's rule

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36. Issue of 20 March 1972, p. 1

37. Holiday, 21 January 1973



ominously threatens to be repeated. The liberation struggle of Bangladesh was a clear and total rejection of a corrupt and untenable system...The present government is under moral compulsion to make public the details of the pact...unless, of course, it has a skeleton in the cupboard.<sup>38</sup>

It is unclear why the League chose to remain silent over an issue as critical as this. It may be that in the changed circumstances of independence, the secret understandings would have appeared too yielding to Indian interests. It is also possible that Mujib might not have liked these understandings and was unable to do anything about them, and therefore preferred to maintain silence over the issue.

The Government did not even publicly discuss the open treaty. Several explanations may be offered. One explanation could be that at the time the treaty was signed, the Bangladesh Government was materially and psychologically indebted to India for its support during the war period and painfully aware of the need to maintain that dependence for some time into the future, especially since assistance from other quarters was not yet forthcoming. Any public criticism of the treaty would have been extremely embarrassing to the League Government, and could have also jeopardized the continuation of the much-needed Indian assistance.

A second plausible explanation is that the treaty was viewed by the Government as merely an institutionalization of what was already a reality - namely, the special friendship between the two countries. The treaty was not seen as a radical departure from the

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38. Ibid.

existing state of relations, and hence there was no need to articulate it further in public. Interviews with members of that Government support this view. For instance, President Chowdhury was of the opinion that "the friendship treaty was merely a communique".<sup>39</sup>

And Foreign Secretary Karim recalled:

It was always an unstated assumption that Bangladesh-India relationship was a special relationship and because we are going to have a special relationship why not institutionalize it through a treaty that could create a framework for more cooperation.<sup>40</sup>

A third possible explanation is that at the time the Treaty was signed the Government was saddled with numerous problems that it had to tackle simultaneously. The treaty was only one issue among a gamut of many other very pressing issues; thus the Government could not give as much public exposure to the treaty as it otherwise might have.

Which of the above explanations is most credible is a matter of opinion, no doubt, but elements of all three may have been present in the Government's decision not to give any singular emphasis to the treaty aspect of its relationship with India. That the Government feared public criticism, especially since the Khondakar faction had strong reservations about it, seems to have been an important factor indeed. That the Government had numerous other affairs of state to attend to was also true. And that the Government did not view the treaty as anything specially significant, in view of the already existing 'eternal friendship', may also have been the case as evidence suggests. Whatever the most likely explanation, it is clear

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39. Interview in Dhaka on 2 June 1985

40. Interview in New York on 26 March 1985

that the Government failed to gauge properly the depth of anti-Indian sentiments prevailing within the party and among certain sections of the politically active public.

Why was the Treaty signed?: A number of reasons why the friendship treaty came about have been offered by political observers. According to one source close to the League, the signing of the treaty was linked to the withdrawal of the Indian Army from Bangladesh. With a large number of countries, particularly China and certain Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, withholding their recognition of Bangladesh because of the presence of Indian troops, the need was felt to effect a quick withdrawal of the troops from Bangladesh soil. "Consequently, at the end, an arrangement was made to sign a Treaty and as a bargain Mujib was able to effect the withdrawal of the Indian army. Accordingly, by a prior arrangement, the Indian army was formally withdrawn on March 12, 1972...and in return, just a week later, Bangladesh received Mrs. Gandhi on its soil and signed the Joint Declaration and the Friendship Treaty."<sup>41</sup>

Another observer cites unnamed sources close to Mujib who suggest that "rather than being pressured, Sheikh was the one who approached Mrs. Gandhi on such a treaty". This observer offered two explanations for Mujib's alleged insistence on signing the treaty. First, signing the treaty with India would demonstrate Bangladesh's sovereign and independent status, indicating further its capability

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41. Moudud Ahmed, Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, op.cit. pp. 185-186



to manage its own affairs and make its own decisions. Second, Mujib allegedly saw the treaty as an insurance against his own political fall. The treaty was to provide Indian support in any political upheaval against his party.<sup>42</sup>

A third explanation, based on an assertion by an Indian journalist suggests that Mrs. Gandhi needed the treaty to show her people that there was a 'pay off' for all that India had done for the people of Bangladesh. The treaty had been done in haste, lest relations between New Delhi and Dhaka turn sour.<sup>43</sup>

Yet a fourth explanation starts with the assumption that there was a secret wartime treaty between the Indian Government and the Provisional Government, and the clauses of this treaty dictated the nature of relationship between the two Governments during the war period as well as in the post-independence period. The argument goes that "India was conscious of her inability to bind down Bangladesh with this treaty in the changed circumstances of independence. Therefore, in order to legalize it, she had necessarily to come forward with an open treaty of similar nature. Given the existence of an anti-Indian lobby within the Awami League and the rapid disenchantment with India among the Bangladesh people, India had also to ensure the conclusion of this treaty in the minimum possible time".<sup>44</sup>

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42. Ishtiaq Hossain, "Bangladesh-India Relations: Issues and Problems", in Emajuddin Ahamed, ed. Foreign Policy of Bangladesh Dhaka: The University Press Ltd., 1984, p. 35

43. Ali, op.cit., p. 145; cited in Siddiqui, op.cit., p. 16

44. Siddiqui, op.cit., pp. 16-17

Of these interpretations, the first one would be very attractive to the pro-Islamic and the pro-Chinese lobby in Bangladesh. They had all along suspected India of having ulterior motives in assisting Bangladesh and viewed the treaty as a form of exaction for services rendered. This interpretation does imply a certain degree of arm twisting by India, in the sense that the treaty was a *quid pro quo* for the withdrawal of the Indian military from Bangladesh's soil. However, if one subscribes to the view, as does President Chowdhury, that India desired to promote the image of a benefactor among the people of Bangladesh, then it is difficult to accept the notion that it would put such a steep price on the withdrawing of its Army. One has to concede that friendship between countries requires a strong foundation of mutual trust and if the Indian leadership genuinely desired that the people and government of Bangladesh should be favourably disposed towards India, then this explanation is suspect. According to Foreign Secretary Karim:

Various forms of cooperation had been discussed during Sheikh Mujib's visit to Calcutta a month before the signing of the treaty. At that time we went through the whole gamut of various types of cooperation that could take place...It was India who made these proposals. They were well prepared. They came practically with texts of framework for discussion. Practically everything was initiated from their side. We reacted rather than initiated anything. If the friendship treaty was their idea they would have had a draft with them like other texts. But they didn't.<sup>45</sup>

It is possible that the issue of the treaty may have been discussed privately by Mujib and Indira Gandhi and no member of either delegation was privy to it.

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45. Interview, op.cit. (40)

The second interpretation, that Mujib insisted on such a treaty to demonstrate Bangladesh's sovereignty and also to benefit from Indian military intervention on his behalf, is also quite untenable. When securing recognition from as many countries as possible would confer greater legitimacy on Bangladesh's statehood, why would Bangladesh sign a treaty with India and undermine its recognition from the Muslim bloc and China? It is also inconceivable that Mujib who was known to his people as *Bangabandhu* ('friend of Bengal') would deem it necessary to depend on Indian military power for his political survival. It may be mentioned here that the Defence Forces Intelligence had on a number of occasions informed Mujib of a certain senior Bangladeshi Army officer's activities that were prejudicial to the Prime Minister's political and physical survival, to which he is supposed to have replied that his political power emanated from the people, not from the Army.<sup>46</sup> If the Prime Minister did not feel the need to depend on the Bangladesh Army for his political survival, it is all the more ridiculous to think that he would consider the Indian Army his political guarantor. Given Mujib's universal image at home of being a fierce nationalist and a patriot, it is difficult to comprehend that he would sign a treaty with India against Bangladesh's interests. As Inder Mohotra, the editor of the *Times of India*, observed:

Mujib wouldn't tolerate an affront. If the Indo-Bangla treaty infringed on Bangladesh's sovereignty, Mujib would have thrown it overboard.<sup>47</sup>

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46. Confidential interview with a senior Bangladeshi Army officer who served in a sensitive post during the League Government. Dhaka, 9 July 1985

47. Interview in New Delhi on 26 April 1985



As to the other two interpretations, that the treaty was a pay off needed by Mrs. Gandhi and that it was a public legalization of the wartime pact, these probably contain certain elements of truth. It is plausible that a treaty with Bangladesh would be a feather in Mrs. Gandhi's cap and would also serve the additional purpose of making public a confidential agreement reached during the war period.

Given Mujib's tremendous emotional appeal among the people of Bangladesh, it is reasonable to expect that he would not need to agree to a treaty under duress. If one assumes that he would not sign a treaty with India under duress, that he would never barter away Bangladesh's national interests, and that the Indian leaders would be politically sagacious enough not to negotiate Indian troop withdrawal in the form of a treaty - all of these assumptions being quite realistic - then the only plausible interpretation would be that Mujib did not attach much significance to the treaty when he signed it, and certainly did not feel that Bangladesh's sovereignty would in any way be vitiated by it. The treaty was perhaps an obliging gesture to Mrs. Gandhi for whom it became a great political dividend. Mujib probably felt that given the extent of Indian assistance to the liberation struggle, the Bangladeshis would not be offended by such a treaty. But despite his keen political perceptions, what he failed to appreciate was that it would not be the masses but a particular section of the Bangladeshi elite that would be agitated by the treaty. The stirrings against the treaty came to his notice only later.

It is perhaps for the same reasons that there was such neglect in making public the negotiations leading to the signing of the

treaty. It appears that except for Mujib, the pro-Moscow Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and the pro-Indian Foreign Secretary (administrative) S.A.M.S. Kibria, no one was really aware of it. Even the most senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had no advance knowledge of it. One of them later complained:

If the officials of India and the Soviet Union had two years to prepare for a similar treaty between their countries, the Sheikh might have given us at least two months to work on our treaty.<sup>48</sup>

And the former President himself recalled:

When *Bangabandhu* and Mrs. Gandhi walked to my room and when Sheikh Mujib gave me a copy of the treaty, Mrs. Gandhi realized that I had not been told of it, and she was visibly surprised. I had never been told of this treaty. I first heard of it at a press conference.<sup>49</sup>

In fact it was not even tabled for discussion when the Bangladesh Parliament convened, one month after the treaty was signed, whereas Mrs. Gandhi submitted it to the Indian Parliament the following day. The treaty came up for discussion in the Bangladesh Parliament on 13 April 1973, almost thirteen months after the actual signing.

Conflicting Interpretations of Treaty Provisions: As stated earlier the Awami League, with the exception of the Khondakar group, viewed the treaty as beneficial to Bangladesh, since it provided a basic framework of cooperation and collaboration between the two Governments - an important cornerstone of the League's foreign policy. But most other parties and certain sections of the informed public,

48. Quoted in Ali, op.cit. p. 144

49. Interview, op.cit. (39)

which did not share its benign image of India, considered the treaty inimical to Bangladesh's interests.

The root cause of this diverse view was their conflicting perceptions of India. Since the League viewed India as the benefactor, a treaty with it was seen to strengthen Bangladesh's sovereign existence. But the NAP-B, the CPB(M-L) and the JSD, to name a few, suspected India of aspiring to regional hegemony and saw the development of closer ties with extra-regional centres of power as a greater guarantee of security against the regional behemoth. In such a situation, even if the treaty were renegotiated to dispel all possible fears of India, one suspects that it would still be unacceptable to the opposition, simply because it would establish a sort of institutionalized link between the two countries, a development to which most non-Awami Leaguers seemed to be adverse.

The treaty as it stood gave scope for considerable criticism. Though Article 1 offered a solemn pledge to "refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other side", it was a small consolation in the face of certain other articles that, one could argue, legitimized interference in the affairs of Bangladesh. According to Article 4 the signatories were required to "maintain regular contacts with each other on major international problems affecting the interests of both States". While on the surface it appeared innocuous enough, stripped to the bone it could mean two things: Bangladesh had to keep India informed of its foreign policy pursuits; and Bangladesh was not at liberty to conduct its foreign policy without taking into account repercussions on India's interests, according to a strict interpretation of the clause. Though Article 4 alluded to



reciprocal concern for each other's interests, one had to contend with the possibility that sooner or later Bangladesh's external policies might be subject to revision to keep the Indian Ministry of External Affairs happy. The wording of this article was disturbing also for another reason; it reminded one of Nepal, whose foreign and defence policies stood effectively circumscribed by its friendship treaty with India.

Article 6 seemed to increase Bangladesh's insecurity by requiring it to commit itself to India's regional plans in the Eastern half of the subcontinent with regard to flood control, river basin development, power and irrigation, without any reference to Bangladesh's sovereign status. While a common approach regarding these issues could greatly benefit Bangladesh, given India's relatively considerable economic, scientific, technical and industrial resources, the need for sovereign assertion by the Bangladeshi elite seemed to undermine that. A commitment to solve the perennial problem of the equitable sharing of the Ganges waters between the two countries would have been a healthier first step; instead, the pre-1971 Indian proposal to build a barrage at Farakka, a few miles upstream from the Bangladesh border, to divert water from the international river Ganges to the local Hooghly, without guaranteeing Bangladesh the unobstructed flow of its equitable share, was already of great concern to Bangladesh. Once India's regional plans for the river basin development were accepted, India would then be in a position to control all the 54 rivers including the major ones - Ganges, Brahmaputra, Teesta, Gumti, Karnaphuli - that flowed from its territory, thereby securing a stranglehold on Bangladesh's riverine economy. Thus acceding to

Article 6 could mean allowing India formally to establish a hold over Bangladesh.

Article 8, which required each party to abstain from entering or participating in any military alliance directed against the other, was seen by the anti-Indian lobby as restricting Bangladesh's security options. Since, in its estimation, India was the adversary, a logical step would be to seek security arrangements with those who could guarantee Bangladesh's territorial integrity against a possible Indian threat. It is doubtful whether the anti-Indian lobby ever considered the fact that reaching a security understanding with India could perhaps bring for Bangladesh the best territorial security possible under the circumstances. Convinced that India was the real enemy, the anti-India lobby took particular exception to this treaty, because it foreclosed the option to seek security or defence arrangements with China or the United States.

Article 9, which required mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective steps to eliminate any threat to either country, was seen as laying the legal basis for the use of Bangladesh territory in the event of a war between India and China.<sup>50</sup> And under Article 10 Bangladesh was prevented from undertaking any commitment with a third party "which may be incompatible with the present Treaty". This could be seen as not only restricting Bangladesh's political options but also raising the question of who would decide what was incompatible. Though Article 12 laid down bilateral negotiation "in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding" as the basis for

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50. Siddiqui, op.cit., pp. 17-18

resolving any differences in the interpretation of the treaty, it was quite possible that Bangladesh would not be able to escape the Orwellian dilemma of facing a 'more equal' India in such situations.<sup>51</sup> Since interpretations of treaty clauses occasionally led to conflictual situations, critics were all the more uncomfortable with the treaty.

Regional Implications: The full significance of the friendship treaty cannot be understood solely in the context of Indo-Bangla relations, for it has important implications in the regional context as well.

The overriding factor in South Asian politics would seem to be the 'tyranny of geography', which placed India in a predominant position in the subcontinent, thus forcing it to reconcile a series of interconnected security implications. Indian security and defence perceptions had undergone a thorough overhaul after the 1962 Sino-Indian war. India had realized then that the *Panch Sheel* ('five principles' of interstate relations) first enunciated in the Nehru-Chou talks of 1954 had little relevance in the clash of state interests. One important lesson it learned was that its ultimate security rested on the proper military defence of the whole of the subcontinent. This of course would require cooperation from its regional neighbours.

In the light of these observations the friendship treaty would have several implications. First, it was a step towards India's attempts to build a system of security in the subcontinent so that

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51. Holiday, 26 March 1972, p. 1



forces external to this area could be effectively excluded from having any say whatsoever in the affairs of the region. There has always been the unspoken assumption in the minds of the Indian leaders that the main responsibility of underwriting the defence and security of the South Asian region was India's. Therefore foreign intrusion, in the form of defence arrangements between regional countries and external powers, has always been of vital concern to India, as it was seen to support political forces that worked to subvert regional unity and cooperation. India had tried to foreclose the need among its regional neighbours to turn outwards for the guarantee of their respective territorial integrity by offering no-war pacts or entering into treaties of friendship with them, but the results had been disappointing.

Second, the treaty was a step towards the promotion of political stability in the region, as it was an essential prerequisite to regional security. It considerably stabilized the politics in the Eastern region on three counts: communal disturbances were checked; Naxalites and other leftist extremists were either routed or decimated;<sup>52</sup> and the insurgency in India's Eastern states was contained if not permanently undermined. These developments were in keeping with India's basic desire to maintain the status quo in the region so that leftist adventurism and rightist fanaticism would remain contained.

Third, it guaranteed India a stake in Bangladesh's domestic and external politics. The provision of the treaty not only required

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52. Ibid., 2 April 1972

India to defend Bangladesh against external threats, they also left open the possibility of Indian intervention in Bangladesh's internal affairs under extenuating circumstances.<sup>53</sup>

Fourth, it created for Bangladesh certain obligations towards the subcontinent, thus assuring Bangladesh a regional role. This was of no small benefit to India, because with a high coincidence of interests between New Delhi and Dhaka India was assured of political support in its regional undertakings. Bangladesh's acquiescence in India's annexation of Sikkim and the explosion of a nuclear device are cases in point.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the treaty also assured India of joint studies and integrative approaches to regional development issues.

The net effect of the treaty has been greatly beneficial to India because it was able to realize at least three important regional objectives: (1) India was able to convince Bangladesh that it did not require any defence arrangement with external powers, nor a strong army since, in both cases, India would assume the responsibility for Bangladesh's defence; (2) India's influence and 'guidance' in Bangladesh's affairs were guaranteed by several treaty provisions, particularly Article 4; and (3) the economic 'salvation' of Eastern

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53. There have been several reports of Indian Army concentrations along Bangladesh's Western border immediately after the fall of the Mujib Government. Some reports suggested that the Indian Army had actually penetrated several miles into Bangladesh, but withdrew upon learning that 'pro-Indian' Brigadier Khaled Musharraf had come to power through a counter-coup on 3 November 1975. Confidential interviews, *op.cit.* (2) and (46). It was also alleged that Musharraf was toppled and killed on 7 November just when he was going to invoke the treaty. Ishtiaq Hossain, *op.cit.* (42)

54. Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain's comment on the nuclear test is noteworthy: "Other countries may have an opinion of their own, but I do not think India's nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes will create any tension in the subcontinent." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 July 1974, p. 14

India was assured by the economic understandings across the "border of peace and friendship". With the high coincidence of interests between the Indira Government and the Mujib Government, India could feel secure in the knowledge that the Eastern part of the subcontinent had been effectively insulated from outside interference.

But it was precisely for these reasons that the opposition parties were vehemently against the treaty. Seeing a denudation of Bangladesh's political, economic and defence options, they feared 'encapsulation' by India. Not only did they oppose the treaty provisions, they simply rejected the notion of a treaty with India because they were aware of the fact that in all such treaty arrangements, "between a strong and a weak power, the latter implicitly surrenders part of its independence of policy in exchange for security, which is directly or indirectly guaranteed by the stronger power".<sup>55</sup>

Conclusions: The Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty had sought to lay down a long-term framework for bilateral cooperation and peace, but the affair was mishandled by the League Government due to what appears to have been a gross political miscalculation. The failure on both sides to grasp the consequences of the treaty for Indo-Bangladesh relations would suggest a certain degree of complacency on the part of both Governments. It would seem that neither side seriously thought that there would be any noticeable degree of public displeasure in the signing of the treaty if too much was not made of it. This was a costly misjudgement.

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55. J.D. Sethi, "Indo-Soviet Treaty and Nonalignment", India Quarterly, vol. 27, no. 4, (Oct -Dec 1971), p. 330



At the heart of the disagreement were the diverging views of the League and those opposing it. While the League saw it as merely the institutionalization of the actual relations obtaining at the time between India and Bangladesh, the detractors of the treaty saw a more sinister picture in which India's influence and interference in Bangladesh's affairs, both internal and external, were assured. While the League did not see the treaty as infringing on Bangladesh's sovereignty, those opposing it saw it as severely restricting Bangladesh's political and security options, and also as a means to stifle nationalist sentiments. The Mujib Government saw the friendship treaty as essentially a diplomatic instrument, whereas the opposition saw it as a military instrument.

Ironically, it would seem that to India the treaty had greater significance as a security arrangement in the region than as a diplomatic one. In fact, most observers within the region and outside it gave greater emphasis to its security clauses than to any other aspect of the treaty.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately for Bangladesh, these security clauses had negative political ramifications; the treaty was no longer simply a friendship treaty, but had come to be seen as a security arrangement aimed at countries internal and external to the region. Bangladesh's chances for quick recognition from the pro-Pakistan Muslim countries and from China were undermined; recognition from the former was delayed till the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit in Lahore in February 1974, and recognition from the latter came only after the League Government's

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56. For instance, Nicole Ball, Regional Conflicts and the International System: A Case Study of Bangladesh, Institute for the Study of International Organization, University of Sussex, first series, number nine, 1974, p. 48

downfall in August 1975.

Since the timing of the treaty was politically unwise because it created an unnecessary obstacle to recognition by certain important countries, one can only speculate to what extent secret understandings between the Indira Government and the Provisional Government influenced it. But the high coincidence of interests between New Delhi and Dhaka, as reflected by the treaty, no doubt paved the way for Dhaka's political support in India's regional undertakings; in other words, on specific issues, India's influence over Dhaka became highly probable.

If the League leadership had been wise, the treaty could have been used to Bangladesh's advantage. The security clauses in the treaty would suggest the Government's desire to obviate the necessity of maintaining a large defence force. With India guaranteeing Bangladesh's security, the Government was in an enviable position to keep the country's defence budget at a minimum while concentrating the bulk of its resources on much-needed socio-economic developments. The economic and other benefits accruing from such a policy would have blunted any criticism the League's detractors would have had regarding the limitations on sovereign prerogative inherent in the treaty. But due to conflicting interests within the party hierarchy, the Government was unable to realize any of these essential goals. The result was an alienated army and confused economic policies. In the next two chapters, these two issues will be dealt with in detail.

It is also clear that the influence theory was in operation.

The Provisional Government sought to influence the Indira Government into speedily recognizing it so that it could establish itself as the legitimate government of the future Bangladesh, and it did so by holding up the promise of pursuing pro-Indian policies. Thus, in exchange for India's recognition of Bangladesh and its assistance in installing the League Government in power in Dhaka, Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed was willing to pursue a policy of acquiescence towards India. The interests of both the ruling elites were served.

Mujib's decision to sign the treaty with India indicated a shift in his previous position that a friendship treaty between the two countries was not necessary because "our treaty of friendship is in our hearts". According to our first criterion - shifts in the position of the actor influenced - this is an example of influence.

Whatever reason Mujib may have had for signing the treaty with India, it not only enhanced India's strategic position in South Asia - an influence manifestation according to the sixth criterion - it also distanced whatever influence the Chinese and the conservative Muslim states might have had on Bangladesh's internal and external policies. The latter improved sharply India's ability to carry out political transactions *vis-a-vis* Dhaka - which is our second criterion of influence manifestation. In short, the treaty was generally seen in India as a rare example in history of a close relationship between two countries; from this, the implications of an influence relationship are obvious.



## Chapter 5

## INITIAL SETBACK: PROBLEMS IN ECONOMIC RELATIONS

As already stated in Chapter Three, one of the Indian Government's motives for militarily assisting East Pakistan in its war against West Pakistan in 1971 was the expectation that the former's independence would bring an economic windfall to India. Particularly in the state of West Bengal, there was a universal assumption that better days were ahead because the volume of trade with Bangladesh would now exceed even that achieved in 1965, in the September of which year all trade between East Pakistan and the neighbouring Indian states had been banned on account of the Indo-Pakistan war.

In the first two years after Bangladesh's independence, India was the country's most important trading partner because India was the only country willing to underwrite Bangladesh's economic viability and because trading with a neighbouring country made good economic sense. But while Indian assistance substantially contributed to Bangladesh's economic survival during those formative years, it also conjured up memories of pre-partition days when the Muslim majority in then East Bengal was relegated to a subservient economic role; the revival of that relationship was widely feared in Bangladesh.

This chapter is an examination of the complexities of the economic relations between the two countries during those initial years, and their political ramifications.

If one traces the roots of Indo-Bangladesh economic alienation, one is likely to be led to certain intellectual conclusions arrived at by important sections of the Indian elite during the Pakistan crisis of 1971 that were patently false. The primary motive for the secession of East Pakistan from Pakistan was the desire among the East Bengalis for economic self-determination. A section of the Indian elite chose to give a greater meaning to this act of secession than was warranted. It asserted that in seeking independent statehood, the people of East Pakistan had rejected the 'Two Nation' theory and had opted to restore their former economic links with India.<sup>1</sup> In retrospect, while the former assertion was patently wrong, the latter was a distortion of the truth. The issue of the 'Two Nation' theory has been discussed in Chapter Three and needs no recapitulation here, but the issue of the restoration of economic links with India requires clarification.

In 1971, Pran Chopra, an eminent Indian political commentator and former editor of *The Statesman* (Calcutta and New Delhi) summed up the Indian view thus:

The people of East Bengal have long desired closer economic cooperation with India...with such cooperation India and East Bengal can find much better answers to the grave economic and political problems of the area than either can by itself.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See the arguments in Chapter 3
  2. Pran Chopra ed. The Challenge of Bangladesh: A Special Debate, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1971, p. 9

While it is true that Bangladesh wanted trading relations with India, what was overlooked in India was that this would have to be on Bangladesh's terms; that is, there would be no going back to the pattern of trade that existed in pre-partition days when East Bengal served as the hinterland of Calcutta, where all manufacturing was concentrated. Such an expectation was unsound in the changed circumstances of the 1970s, no matter how reasonable it may have appeared to some Indian economic planners. This important qualification on which hinged the future of Indo-Bangladesh economic relations, as events later proved, was a costly oversight by the economic planners in India. D.P. Dhar, chairman of the Policy Planning Commission of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and described at the time as *eminence grise* of Mrs. Gandhi, himself seems to have been guilty of it. According to Peter Gill, the *Daily Telegraph's* South Asia correspondent in New Delhi from June 1971 to 1975:

Dhar saw the opportunity for economic and commercial relations. To him Bangladesh was a vast market for Indian goods. He saw Bangladesh in mercantile and economic terms. He talked of resumption of pre-partition economic relations between East Bengal and West Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

Without serious consideration of how Bangladesh's already war-ravaged economy would be affected, Indian economists argued for the integration of the economy of Bangladesh with the economy of Eastern India:

A Jute Community, Tea Community, a Customs and a Payments Union, total Inter-Governmental State Trading, a single Electricity and a single Water Resources grid for the whole of Eastern India and Bangladesh can...lay the foundations of a long term perspective plan based on the immense water

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3. Interview in London, 5 April 1985



and mineral resources of the entire Lower Ganges-Brahmaputra Basin...<sup>4</sup>

It was further argued that not only would India remain Bangladesh's "chief and dominant trading partner", but that "India is about the only country whose aid Bangladesh can requite with little cost to itself and in fact at much benefit, and with whom by the same means it can balance its trade".<sup>5</sup> Thus, the theme of mutual benefit through economic cooperation between the two countries was constantly invoked in certain vested quarters in India.

It was equally in the Indian interest that Bangladesh's economic recovery should be swift for at least two compelling reasons. Having speeded up Bangladesh's political independence and assisted the League Government to come to power, India had to guarantee the new Government's economic viability. Second, a delayed economic recovery in Bangladesh would also delay the economic windfall to India that many Indians, including Dhar, eagerly waited for.

The Indian Government was aware of the economic exigency in Bangladesh and confident of tackling it successfully. Mrs. Gandhi admitted in a press conference that the rehabilitation of the Bangladesh economy "is a very big task, but it certainly is manageable [because it] is not as bad as we feared...partly due to the rapid advance of the Indian armed forces which had been able to prevent destruction on a large scale".<sup>6</sup> And P.N. Haksar, Mrs. Gandhi's

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4. See for instance, Boudhayan Chattopadhyay, "Impact of Bangladesh: Economic Dimensions", Seminar #150, February 1972, p. 27

5. Pran Chopra, "Bangla Desh in Search of a Role" India Quarterly, vol. xxviii, no. 2 (April-June 1972), p. 124

6. The Hindu, 1 January 1972, p. 9

Principal Secretary, remembered:

Immediately after the war, India's overriding concern was to help Bangladesh in its economy, transport and food situation. India had then nine million tons of surplus foodstock. Up to 1973 our concern was dictated by the needs in the aftermath of the war.<sup>7</sup>

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The first expression of Indo-Bangladesh economic cooperation came in the form of a trade agreement, signed on 28 March 1972. It envisaged two types of trade: a border trade between the two countries whereby permits would be issued to people living up to sixteen kilometres on either side of the border to dispose of their goods on a day to day basis; and a balanced rupee trade worth Rs. 250 million (US \$35 m) each way. The border trade was to be free of customs and currency regulations and restricted to specified commodities only, while the rupee trade was to be in goods of special interest to the two countries and on a balanced basis.<sup>8</sup>

Under the latter provision, among the important commodities that India agreed to export to Bangladesh were cement (Rs 45m), raw tobacco (Rs 100m), cotton textiles (Rs 2.5m), cotton yarn (Rs 15m), coal (Rs 40m), asphalt (Rs 10m), chemicals and pharmaceuticals (RS 2.5m) and machinery and spare parts (Rs 5m). In return, Bangladesh agreed to export to India fresh fish (Rs 90m), semi-tanned cow-hides (Rs 10m), raw jute (Rs 75m), furnace oil, batching oil and

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7. Interview in New Delhi, 28 April 1985

8. For the text of the trade agreement see, Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publications Division, Bangladesh Documents, vol. 11, May 1972, pp. 648-656; also given in Appendix 2.

naphtha (Rs 15m), and newsprint and low grammage writing paper (Rs 30m).<sup>9</sup>

Within months these trade arrangements precipitated undesirable political repercussions in Bangladesh because the economic effect on the people was anything but beneficial. The export to India of fish, eggs and poultry, to name just a few, greatly reduced domestic supply causing considerable hardship particularly to the poorer sections comprising the peasantry, the working class and the lower middle class. India was blamed for the scarcity and the resulting price rise.<sup>10</sup>

But smuggling across the border did considerable damage to Indo-Bangladesh economic relations. It had existed even before Bangladesh's independence, but the daring and the scale it reached immediately after independence was unlike anything seen before. The 2,600 kilometers of border cutting through swampland, dense jungles and winding rivers of the Bengal delta already made border policing impossible. To this, two new factors were added: the inter-state cordiality of the period brought about a correspondingly relaxed border vigilance, thus allowing a drastic rise in smuggling; and some members of the Awami League itself, in the aftermath of the League's control over the country's economy were not averse to making quick money while the opportunity presented itself.<sup>11</sup> As a

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9. Ibid., pp. 650-651

10. Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay), vol. vii, no. 24, 10 June 1972, p. 1142

11. When Mujib deployed the Army to curb smuggling, many of the smugglers caught were found to be operating under the direct supervision and protection of some Awami League leaders. When the Army arrested the Awami League members involved in



result, Bangladeshi jute, rice and fish were being smuggled to India thereby pushing their domestic prices up and adversely affecting normal trade. The border trade agreement was thus doomed even before it could be properly implemented; between March and June 1972 border trade between the two countries was valued at only US\$ 13.7 million.<sup>12</sup> While the Bangladeshis saw smuggling as its primary cause, the League Government blamed it on the disruption of transportation, the absence of formalized banking arrangements and procedural administrative inefficiencies.<sup>13</sup> The Government's arguments were to a certain extent valid, but it was these same reasons that provided a fillip to the unprecedented scale of smuggling.

Independent observers held smuggling to be the main cause of the disruption of the country's nascent economy. Tony Hagen, one time chief of the United Nations Relief Operations in Dhaka (UNROD), remarked early in 1972 that "Bangladesh is like a sieve suspended in India".<sup>14</sup> This was in fact so because of the League Government's pricing policy which made smuggling across the border to India a highly lucrative business.<sup>15</sup> An England-based independent study of

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smuggling, Mujib was under tremendous party pressure to have them released and the Army recalled to the barracks. This, Mujib did, causing an irrevocable falling-out between him and the Armed Forces. Sources: interviews with Army officers who were involved in anti-smuggling operations. Mujib's close relatives were also involved in smuggling, see, Far Eastern Economic Review, 4 February 1974, p. 20

12. New York Times, 12 June 1972; cited in Iftekhar Chowdhury, "Strategy of a Small Power in a Subsystem: Bangladesh's External Relations" Australian Outlook, vol. 34, no. 1, 1980, p.86
13. Ibid.
14. The Sunday Times, (London), 19 March 1972
15. Ibid.

the problem came to the conclusion that "food prices are soaring in Bangladesh chiefly because supplies sent in from abroad to relieve widespread hunger are being smuggled out to the Indian market by Bangladeshi traders aided by corrupt government officials".<sup>16</sup>

Increasingly, it became politically expedient for Bangladeshis to blame India for their economic ills,<sup>17</sup> and Mujib and his colleagues, whose Government was also to be blamed for doing very little to stop smuggling, reacted no differently. Anthony Mascarenhas, an astute observer of the Indo-Bangladesh scene, wrote:

While Mujib and his ministers publicly extolled the close ties with India, they also privately made it the scapegoat for their own inadequacies. The Indians cannot be absolved of blame for some of the incidents that have vexed relations between the two countries, and it is a fact that Indian merchants benefited enormously from the clandestine trade with Bangladesh. But it is also a fact that the Bangladeshis themselves did the actual smuggling and had a proportionate share of the loot.<sup>18</sup>

This is of course true as is evident from the Bangladeshi newspaper reports of the period; not a week went by without reports of

16. Quoted in The Observer (London), 15 October 1972 from a study by K.H. Ahmed, a Bangladeshi lecturer in Brunel University, United Kingdom.
17. Anthony Mascarenhas, the journalist who defected from Pakistan to tell the world of the massacre in East Pakistan in early April 1971, narrates an interesting anecdote in his book: Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986, p. 28. At a cocktail party given by a Western diplomat in Dhaka in February 1974 there were some local editors and journalists. "One of the latter was waxing hot about how the Indians were 'bleeding the country'. Finally our host had had enough. 'Tell me', he asked this man, 'do the Indians come all the way into Bangladesh and carry off the jute and rice or do the Bangladeshis carry it out to them?' That was the end of the argument."
18. Ibid., pp. 27-28

smuggling, some of which could be ultimately traced to the Awami League. The smugglers were quite willing to dispense a percentage of their profit in exchange for official protection whether at the district or the central level. Since the smugglers operated with relative impunity, sometimes under local Awami League patronage, and would sometimes go free after arrests because of intervention from the highest levels of government,<sup>19</sup> the attitude of the Bangladeshis towards the League leadership began to change for the worse. And since the smuggled goods went to India, causing domestic economic hardship, it was easy for the people to paint India as their enemy.

This was reinforced by the failure of the Indian states bordering on Bangladesh to curb smuggling. It was widely felt in Bangladesh that the beneficiaries of smuggling were the bordering Indian states, because, had smuggling gone against their economic interests, there would have been a hue and cry from across the border. But that was hardly the case. On the contrary, it seems that the bordering states were mentally geared towards deriving as much economic benefit from the independence of East Pakistan as possible. This seemed to be particularly true of the state of West Bengal whose attitude towards Bangladesh was more proprietary than the Union Government's. This is better explained by a glance at history.

After the secession of East Bengal in 1947, West Bengalis had suffered a terrible psychological blow. They had lost two-thirds of Bengal and the majority population. This contributed to their loss

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19. Interview, op.cit. (11). For further details of the Army's crackdown on smuggling and the Awami League's cover-up, see Far Eastern Economic Review, 29 August 1975, pp. 10-13



of the political and economic control of India. Earlier on, the capital of the British Raj had been transferred to New Delhi from Calcutta and, what was worse, political leadership of India had also slipped away from the hands of metropolitan Calcuttians to the hands of the Kashmiri Brahmins. Where once the Calcutta *bhadrolok* (gentlemen) proudly proclaimed that "What Bengal thinks of today, the rest of India thinks of tomorrow", West Bengalis were now lagging in many aspects of national endeavour. The alleged neglect of the state by the Union Government only increased their suspicion and bitterness.<sup>20</sup> The independence of Bangladesh was therefore a powerful psychological phenomenon as it held the promise of Bengal's renaissance.

But this view of renaissance was parochial, only self-aggrandizing. West Bengal had its own specific interests *vis-a-vis* Bangladesh which do not seem to have coincided with the Union interests. While the Union Government's interests regarding Bangladesh were long-range and couched in subcontinental terms, West Bengal's interests were short-term and affected by the nature of its relationship with the Union Government. It could perhaps be argued that while India saw Bangladesh as a subcontinental neighbour, to be carefully handled in order to maximize its long-range interests, West Bengal more than likely saw Bangladesh in its pre-partition perspective, as a hinterland that could once again be manipulated to regain metropolitan Calcutta's lost glory and to bolster its status *vis-a-vis* New Delhi.

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20. See, Ranajit Roy, The Agony of West Bengal: a Study in Union-State Relations, Calcutta: New Age, 1971; Sankar Ghosh, The Disinherited State: A Study of West Bengal, 1967-70, Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1971; A.K. Sen, West Bengal: An Analytical Study, Calcutta: Oxford Publishing Company, 1971.

Seen in this perspective, it is easy to understand the extraordinary pressure the West Bengal Government brought upon the Union Government in 1971 to commit itself to the political independence of East Pakistan. The West Bengalis were convinced of an economic wind-fall for them from the independence of East Pakistan, though this conviction was not shared elsewhere in India. According to one source:

On the issue of Indian support for Bangladesh there were many lobbies - regional and Union. The powerful North Indian industrial and business bourgeoisie had strong reservation about India going to war against Pakistan. They wished to keep the Tashkent spirit alive and wanted continued collaboration with West Pakistan in business and industry...They were not sure of Bengali opinion. Would aggressive Bengali nationalism jeopardize India's own economic interests?...There were many worries. <sup>21</sup>

The West Bengalis were primarily concerned with the economic and political future of their own state. With the restoration of trade relations with Bangladesh, contradictions began to surface which they seemed willing to overlook. But outside West Bengal these did not go unnoticed. The influential *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay) cautioned:

Rising prices, the result mainly of the operations of smugglers and black marketeers of both India and Bangladesh, have started giving rise to anti-Indian feeling...They [smugglers] operate with the active patronage and connivance of social elites in both countries. <sup>22</sup>

An important contradiction that surfaced fairly early was the emergence in Bangladesh of a new entrepreneurial/business class that sought to replace the Pakistani mercantile and business interests.

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21. Interview with Amirul Islam who did liaison work for the Mujibnagar Government in Calcutta. Dhaka, 15 June 1985.

22. Economic and Political Weekly op.cit. vol. vii, no. 24, 10 June 1972, p. 1142

The military-industrial oligarchy of Pakistan had suppressed the growth of an indigenous industrial and business bourgeoisie in East Pakistan. After the latter's independence, the emerging new entrepreneurial class saw itself as the inheritors of that interest and was loth to play second fiddle to the Indian business bourgeoisie. It genuinely feared that the Indians who were given ample access to the new country's economy would, like the West Pakistanis before them, deny it the economic opportunities brought forth by independence. This conflict of interest directly affected Indo-Bangladesh economic relations and significantly contributed to the growing anti-Indianism within the country.

## III

Besides smuggling, there were allegations that trade and other economic understandings with various countries required the tacit approval of India before they could be signed. There was also the widespread feeling that the terms of trade with India were unfair to Bangladesh because Indian goods were being bought at prices more than 30 to 40 percent higher than the international market prices.<sup>23</sup> Bangladeshis watched with alarm the constant stream of Indian merchants, businessmen, politicians and officials visiting Dhaka to conclude this deal or that, or to advise members of the League Government or to discuss joint policies and options; the perception among the Bangladeshis was one of expanding Indian economic hegemony. This went against the interests of the new entrepreneurial and business community.

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23. Ibid. Also the Times of India, 19 November 1972



Perspectively, the *Economic and Political Weekly* wrote:

In this situation it is the duty of both the governments, particularly of the Indian government, to drive out the suspicion and remove the ill-feelings by taking corrective measures. This should not be difficult if we value friendship more than fish or poultry, kerosene or petrol. To begin with, both governments should brush aside criticisms of India in Bangladesh as the work of anti-Indian quarters.<sup>24</sup>

There appeared to be a lack of realization that the prospects of trade between the two countries were in fact circumscribed by opposite sets of forces. On the positive side were the geographic proximity, the political coordination between the two Governments (as specifically laid down in Article 4 of the Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty), a disposition towards economic cooperation, and the ban in Bangladesh on trade with Pakistan (its largest pre-1971 trading partner). All these, no doubt, laid open the possibility of huge increases in the volume of Indo-Bangladesh trade. But the negative factors were no less important. The lack of economic complementarity, the difficulties in substituting the inter-wing exports of former East Pakistan by additional exports to India, the possibility of a diversion of exports from third market (or re-exports) and the related foreign exchange costs, the ineffectiveness of state-to-state trade consequent on large-scale smuggling, and the possibility of trade disputes between the two countries, all of these went largely unrecognised. The Indians, particularly the West Bengalis, failed to realize that the actual turnover would depend on the relative strengths of these opposing forces.<sup>25</sup>

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24. ibid.

25. Sunanda Sen, "Indo-Bangladesh Trade: Problems and Prospects", Economic and Political Weekly, vol. vii, no. 15, 8 April 1972, p. 767

Mrs. Gandhi herself seems to have been well aware of the possibility of setbacks in Indo-Bangladesh relations. As early as in May 1972, a senior Indian journalist observed:

We think the question of India imposing her domination over Bangladesh is still hypothetical. But, as far as I understand, Mrs. Gandhi recognizes the danger that unless her government is very careful, the question may suddenly become a real one. She has told everyone that we must avoid the danger at all costs. In other words, India must not do anything which turns the hypothetical question about her domination over the new state into a valid subject for discussion, anywhere in the world, including Peking.<sup>26</sup>

The journalist went on to say:

We are no longer dealing with Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister of the government-in-exile, who could be often told quite bluntly what was good for his country and what was not; we are dealing with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who will have our advice only when he asks for it.<sup>27</sup>

The then Bangladesh President, Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, also confirms Mrs. Gandhi's concerns:

Nurul Hasan, India's Minister of Education... was apologetic when I raised the issue of smuggling. During his second visit he informed me that my sentiments were conveyed to Mrs. Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi told him to convey to me that the [Indian] smugglers were her enemies, out to make her unpopular. They were Marwaries [ruthless merchant class in West Bengal and Bihar] and West Bengalis. We should take stern measures and it would have her support. Nurul Hasan also said that she asked the West Bengal government to be vigilant, apart from the Customs Department.<sup>28</sup>

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26. Bangladeshi journalist, S.M. Ali's interview with an Indian journalist in May 1972, quoted in Ali, After the Dark Night: Problems of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Ltd., 1973, pp. 135-6
27. Ibid.
28. Interview in Dhaka, 2 June 1985

Thus it is clear that Mrs. Gandhi saw Indo-Bangladesh relations in a long-term perspective and was averse to any inter-state activity that could undo a politically promising relationship. This concern was written into the first inter-state trade agreement signed after her state visit to Bangladesh in mid-March 1972. Article 2 of the agreement described it as only "an *interim* trade arrangement". Article 4, clause 7 provided for review of these arrangements after six months to consider whether they should be extended or amended in any manner. It had further laid down: "if even before the expiry of this period of six months either country feels the need to withdraw or modify the facilities under this Agreement, it would enter into immediate consultations with the other country taking such measures as it may consider necessary".<sup>29</sup>

## IV

When Bangladesh started accusing India of causing domestic scarcity, an official statement was issued in New Delhi in early June 1972 stating that India would "accept only those commodities which are considered surplus by the Government of Bangladesh".<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the West Bengal Chief Minister Siddharta Shankar Roy was sent to Dhaka where he held talks with the President, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Home Minister on the appropriate steps to be taken regarding "the problems of border smuggling, inflow of undesirable elements in the border areas and infiltration of extremists to and from Bangladesh". After the talks, Bangladesh

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29. Op.cit. (8), pp. 652-3

30. The Hindu, 7 June 1972, p. 7



Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad told newsmen that a consensus was reached and "the decisions would be sent to the respective governments in the form of recommendations for final approval".<sup>31</sup>

Soon after, the magistrates and district commissioners of all eight border districts of West Bengal were ordered to maintain constant contact with their counterparts in Bangladesh, and to hold joint meetings as and when necessary to stop smuggling and dacoities in border areas. Checkpoints on the Indian side were reportedly strengthened.<sup>32</sup> On 1 September 1972, India reacted strongly to allegations by certain Bangladeshi political parties about India's lack of effort in curbing smuggling by stating that if the League Government so desired, India would be willing to seal the borders between the two countries in cooperation with Bangladesh.<sup>33</sup> The Bangladesh Commerce Minister, M.R. Siddiqui, while addressing a conference of exporters at the Bangladesh Secretariat, replied that Bangladesh was indeed seriously considering sealing the borders completely and postponing the Indo-Bangladesh border trade, but any decision would be withheld until after the Government discussed the matter with the Indian trade delegation that was due to visit Bangladesh on 3 October.<sup>34</sup>

The public charges of smuggling, scarcity and higher domestic prices, and higher prices and coarse quality of imports from India

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31. Ibid., 11 June 1972, p. 7; 13 June 1972, pp. 7,9

32. Ibid., 15 June 1972, p. 7

33. Ibid., 2 September 1972, p. 1

34. Ibid., 24 September 1972, p. 9

continued to take its toll on the League Government's credibility. In late September, Bhashani, while addressing the National Convention of Revolutionary Students, harangued:

India cannot purchase Bengalis with the support of a few Bangladesh leaders like the Sheikh and Tajuddin...By helping us in our days of distress, India is now getting the benefit from us 70 times...India has captured our market by exporting low quality goods and by interfering in our internal affairs.<sup>35</sup>

The words of the *maulana* (religious leader), perhaps Bangladesh's most respected political watchdog, caused concern among Government officials and ministers. The result was the frequent imposition of curfews in border areas and stepped-up vigilance and restrictions by the Bangladesh Rifles guarding the borders, causing virtual stoppage of legal border trade.

The political reverberations were also felt in India. The *Times of India* regretted that the two Governments continued to be indifferent towards the actual cause of anti-Indianism in Bangladesh.<sup>36</sup> And the *Economic and Political Weekly* enquired:

For how long are we going to maintain this fiction that the ruling tide of ill-will in Bangladesh towards India and Indians is exclusively the consequence of Maulana Bhashani and the handful of pro-Pakistani elements? Why not admit that the problem has deeper roots?<sup>37</sup>

During the talks between the visiting Indian trade delegation and the Bangladesh Government in the first week of October 1972, border trade issues were discussed extensively. Bangladesh suggested

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35. Ibid. 30 September 1972, p. 5

36. Issue of 28 June 1972

37. Quoted in the Times of India, 29 September 1972

suspension of border trade temporarily. India suggested that the items under barter trade be shifted to normal trade arrangements. Bangladesh countered that this would create further imbalance in the already adverse balance of trade for Bangladesh. The Indian delegation argued that the barter trade across the border had not had a fair trial so far, and proposed that border trade be suspended only in those sectors of the border where there was reportedly large-scale smuggling. It also suggested that a better scrutiny of exporters holding permits in border trade areas would considerably curb smuggling. But the Bangladesh Government countered that it did not have the necessary machinery to implement the trade in the desired manner, and until it could establish adequate checks and controls along the border, the border trade should be suspended. India remonstrated that border trade was essential to the economic well-being of a large number of people living on both sides of the border, particularly in remote areas without adequate communication facilities. The Indian delegation seemed to be prepared to accept any suggestion short of suspension of border trade. The discussion headed towards deadlock, until Mujib intervened to ask the Indian High Commissioner, Subimal Dutt, to convey to Mrs. Gandhi his desire to scrap the border trade agreement. Dutt talked to Mrs. Gandhi, and in the following meeting India agreed to suspend the border trade "in deference to Bangladesh's request". With that an unseemly episode in Indo-Bangla trade relations came to an end.<sup>38</sup>

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38. Interview with Mujib's private secretary in Dhaka, 15 July 1985. For details of the negotiations, see The Hindu, 7-11 October 1972



But this certainly did not mean a total cessation of inter-state economic activity. In May 1972, just two months after the first trade agreement was signed, India and Bangladesh had signed three credit agreements covering the costs of rehabilitation of the Bangladesh Railway System and the supply of railway stores, telecommunication equipment, two ships, two F-27 aircraft and 500,000 tons of crude oil. The total Indian loan of Rs.241 million (about US\$ 34m) was repayable in equal semi-annual instalments over a twenty-five year period that included a grace period of seven years.<sup>39</sup>

In July 1973, India and Bangladesh signed a new three-year trade agreement. Effective from 28 September, it allowed for Rs. 305m (US\$ 42m) worth of exports each way during the first year, with Bangladesh importing coal, tobacco, raw cotton, cotton yarn, cotton textiles and movies in exchange for raw jute, fresh fish, newsprint, skins, pharmaceutical products, ayurvedic medicine, spices, movies and books.<sup>40</sup>

Among other economic understandings, in October 1972, India waived import duty on fish from Bangladesh in exchange for the latter not imposing export duty on the commodity.<sup>41</sup> On 1 November 1972, the two Governments signed a protocol on inland water transport providing trade and transport facilities between the two countries. Valid for a period of five years, it revived the waterway facilities suspended

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39. The Hindu, 17 May 1972, p. 7

40. Ibid., 7 July 1973, p. 5. See also Jatiyo Sangsad, Official Proceedings, 2nd Session, 23rd Sitting, 30 June 1973, pp. 1050-1061; 2nd Session, 28th Sitting, 6 July 1973, p. 1662

41. Ibid., 7 October 1972, p. 1

in 1965.<sup>42</sup> The two Governments also agreed in principle to resume goods traffic from Tripura (Eastern India) to West Bengal across Bangladesh via the Bangladesh railway.<sup>43</sup>

During the summit meeting in May 1974, an economic pact was signed. India agreed to provide money and technical knowhow in four joint industrial ventures in Bangladesh: a sponge iron plant in Shantaul, a clinker mill at Chittagong, a gas-based fertilizer plant near Dhaka and a new cement plant in Chattak. India undertook to provide the clinker and the raw materials (limestone and sponge iron), and also to buy the excess products from these industries after Bangladesh's needs were met.<sup>44</sup> The League Government also continued to expect Indian assistance for its Five Year Plan and during the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Dhaka in February 1974, this was an important topic on the agenda.<sup>45</sup>

## VI

But these economic transactions, far from bolstering Indo-Bangladesh friendship, could hardly tide over the setbacks discussed above. There were a few other difficulties worth noting. The case of jute sales to India was one of them. The Indian jute industry, long in competition with the Pakistan jute industry, immensely benefited from the Bangladesh crisis in 1971, during which manufacture of

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42. Bangladesh (Washington D.C.: Embassy of Bangladesh), vol.2, no. 23, 17 November 1972, p. 4

43. Bangladesh Times, 26 July 1974, p. 8

44. Amrita Bazar Patrika (Bengali daily from Calcutta), 16 May 1974, p. 5 and 17 May 1974, pp. 1,5

45. The Hindu, 13 February 1974, p. 7

jute goods in then East Pakistan came to a halt, while the export of jute goods and raw jute virtually ceased. The Indian industry was able to procure the un-exported raw jute at extremely low prices and then re-export it as manufactured goods at higher prices. Domestically in India, a number of jute mills out of production for years came to life, and internationally India captured East Pakistan's market. The Indian jute industry, concentrated around Calcutta, was eager to preserve this advantage by promoting a jute community of India and Bangladesh. As the *Economic and Political Weekly* explained:

As the Indian jute industry sees it, its future lies in the export market for carpet backing and the burgeoning internal market for sacking. For protecting the first the production of carpet backing by the Bangladesh industry has to be curbed; and for exploiting the latter the Indian industry needs Bangladesh's cheap raw jute. This, in sum, is the rationale of the jute 'community' as perceived by those who preside over our jute industry.<sup>46</sup>

Immediately following the surrender of the Pakistan Army on 16 December 1971, it was announced in New Delhi that India would provide Bangladesh with two helicopters to locate and lift the huge amount of jute scattered in various parts of Bangladesh, and would provide shipping and re-insurance facilities for the immediate export of 200,000 bales of raw jute lying at Chalna and Chittagong ports.<sup>47</sup>

Within days the League Government made an announcement that was a godsend for West Bengal. First, the ban (imposed in 1965) on the sale of raw jute and jute goods to India was removed with immediate

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46. Vol. vii, no. 4, 22 January 1972, p. 133

47. The Hindu, 28 December 1971, p. 7



effect. Second, it declared null and void all foreign contracts for raw jute and jute goods entered into by exporters and mills before and during the Bangladesh crisis. All new shipments were required to have fresh contracts at current prices posted by the Bangladesh Bank. This released a large quantity of jute for export to India. Third, export bonus on raw jute and jute goods, which had made jute exports from Pakistan too competitive for the Indian jute exporters and thus crippled their export capability was abolished.<sup>48</sup>

This ill-conceived announcement greatly damaged Bangladesh's reputation in foreign jute markets, and considerably enhanced India's access to Bangladeshi jute, though it still did not satisfy the Indian jute barons who were eager to control their largest single rival and secure its jute for their mills. *The Economic Times* (India) in its editorial of 28 January 1972 grumbled about Bangladeshis being allowed to sell their jute to foreign buyers without first fulfilling India's needs: "India has reason to expect Bangladesh to meet our raw jute needs as a reciprocal gesture to what we have done to [sic] our neighbour". With such an attitude pervading jute circles in West Bengal, it is not difficult to understand why smuggling of jute could not be curbed. According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, in the period between March and June 1972, jute worth US\$ 65 million was smuggled into India.<sup>49</sup> Not only were Indian jute mills operating increased shifts, a new jute mill was built in Agartala (Eastern India) in addition to the one hundred-odd mills in West Bengal.<sup>50</sup>

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48. Ibid., 2 January 1972, p. 9; Keesing's Contemporary Archives, February 19-26, 1972, p. 25113

49. Quoted in Chowdhury, op.cit. (12)

50. Holiday (Dhaka), 4 November 1973

Formal trading also picked up. According to a statement in the *Jatiyo Sangsad* (Bangladesh National Assembly) in September 1973, barter trade in jute with India amounted to Taka 200 million (600,000 bales), followed by trade with Yugoslavia (106,320 bales), Egypt (94,809 bales), Poland (67,200 bales, and Bulgaria (8,400 bales).<sup>51</sup>

The League Government was charged with undermining the country's jute business. For instance, in January 1974, the State Minister for Jute, Moslemuddin Khan, had to defend the charges against his Government that it had sold 200,000 bales of raw jute to India at less than the prevailing international market price, thereby causing Bangladesh a loss of TK 20 million (US 2.7m). The Government was also charged with driving the jute price down in Indo-Bangladesh trade at a net loss for Bangladesh.<sup>52</sup> Thus the League Government continued to be plagued with charges of failing to protect the country's greatest foreign exchange earning resource.

## VII

The inter-state relations experienced attack from another direction, this time regarding the printing of Bangladeshi currency notes in India. In the first week of the League Government's accession to power in Dhaka, S. Doha, Manager of the Dhaka branch of the State Bank of Pakistan (now renamed the Bangladesh Bank) announced that the Bank had already made arrangements with the Government of India Security Press at Nasik to print new currency notes worth

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51. Official Proceedings, op.cit. (40), 3rd Session, 7th Sitting, 22 September 1973, p. 259

52. Ibid., 4th Session, 4th Sitting, 21 January 1974, pp. 145-151

Rs. 3,000 million (US \$416 m).<sup>53</sup> The first currency notes of Bangladesh came into circulation in the first week of March 1972.<sup>54</sup>

Within a few months there were widespread rumours in the country that the Indian Government was circulating counterfeit currency notes to undermine Bangladesh's economy. On the eve of the first parliamentary elections in Bangladesh in March 1973, Bhashani's pro-China National Awami Party (NAP-B) launched a massive anti-Indian tirade through election leaflets and posters. One such leaflet carried a picture purporting to show two currency notes bearing the same serial number, claiming that such notes were printed by the Indian Government in collusion with "its puppet regime in Bangladesh".<sup>55</sup> A month later, the leader of the Opposition, Aaur Rahman Khan, took up the issue in Parliament:

We do not know how much money has been printed in India because many have seen two or three notes with the same number on them. I myself have seen two notes with identical numbers...It is necessary to have an official declaration of how much money has been printed. The people would like to know it.<sup>56</sup>

The first response, however, came from the Indian *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House) a month later. K.P. Ganesh, Indian Minister of Revenue and Expenditure, in a reply to a member's query stated that at the

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53. The Hindu, 5 January 1972, p. 7

54. Ibid., 4 March 1972, p. 1

55. Ibid., 5 March 1972, p. 6

56. Official Proceedings, 1st Session, 3rd Sitting, 12 April 1973, p. 92



request of the League Government Tk 4,216 million (US \$585 m) were printed and supplied from the Nasik Press during the period February-August 1972. The Minister conceded that although the notes printed in India had several security features, they were not fool-proof for want of regular watermarked paper. He explained that at the time it was not technically feasible to incorporate portrait watermark on the paper because of the short time and the urgency with which Bangladesh's initial requirements of currency notes had to be met. The Minister noted that Bangladesh had withdrawn the currency notes printed in India, except Tk 1 notes, with the receipt of alternative notes printed in the United Kingdom on standard watermarked paper.<sup>57</sup> Verifying the above, a month later, the Bangladesh Finance Minister Tajuddin Ahmed explained that he had to request the Indian Government to print the notes because these were needed soon after Bangladesh's independence, when no other country except India had recognized it. The agreement with the Indian Security Printing Press was signed on 29 December 1971, about two weeks after the war had ended, and since the notes "had to be delivered in less than two months, the watermark was dropped".<sup>58</sup> The debate, however, continued in the *Jatiyo Sangsad*.<sup>59</sup> The upshot was an increased suspicion of India in Bangladesh.

## VIII

Summary: Both Governments had expressed quite early in their relationship the desire to prevent private trade between the two

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57. The Hindu, 17 May 1973, p. 1

58. Far Eastern Economic Review, 18 June 1973, p. 25

59. 2nd Session, 4th Sitting, 6 June 1973

countries and to implement state-to-state trading, in keeping with their professed socialistic orientation. Ruhul Quddus, Mujib's Principal Secretary, recalled that

in December 1971, there was an unwritten agreement between the Mujibnagar government and India that no private Indians would be allowed to do business in Bangladesh because Marwari capital would go against Bangladesh's interests.<sup>60</sup>

But this was not formalized in the trade agreement in March 1972. On this issue, the preamble merely stated that economic relations "can best be secured by organizing trade between the two countries on a State-to-State basis as far as possible". Perhaps as a check, Article 4 in the treaty called for regular meetings at all levels between the two Governments. This in fact meant coordination in policy planning and implementation. One example of this was given by P.N. Haksar, Mrs. Gandhi's Principal Secretary:

The Planning Commissions of India and Bangladesh endeavoured to work in unison to identify common problems and policies and to coordinate studies such as the rationalization of jute production and use; also the trading of Indian iron ore, coal and fertilizer for Bangladesh's gas, fish and river navigation facilities.<sup>61</sup>

After independence, the League Government found itself beholden to Mrs. Gandhi's Government for aid and advice. To balance India off, but without committing a *volte-face* in its basic secular-socialistic, nonaligned orientation, Mujib tried to enlist Soviet assistance. But the Soviet leaders demurred. The then Foreign Secretary, S.A. Karim, recalls:

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60. Interview in Dhaka, 7 July 1985

61. Interview in New Delhi, 28 April 1985

We realized pretty early that the Soviet Union was not going to give us much economic assistance. The Soviet leaders made it quite clear to us in Moscow during our very first visit there that they were not in a position to help us substantially. They said that when they came to power in 1917 the country was totally devastated and nobody came to their assistance. So we too can make it on our own.<sup>62</sup>

So, much of the support in the initial phase of reconstruction came from India, which donated US\$142.7 million in cash and commodities up to May 1972, followed by the United States with \$119 million.<sup>63</sup> By March 1973, the United States became the largest donor with \$318 million, compared to \$262 million from India and \$136 million from the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup>

Despite this initial assistance from India, the loss of wealth from Bangladesh in the form of smuggling undermined its image among the Bangladeshi elites. The League Government was also tarred. Home Minister Abdul Malek Ukil declared in Parliament his Government's inability to police the river and land borders effectively because of a lack of equipment, facility, manpower and trained personnel.<sup>65</sup> And Mujib publicly lamented:

Who takes bribes? Who indulges in smuggling? Who becomes a foreign agent? Who transfers money abroad? Who resorts to hoarding? It is being done by us - the five percent of the people who are educated. We are the bribe takers, the corrupt elements...It seems that society is worm infested.<sup>66</sup>

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62. Interview in New York in March 1985

63. New York Times, 20 May 1972

64. Ibid., 10 March 1973

65. 4th Session, 6th Sitting, 23 January 1974

66. Public address in Dhaka on 26 March 1975, quoted in Mascarenhas, op.cit. (17), p. 28



The Awami League's defence of its Government was unconvincing in the face of domestic scarcity, spiralling costs and shoddy Indian imports.<sup>67</sup> Regarding the latter, the Indian Union Commerce Minister, D.P. Chattopadhyay, exculpated his Government, claiming that a large portion of the textile imports to Bangladesh from India was handled by private trade on the basis of open general licences issued by the Bangladesh Government. He urged his Bangladeshi counterpart to issue higher specifications for the textiles to be imported from India.<sup>68</sup>

The increasingly widespread anti-Indian reactions to all these were to be expected. Bhashani, India's *bête noire*, not only kept his anti-Indian tirade alive, he also threatened to send batches of a trained volunteer force to every market in the country to effect a blockade of Indian goods.<sup>69</sup> Emotions ran so high that even twelve years later when the former editor of *Holiday* was asked to recall those times, he did not mince words:

It was a re-enactment of colonial trade. We were to supply primary goods and they would process it. The League Government's ceiling of Tk 25,000 [US\$3,400] on investment, border trade agreement and smuggling, all these contributed to this colonial pattern. Our industry was not allowed to develop because of this ceiling, thus allowing Calcutta capital to dominate.<sup>70</sup>

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67. 1st Session, 3rd Sitting, 13 April 1973

68. The Hindu, 14 June 1973, p. 7

69. Ibid., 8 June 1973, p. 7

70. Interview in Beijing, 16 August 1985

## IX

Conclusion: It was not lost on Mrs. Gandhi's Government, barring a few members, that the grievances of the people of East Pakistan against West Pakistan were mainly economic. It is also equally likely that Mrs. Gandhi remembered that economic subservience of the Muslims of undivided Bengal was a powerful factor in their decision to vote for a separate Muslim state. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that Mrs. Gandhi would have been doubly cautious about allowing a relapse of economic arrangements that would overtly discriminate against the Bangladeshis and undermine Indo-Bangladesh relations. This seems to be borne out by various top-level interviews, and by Articles 2 and 4 of the trade agreement.

In the context of influence relationship, these two Articles can be seen as influence attempts on the part of India. It was quite obvious to both Governments that after Bangladesh's independence, trade relations between the two countries would be an important component of their bilateral relations. The wording of the Articles suggests that Bangladesh had considerable flexibility to amend or withdraw from the arrangement. Thus, this would suggest an Indian attempt to reinforce the desire between the two Governments for close economic relations - which falls within our definition of 'influence'.

Despite Mrs. Gandhi's caution, she was unable to prevent deterioration of India's image in Bangladesh, mainly because of West Bengal's proprietary attitude towards the latter. The ineptitude

of the League Government was also to be blamed. If good relations existed at the Governmental level, that was certainly not the case between the two peoples.

Mrs. Gandhi appears to have been quite receptive to Mujib's needs. Despite India's long-awaited hope of restoration of border trade, and the strong disinclination of the Indian trade team to repeal the agreement only six months after it was signed, Mrs. Gandhi responded affirmatively to Mujib's request to suspend it. This was done both as a political gesture to the League Government under fire on that issue, and in full recognition of India's long-term interests. It is less clear whether influence operated in this case. It is quite likely that India realized that its influence would disappear if it seemed unbending on this relatively minor issue; in other words, it may have been a case of not so much Mujib's influence over Mrs. Gandhi as Indian self-interest at work.

It is reasonable to assume that India wanted to guide, and where possible control, the direction of Bangladesh's economy; for instance, to prevent its total dependence on capitalist countries. Convincing the League Government to coordinate its economic policies and plans with those of India (Article 4) was one such example. But its substantive effects gradually diminished as Bangladesh's economy transferred its dependence on India to international aid giving agencies, and later to the West. As one observer noted:

In Bangladesh, where charges against Indian control were most often made in the period following secession from Pakistan, these



could be partly supported by examining the record of loans and credits India gave Bangladesh in the period 1972-75...Following Mujib's assassination, as Bangladesh successfully switched to total dependence on the West, the Gulf States, and to China, India's real ability to control events there was seen to be very small.<sup>71</sup>

Bangladesh's initial dependence on India for economic aid resulted from the unavailability of alternative sources, and not from Indian influence. From late 1973 onwards Mujib managed gradually to switch over to western sources, thus confirming that little, if any, Indian influence operated on him.

The context for influence theory to operate was, however, present. It was in the Indian perception that an independent Bangladesh would be amenable to vigorous trade links with the bordering states of India, this being a repeatedly stated goal of many East Bengali political leaders. Since this was also the desire of the Indian Government, and given the responsiveness of the League Government, it is little wonder that one of the first official acts of the two Governments was to enter upon a trade agreement between them.

However, it was not so much the trade agreement *per se* as much as the increased scope for economic influence that spilled over out of this agreement, that widened the scope for the operation of the influence theory. Bangladesh's pricing policy which encouraged smuggling to India to the great benefit to the economies of the bordering Indian states, the likelihood of tying the taka to the Indian rupee, the removal of the competitive edge that Bangladeshi jute exporters enjoyed over Indian jute exporters before 1972, and the

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71. Srikant Dutt, India and the Third World, London: Zed Books Ltd., 1984, p. 156

lifting of restrictions on export of jute to India, are cases in point. But, these same factors were responsible for the souring of relations between the two countries, thereby reducing the options for the influence theory to operate.

## Chapter 6

## DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY

It seems that the primary motivation behind India's support for Bangladesh in 1971 was to enhance India's security in the sub-continent by re-defining the pre-1971 balance of power that had been artificially sustained by Pakistan with the help of extra-regional powers since the fifties. With the independence of Bangladesh the fruition of that hope was nearer than ever. While the subsequent Simla Talks between India and Pakistan sought to take care of the outstanding issues in the western part of the subcontinent, in the eastern half new opportunities raised new questions that required favourable resolution for the Indian leadership. Given the nature of interaction between the two countries during the Bangladesh crisis, what security obligations did each have towards the other? Would a formal security and defence arrangement between the two countries be necessary? Did Bangladesh need a professional standing army, and if so, what would be its aim, orientation and strength? There were also the issues of Islamic revivalism and leftist adventurism and how either would affect Bangladesh's internal politics and also India's regional interests.

These were some of the immediate security concerns that the Indian leadership had in the aftermath of Bangladesh's independence, and Indian policies towards Bangladesh seemed to have been guided accordingly. We have discussed in Chapter Four the formal security



and defence arrangement in the form of a treaty and its effects on Indo-Bangladesh relations. In this Chapter we shall turn our attention towards other defence and security aspects of that relationship.

## I

Bangladesh in India's Security Perception: By 1972, the Indo-Soviet treaty and the destruction of the artificial military parity between India and Pakistan had considerably enhanced India's security posture in the subcontinent. Having established its supremacy in regional affairs, New Delhi now felt that it "should go all out to convert and convince the neighbouring countries...about India's *bona fides* and friendly intentions towards them and its genuine desire to join them in building up the defence security of the region", and this was to be done by "a fine synthesis of friendliness and firmness".<sup>1</sup> This seems to have been the logic of India's initial high profile in Bangladesh's affairs, particularly in the areas of defence and security, since it was recognized quite early in New Delhi that Bangladesh's potential value in regional security would be an important factor.<sup>2</sup>

The Indian leadership was also aware that by virtue of its historical experience, religious orientation and geographic location, Bangladesh could be a potential threat to the stability of the eastern half of the subcontinent and perhaps also to the integrity of the Indian Union. While the independence of Bangladesh brought about the

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1. D.R. Mankekar, "Defence Security of South Asia", India Quarterly, vol. xxix, #3, July-September 1973, pp. 196-197
  2. The Hindustan Times (Delhi), 1 April 1971

initial suppression of overtly anti-independence forces such as the fanatic Islamic parties, it had also released a myriad of other feelings among the Bangladeshis, not all of which were favourable to India or to Indo-Bangladesh amity. A careful segregation of these potentially harmful elements was in the interest of both parties, as was the need to identify and contain all negative tendencies that would be contrary to regional interests, particularly as perceived by India. Specifically, it was to be the measure of India's Bangladesh policy to prevent the recidivism of those forces that had alienated the Bangladeshis first from the Hindu overlords of Bengal and then from Pakistan; to reduce the significance of religion in politics so that Indo-Bangladesh relations could be built on solid ground; to neutralize the advantages of geographic location accruing to Bangladesh; and to steer Bangladesh away from external defence concerns as much as possible.

## II

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Advantages and Disadvantages of Bangladesh's Independence for India: From the military point of view Bangladesh's geographic location was of immense strategic value to India. As noted earlier, in the event of a major Sino-Indian military conflagration, the Chinese could easily strike southward from the Tibetan Chumbi valley separating the Indian protectorates of Bhutan and Sikkim. The territory of Bangladesh totally cuts off India's eastern states from its main body except for the narrow Siliguri Corridor (also known as the 'chicken neck' in military colloquialism) that separates Nepal and Bangladesh only by 11 miles. A determined Chinese southward

advance of less than eighty miles would sever this vital Indian land corridor and totally cut off the Indian protectorate of Bhutan, the northern part of West Bengal, all of Assam and the NEFA (North East Frontier Areas) from the rest of India. As Inder Malhotra, editor of *Times of India*, admitted:

The narrow Siliguri Corridor could be taken in a couple of hours and we would be in a precarious position. So the independence of Bangladesh has provided India with strategic security on the eastern sector.<sup>3</sup>

India's only access to those beleaguered areas would be through the territory of Bangladesh, and, therefore, a Bangladesh friendly towards India and willing to appreciate India's security dilemma would be the aim of India's eastern regional policy.

Further, by virtue of its location, Bangladesh retained the ability to abet insurgency that had been rampant in NEFA since India's independence. It had been the policy of the Pakistan Government to fuel insurgency against the Indian Union by providing the Mizo and Naga rebels with sanctuary, training and arms. As S.A. Karim, who served in the Pakistan Foreign Service and later became Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary in the Mujib Government, recalled:

The training etc. was provided by Pakistan in the secret camps which were in the Chit-tagong Hill Tracts. To what extent the Chinese were involved I do not know. The Pakistan Army was doing it directly and it had nothing to do with the then East Pakistan Government...it was treated as a completely separate operation.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Interview in New Delhi on 26 April 1985

4. Interview in New York in March 1985. Mr. Karim subsequently became Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the United Nations until his retirement.



Tied to this was also the possibility of the massive amount of unrecovered arms in Bangladesh finding their way into these sensitive areas and also into the hands of the Naxalites in West Bengal. These unrecovered arms came from three sources: those captured by the *Mukti Bahini* from the Pakistan Army; those given by the Indian Army to the *Mukti Bahini* and the *Mujib Bahini*; and those the Pakistan Army gave to the anti-independence forces such as the *razakars* (members of minority, non-Bengali, Bihari community) during the war and to the fanatic religious groups such as the *Al-Badr* and *Al-Shams* at the time of surrender to create a fifth column for possible future use. Despite repeated appeals by the League Government to return these arms, much of these remained unrecovered. It was not lost on the Indian leaders that the recovery of these arms was essential to law and order in Bangladesh, the ultimate viability of the League regime, the emasculation of the still extant anti-independence forces, and the preservation of the *status quo* in Bangladesh's periphery.

Indian and Bangladeshi leaders also had to take into account the radicalizing effect of the war on the *Mukti Bahini* which was a heterogeneous mixture of students, teachers, peasants, blue-collar workers, day labourers and the unemployed. With the exception of certain student leaders, these disparate elements had no clear-cut political ideology or commitment, the sole motivating factor being Bengali nationalism. In the course of the nine-month struggle against Pakistan various groups received various types of political exposure;<sup>5</sup>

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5. See Talukdar Maniruzzaman, Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh, Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International Ltd., 1975; also M.A.W. Bhuiyan, Emergence of Bangladesh and Role of Awami League, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982, pp. 247-253

for instance, those fighting under the banner of leftist parties picked up class-conscious rhetoric; those fighting in the *Mujib Bahini* were swayed by notions of popular dictatorship; and those serving under the direct command of certain military officers (such as the 'Z' force under the command of Major Ziaur Rahman) acquired their commanders' views that it was the Bangladesh Army which brought independence to the country and that no political party, least of all the Awami League, had any role in this struggle. As a senior Army officer who served in a sensitive command during the League Government explained:

Most of the professional military officers who fought in the independence war were against the Awami League. Zia [ur Rahman] was the architect of this anti-Awami League sentiment. He believed that it was their physical involvement against the Pakistan military that finally brought independence to the country. The Awami League's historical role of continued struggle against the military-bureaucracy of Pakistan that had forced the confrontation between the Pakistan military and Bengali nationalism in 1970-71 was unrecognized by Zia and his followers.<sup>6</sup>

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While many members of the *Mukti Bahini* returned to their jobs or vocations after independence, there was a significant flotsam that needed to be absorbed in the society. Given its haphazard political exposure, failure to deal swiftly with it could create a potentially disgruntled and estranged section of society, which could easily upset the desired *status quo*.

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6. Confidential interview in Dhaka in July 1985. While Zia's anti-Awami League stance has been verified by other confidential sources, the assertion that most of the professional military officers were against the Awami League has not been verified, and therefore it must be accepted with caution.

Indian leaders, perhaps more so than their Bangladeshi counterparts, had also to take into account the roles of those political parties and groups in Bangladesh not keen on friendship with India. Maulana Bhashani, who represented a curious mixture of Islam and Chinese socialism, was the ultimate *bête noire* to the Indian leaders. Speaking before the National Convention of Revolutionary Students, Bhashani offered support to the "freedom movement" of the Bengalis living in the eastern states of India.<sup>7</sup> A month later, on 1 November 1972, at a press conference he spoke of the movement for a "Greater Socialist Bengal" comprising West Bengal, Bangladesh and those parts of Assam where people spoke Bengali.<sup>8</sup> These constant revolutionary pricks aimed at areas already under considerable leftist sway and where the Congress Party had had repeated political and electoral setbacks made the Indian leadership extremely queasy, a development not unnoticed by the League Government which was quick to condemn the "agents of China's yellow imperialism" who had joined forces with reactionary elements to conspire against Bangladesh's friendship with India and the Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup> As President of the Assam Muslim League in pre-partition India, Bhashani had represented peasant interests in Assam and Bengal and, after partition, in East Pakistan. His appeal in Bangladesh was such that during the precarious twenty days between 22 December 1971 when the Government-in-Exile was flown to Dhaka by India to take over governmental responsibility of the new country and 10 January 1972 when Mujib returned home after his release

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7. The Hindu, 30 September 1972, p. 8

8. Ibid., 1 November 1972; see also issue of 26 August 1972, p. 7

9. Ibid., 9 May 1972, p. 5 and 2 September 1972, p. 1



from Pakistan, the Indira Government kept Bhashani under house arrest during his post-operative 'convalescence' in a New Delhi hospital for fear of losing political control of Bangladesh to leftist forces in Mujib's absence.<sup>10</sup>

Besides Bhashani's NAP, Mohammad Toaha's Bangladesh Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), whose forces had fought both the Pakistan Army and the Indian-supported *Mujib Bahini* as a rejection of Indian hegemony over Bangladesh,<sup>11</sup> publicly vilified India:

The establishment of Bangladesh, now under the control of India, has given complete shape to the anti-China bulwark which the superpowers have long since been trying to build up.<sup>12</sup>

The fanatic Muslim groups, *AL-Badr* and *AL-Shams*, raised and armed by the Pakistan Army also could not be overlooked by the two leaderships, even though they were now banned. As members of the *Islamic Chattra Sangha* (Islamic Student Organisation), the fanatical student wing of the *Jama'at i Islam*, these two groups were responsible for the cold-blooded extermination of a section of the anti-Pakistan Bangladeshi elite in the last week before the surrender of the Pakistan Army,<sup>13</sup> and were diehard anti-Indian.

A new political challenge to the Awami League was the *Jatiyo*

10. Kamal Siddiqui, The Political Economy of Indo-Bangladesh Relations, Unpublished MA Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1975, p. 14. Also see The Red Mole (London), September 1971
11. Bhuiyan, op.cit., pp. 251-252; Far Eastern Economic Review, 4 March 1972, p. 20
12. S.M. Ali, After the Dark Night: Problems of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Ltd., 1973, p. 65
13. Dainik Bangla (Bengali daily from Dhaka), 22 December 1971; also Bhuiyan, op.cit. p. 262

*Samajtantrik Dal* (JSD - National Socialist Party). Composed of the dissident and militant factions of the Awami League's own student and labour fronts, the JSD emphasized youth, nationalism and authoritarianism and was quite unconcerned about parliamentary democracy.<sup>14</sup> The party's ability to attract the disillusioned youth and other alienated segments of the society, including sections of the Army, by its call for scientific socialism in Bangladesh caused concern in New Delhi and Dhaka.

These, then, were the main political forces arrayed against Indo-Bangla interests visible on the political landscape of Bangladesh in the years immediately following independence. India was concerned by both Islamic and leftist elements. The first threatened the resurgence of communalism, which would adversely affect the Hindu minority in Bangladesh and, by emphasizing ties with Pakistan, could work against Indo-Bangladesh interests. The second could reinstate Chinese influence in Bangladesh and also incite autonomy struggles in the sensitive border states of West Bengal, Assam and NEFA.

Another potentially dangerous development for the Indian leadership was the possibility of 'demographic aggression' from densely populated Bangladesh against the surrounding sparsely-populated Indian territories in the northwest, north and the east.<sup>15</sup> One of the reasons for India's military confrontation with Pakistan in 1971 was to restore the *status quo ante bellum* so that the refugees could return home.

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14. Rounaq Jahan, "Bangladesh in 1972: Nation Building in a New State" Asian Survey, vol xiii, #2, February 1973, p. 207

15. For an excellent historical discussion of this problem, see Marcus Franda, Bangladesh: The First Decade, New Delhi: South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1982, pp. 77-124

Therefore any political instability in Bangladesh whether due to communalism or other factors could cause forced migration and throw into imbalance the already delicate balance among the ethnic and religious communities of the neighbouring Indian states; this would not only have adverse social consequences, but the economic and political repercussions would also have far-reaching effects for the Indian Union. Therefore political stability and *status quo* under the League administration were imperative in Bangladesh as far as the Indian decision-making elite was concerned.

The economic content of the Indo-Bangladesh relationship was also of great strategic concern to the Indian leaders. As noted in the previous chapter, long-term friendly relations between the two countries not only held the promise of an economic boon for the relatively inaccessible and undeveloped Eastern states of India, but more important to the political health of the Union, it stood to undermine the insurgency in the area, due in no small measure to the economic and political deprivations there.

And, finally, both the leaderships had to be specially aware of the psychological dimension of the new relationship - namely, what Mujib's Principal Secretary, Ruhul Quddus, called 'negative sustenance'.

As Quddus explained:

Mentally we are still communal and anti-Indian and this is maintained by our Establishment's posture of negative sustenance. This negative sustenance is to establish our separateness, since we are basically the same people with the same history and culture. Because we desire a separate political homeland, negative sustenance becomes absolutely necessary.<sup>16</sup>

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16. Interview in Dhaka on 7 July 1985



This 'negative sustenance' had been a subtle but constant undercurrent of the state philosophy of Pakistan, and the East Pakistanis had been constantly exhorted to maintain their religio-cultural separateness from the Hindus of West Bengal by rejecting Tagore's works, Hindu literature and films, etc. Since pro-Pakistan forces were banned but not necessarily eliminated from the political fabric of the country, it was incumbent on the League Government to maintain a constant vigil over any untoward development that could strengthen the forces of negative sustenance.

Members of the Indian elites were equally aware of this. As Inder Malhotra explained:

The problem of identity is unfortunately a reality to some degree in every neighbour. Even Nepal with separate existence for the last three hundred years feels it needs to assert its separateness from the common Hindu identity...our neighbourhood is unique. Even though the Soviet Union has more neighbours than us, it doesn't have the same problems as we do. The Soviet Union's neighbours were not carved up from Soviet territory. But India's neighbours have been. Therefore, identity crisis - to assert oneself - will continue.<sup>17</sup>

And P.N. Haksar, recalling the events fifteen years later, said:

I told Mujib that he could be as anti-Indian as he wished if it was politically expedient for him. It would not bother India because India had learnt to live with it. After all, Bangladesh's anti-Indianism could not be any more virulent than the Pakistani anti-Indianism that we survived the past thirty years. We are not the least bothered by it.<sup>18</sup>

Although Haksar may have personally felt that way, it was

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17. Interview, op.cit., (3)

18. Interview in New Delhi on 28 April 1985

perhaps an exaggeration to say that the Indian Government was 'not the least bothered by it'. Nonetheless, it does suggest that the Indian leadership was aware of potential anti-Indianism in Bangladesh, whether occasioned by a sense of insecurity among the people or as a reflection of the power struggle within the country.

Thus, given Bangladesh's acquired role in regional security, it was all the more important to the Indian leadership that all the potentially negative tendencies that could arise out of the country's new status be kept in check so that regional interests, and particularly regional security as perceived by India, were well served.

Having discussed the various security concerns arising out of Bangladesh's independence, we now turn to three specific security related developments in Bangladesh's domestic politics and India's role in each: the development of a professional army; the establishment of an internal security force; and, Bangladesh's accession to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

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### III

The Development of a Professional Army: The dominant Indian thinking on defence had always been that the main responsibility of underwriting the defence and security of the subcontinent must fall on India, and that the security of regional neighbours cannot be detached from the security of the region.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, like all its neighbours,

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19. See K.M. Panikkar, The Future of South East Asia: An Indian View, New York, 1948 and Problem of Indian Defence, Bombay, 1969; William Dunbar, India in Transition, The Washington Papers 31, vol. III, London: Sage Publications, 1976; Mankekar, op.cit. (1)

Bangladesh too was vitally important to India's external and internal security.

This was made clear by India's leading defence analyst, K. Subrahmanyam, within five months of Bangladesh's independence. In his 'Security of Bangladesh' he made two important observations that reflected Indian perceptions of Bangladesh at the time, and which are perhaps still valid: Bangladesh had no external security concerns; and its only concern would be internal security. Elaborating his views, Subrahmanyam claimed that Bangladesh was "fortunate" because "a threat to Bangladesh will be considered a threat to India, treaty or no treaty" and that "the main responsibility for ensuring the security of the countries on the shores of the Bay of Bengal from external maritime intervention will be India's".<sup>20</sup>

On the "theoretical" possibility that serious differences could develop between India and Bangladesh, he cautioned that "those differences will have implications for the security of Bangladesh... [and] the problem for Bangladesh will be unmanageable".

He then raised the issue of whether Bangladesh should have a professional standing army or a militia. On the issue of militia, he observed that

militias are most suited to nations which run the risk of being overrun and occupied. To continue resistance after occupation, militias fully rooted in the local population are ideal. But Bangladesh does not have such a security problem.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay), vol. vii, #19, 6 May 1972, p. 946

21. Ibid., p. 947



Besides, "militias can be properly organized only in countries where there is a high degree of political indoctrination and a one-party state", which was not the case in Bangladesh. Therefore, Bangladesh needed a small professional standing army, even though militarism could become a problem. Subrahmanyam observed that

Militarism in third world countries very often arises from the 'guardianship' role the armed forces attempt to play and the elitist self-image they have of themselves ... Nations like Libya, UAR, Syria, Iraq, Sudan and above all, Pakistan, have suffered from the intervention of the armed forces in politics... the threat of militarism arises only from professional standing armies and not from militias.<sup>22</sup>

But since states have on occasions found it necessary to employ the regular army against local militias, as was the case with the employment of the Chinese People's Liberation Army against the Red Guards to restore order, the dilemma Bangladesh faced was that it was

in a situation where a small standing army is inescapable, yet the issue is how to reduce the risk of militarism while raising and maintaining such a standing army.<sup>23</sup>

This line of thinking was also prevalent in the Indian defence establishment, which also seemed to have had a solution for "the risk of militarism". According to Major General D.K. Palit, Director of Military Operations during the 1971 war:

Bangladesh had no enemies, and since provisioning of the army would come from India, it was felt that Bangladesh need not have a large standing army. It was suggested that three infantry brigades with scaled down allotment of heavy arms would be enough.<sup>24</sup>

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22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Interview in New Delhi on 27 April 1985

This was confirmed by Lieutenant General J.S. Aurora, Chief of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Command:

It was suggested that Bangladesh might have a series of brigades since its economy was in shambles and the requirement would be only for internal stability. [Defence Secretary] K.B. Lal was the man who suggested it. But [Mujib's Defence Advisor, General] Osmani rejected it.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note that even before the League Government had identified its policies on important national issues, influential members in the Indian defence establishment and civil bureaucracy had already sought to formulate Bangladesh's defence policy on the basis of a number of assumptions. For instance, it was assumed that Bangladesh, out of its own security consideration, would not allow any serious difficulties to arise between the two countries because it would be "unmanageable" for the Bangladeshis. It was assumed that Bangladesh would not need to concern itself with external security because that was properly an Indian concern. It was further assumed that the size and strength of the army could be dictated by India. It was also assumed that the army would be totally reliant on India for its wherewithal.

On the Bangladesh side, it appears that the League Government had given only cursory thought to defence and security matters<sup>26</sup> as it was preoccupied with pressing national issues such as the framing of the Constitution, economic reconstruction, internal law and order and external political recognition. These tasks were so daunting that defence and security issues did not gain national prominence during

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25. Interview in New Delhi on 1 May 1985

26. The Hindu, 28 December 1971, p. 9

the entire period when the League was in power. As Mujib's Foreign Minister, Dr. Kamal Hossain, explained:

[Defence and security] were undeveloped ideas. We were not there long enough for these ideas to begin to be worked out.<sup>27</sup>

The Awami League's only known position regarding the defence and security of Bangladesh was envisaged in its famous 'Six-Point Formula' that was drawn up in the context of united Pakistan on 23 March 1966. Point six of that 'formula for autonomy' called for the setting up of a militia or a para-military force for East Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> After independence, and in the absence of any revision of the 1966 manifesto, the League Government's security posture continued to be guided by the broad principles - abstaining from military alliances and joining the Nonaligned Forum - laid down in the 1966 party manifesto. Besides the Government was also secure in the belief that Bangladesh was surrounded by a friendly country and thus there was no threat to its territorial integrity. Nor, it must be added, did India give any cause for concern in this regard. Both Governments had sought to identify the areas of potential tension and conflict and resolve them through friendly bilateral negotiations.<sup>29</sup> There was therefore no urgency for the League Government to identify a specific defence policy for the country.<sup>30</sup>

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27. Interviews in Dhaka in July-August 1985

28. For the full text of the Six-Point Formula, see Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bangladesh Documents, vol. I, New Delhi, undated, pp. 23-33

29. Interview with Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain, op.cit. (26)

30. Dr. Hossain, however, recalls that on 6 August 1975 General Zia (Deputy Chief of Army at the time) "called on me at the Foreign Office and expressed his concern that do we really think enough of our national security". Dr. Hossain remembers asking General Zia to seek the assistance of other like-minded officers to prepare a study on Bangladesh's security needs and submit it to him. Interview, Dhaka, August 1985



There were, however, general ideas of what Bangladesh's defence arrangement should look like. As Dr. Hossain tried to reconstruct his Government's thoughts on the matter:

I think we certainly thought in terms of having a good, well-equipped professional force as the core. We did not have wholly developed ideas about military requirements for our security...We did think of how best we can involve the population...because we cannot think of the security of Bangladesh as being separated from the task of every single citizen playing his part in defending our sovereignty...We saw the repatriates coming back and taking their rightful place in that set-up and we hoped we could work out between them and the freedom fighters a cohesive relationship.<sup>31</sup>

In retrospect, however, the repatriates were not allowed to take "their rightful place in that set-up"; therefore, how much of this recollection has been influenced by post-1975 events is really academic. Be that as it may, even though there was no defence policy as such, there is evidence of strong undercurrents of conflicting sentiments at the time regarding the idea of an army. While many influential members of the Awami League and the rank and file were barely in favour of an army because of their experience in Pakistan,<sup>32</sup> three important exceptions were Mujib himself; the leader of the rightist faction in the League, Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed; and the Defence Advisor to the Prime Minister, Colonel (promoted to General after independence) Osmani. Both Osmani and Khondakar wished for a strong professional standing army, and Mujib certainly did not wish to rely on the Indian Army for his country's security needs.

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31. Ibid.

32. This was gathered from interviews with two private secretaries to Mujib who wish to remain anonymous since they are still in government service and from some retired army officers.

But Mujib was torn between the desire for pomp and fanfare that a national army would provide and the fear that there could be a repeat of the Pakistan experience. While he acquiesced in the decision to form a strong internal security force answerable only to him instead of investing in a large army, he was also aware that it would not be the answer to the problem of national defence. While he realized that no Bangladesh Army would be a match for India and that a large army would be wasteful, he nonetheless desired an army commensurate with the dignity of a sovereign nation; and at the same time he was concerned that India must not be allowed to misunderstand his desire for a proper military for Bangladesh. While he delighted in being present at passing out ceremonies and parades in military academies and cadet colleges, he was also sensitive to what his senior party colleagues thought of him.<sup>33</sup>

In that fluid state obtaining in the country, a position paper was prepared at the General Head Quarters in 1974 under the guidance of the Director of Military Operations. The paper argued for the augmentation of the Bangladesh Army along divisional lines in order to accommodate the interests of the *Mukti Bahini* and the repatriated personnel. After considerable discussion (under Mujib's chairmanship since he was also the Defence Minister), Mujib gave his assent to the paper and asked it to be implemented. But when it became known within party circles, the pro-Indian faction led by Tajuddin Ahmed and Abdus Samad Azad was able to tap the anti-military sentiment within the party to demand that the decision to

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33. Ibid. Also from interview with Shamsur Rahman, Mujib's ambassador to Moscow and then New Delhi. Dhaka, 9 July 1985

augment the Army must be rescinded unless he wished to see a repeat of the Pakistan experience; Mujib succumbed to its pressure and overturned his directive.<sup>34</sup> Thus, as Lieutenant General Khwaja Wasiuddin confirmed, the view that prevailed within the League and the Government was that

there was no need to have a large army or even a very organized army. I was told there would be no formation higher than a brigade, or even that. The idea was to completely align our defence service with India. One way the Government did that was, having found that there may be a certain amount of resistance to this, to come into agreement [with India] that the border force in Bangladesh would be similarly armed, similarly uniformed [like the Indian border] force and no one would know the difference.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the League's paranoia at the possibility of military resurgence in Bangladesh tallied with the Indian desire to keep the Bangladesh military at an inchoate state and the end result was a weak army. But a weak army did not mean that Mujib would kowtow to the wishes of the Indian leaders regarding security matters. For instance, during the counter-insurgency operations in Nagaland and Mizoram around mid-1974, the Indian Government suggested that Bangladesh send a brigade to the Chittagong Hill Tracts border to prevent insurgents from escaping to Bangladesh, and requested that this brigade be placed under the operational command of India. A Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Defence informed the GHQ of the Prime Minister's consent to allow the Bangladesh brigade to operate under Indian

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34. Interview, *op.cit.* (6). This officer participated in the discussion on the position paper.

35. Interview in New York on 29 March 1985. Wasiuddin was the only Bengali general in the Pakistan Army and had refused to participate in the war. At the time of this interview, he was Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, having taken the post after Karim's retirement.



command. The GHQ sought confirmation directly from the Prime Minister. Upon learning of this, the Prime Minister dismissed the Joint Secretary and all others in the Ministry connected with this episode. Mujib refused to allow any Bangladeshi troops to be placed under Indian command. So no troops were sent.<sup>36</sup>

There was another conflict of interest between the Indian leadership and Mujib. To the extent that Mujib entertained doubts about the Army, these seemed to have been directed mainly against the resident Army personnel who had fought in the war. He was aware of many of these officers' lack of allegiance to the League Government and of latent political ambition among some of them.<sup>37</sup> At times he even vented his frustration; referring to Army Chief Shafiullah and Deputy Chief Zia, Mujib once told his secretary:

Just look, yesterday I made them colonel, today they want to be brigadier. How can this country improve if everybody wants to become big overnight.<sup>38</sup>

While Mujib did indulge the resident Army because it was composed of freedom fighters and had a powerful lobby in the country, the Government and the party, he desired the speedy return of the non-repatriated Bengali military personnel from Pakistan to man the three Services.<sup>39</sup> And when they did get repatriated, starting from late 1973, many of the senior officers were retained in

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36. Confidential military source, corroborated by one of Mujib's private secretaries. Interviews in Dhaka in July 1985
37. Interviews, op.cit. (30) and (31)
38. Interview with Abdur Rahim who was Inspector General of Police and then Secretary to the Prime Minister from 1 January 1974 till Mujib's assassination on 15 August 1975. Dhaka, 11 July 1985
39. Interview, op.cit. (30)

service even against the advice of the hastily convened Army screening board - a brainchild of Ziaur Rahman to eliminate seniority and all obstacles to accelerated promotion of freedom fighters like him who were majors and colonels - and given important postings. Mujib also rejected the Board's recommendations that those Bengali officers in the Pakistan Army promoted during the 1971 crisis should not be allowed to retain their new ranks or given pensions.<sup>40</sup>

As stated earlier, Mujib's desire to repatriate the stranded Bengali military personnel and retain them in service was contrary to the assumptions and expectations of the Indian decision-making elite. The Indian leaders specifically feared the repatriates' military indoctrination under Pakistan and doubted their allegiance to the League Government. The fear of another 'Pakistan' in the east was very much present. This fear had been voiced by Mrs. Gandhi even before Bangladesh's independence, during her meeting with Bangladesh's then roving ambassador and later President Abu Sayeed Chowdhury in London in October 1971.<sup>41</sup> It was also the desire of the Indian Congress that the repatriates from Pakistan should not be given the upper hand in the military, intelligence and the country's administration.<sup>42</sup>

These Indian concerns were laid down before Mujib at various times, but Mujib was unwilling to take them seriously. According to

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40. Ibid.

41. Interview with ex-President Chowdhury in Dhaka on 2 June 1985

42. Discussion with Dr. Bhabani Sen Gupta, Center for Policy Research, New Delhi, 19 April 1985

Shamsur Rahman who served as Mujib's ambassador first in Moscow and then in New Delhi:

P.N. Haksar told me that Mujib had several times mentioned his stranded soldiers in Pakistan. Haksar said that he had tried to convince Mujib that even Mao didn't take back the 1.8 million Chinese Army, but Mujib ignored the suggestion. Haksar had also argued that the freedom fighters raised during his absence had proved their loyalty to Mujib and the Awami League... [but they] were suspect in Mujib's eyes.<sup>43</sup>

Failing to prevail upon Mujib on this issue, India did the next best thing possible, and that was to try to influence the promotion of junior officers in the resident Army to senior positions,<sup>44</sup> though that was not necessarily to Indian advantage, as events later proved.

The Indian pressure was also felt on a related issue, the taking away by the Indian Army of arms surrendered by the Pakistan Army in the 1971 war. This was a very sensitive issue among the anti-Indian elite, not to mention the Bangladesh Army. It was felt that the huge quantities of sophisticated arms surrendered by the Pakistan Army<sup>45</sup> properly belonged to Bangladesh for at least two reasons: because most of Pakistan's defence needs were financed by exports from East Pakistan, these arms could be seen as East Pakistan's belated acquisition of its share; and the arms were surrendered within the territory of Bangladesh. If India insisted on a share of the booty, then at least half of it should be returned to Bangladesh.

According to one newspaper report, however, these captured weapons were removed to India at the request of the Bangladesh

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43. Interview, op.cit. (31)

44. Interview, op.cit. (33)

45. The Hindu, 24 December 1971, p. 9



Government which feared that in the state of flux that prevailed immediately after the war, these weapons could fall into the hands of extremists, a situation neither Government desired.<sup>46</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter, there was overwhelming sentiment in the Government and among the Bangladesh elite that these weapons should be returned, and the Indian Government was equally adamant against returning them. According to General Wasiuddin:

I asked Mr. Dixit that while on 16 December 1971 when the Pakistan Army surrendered the Indian Army was received well, why by 1974 there was complete hatred towards them. He said the reason was the taking away of the weapons. He said that he had wanted the weapons to be returned and then shared between the two forces, but Dhar ruled him out.<sup>47</sup>

Initially there were negotiations between the two Armies for the return of these captured arms, but the Indian Army was unreceptive. India refused to hand over a complete list of the captured arms and to return the captured Chinese-made weaponry. Recalled Dr. A.R. Mallick, Bangladesh's High Commissioner to India at the time:

I met the Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, and asked him why they were keeping the Chinese arms. Haksar called and told me not to get excited over it; they would be returned. Mrs. Gandhi intervened on our behalf.<sup>48</sup>

It was not until the summit meeting between the two Prime Ministers in mid-May 1974 that this issue was finally resolved. A month later, the Bangladesh Minister of State for Information, Taheruddin

46. Amrita Bazar Patrika, (Bengali Daily from Calcutta) 12 May 1974

47. Interview op.cit. (33). Mr. Jyotindranath Dixit was the second ranking Indian diplomat in Dhaka and is said to have had links with the underground. D.P. Dhar was Mrs. Gandhi's liaison man in Calcutta during the war and subsequently her personal emissary to Mujib.

48. Interview in Dhaka on 31 July 1985

Thakur, announced that India had started returning the arms and ammunition left by the Pakistan Army after the war.<sup>49</sup>

## IV

The Establishment of an Internal Security Force: This issue gained greater prominence among the people of Bangladesh than did the Army issue not only because of the League Government's mishandling of it, but also because the people suffered tremendously from it. Certain sections in the Bangladesh elite have always seen, and continue to see, an 'Indian hand' in all adverse developments within Bangladesh, and this issue was no exception. But, in this case, the Government unwittingly contributed to the widespread misconception of the intention behind the creation of this force.

The issue of the *Mukti Bahini* was of great concern to the Indian and Bangladesh leaders, because once the *Bahini* had served its purpose in the war, the question was what to do with it after the war. With a constant eye on post-1971 security and stability in the eastern part of the subcontinent, the Indian leaders had devised a plan regarding its role and place in the new country. As General Aurora explained:

In any country that goes through a liberation war, the problem after independence is what to do with the armed scallywags. It requires careful thought...The Pakistanis had armed many irregulars and we had done the same. But after the war...we said that in every district town these people would be told to work in nation-building activity. They should come with their weapons, put them in the armoury, and work for

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49. Bangladesh Times, 19 June 1974; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 18 June 1974

the country. They would be paid a small stipend by India and fed by the Bangladesh Government. The administrator of the region would supervise them.<sup>50</sup>

The Tajuddin Government, however, had different plans. On 6 January 1972, four days before the return of Mujib, Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed in his address to the newly formed Central Board of National Militia announced that every member of the *Mukti Bahini* would be enrolled in the National Militia and given food, shelter and minimum wages by the Government. They would be deployed in the nation's rebuilding work and organized under subdivisions.<sup>51</sup>

But it appears that after Mujib's return and the reconstitution of the Cabinet, this issue was extensively discussed in a Cabinet meeting, and "the first Cabinet decision was not to set up a parallel force" to the Bangladesh Army.<sup>52</sup> According to the accounts provided by Kamal Hossain, Law Minister in Mujib's first Cabinet, and Ruhul Quddus, the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, among several proposals discussed in the Cabinet meeting one found general acceptance.<sup>53</sup>

The freedom fighters were categorized into two groups: university graduates and students; and the less educated and those from the villages. It was decided that since large part of the *Bahini* comprised students, they should return to their studies and also be given credit for the time they had lost. Regarding the second group, which came predominantly from the villages, it was decided that they

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50. Interview, op.cit. (24)

51. Bangladesh Observer, 7 January 1972, p. 1

52. Interview with Dr. Kamal Hossain, op.cit. (26)

53. Interviews, op.cit. (15) and (50)



should be encouraged to return to their agricultural pursuits. But for those who wished to offer their services to the Government on account of their para-military training and discipline, two options were suggested. The less educated group could be recruited for the border security force because, it was felt, being freedom fighters their patriotic sentiments would help in curbing border problems and smuggling activities; this would take care of ten to fifteen thousand of them. The second option was that "those who had given better accounts of themselves in the war" could be taken into the Army.

According to Hossain, General Osmani raised objection to the effect that the training received by the *Mukti Bahini* was not qualitatively adequate for them to join the regular forces and that it would create tensions within the Army. His objection was accepted and it was decided that all of them would be recruited into the border force.

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Following this Cabinet decision, the students were effectively absorbed within Bangladesh's universities, colleges and schools. But the second group with its slightly political bent could not be integrated into the border force, which was more disciplined and organized. Soon dissension between this group and the border force led to feuding, requiring Mujib to intervene personally. The Home Secretary, whose job it was to resolve the crisis, suggested a separate para-military force to be called the *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini* (National Security Force) and charged with internal security.<sup>54</sup>

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54. Ibid., (50)

At the time there were a lot of miscreants armed with sophisticated weapons that were used in political assassinations, internal hijackings, bank robberies and the seizing of police armouries. The Police with its simple .303 rifles was totally stymied in its attempts to restore law and order. So it was felt that the *Jatiyo Rakshi Bahini* (JRB) could assist the Police in restoring internal security. Thus, the JRB came into being on President's Order no. 21 of 1972.

But there was still the question of proper training of this force. Since the Bangladesh Army was ill-equipped for this task and the repatriates had not yet arrived, and given the political orientation of the League Government, the best available source of training and technical assistance was considered to be India. India readily accepted. It is possible that having failed to convince Mujib not to take the repatriated soldiers back into service, India saw the JRB (with the wartime Indian-trained *Mujib Bahini* forming its core leadership) as the counter to them and agreed to train the new para-military force accordingly. Inder Malhotra shed some light on it:

Any help Mujib asked we gave. The more the Army factionalism became evident... the greater the need was felt for security. The feeling that these Army returnees were pro-Pakistan was pervasive in India.<sup>55</sup>

Thus the JRB was initially trained by India. According to General Aurora,

assistance to *Rakshi Bahini* was given by Major General Obund who was advisor to the intelligence branch. He had retired from the Army and

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55. Interview, op.cit. (3)

was re-employed. The Army was not involved, it was done by RAW [Research and Analysis Wing] and Obund was the commandant.<sup>56</sup>

There were actually two Indian officers involved and the training was for six months, with an extension of an additional three months upon the Bangladesh Government's request.<sup>57</sup> Subsequent training was taken over by Bangladeshi officers under the guidance of the Home Ministry, first under Abdul Malek Ukil and later Abdul Mannan.<sup>58</sup>

But in the chaotic political environment of 1972-75, this had important political ramifications. First, being a new force, the JRB was given brand new weaponry and uniforms, whereas the Army was saddled with a few inherited weapons and all the sophisticated weapons surrendered by Pakistan were still in India. This gave vested interests within the Army the opportunity to foment anti-establishment views within its ranks, thereby considerably souring the Army's relationship with the JRB and the League Government.

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second, not only was the *Rakkhi Bahini* trained by Indian intelligence personnel, it was also uniformed like the Indian Border Police. This was of tremendous propaganda value to the anti-Indian forces within the country, especially at a time when the looting of industrial assets and military hardware by the Indian Army and also the smuggling of jute, fish and foodgrains across the border to India had become widely known among the people of Bangladesh.

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56. Interview, op.cit. (24)

57. This was told to the author by General Wasiuddin who had gathered the information from his conversation with Mr. Dixit. Interview, op.cit. (33)

58. Interviews, op.cit. (36) and (15)



Maulana Bhashani repeatedly and publicly claimed that the similarity in appearance of the two forces was deliberate and was a cover for the use of Indian forces in Bangladesh if and when Mujib required them.<sup>59</sup> And the *Holiday* editor, Enayetullah Khan, under the caption

'The Face of Terror' labelled the JRB as

an instrument of counter-revolution on which even the indigent ruling group has no control. It is an extension of the CRP (Central Reserve Police of India) [intended] to safeguard an obliging government of the Indian ruling class and the expansionist interests of Indian sub-imperialism [sic].<sup>60</sup>

The *Bahini* was also described as being "controlled and directed by the Indian Establishment...for the purpose of the containment of a national democratic revolution".

Third, by 1974, people had started spontaneously to resist the JRB's abuse of power that resulted in many deaths on both sides. The League Government chose to overlook the excesses committed by the JRB and condemned the general deterioration of law and order in the country as the work of anti-Bangladesh elements. Instead of curbing the *Bahini's* powers that would have gone a long way in restoring public confidence in the Government, the President's Order no. 21 that had established the *Bahini* was further amended in 1974 giving it extensive arbitrary powers.<sup>61</sup> What followed next were confiscation of property of anyone under suspicion; arrests without warrants; kidnappings; arbitrary killings in the name of law and order; thuggery of all sorts; and so on. The final result was a force that was above the

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59. The Hindu, 8 March 1973, p. 9

60. The Holiday, 13 May 1973

61. See Jatiyo Sangsad, Official Proceedings, 4th Session, 10th Sitting, 28 January 1974, pp. 515-541

law and that often presented itself as a virtual parallel government answerable to no one. The country's internal security deteriorated to such an extent that it greatly contributed to Mujib's decision in January 1975 to amend the 1972 Constitution and institute a one-party dictatorship under his direct control. But the *Bahini* was not disbanded.

Among the casualties was the Indo-Bangla relationship. Although the people had become wise to the fact that the JRB was not an Indian para-military force or composed of Indian personnel as was preached by certain sections of the anti-Awami League forces in the country, it was, however, not possible for them to decouple the activities of the JRB from its initial training in the hands of Indian security personnel;<sup>62</sup> and the Army was convinced that the *Bahini* was set up deliberately to control and contain it.<sup>63</sup> Though the *Rakkhi Bahini* had turned into a Frankenstein's monster as a consequence of distortions within the political system, the Indian Government's original brief association with it was enough for certain sections of the society to fault Indo-Bangladesh relations.

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62. Similar views were expressed by many of the former League officials interviewed: Ruhul Quddus, S.A. Karim, Abdur Rahim, private secretaries to Mujib etc.

63. Credibility was lent to this Army belief by Brigadier Nuruzzaman, commander of the *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini* who reportedly argued against the acceptance of several tanks that Anwar Sadat wanted to give Mujib as a token of Egypt's friendship for Bangladesh. Nuruzzaman argued that those tanks would destroy the power balance between the *Bahini* and the Army. But Mujib had to accept the gift. Ironically, these same tanks were used in the coup that slaughtered Mujib, his family and the top echelon of the Awami League. Source: confidential Army source and one of Mujib's secretaries.

Another issue, alluded to before, that appeared considerably to affect the security perceptions of the Indian leaders, was the possibility of the resurgence of religious forces in Bangladesh. Immediately after independence, a primary foreign policy goal of the League Government was to seek the country's rightful place in the comity of nations through securing wide and swift recognition of its sovereign existence. Since the objective conditions prevailing at the time placed the country in the Indo-Soviet axis, the leadership was all the more aware of the need to gain early recognition from the Muslim bloc. Being itself a Muslim nation, it was as much a psychological and emotional necessity as a political and diplomatic one, and therefore it was politically inevitable that the Government would at some time have to take a stand on the issue of membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

According to then Foreign Secretary Karim, the Indian leaders were against this:

When initially the question came up of joining the Islamic Conference they made a special plea to us that we should not try to join it. The reasoning was that...this would give encouragement to the reactionary forces within the country. My personal view was different. In fact I told Prime Minister Mujib that India herself tried to become a member of the Islamic Conference, but she could not get in because of her tactical mistake of sending a Sikh as representative to the Conference, which gave Pakistan a very good opportunity to point out that India was not only not a Muslim country, the [Muslim] minority had no say...64

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64. Interview, op.cit. (4)



As pointed out earlier, the Indian concern was quite understandable since the resurgence of religious forces could tilt Bangladesh towards Pakistan and tilt the balance of forces within the country towards a rejection of secularism. But Indian concerns did not deter Bangladesh from seeking recognition from the conservative Muslim states like Saudi Arabia. By late 1973 Bangladesh sent special emissaries to Muslim countries to secure its recognition. For instance, President Chowdhury, after he resigned from the Presidency in December 1973, was made Mujib's personal emissary to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia. As a result of these intensive diplomatic activities, Pakistan, which hosted the Second Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore in February 1974, was forced to send an invitation to Bangladesh to participate in the Conference.

While the diplomatic activity and the negotiations (through Foreign Ministers of Muslim countries) leading up to Bangladesh's participation in the Conference would be a separate study in itself, suffice it to say here that those opposing Bangladesh's formal membership in the Conference, namely the pro-Indian Tajuddin group, insisted that Mujib should first consult with India and also stop in New Delhi on his way to Lahore. Mujib upheld the views of those in the Cabinet who rejected this line of thinking. ✓ After the Cabinet decision to go to Lahore, a telegram was handed over to Mr. Dixit of the Indian High Commission informing India of Bangladesh's decision.<sup>65</sup> And, according to one Indian newspaper, "The Sheikh had

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65. This account was gathered from interviews with two private secretaries, Secretary Abdur Rahim, Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain, and the then Director, South Asia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dhaka, 1985. Some insight into this debate is provided by the Far Eastern Economic Review, 25 March 1974 p. 26

talks with Mrs. Gandhi on the telephone last night soon after he decided to go to Lahore".<sup>66</sup> This was of course seen as a great victory by certain political forces in Bangladesh, who interpreted it as an indication that Mujib was frustrated with India and therefore Indo-Bangladesh relations would no longer dictate Bangladesh's other external relations.<sup>67</sup> ✓

## VI

Conclusion: The purpose of this chapter has been to highlight India's awareness regarding the defence and security of the eastern half of the subcontinent. Though Indian leaders had always asserted a preminent right in the subcontinent's defence and security affairs, it was not until 1971 that India was able, for the first time, to force the issue and effect a realignment of power within the region to its advantage. A consolidation of that changed balance of power was indispensable to India's acquired preeminence in the region, and it was this need that dictated India's Bangladesh policy.

The Indian leaders not only made it possible for a smooth transition to power for the Awami League, they were also prepared to deal with the postwar security contingencies in Bangladesh. Their plan for the *Mukti Bahini* called for the latter's surrender of weapons and immediate involvement in national restoration activities. This had important implications for the country's law and order situation and the League's economic reconstruction

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66. The Hindu, 24 February 1974, p. 1

67. Interview, op.cit. (36)

programme. Their plan for the Bangladesh Army called for a token force, capable only of meeting internal security threats. They also tried to deny the repatriated Army personnel any role in the new country as a precautionary measure against military dictatorship. They preferred to keep Bangladesh from joining the Islamic Conference in order to avoid the resurgence of religion-based politics in Bangladesh. While there are indications that the Tajuddin Cabinet would probably have gone along with these, upon his return Mujib took a more assertive position.

Given India's involvement in the war, it was perhaps natural that the Indian leaders would try to 'guide' the defence and security policies of the new Government in a direction best suited to their interests. The logic of their new position in the subcontinent required stable, *status quo* governments in their periphery. Their ideal preference would have been a government totally responsive to India's foreign policy and defence policy needs, but given the evolution of political forces within Bangladesh, they were willing to settle for an independent and militarily secure Bangladesh. At the least, they favoured a viable democratic government.

Nevertheless, from the very beginning there were limits to India's influence. Its leaders had anticipated the post-natal security problems that Bangladesh would face and had worked out their solutions, but were unable to influence the League Government to implement them. For instance, P.N. Haksar, in keeping with the Indian defence establishment's solution for "the risk of militarism" in Bangladesh, had urged Mujib not to reinstate the repatriated Bengali military personnel into the Bangladesh armed services, but



Mujib did not oblige the Indian Government.

If the size of the Bangladesh armed forces was kept in check, it was primarily because the prevailing sentiment within the governing party desired so. That this was also the desire of the Indian Government merely suggests interests in tandem but not Indian influence. If the *Mukti Bahini* officers gained control of the Bangladesh Army, which was what the Indian Government also desired, it was because of the support they mustered from within the governing party, the opposition parties and other urban interest groups; this, again, had little to do with India influencing the outcome.

When Indian interest required that a Bangladeshi brigade be placed under Indian command to assist India in its counter-insurgency operations in the eastern states, Mujib refused to oblige. Yet, Bangladesh was able to regain from the Indian Army the Chinese-made weapons surrendered by the Pakistan Army, despite D.P. Dhar's objections and the unwillingness of the Indian defence establishment. ~~India also failed to prevent Bangladesh from joining the Organiza-~~tion of the Islamic Conference. Mujib did not consult Indira Gandhi prior to his decision to attend the Lahore Summit as was assumed under Article 4 of the treaty. Mujib also decided not to stop in New Delhi on his way to Lahore, though the Tajuddin lobby strongly argued for the necessity of such a gesture to the Indian Government.

All these would suggest that India failed noticeably to influence Bangladesh on matters important to Indian national interests. Bangladesh seems to have been able to assert its position, even though on a number of occasions it was contrary to Indian interests.

Ironically, Bangladesh's overriding significance in India's regional security policy gave Mujib a considerable latitude in asserting his country's interests. Thus, India's perceptions of its long-term goals had much to do with Mrs. Gandhi's 'soft' attitude towards the League Government.

From the standpoint of influence theory, a number of important determinants were present. Since a realignment of power in the sub-continent was the ultimate goal of the Indian Government, it could not remain complacent about Bangladesh's defence and security policies, lest these negated that goal. The Indian Government could not predict with any degree of certainty what the security policy of a sovereign Bangladeshi Government might be, because, while the political elites of Bangladesh had consistently fought against the military dictatorships in Pakistan, it did not necessarily follow that they would be against a strong professional standing army of their own. To obviate this latter possibility, it became necessary for the Indian Government to try to influence the size, shape and goal of the Bangladesh military.

In addition, to preserve the League Government in power, it felt the need to train a *Mujib Bahini* that could in future be used by the pro-Indian ruling party; to reduce the damage potential of the anti-Indian forces in the country, it took away the surrendered weapons, as well as tried to stop Bangladesh from joining the OIC; and to reduce the chances of a military dictatorship in Bangladesh, it tried to persuade Mujib not to take back into the Bangladesh Army the repatriated military personnel.

On the other hand, the need to defend sovereign prerogatives required the Bangladesh Government to attempt to minimize as much as possible the effects of India's attempts to influence preferred outcomes in Bangladesh. Since the issue of national security and its wider manifestations were equally crucial to both countries, the operation of an influence process became extremely likely, thereby validating the influence theory.



## Chapter 7

## DEFINING THE BORDERS

It may be assumed that after a country obtains independence, a primary consideration of its leaders is to have secure frontiers with its neighbours. In the case of Bangladesh, though its border delimitation was incomplete, the League Government nonetheless felt its territorial sovereignty to be secure because Bangladesh was surrounded by friendly India. The League Government was in no hurry to raise it for discussion because it was not seen as an issue of immediate importance.

The signing of the Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty had formalized the existing relations between the two Governments. The League Government was aware that for the friendship treaty to be meaningful, Indo-Bangladesh relations would have to be free of tension and conflict, and a primary task, then, would be to identify all areas of outstanding dispute between the two countries. It appears that the boundary delimitation did not fall into this category; rather, it was more of an area of potential conflict, not requiring urgent attention.

The negotiations on land border delimitation, maritime border delimitation and oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal are the subjects of this chapter, at the end of which some tentative conclusions on influence relationship will be attempted.

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Land Border Delimitation: While the land border agreement between India and Pakistan followed largely the Radcliffe Award of 1947, some areas of the boundary between India and East Pakistan remained undemarcated from as far back as 1952. It would be reasonable to expect that after Bangladesh's independence, an early resolution of the undemarcated border areas, which would have politically benefited both Governments, would have been attempted, but no mention was made of the border issues either in the jointcommuniques issued at the end of Mujib's visit to Calcutta in February 1972 and Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Dhaka in March 1972, or in the communiques issued at the end of several foreign ministerial visits in 1972 and 1973.

It is not exactly clear when the border talks started, but the first official acknowledgement of mutual effort to resolve this outstanding issue was made in June 1973. Then Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain declared in Parliament that

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work has started on the delimitation of the West Bengal-Bangladesh border. Already the Indian Government has given us full cooperation in this undertaking and has promised us full cooperation even in future.<sup>1</sup>

This delimitation exercise essentially consisted of defining the border more accurately at certain points and of completing the demarcation of the land boundary in areas left undemarcated. By the beginning of 1974, this exercise ran into difficulty over the issue

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1. Jatiyo Sangsad, Official Proceedings, 2nd Session, 16th Sitting, 22 June 1973, p. 590

of enclaves,<sup>2</sup> thus requiring the direct intervention of the two Prime Ministers.

The issues were finally resolved with considerable difficulty during the Prime Ministers' summit in May 1974 in New Delhi. Under the new border agreement signed on 16 May 1974, the exchange of enclaves provided Bangladesh with 110.44 sq. km. of territory and India with 49.17 sq. km., with a net gain for Bangladesh of over 61 sq.km.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty was with the Berubari enclave in the northwestern border of Bangladesh. It had a majority Hindu population, while the Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves on the adjacent Indian side had a majority of Muslims. According to the agreement, the southern half of Berubari and the adjacent enclaves were given to India in exchange for the Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves that were given to Bangladesh. India also agreed to "lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh an area of 178 metres x 85 metres near 'Tin Bigha' to connect Dahagram with Panbari Mouza of Bangladesh".<sup>4</sup> This upheld the general rationale of the Radcliffe Award in which border areas with predominantly Hindu population were ceded to India and areas with predominantly Muslim population were awarded to Pakistan.

Perhaps the most important gain for Bangladesh was that the Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and the Bangladesh enclaves in India

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2. Though the Indo-Bangladesh border agreement gave no specific figures, according to one estimate, there were 129 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 80 Bangladesh enclaves in India. Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta Bengali daily), 16 May 1974 p. 5
  3. Ibid., 23 May 1974, p. 5
  4. Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, External Publicity Division, Bangladesh Documents, vol. 2, no. 4, (April-June 1974), p. 15



were exchanged "without claim to compensation for the additional areas going to Bangladesh".<sup>5</sup> Article 2 of the agreement provided that the "territories in adverse possession in areas already demarcated...shall be exchanged within six months of the signing of the boundary strip maps by the plenipotentiaries", and Article 3 provided that "when areas are transferred, the people in these areas shall be given the right of staying where they are, as nationals of the State to which the areas are transferred". Article 5 required that the Instruments of Ratification should be exchanged as early as possible.<sup>6</sup>

Though Bangladesh emerged as the beneficiary in the border talks with India, these negotiations were in fact so difficult that they almost stymied the success of the summit itself. While it was relatively easy to reach other agreements on transportation, commercial relations and economic and technical cooperation, the more important issues of water sharing and border delimitation at first proved particularly elusive. But both the Prime Ministers were painfully aware of the need to break the stalemate on these important issues, since failure to resolve them would be construed as failure of the summit, which would add to their failure in handling the volatile domestic political situations that obtained in both the countries at the time. The Ganges water sharing issue was relegated to the Joint Rivers Commission as a temporary face-saving measure. When the border issue continued to prove intractable, Mujib, finding no way out of this quagmire, made an extraordinary

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5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 16

gesture. According to a Bangladesh Foreign Ministry official who participated in these discussions:

He told Mrs. Gandhi that Bangladesh was only 55,000 sq. mls. in area while her country was vast. *Bangabandhu* then picked up his pen and gave it to Mrs. Gandhi asking her to go ahead and draw the border as it pleased her. Mrs. Gandhi just sat there. We got what we wanted.<sup>7</sup>

Kamal Hossain, who participated in that meeting, put it slightly differently:

In the land boundary talks, he [Mujib] got his points accepted on the three key sticky points by taking the stand that you have so much territory and we are so squeezed in terms of land space that when it is a matter of a few square miles, the benefit of the doubt should be to Bangladesh...indeed that is how those points were resolved in our favour.<sup>8</sup>

The members of the Bangladesh delegation were understandably pleased with the bilateral agreement on the boundary issue. One senior Foreign Ministry official recalled with a sense of accomplishment:

Some of these undemarcated areas had precipitated military incidents in '65, '68 and '69 ...Many disputed areas were given to us. The famous Asalong Mouza came to us without firing a pop gun.<sup>9</sup>

The then Bangladesh High Commissioner to India remembered: "we were able to secure the Pathoria hilltop which our Army wanted for strategic reasons".<sup>10</sup> And the Director General of Survey was emboldened

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7. This account was given to the author by a Foreign Ministry official who had been part of the negotiating team during the summit in May 1974 in New Delhi. It was further corroborated by other officials in the Ministry and by one of Mujib's private secretaries. Confidential interviews in New Delhi (May 1985), Dhaka, (July-August 1985), and Canberra (June 1986)
  8. Interview in Dhaka, July 1985
  9. Confidential interview in Dhaka, 22 July 1985
  10. Interview in Dhaka, 31 July 1985

enough to remark, "we could have gotten more because Mrs. Gandhi was soft towards us".<sup>11</sup>

If the League Government was pleased with the outcome of the summit meeting, the reaction in the Opposition benches in Parliament was less than happy. The territorial gains registered in the boundary agreement with India were not sufficient to overshadow the concern in the Opposition benches at the Government's decision to hand over South Berubari to India. It appears that the League Government did not take any early initiative to brief the leaders of the Opposition on the details of the negotiation, particularly on the issue of the transfer of South Berubari. Given the Awami League's overwhelming majority in Parliament, it is quite likely that the Government did not give any serious thought to briefing the Opposition on the issue, since there was no chance of the agreement not being ratified.

There may be two possible explanations for this, both historical. Arrogance of the majority party has been part of Bangladesh's legacy. Almost all governing parties in Pakistan and Bangladesh had come to power with overwhelming mandates, popularly acquired or otherwise, which gave them an ersatz sense of power over all other parties. The resulting arrogance tended towards the disregard of elementary standards of parliamentary courtesy and decency, and, at times bordered on parliamentary tyranny.

The second factor has been the tendency among all governing parties to view the opposition parties as enemies of the state and

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11. Told to the author by the then Bangladesh High Commissioner to India. Ibid.



therefore incapable of desiring anything good for the country. This self-arrogated monopoly over patriotism, more often than not, scuttled all possibilities for inter-party dialogue, and the opposition parties were never taken into confidence unless the very survival of the governing party necessitated it. On both scores, the League appeared to be no different from its predecessors.

The leader of the Opposition, completely in the dark about the nature of the negotiations, argued that not even the anti-Bengali Pakistan Government had yielded an inch of East Pakistan's territory to India. In general, the Opposition members attacked the League Government for betraying Bangladesh's territorial sovereignty. There was some opposition to the border agreement outside of Parliament also. Maulana Bhashani, while addressing a political rally by the United Front that comprised several parties, condemned the transfer of South Berubari to India.<sup>12</sup> The National Socialist Party, describing the agreement as an infringement of Bangladesh's sovereignty, argued that since South Berubari was not a disputed area,<sup>13</sup> the League Government had no right to include it in the negotiations or to transfer it to India without a referendum on the issue.<sup>14</sup> The *Jatiyo Gono Mukti Union* comprising dissenting factions of various parties and groupings also urged the Government to rescind its decision regarding South Berubari.<sup>15</sup>

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12. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 14 June 1974, p. 5

13. India had earlier agreed with Pakistan to turn Berubari enclave over to it. Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, "Strategy of a Small Power in a Subsystem: Bangladesh's External Relations" Australian Outlook vol. 34, no. 1, 1980, p. 88

14. Bangladesh Times (Dhaka), 19 May 1974, p. 1

15. Ibid., p. 8

While the League Government could afford to disregard the latter's condemnation because of its relative political ineffectiveness, it could not remain complacent in the face of the condemnation by the JSD and NAP-B, because of their growing political appeal to the people at the time when the League Government was being universally discredited for the massive political, economic and social disharmony in Bangladesh. This lack of confidence in the Government tended to diminish its achievements at the summit meeting, particularly on the border talks, and even lent some credibility to the Opposition's accusation that the country's territorial sovereignty had been tampered with.

If the Opposition accused the League Government of bad faith, there is some indication that it may have been justified, for the transfer of South Berubari to India may have been more than purely a *quid pro quo* in the negotiations. It seems that Mujib may have also had a political motive in this territorial transaction. Noted the Bangladesh High Commissioner to India at the time:

I asked Mujib about Berubari. He said Berubari is very dangerous because there are many communists there and they are all Hindus. They are politically subversive and contrary to our national interests. Against that, said Mujib, I want Dahagram where 80 percent are Muslims.<sup>16</sup>

It is not clear whether this was the centrist, anti-communist Mujib speaking, or merely a *post facto* rationalization by Mujib to soothe ruffled nationalist feeling, but the willingness to transfer an undisputed area to India did put the Government in a bad light. It was compounded

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16. Interview, op.cit. (10)

further by the failure of the Indian Parliament to ratify the agreement, although the Union Cabinet had ratified it on 31 May 1974.<sup>17</sup>

The ratification of the agreement by Bangladesh was a foregone conclusion, given the overwhelming majority of the Awami League in the Parliament. The process of ratification was expedited by a suit filed against the League Government by a Bangladeshi citizen, questioning the Government's authority to transfer South Berubari to India.<sup>18</sup> The Bangladesh High Court held the view that it was well within the Government's constitutional prerogatives to negotiate on the country's territory, and advised the Government to put it through as a constitutional amendment. The agreement was finally ratified and South Berubari duly transferred to India.

Various reasons have been given to explain India's failure to ratify the border agreement. One Foreign Ministry source explained that the difficulty was with the 'Tin Bigha' corridor that would connect Dahagram with Bangladesh. The Indian Parliament was not convinced that transit rights would be necessary or that an underpass or an overpass would do.<sup>19</sup> Another Foreign Ministry official pinned the reason on Mujib's downfall; ratification did not come about because of the Indian Government's displeasure with the military takeover in Bangladesh.<sup>20</sup> And Foreign Minister Hossain's view is:

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17. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1 June 1974, p. 1

18. According to one inside source in the Foreign Ministry, the suit was the brainchild of the League Government itself to force India to ratify the agreement as soon as possible. But this could not be corroborated.

19. Confidential interview in Dhaka, July 1985

20. Confidential interview in Dhaka, July 1985



The land boundary agreement was favourable to us and that is why it has been difficult for India to move towards implementation. You do also run into certain constitutional and administrative snags...If there was no discontinuity in the Government in Bangladesh then we could have probably achieved implementation of that agreement within six months to a year.<sup>21</sup>

Since Mujib had secured a border agreement favourable to Bangladesh by insisting on Mrs. Gandhi's magnanimity, there is little reason to doubt that implementation would have followed soon thereafter. The fact that the border agreement to this day has not been ratified by India speaks convincingly of the special sensitivity Mrs. Gandhi displayed towards Mujib's concerns. On the maritime boundary negotiation, it was however a different story.

## II

Maritime Boundary Negotiation: The first official pronouncement of the limits of Bangladesh's jurisdiction over territorial waters was made on the day the Pakistan Army surrendered in East Pakistan, 16 December 1971. The Home Minister in the Government-in-Exile, A.H.M. Kamaruzzaman, announced that the "territorial waters of Bangla Desh extend into the sea to a distance of 12 nautical miles measured from the appropriate baseline".<sup>22</sup> But what was the "appropriate baseline" was left unannounced.

The issue of maritime boundary delimitation was not seriously discussed in the League Government until early 1974. One reason for

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21. Interview, op.cit. (8)

22. The Hindu, 17 December 1971, p. 9

this delay may be that it was not yet an issue of contention between India and Bangladesh, because Bangladesh had not made its claims known. It should be remembered that this was the time when global negotiations on the law of the sea were taking place, and no universal declaration had as yet emerged. Thus, as a part of the law of the sea negotiations, the issue of maritime boundary delimitation was in a state of flux.

The League Government sought the advice of a maritime law expert from Stanford University regarding Bangladesh's jurisdictional claim. The Law professor was of the opinion that the Bangladesh coastline was unstable and that the low water mark, which usually indicates a country's baseline, was totally unrecognizable. He suggested that due to the presence of these unique coastal features, Bangladesh should adopt the argument presented in the Anglo-Norwegian Fisheries Case and declare the ten fathom line on the Admiralty Chart as its natural baseline. On the basis of this recommendation, the League Government enacted legislation declaring the ten fathom line as the country's natural baseline and published it in the official gazette.<sup>23</sup>

Soon thereafter, in November 1974, the Indian Government sent a protest note to the Bangladesh Government saying that the latter's claim of jurisdiction over territorial waters cut into twenty-one miles of Indian territory.<sup>24</sup> What followed next were five rounds of

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23. This account was given by the Foreign Ministry official who was in charge of the spadework leading to the Government's announcement of its maritime legislation. Interview, op.cit. (9)

24. Financial Times (London), 22 November 1974. Also, interview, ibid.

negotiations, much of them technical, between November 1974 and May 1975 to resolve this conflicting claim.

The dispute involved three aspects. First, the Indian Government was in favour of the equidistance principle which called for certain types of base points from which the median line would be drawn. Such an approach denied Bangladesh a large portion of what it considered to be its territorial waters. Bangladesh found to its advantage the principle laid down in the North Sea Continental Shelf (NSCS) case, the principle of equitable delimitation. In the NSCS case involving Holland, Denmark and West Germany, the equidistance principle was rejected as the basis for delimiting the continental shelf because the terrain was such that it acted unduly to the detriment of West Germany, cutting off a very large part of what West Germany might legitimately expect, given its conception of an equitable basis for delimiting the continental shelf of the three states.

The West German Government had done a global exercise identifying situations where a territory would be disadvantaged by peculiar geographical configurations and where the equidistance principle would be prejudicial to that territory. In its memorial to the International Court of Justice, the West German Government had identified twelve situations similar to the one faced by it, and, interestingly, one was the case of East Pakistan *vis-à-vis* India. The Bangladesh Government, arguing that long before Bangladesh had come into being this difficulty had been anticipated, pressed from the start the principle of equitable delimitation in contrast to the equidistance principle.<sup>25</sup>

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25. This account was detailed by Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain. Interview, op.cit. (8)



The second issue was the question of base points, and the method of defining a baseline. Whereas internationally the low water mark along the coastline is normally taken to be the baseline, the League Government argued that this was inappropriate for Bangladesh because its coastline constantly shifted on account of the continuous formations at the mouth of the two rivers that emptied into the Bay of Bengal. In the absence of identifiable fixed land points, the Government argued for the ten fathom line on the Admiralty Chart as the baseline. If the Indian Government could be made to accept this, it would greatly enhance Bangladesh's territorial waters.

The third issue was the question of sovereignty over the island of Talpatti, or New Moore Island as the Indians call it. This was one of those formations that was emerging from the water and was first noticed in 1971; it was submerged for part of each year.

Talpatti is located directly south of the Hariabanga River that forms the southernmost boundary between the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh. The mainstream of the Hariabanga River, as it empties into the Bay, splits into several currents and the crux of the problem was agreeing on which of these currents was the continuation of the mainstream. The current which the Bangladesh Government claimed to be the mainstream flowed southward in the Bay and passed west of the island, thus suggesting Bangladesh's sovereignty. The current claimed by India to be the continuation of the mainstream passed east of the island, suggesting Indian sovereignty. The issue could be resolved only by a complicated hydrological exercise, and this resulted in highly technical discussions.

In the course of the five rounds of discussions over a six month period, substantial progress was made. The Indian Government accepted the Bangladeshi Government's dynamic coastline argument and the ten fathom line on the Admiralty Chart as the appropriate base-line of Bangladesh,<sup>26</sup> though the reason for this change of position is unknown. One can only conjecture that Mrs. Gandhi may have appreciated the merit of Bangladesh's case. Be that as it may, the initial grey area of over three thousand square miles was reduced to an area of about two hundred square miles over which discussion continued until an impasse was reached. As Foreign Minister Hossain recalls it:

You know how these boundary negotiations take place. You have a line, the other side gives a line, and in between is the triangle of disagreement and the whole effort of the negotiation is to narrow down the area of disagreement ... [At the last stage] we were beginning to think in terms of friendly arbitration as has been done between Britain and France for the Channel Islands and Canada and the US in the Gulf of Maine...Neutral arbitration gets both sides off the hook and that is where we were going. We were making progress, tangible progress, from month to month.<sup>27</sup>

Another round of talks was scheduled for the second half of August when Bangladesh officials hoped to cut the Gordian knot, but by then the League Government had fallen.

### III

Oil Exploration in the Bay of Bengal: The right to explore for oil in a certain area in the Bay of Bengal also became a bone of contention between the two Governments. A paper on Bangladesh's petroleum resources and its exploitation was prepared under the guidance of Kamal Hossain and discussed in a Cabinet subcommittee sometime in

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26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

late 1973. The recommendations in the paper were adopted as Government policy and Hossain was given the additional portfolio of Petroleum Minister.<sup>28</sup> Once the League Government decided to go ahead with oil exploration in its territorial waters, it became necessary to enact legislation regarding those waters and to declare the limits of the economic zone. Thus it was the desire for petroleum exploration in the Bay that triggered the need to enact maritime legislation.

While this process was underway, the Government began negotiation with foreign oil companies. Exploration contracts were awarded to six companies: three American (Union Oil, Atlantic Richfield, and Ashland Oil); a Canadian subsidiary of an American company (Canadian Superior); a Japanese consortium (Japan Petroleum Development Corporation); and a Yugoslav company that got a very small share. The enactment of legislation on territorial waters was followed by India's protest note mentioned earlier. The area of contention straddled India's eastern maritime boundary, the same zone that was apportioned to Ashland Oil by Bangladesh.<sup>29</sup>

While the other oil companies proceeded with their work, Ashland Oil, acting under the advice of the US State Department, opted to delay its preliminary work of shooting the seismic lines until the dispute between India and Bangladesh over this zone was satisfactorily resolved. The decision was powerfully reinforced by the intervention of an Indian naval ship in the area.<sup>30</sup>

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28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.



According to Mujib's private secretary at the time, Mujib was annoyed at this Indian naval flag-showing. He was equally upset at Ashland Oil's decision not to start work because, as he argued, this in itself weakened Bangladesh's claim over the territory. Mujib wanted Ashland Oil to commence work immediately and was prepared to show the Bangladesh naval flag if necessary.<sup>31</sup>

According to the then Bangladesh High Commissioner to India:

[External Affairs Minister] Swaran Singh called me to his office and said you have leased out areas to US companies without negotiating the maritime boundary...I came to Dhaka and went to Mujib's office in *Gonobhaban* where there was a map. When I raised the issue, Mujib showed me the various seas around India with a stick in his hand and asked why Mrs. Gandhi wanted so much. He admitted that the boundary was unresolved. He asked me to explain it to Mrs. Gandhi that we have already taken money from the oil companies and now we could not possibly back out of the contracts...When I told Mrs. Gandhi about it, she exclaimed: imagine my position in Parliament!<sup>32</sup>

The issue could not be resolved without settling the border dispute because, as Swaran Singh pointed out: "if oil is struck then the two countries might fight over it in the event that the boundary remains unresolved".<sup>33</sup>

But it appears that both Governments were aware of the fact that if an oil discovery was part of some continuous geological feature that straddled an international boundary or a defined grey area, then precedents for maritime agreements on joint exploration or

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31. Confidential interview in Dhaka, 15 July 1985

32. Interview, op.cit. (10)

33. Ibid.

sharing of the resource between contiguous countries existed. Such was the case between Britain and Norway, Australia and Indonesia, and Japan and South Korea. According to Kamal Hossain, an "embryo of this idea was being floated on the Indian side", and "around July [1975] or so there might have been an informal indication from the Indian side that this could be an option". The League Government was also open to this suggestion, but since the issue was intimately linked to the maritime border dispute, the Government was rapidly moving towards the option of a third party determination on the maritime boundary delimitation issue. The next round of negotiations scheduled for 18 August 1975 never took place, as all negotiations came to a standstill with the collapse of the League Government.

## IV

Conclusion: It cannot be said with any degree of certainty whether raising the issue of border delimitation in the halcyon days of Indo-Bangladesh relations would have brought different results, though it can be said that the years 1974 and 1975, when this issue was discussed, were hardly propitious. By then, the banned religious parties had resurfaced under different labels and repatriation of stranded Bangladeshis in Pakistan had been completed. These two developments, *inter alia*, strengthened the anti-Indian forces within the country,<sup>34</sup> and from then on politics

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34. Even as early as November 1972, Pakistan had released a large number of religious fanatics and members of the *Jama'at i Islam* from among the stranded East Pakistanis to create a fifth column in Bangladesh. Also, the advance delegation sent to Bangladesh to prepare for Bhutto's visit there was headed by the Chief of Pakistan's national intelligence service. At

was far more vocalized than ever before. Under these circumstances, the League Government could not be seen to be yielding to India on any bilateral issue.

But Mrs. Gandhi had better options. Since, at the time, India's internal political developments had little reference to its external relations, Mrs. Gandhi had a relatively free hand in foreign policy, and could have chosen to be tough on Bangladesh. But she adopted a flexible stand in the border negotiations because a successful conclusion of the summit, even at the expense of certain concessions, was to her immediate political benefit and to India's long-term gain.

On the land boundary, basic agreements had been reached in the earlier negotiations between the Pakistan and Indian Governments, and the difficulty was mostly with Bangladesh's insistence on getting the benefit of the doubt. But in the case of the maritime boundary, the formation of the island of Talpatti and the complex technical exercise regarding the mainstream of the Hariabanga River were relatively recent phenomena which complicated the issue. Nor was it helped by the Bangladesh Government's unilateral decision to hand out exploration contracts to foreign companies before the maritime boundary was defined bilaterally.

Mujib seemed to be less concerned with legal arguments and emphasized more the principle of equitable distribution. In both cases, Mujib's stand was that India had so much land and seas that

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the conclusion of Bhutto's visit, the Pakistan Government sought an extension of stay for its intelligence chief. Both these developments contributed to the strengthening of the anti-Indian forces in the country. The Bangladesh Government was annoyed on all counts. Interview, op.cit. (9)



it should be magnanimous towards Bangladesh. Mujib quite successfully played the role of a dejected ally, and, by doing so, elicited the desired response from Mrs. Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi had not only yielded to Mujib's arguments on the land border issue, she also seemed to have been persuaded by Mujib's position on the oil exploration issue. It is interesting to note that her reaction to Mujib's stand on the oil contracts was only that she had been put in a tight spot in Parliament. This would suggest that India was willing to make concessions to maintain the friendship of an important ally, indicating perhaps an influence relationship in the reverse order. But this was possible only during direct dealings between the two Prime Ministers. The discussions on the maritime boundary did not reach the level of Prime Ministerial talks. This would indicate that while an influence relationship may have operated at the highest personal level, it did not operate at the regular government level.

One of the determinants of influence theory is "the perception on the part of A's decision-makers that A and B are, or will be, in a relationship of significant interdependence, and that B's future behaviour consequently could well be such as to exercise either a harmful or beneficial impact on A". This seems to have been foremost in Mrs. Gandhi's mind during her summit with Mujib in May 1974. By that time, relationship between the two countries had become considerably less intense due to a number of factors, the resurgence of rightist politics being one. It was necessary to try to accommodate Mujib, and so Mrs. Gandhi yielded ground in the land boundary negotiations because it was a relatively less

important issue. But where issues had greater national significance, such as the sharing of the Ganges waters, or the delimitation of the maritime boundary in an area where oil could be struck, the above calculation did not hold. Neither party could afford to compromise on important national issues, lest it lost electoral support.

In terms of influence theory, two points are to be noted here; first, the influence process tended towards becoming frigid with the gradual lessening of intensity in bilateral relations; and second, influence did not operate when the party's mandate to govern was at stake.

Chapter 8

CONFLICT OVER THE SHARING OF THE GANGES WATERS

In addition to the unresolved borders, Bangladesh inherited the problem of sharing the waters of the Ganges - an international river that traverses through India and Bangladesh and empties into the Bay of Bengal. Despite four experts' level meetings and five secretaries' level meetings held between India and Pakistan in the 1960s, no permanent settlement on the issue was reached.<sup>1</sup>

After Bangladesh became independent, both the Indira and Mujib Governments had high hopes that the water issue would be finally laid to rest; yet, even as late as 1975 a long-lasting amicable solution was nowhere in sight. A final solution to the problem of sharing the waters of the Ganges had yet again proven elusive. Though there was an interim agreement of sorts in April 1975, in the minds of the public in Bangladesh and in India, particularly West Bengal, there was a widespread feeling of frustration and bitterness. By then the water issue had become so politicized that it became increasingly difficult to separate fact from fiction and the people were wont to believe that their worst suspicions regarding the other side were confirmed.

What was at the root of the problem of water sharing? Why did the Indira and Mujib Governments fail to solve it? What were

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1. For details of these meetings, see B.M. Abbas, The Ganges Water Dispute, Dhaka: The University Press Ltd., 1984, pp. 16-28



the conflicts of interest? Were there any false expectations?

The examination of these queries form the substance of this chapter. However, first, two things are in order: a brief description of the Ganges basin to provide familiarity with the geographic setting of the problem, and a word about the Farakka Barrage itself which was central to the dispute between the two countries.

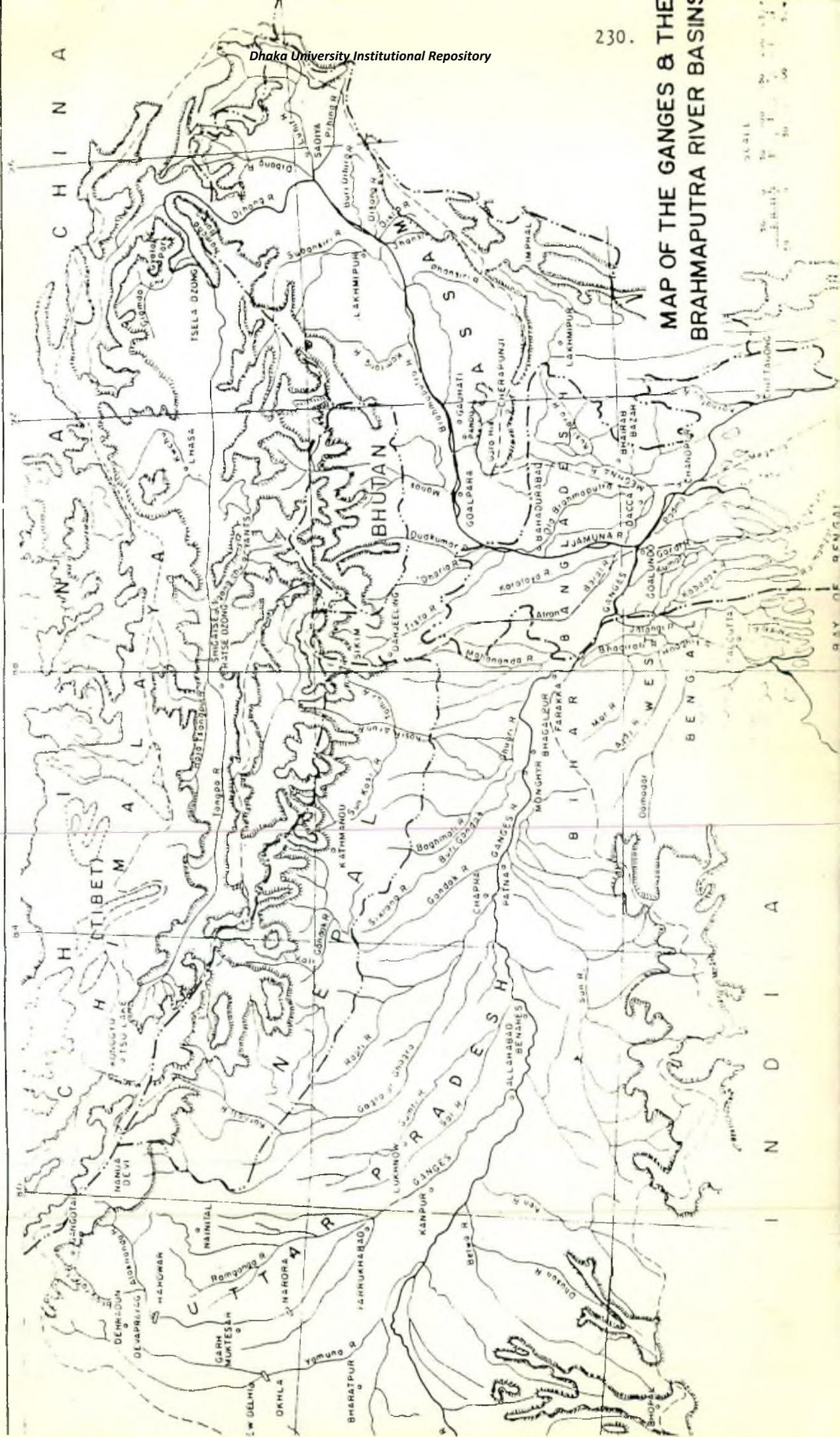
### The Ganges Basin

The Ganges is one of the largest rivers in the world and the longest and holiest in India. Its headwaters spring from the Gangotri glaciers some 23,000 feet high in the southern slopes of the Himalayas, in the northwesterly direction from New Delhi. Known as the Bhagirathi river in its initial, short southwesterly run, it changes over to a southeasterly direction over half its course and then flows in an easterly direction across northern India until it reaches the border with Bangladesh.

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It is fed by a number of tributaries originating in the Himalayan slopes of Tibet, Nepal and India. Of the major tributaries, the Karnali, the Gandak and the Kosi originating in Nepal together contribute seventy-one percent of the dry season flow of the Ganges and forty-one percent of its annual flow.

As the Ganges approaches the Indian state of West Bengal, the river swings southward towards the delta. A short distance before it enters Bangladesh, it splits into two channels. The smaller, again known as the Bhagirathi, continues southward becoming in its lower reaches the Hooghly on which is situated the port of Calcutta.



MAP OF THE GANGES & THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER BASINS

C H I N A

T I B E T

N E P A L

I N D I A

B H U T A N

P A K I S T A N

B A N G L A D E S H

B I H A R

B E N G A L

Scale

0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles

0 10 20 30 40 50 Kilometers

0 10 20 30 40 50 Nautical Miles

0 10 20 30 40 50 Statute Miles

0 10 20 30 40 50 Kilometers

0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles



The main channel enters Bangladesh and forms the boundary between India and Bangladesh for about 130 kilometres. Then it flows southeasterly for another 110 kilometres before joining the Brahmaputra-Jamuna and takes the name Padma. Further downstream the Padma joins the Meghna and continues as the lower Meghna until it empties its waters into the Bay of Bengal.

#### The Farakka Barrage

At Farakka, about 250 kilometres north of Calcutta and 18 kilometres from the Indo-Bangladesh border, the Indian Government, in 1970, completed the construction of a barrage with the intention of diverting a proportion of the flow of the Ganges down the Hooghly-Bhagirathi. It was the objective of the Indian Government to increase the flow in the Hooghly River so that the tidal inflow of silt in its lower estuarine reaches could be flushed away to maintain access from the Port of Calcutta to the sea.

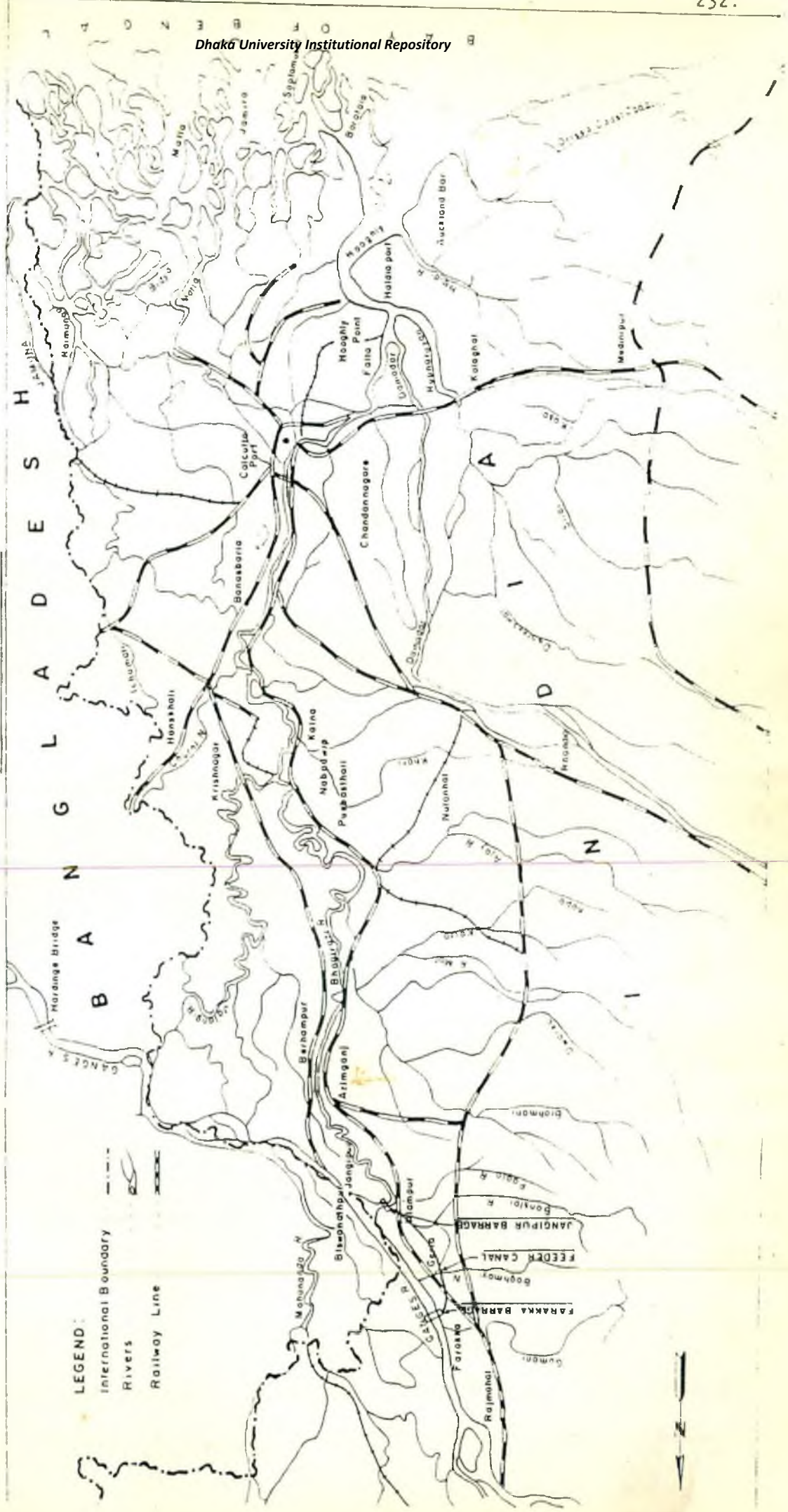
This provoked a dispute between India and Pakistan. Pakistan maintained that such transfers of water would be at the expense of the flow in the main channel, on which was dependent the agriculture, ecology and economy of one-third the territory of the eastern province. Pakistan insisted that if the barrage were completed and commissioned, it would throttle East Pakistan's economy; therefore, India should, in advance, agree to an equitable apportioning of the Ganges waters so that East Pakistan's current and future water needs were guaranteed. India rejected these contentions.

After 1971 the Bangladesh Government became party to this dispute.



# MAP SHOWING THE FARAKKA BARRAGE AND ITS FEEDER CANAL, BHAGIRATHI - HOOGHLY AND OTHER RIVERS

SCALE 1 INCH = 16 MILE



**LEGEND:**

- International Boundary
- Rivers
- Railway Line

Prior to independence, the Awami League, the main opposition party to the Pakistan Government, had blamed not only India, for causing permanent damage to the ecology and economy of East Pakistan by constructing a barrage across the Ganges, but also the Pakistan Government for its callous disregard of the concerns of the East Pakistanis. This was highlighted in its 1970 Election Manifesto:

The criminal neglect of the earlier government has allowed the Farakka Barrage to become a *fait accompli* resulting in grave and permanent damage to the economy of East Pakistan. Every instrument of foreign policy must be immediately utilized to secure a just solution to this problem.<sup>2</sup>

The issue was raised for the first time between Bangladesh and India during Mujib's visit to Calcutta in February 1972. According to the Joint Statement:

The two Prime Ministers emphasized that the geography of the region provided a natural basis for cooperation...They discussed the problem of flood control, Farakka Barrage and other problems.<sup>3</sup>

During Mrs. Gandhi's first state visit to Dhaka from 17 to 19 March 1972, the water issue was incorporated into the friendship treaty signed between the two countries. Article 6 of the treaty stated that the two Governments "agree to make joint studies and take joint action in the fields of flood control, river basin

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2. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Bangladesh Documents, vol. 1, 1971, p. 81
  3. Satish Kumar ed. Documents on India's Foreign Policy 1972, Delhi: Macmillan, 1975



development and the development of hydro-electric power and irrigation".<sup>4</sup> It must be noted, however, that there is less than unanimity that the reference in the treaty to the water issue was included to highlight its special significance in Indo-Bangla relations. In a dissenting opinion, S.A. Karim, the then Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, stated that

certain senior members of the Government were conscious of the fact that such a treaty could be misconstrued as a defence arrangement with India. The idea of injecting the water issue into the treaty was to dilute whatever military tone there was.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the reasons for its inclusion in the body of the treaty, the fact that it gained mention in the treaty and the joint communique - two important documents pertaining to the state visit - would in itself lend credence to its special significance.

It was also agreed that a Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) would be formed "on a permanent basis to carry out a comprehensive survey of the river systems shared by the two countries...so that the water resources of the region can be utilized on an equitable basis for mutual benefit of the peoples of the two countries".<sup>6</sup>

This was an important step towards the resolution of the Ganges water dispute because it created for the first time a formal forum in which bilateral technical discussion could be held that would pave the way for political discussions to follow. What was of greater significance still was that by not raising the issue of the

4. The full text of the treaty is given in Appendix I

5. Interview in New York, 27 March 1985

6. Bangladesh Documents, vol. 11, op.cit. (2), p. 644



construction of the barrage and the purpose it was intended to serve, the Bangladesh Government appeared to concede the fact that India had the right to construct and use the barrage. In return, India conceded that the Bangladesh Government had the *locus standi* to negotiate the sharing of the waters with India. This was no mean achievement considering the fact that in 1968 the Indian Irrigation Minister, K.L. Rao, had declared in the *Lok Sabha* that "after all Ganga river is an Indian river".<sup>7</sup>

Eight months later, on 24 November 1972, the Statute of the JRC was formally signed and adopted by the two Governments. According to Article 4 of the Statute:<sup>8</sup>

- (1) The Commission shall have the following functions in particular:
  - a) to maintain liaison between the participating countries in order to ensure the most effective joint efforts in maximizing the benefits from common river systems to both the countries;
  - b) to formulate flood control works and recommend implementation of joint projects;
  - c) to formulate detailed proposals on advance flood warnings, flood forecasting and cyclone warnings;
  - d) to study flood control and irrigation projects so that the water resources of the region can be utilized on an equitable basis for the mutual benefit of the peoples of the two countries; and
  - e) to formulate proposals for carrying out coordinated research on problems of flood control affecting both the countries.
- (2) The Commission shall also perform such other functions as the two Governments may, by mutual agreement, direct it to do.

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7. Lok Sabha Debates, 26/7/68, 54, 18, col. 2080

8. The full text of the Statute of the JRC is given in the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission, Record of Discussions of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission, Dhaka, May 1985, pp. i-iii; also given in Appendix 4.

It is important to note that its terms of reference did not include the Farakka issue, and Article 7 of the Statute stated that "all meetings shall be closed meetings unless the Commission desires otherwise".

In the third week of January 1972, B.M. Abbas, Advisor to the Prime Minister, went to New Delhi to discuss the Ganges issue. During his talks with various senior members of the Indian Government, the Indian perception of things was clearly laid before him. The Indian External Affairs Minister, Sardar Swaran Singh

laid stress on flood control rather than irrigation. He wanted Bangladesh to take coal for setting up power stations and saw possibilities of our supplying power to India from the east... He enquired about utilization of our gas and production of fertilizer.<sup>9</sup>

Farakka was not mentioned. Principal Secretary P.N. Haksar's concerns were more political. He tried to impress upon Abbas the need for

joint action by India and Bangladesh to avoid future complications. He said outside experts and aid were not necessary or desirable...and expressed himself against any third-party involvement [regarding the water question] <sup>10</sup>

While Singh and Haksar would only stress the theme of interdependence, Abbas was able to raise the Farakka issue with the Irrigation and Power Minister, Rao. Though these talks resulted in a list of cooperative ventures that the two countries could undertake on water-related issues, there was no public statement on the Farakka issue itself. On his return from India, Abbas told newsmen at the

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9. Abbas, op.cit. (1), p. 30

10. Ibid., p. 31

airport that "he was offered fullest cooperation by the Indian government and he was satisfied".<sup>11</sup>

On 26 April 1972, Rao came to Dhaka to discuss with his counterpart, Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed, the statute of the proposed JRC and the possibilities of cooperation on issues relating to water and power sectors. During this visit, agreements on advance flood warning and power development were signed,<sup>12</sup> but the crucial issue of the actual amount of the Ganges water that would go to each country was again sidestepped; it was left for the two Prime Ministers to decide. But, Rao told newsmen at Calcutta airport that "all doubts and misgivings of the Bangladesh authorities...had been removed".<sup>13</sup>

The first meeting of the JRC was held in New Delhi on 25-26 June 1972. The main issues on the agenda were flood control, river training works in the border rivers and river development works in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna system. Nothing substantive came out of this meeting, but for the first time bilateral talks were held in which the Brahmaputra-Meghna system, which covered more than half of Bangladesh and was outside the purview of the Indo-Pakistan talks in the 1960s, was integrated with the Ganges system, giving the Government of India a toehold in the plans for the two major rivers of the eastern region of the subcontinent.

Two and a half months later, on 16 August 1972, Rao made a statement in the *Lok Sabha* on the Farakka Barrage that caused

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11. Bangladesh Observer (Dhaka), 29 January 1972, p. 1

12. The Hindu (Madras), 1 May 1972, p. 7; 3 May 1972, p. 8

13. Ibid., 1 May 1972, p. 7



considerable consternation in the Bangladesh Government. In it he announced "a programme of experiments on the navigational requirements of the Hooghly with varying discharges from the Ganges beginning with a flow of 40,000 cusecs [volumetric unit of flow equal to a cubic foot per second]".<sup>14</sup> What caused Rao to make his statement is not clear, but there are some indications from the Indian press that during this time political leaders of West Bengal had begun lobbying the Union Government over their share of the Ganges water. It was reported that the Chief Minister of West Bengal had returned to Calcutta from week-long talks in New Delhi with an agreement on the operation of the Farakka Barrage. According to this agreement:<sup>15</sup>

- a. the feeder canal of the barrage would be completed by December 1973;
- b. for five years after that 40,000 cusecs could be diverted from the Hooghly and, for the following two years, the diversions would be varied experimentally;
- c. at the end of seven years there would be a review.

Whatever the basis of this press report, it was enough for Bangladesh officials, particularly those who had been in the Pakistan negotiating team on the Ganges water talks with India, to be wary of the intentions of the Indian Government. The matter was raised by Abbas in his meeting with Rao on 13 September 1972 in New Delhi. Rao's response was: "One of your very important persons, not Sheikh Mujib but near to him, had told Madam [Mrs. Gandhi] that 10,000

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14. Abbas, *op.cit.* (1), p. 33

15. Times of India (New Delhi), 2 and 15 August 1972

cusecs will be enough for Bangladesh".<sup>16</sup>

This revelation would suggest at least two things: that certain senior members of the Bangladesh Government might have been predisposed to securing friendship with India, or at least removing bilateral tension, at any cost; and that Abbas did not enjoy the confidence of a section of the Government he served since he was not previously aware of what Rao told him, even though the Prime Minister himself had appointed him as advisor to the Government and chairman of the JRC. A more intriguing suggestion would be that there were already splits in the Bangladesh Government on the tenor of relations with India.

The JRC met for the second time in Dhaka on 28-30 September 1972 and again in New Delhi from the 11 to 13 December 1972. During these meetings, there was no mention of the Farakka issue nor any mention of the proportion of water that each country was entitled to. In the fourth meeting held on 29-31 March 1973, Abbas expressed the difficulties that Bangladesh faced in planning its water programme in the absence of a precise knowledge of India's water use plan in the upper reaches of the Ganges. Abbas also raised the issue of augmenting the dry weather flow in the Ganges to meet the long-term irrigation requirements of India and Bangladesh by constructing dams in the head reaches of the tributaries feeding the Ganges. He alluded to the need for Nepal's participation in the JRC talks, on the grounds that appropriate sites for dams and reservoirs were to be found only on tributaries feeding

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16. Abbas, op.cit. (1), p. 33

the Ganges and lying in the territory of Nepal. The Indian side ignored the suggestion.<sup>17</sup>

It was only in the sixth meeting held in Dhaka from 8 to 10 November 1973 that there was some unanimity of opinion in the Commission on "an inventory of storage possibilities in the upper reaches of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra", though Nepal was not mentioned.<sup>18</sup> The Commission, however, recommended that "possibilities of storage dams in the upper reaches of the rivers in Sikkim and Bhutan should also be examined".<sup>19</sup>

In keeping with the Joint Declaration of 19 March 1972 of the two Prime Ministers to hold regular consultations between the two Governments, the Planning Commissions of the two countries met in Dhaka on 22 May 1973 to review, *inter alia*, the work of the JRC. In between these meetings, Mostaque raised with Dhar the issue of Rao's statement in the *Lok Sabha* on the diversion of Ganges water to the Hooghly. Dhar replied that making the statement without the prior consent of the Bangladesh Government was "inadvertent" and assured him "that the earlier understanding between the Governments on Ganges waters stood".<sup>20</sup>

But the damage to the spirit of Indo-Bangla relations was

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17. Record of Discussions, *op.cit.* (8), pp. 17-18

18. Ibid., p. 27. That Summer India's Irrigation Minister, K.C. Pant had conceded that: "8 districts of Bangladesh would be turned into 'desert' if the Farakka Barrage went into operation as originally planned". Far Eastern Economic Review 2 June 1974, pp. 50-51.

19. Ibid.

20. Abbas, op.cit. (1), p. 34



already done. Those in the Bangladesh Government and outside who took a hard line on the development of amicable relations with India found new grounds for suspecting India's motives on the sharing of the Ganges waters. For instance, two months later, Mostaque, one such hardliner, prior to leading a Bangladesh delegation to India told a news conference in Dhaka that with the building of the Farakka Barrage the water flow would be "dangerously curbed", and warned that "a decision needs to be taken at the highest political level".<sup>21</sup> Judging from the general sense of the news conference, it would appear that Mostaque's message was meant as much for the Indian leadership as for Mujib and his pro-Indian colleagues in the Cabinet.

Mostaque's hawkish public posture did cause concern in New Delhi. Mrs. Gandhi appointed Swaran Singh, India's Minister for External Affairs, as the leader of the Indian team instead of Rao, who was Mostaque's counterpart in the Indian Cabinet. It signified India's willingness, for the first time, to raise the talks from the technical to the political level. Mrs. Gandhi herself granted an half-hour meeting to Mostaque.

These talks between Mostaque and the Indian Government were the most important to that point because of the significant political concession that Bangladesh had won from India: "The two sides further agreed that a mutually acceptable solution will be arrived at before operating the Farakka Barrage".<sup>22</sup> It was the first public

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21. The Hindu, 11 July 1973, p. 6

22. Lok Sabha Debates, 31/7/73, 39, col. 127

commitment by the Indian Government that it would not act unilaterally regarding the commissioning of the Farakka Barrage.

Mostaque kept up the pressure on the Indian Government. In his statement before the *Jatiyo Sangsad* he said that the

winter discharge from the Ganges is limited. As a result, any diversion such as at Farakka will adversely affect our irrigation scheme, riverine transport, pisciculture, water content and salinity of our soil.<sup>23</sup>

The Indian Government's commitment was reaffirmed seven months later in February 1974 when Swaran Singh visited Dhaka.<sup>24</sup>

From 28 February to 2 March 1974, the JRC met for the seventh time, but the Farakka issue was not, as usual, part of its agenda. Despite the pious intentions expressed in the meetings between the senior members of the two Governments, neither Government saw it fit specifically to instruct the JRC (under Article 4, Clause 2 of its Statute) to discuss the crucial issue of the formula for sharing the waters of the Ganges and make recommendations for Governmental consideration; thus it continued to remain outside the ambit of the JRC.

Understandably, the image of the JRC suffered. While there were expressions of public dissatisfaction in Dhaka and even rumblings among some junior members of the Commission,<sup>25</sup> in India the *Times of India* editorialized:

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23. *Jatiyo Sangsad, Official Proceedings*, 4th Session, 3rd Sitting, 17 January 1974, p. 74
24. Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, External Publicity Division, *Bangladesh Documents*, vol. 2, #3, January-March 1974, p. 19
25. Confidential interviews with senior members of the JRC in Dhaka in July 1985

The issue has been handled ineptly so far. Instead of getting the Commission to assess the discharge of the river in different seasons and the extent of the replenishment at different points, another infructious [sic] attempt was made to evolve a solution based on the previous data.<sup>26</sup>

II

The year 1974 turned out to be particularly crucial for Bangladesh. In its early months the Government was preoccupied with a number of critical issues: attempts to secure UN membership in the face of a Chinese veto; participation at the Islamic Conference in Lahore even though Pakistan and the conservative Muslim states like Saudi Arabia had not recognized Bangladesh; negotiations on the prisoners of war issue and on the war crimes trial of 195 prisoners. Added to these was the forthcoming summit with Mrs. Gandhi at which, it was widely assumed, the Farakka issue would figure prominently.

From the account given by Abbas, Mujib was inclined to accept a modest share of the Ganges water:

He told me that he was contemplating an agreement on the sharing of Ganges water and mentioned a figure he had in mind. I strongly protested against this and said that the figure was too low. He then said that he would again discuss this with me after reaching New Delhi.<sup>27</sup>

But after Mujib arrived in New Delhi, on 12 May 1974, he informed Abbas the following day that "he had decided not to compromise on the water question and he had said this to Mrs. Indira Gandhi".<sup>28</sup>

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26. Issue of 21 February 1974, 'Indo-Bangladesh Water Studies'.

27. Abbas, op.cit. (1), pp. 34-35

28. Ibid.



What made Mujib change his mind is not known. Besides, there is no supporting evidence to corroborate Abbas' account that suggests that Mujib's views on water sharing actually hardened once he reached New Delhi. Be that as it may, the summit was not a disaster by any account. But, that an agreement on the equitable sharing of the Ganges water could not be reached merely drove home the point that there existed a genuine conflict of interest between the two Governments on this issue. Paragraphs 17 and 18 from the Joint Declaration highlight this dilemma:<sup>29</sup>

The two Prime Ministers took note of the fact that the Farakka Barrage Project would be commissioned before the end of 1974. They recognized that during the periods of maximum flow in the Ganga, there might not be enough water to meet the needs of the Calcutta Port and the full requirements of Bangladesh and, therefore, the fair weather flow of the Ganga in the lean months would have to be augmented to meet the requirements of the two countries...It was, accordingly, decided that the best means of such augmentation...should be studied by the Joint Rivers Commission.

For the first time the Indian Government publicly admitted that "there might not be enough water to meet the needs of the Calcutta Port and the full requirements of Bangladesh". When in 1968 the Pakistan Government had made a similar claim to safeguard the interests of East Pakistan, Rao had dismissed it as nonsense.<sup>30</sup> Six years later, the Joint Communique of the Prime Ministers' talks implicitly recognized Bangladesh's right to an equitable claim to the waters of the Ganges. Also, for the first time the JRC was called into the picture and charged with the responsibility of studying

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29. Record of Discussions, op.cit. (8), p. 56

30. Lok Sabha Debates, 26/7/68, S4, 18, col. 2080

"the best means of such augmentation through optimum utilization of the water resources of the region available to the two countries".

The JRC met a number of times in 1974. In its tenth meeting in Dhaka from 29 August to 2 September 1974, the Commission was able to agree on a formula: that the available seventy-five percent dependable flow at Farakka could be taken as 55,000 cusecs. But there was no agreement on the water claims of the Calcutta Port and of Bangladesh.<sup>31</sup> On the possibilities of augmenting the Ganges flow, C.C. Patel, India's chief negotiator in the JRC, argued that Abbas' proposal of building storage facilities in the upper reaches of the Ganges was infeasible because "most of the existing storages which cover some seventy percent of the total possibilities are already built or are being built and their waters are being used or will be used"; further storage possibilities on the Ganges are limited. Instead, he proposed the building of a Ganges-Brahmaputra canal which would augment the Ganges flow by a minimum of "15,000 to 20,000 cusecs just by connecting the Ganga at Farakka with the Brahmaputra".<sup>32</sup> Abbas disagreed; he argued that there were very good possibilities of storage in the Ganges basin able to meet the shortages in the dry weather flow in the Ganges, and that Bangladesh would not be able to consider other means of augmentation until the question of storage in the Ganges basin had been studied exhaustively.<sup>33</sup> These positions were carried through into the next two JRC meetings in November 1974 and January 1975. The disagreement, by then, was so

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31. Record of Discussions, op.cit. (8), p. 56

32. Ibid., pp. 41-42

33. Ibid.

intense that whereas the *Record of Discussions* of each meeting covered on the average six pages, that of the twelfth meeting (31 December - 7 January 1975) was only half a page.

While these and other talks were going on at various levels between the two Governments, it appears that they were closely watched by the World Bank. According to Kamal Hossain, in 1969 the Bank had expressed its interest on the Ganges dispute to an East Pakistani opposition leader, and had encouraged a mutual solution to the problem. Similar contact was made in 1972 with the Bangladesh Government.<sup>34</sup> In August 1973 Finance Minister Tajuddin Ahmed, after attending the meeting of the Committee of Twenty of the IMF in Washington.D.C., had detailed discussions with World Bank president Robert McNamara about the possibility of an Indo-Bangla joint venture for flood control and water resources development along the lines of the sharing of Indus Basin water resources by India and Pakistan. Talking to newsmen at the airport on his arrival in Dhaka, Tajuddin said that McNamara had assured him of World Bank assistance for any project that would benefit India and Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup>

On its own, the World Bank had commissioned studies to evaluate the total water supply of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin and to examine the possibility of maintaining or even augmenting the low flow of the rivers during the lean period. These studies

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34. Interview with Ben Crow on 3 January 1979. See, Ben Crow, The Politics and Technology of Sharing the Ganges, Ph.D. Thesis at the University of Edinburgh, 1980, p. 132

35. Bangladesh (a fortnightly news bulletin), Washington, D.C.: Embassy of Bangladesh, vol. 3, #15, 24 August, 1973, pp. 1 and 4.



also examined the need and the possibilities for international cooperation between the countries situated in the river basins.<sup>36</sup>

The final report recommended the establishment, under UN auspices, of a five-nation (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan) Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Coordinating Committee. Nothing much was heard of that report, nor did the World Bank consider involving itself in the bilateral dispute. However, after the 1974 summit between the two leaders, the resident representative of the World Bank in Dhaka, Leonard Weiss, conveyed to the Bangladesh Government a message from McNamara on the Bank's readiness to provide technical assistance and, if necessary, even to mediate between the two disputants.<sup>37</sup> But Mujib, aware of India's unyielding position regarding third-party involvement in bilateral disputes, did not or could not show any interest in the message.<sup>38</sup>

After the fiasco at the twelfth meeting of the JRC in January 1975, Mujib decided to send Rab Serneabad, Flood Control, Power and Irrigation Minister since April 1974, to New Delhi for talks with Jagjivan Ram, the new Indian Irrigation and Agriculture Minister. But that meeting too was unfruitful.

In early April the Indian Government sent a message to the Bangladesh Government stating that it had become necessary to test

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36. M. Maasland, Water Development Potentials of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna River Basins, World Bank, Special Projects Department, Washington, D.C. August 30, 1972 (with revisions February 12, 1973), p. 1; cited in Crow, op.cit. (34), p. 132

37. Abbas, op.cit. (1), p. 38

38. Ibid.

the feeder canal - linking the Farakka Barrage on the Ganges to the Jangipur Barrage on the Bhagirathi - during the coming dry season, and suggested that joint observations might be made on the effect of the withdrawals at Farakka on Bangladesh and on the Hooghly. Immediate meetings were held within the Ministry of Flood Control and then with Mujib. Of the seven points placed before Mujib for his consideration, the three crucial ones were:<sup>39</sup>

- a 'test' run meant commissioning the barrage
- allocation of water would have to be agreed to before the feeder canal can be allowed to operate
- no joint study of the effects of withdrawals should be agreed to as it would only mean prolonging the issue of equitable share of the Ganges water leading to further disputes.

But the participants in that meeting were in for a surprise; after considering those points, Mujib declared that he had already agreed to the feeder canal operations and to the joint investigation of the effects.<sup>40</sup> What remained to be settled was how much water would be allowed for the Hooghly.

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On the next day, 16 April 1975, Jagjivan Ram arrived in Dhaka for talks on the issue of the withdrawals at Farakka. After much difficulty the two Ministers were able to agree on a figure. The accord announced on 18 April 1975 in the form of a joint press release stated that while discussions on the allocation of fair weather flows of the Ganga during lean months will continue, the feeder canal would be test run according to the following schedule:<sup>41</sup>

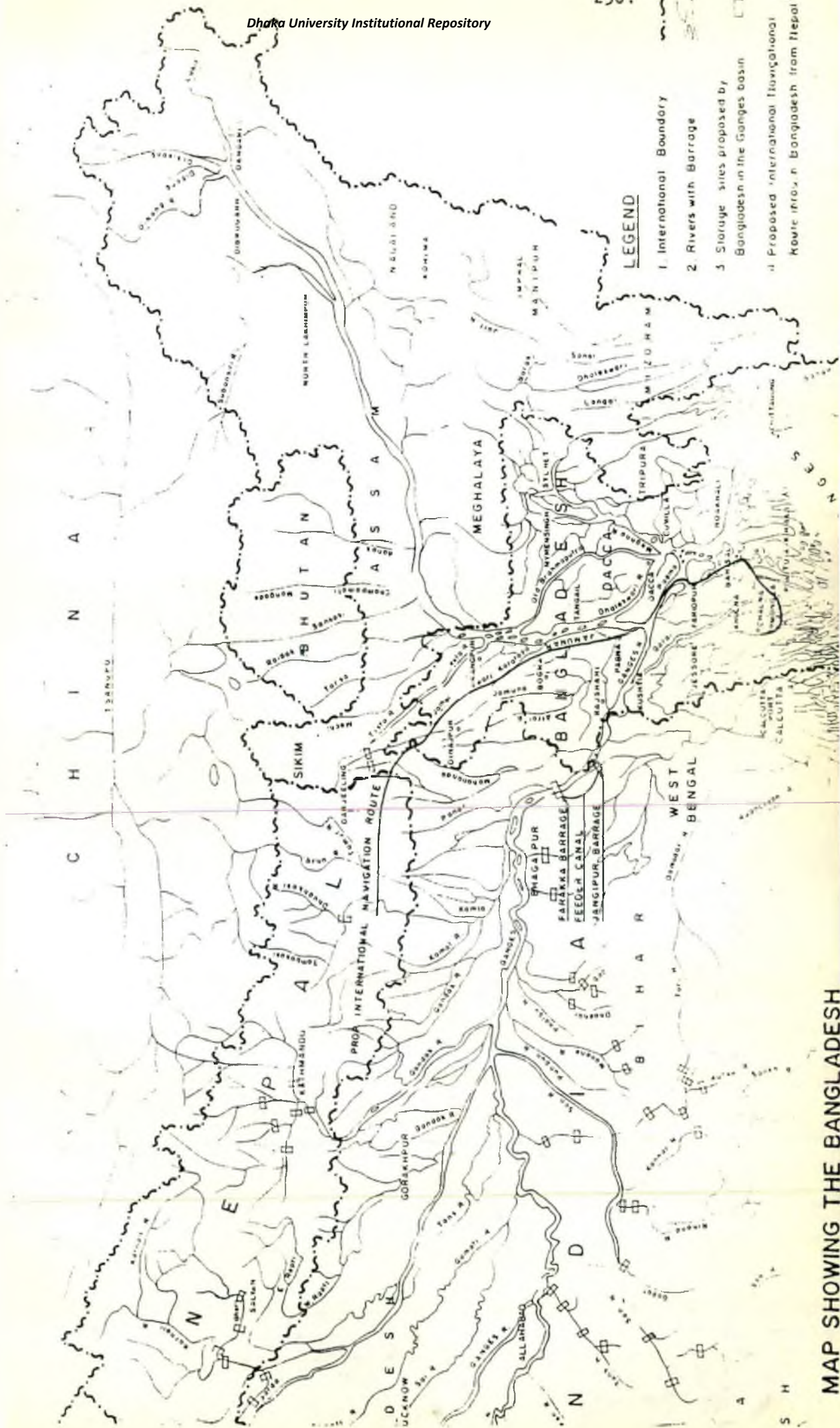
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39. Ibid., p. 40

40. Ibid.

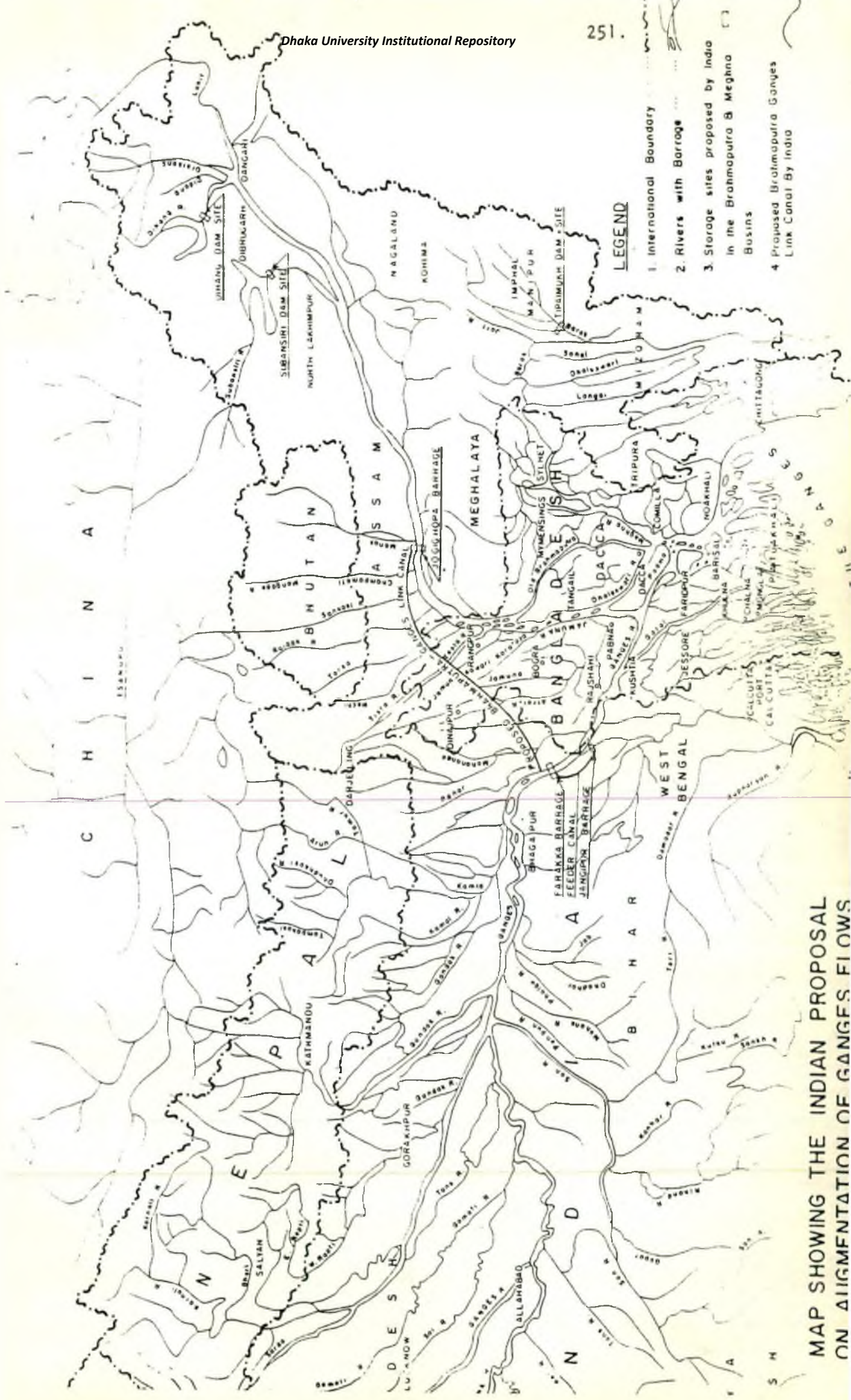
41. Record of Discussions, op.cit. (8), p. 51





MAP SHOWING THE BANGLADESH





**LEGEND**

- 1. International Boundary
- 2. Rivers with Barrage
- 3. Storage sites proposed by India in the Brahmaputra & Meghna Basins
- 4. Proposed Bratmaputra Ganges Link Canal By India

MAP SHOWING THE INDIAN PROPOSAL ON AUGMENTATION OF GANGES FLOWS

canal proposed by India - but each side rejected the other's proposal. The meeting ended inconclusively. No further progress was registered that year as domestic political crisis shook Bangladesh.

## III

It was the Indian contention that there was already insufficient water to irrigate the 150 million acres of irrigable land in the Ganges basin.<sup>44</sup> Even if the flow in the Ganges could be augmented by building storages in upper India and in Nepal, as the Bangladesh proposal suggested, India would not like to release this augmented flow because of the potential need upstream. To concede that storages built in the upper reaches could augment the flow would necessarily mean that the downstream co-riparian state could legally demand its share. Thus the policy was, and is, to deny the very fact that augmentation could be achieved to any significant degree through storages.

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On the other hand, the Indian side saw great merit in linking the Brahmaputra to the Ganges through a canal across northwest Bangladesh so that some Brahmaputra water could be transferred to the Ganges. If Bangladesh accepted this proposal, there would be a windfall for India for the following reasons. First, building a link canal between the two rivers across the territory of Bangladesh would be considerably cheaper and an easier engineering undertaking, because, otherwise, it would have to be built against the natural gradient of the land and would require a complicated system

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44. Record of Discussions, op.cit. (8), p. 42



of locks and pump houses. Second, a link canal would allow a cheaper and a more efficient transportation route than that now existing between West Bengal and Assam.<sup>45</sup> Third, from India's security point of view, the canal would afford it efficient and fast movement of men and materiel to its northeastern and eastern states.

The Bangladesh Government conceded that India would in future require more water than is presently utilized for its irrigation purposes, but contended that the potential for augmenting the Ganges flow is so vast that the irrigation needs of India and Bangladesh and water needs of Calcutta Port could all be met. However, Bangladesh also insisted that to optimize the flow in the Ganges, Nepal would have to be approached since most of the suitable sites are located there. The Indian Government has insisted that a third party cannot be brought into the picture because the Farakka issue is a bilateral one and thus the solution to it would also have to be bilateral. Bangladesh has insisted that if a comprehensive approach to the development of the total water resources of the region is desirable, as India acknowledges, then Nepal, with almost all its territory in the Ganges basin, must be a part of the collective endeavour.

At least two reasons for India's objection to Nepal's participation may be suggested. First, India wanted to keep Bangladesh out of the picture and reach its own agreements with Nepal to maximize its gains. As post-1975 events show, that is precisely what

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45. The Hindu, 3 December 1971, p. 8



happened.<sup>46</sup> Second, Nepal must be kept out of the JRC because of the Indian "fear that Nepal might be the Chinese Trojan Horse".<sup>47</sup>

For its part, Bangladesh has also refused to consider the merits of the Indian proposal for at least three reasons. First, India would retain control over the link canal because the barrage to be built on the Brahmaputra to regulate the flow of water to the Ganges would be built in Indian territory. With the barrages at both ends of the link canal lying in India, Bangladesh would have relatively little control over the canal's use. Should India decide to divert increasingly more water from the Brahmaputra to the Ganges to meet its own demands, northern and central Bangladesh, which mostly depend on the Brahmaputra waters, would face the same problems as the southwest areas of Bangladesh were now facing because of the Farakka Barrage. Once again Bangladesh would be at the mercy of India.<sup>48</sup> Second, the construction of the canal across northwest Bangladesh would mean the loss of thousands of hectares of valuable agricultural land. With problems of overpopulation and insufficient foodgrains already at crisis points, Bangladesh could not afford to lose any irrigable lands. Third, there was a general feeling within informed circles in government and outside, that by insisting on the link canal India was telling Bangladesh, in effect, to forget about the waters of the Ganges.<sup>49</sup> Because of these

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46. Confidential interview with a JRC official in Dhaka, 8 July 1985

47. Confidential interview with a senior Bangladesh Foreign Ministry official in Dhaka on 5 August 1985

48. Interview with the editor of a Bengali newspaper in Dhaka who wishes to remain anonymous. July 1985

49. In the many interviews I conducted in June-August 1985, this emerged as a general resentment against India.

considerations, the League Government, as indeed have all subsequent Governments, found it impossible to entertain the Indian Government's link canal proposal.

This, however, does not mean that the Indian and Bangladeshi proposals have received unanimous support in their own countries. Regarding India's link canal idea, there was only lukewarm support from the Government of West Bengal. As one Bangladesh official explained it:

The West Bengal Government has also realized that the Ganges waters would not be forthcoming because of the callous ways the waters are being withdrawn in the upper reaches in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Since they would not get the required amount of the Ganga waters, they were forced to lend support to the Union's link canal approach. This was the Union's way of forcing West Bengal support for the link canal.<sup>50</sup>

The Assamese reaction to the link canal proposal, moreover, has been one of suspicion as to the motives of the Union Government. According to a JRC member in Dhaka:

Regarding the link canal the Assamese leaders have all along opposed it because they want their needs to be taken care of first. The Assamese suspect that the Union Government is less interested in their welfare and would use the Brahmaputra waters as a political weapon against them.<sup>51</sup>

Newspaper reports and studies by the Assam Institute of Development Studies confirm the above interpretation.<sup>52</sup>

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50. Interview with an official of the Ministry of Irrigation and Flood Control in Dhaka on 27 June 1985

51. Interview, op.cit. (25)

52. The Assam Tribune (Guwahati, India), 22 July 1981; 17 March 1982; and 14 May 1982

With regard to Bangladesh's proposal to India, there has been some disagreement among influential individuals in Bangladesh. They have challenged the premise that Nepal would always take a sympathetic attitude towards Bangladesh, and have pointed to the fallacy of considering Nepal a permanent ally of Bangladesh. In the words of Rehman Sobhan, a senior member of the Bangladesh Planning Commission in the Mujib Government and currently Chairman of the influential Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies:

B.M. Abbas' arguments that storage tanks in Nepal would be beneficial for Bangladesh is debatable. Nepal being under Indian control we would be permanently under Indian control regarding getting our share of the waters. His suggestion for reservoirs in Nepal can be against Bangladesh's interests. 53

Notwithstanding the above, the question still remains: given the importance of the issue in the context of bilateral relations, why was it not tackled urgently at the highest political level?

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 IV
 

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On the Bangladesh side, keeping the Farakka issue outside the JRC appears to have been a deliberate policy. According to Sobhan:

For a long time the question of Ganges water sharing was kept out of the JRC because Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed wanted it so. Mostaque preferred to deal with it personally. Only when he was removed and Serneabad became the Irrigation Minister did the water issue come up for mutual discussion in the JRC framework. 54

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53. Interview in Dhaka on 9 June 1985

54. Ibid.



This may be so, given Mostaque's hardline attitude towards India. Then the question arises, Why was Mostaque given the portfolio of Irrigation and Flood Control? Given Mostaque's political biases, Mujib should have been aware of the slim chances of any progress in the Farakka issue. Unfortunately, neither Mujib nor Tajuddin is alive to answer this question. Mostaque has refused to be interviewed, and one can rely only on secondary sources. According to Government officials connected to the water issue, because Mostaque was a strong defender of Bangladesh's interests his appointment made it certain that Bangladesh would be able to make an effective presentation of its case. This expectation would seem to be borne out by the fact that it was during the Mostaque-Singh talks in New Delhi that the Indian Government made a public commitment that the Farakka Barrage would not be commissioned without prior agreement on the equitable apportionment of the Ganges water.

But partisan political concerns also seemed to be present.

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Enayetullah Khan, editor of the leftist weekly *Holiday*, recalls that:

Mostaque was keeping the issue alive for political reasons...He was trying to make...his career out of it. He had almost capitalized on it. The tussle between Mujib and Mostaque was not ideological. There was potential rivalry. Only two people could historically have challenged Mujib: Tajuddin Ahmed and Mostaque.<sup>55</sup>

Whatever the case, by 1974 the gradual deterioration in Indo-Bangla relations forced Mujib to replace Mostaque with Serneabad in the

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55. Interview with Ben Crow, op.cit. (34), p. 142

Ministry. Apparently, Mostaque himself believed that he was transferred because he was "too hard on Farakka".<sup>56</sup>

Besides Mostaque, the other hardliner was Abbas, who was chairman of the Commission and who had represented Pakistan in the water talks in the 1960s; he too was seen as an obstacle to the talks. According to one of his colleagues in the JRC:

One would have to admit that Mr. Abbas perhaps found it hard to change his ideas and views on the water issue. In retrospect, perhaps he was a bit hard on the negotiations.<sup>57</sup>

Another colleague commented that the "Indians did suggest casually why Bangladesh had chosen Mr. Abbas who was used by Pakistan".<sup>58</sup> And according to Ruhul Quddus, Mujib's Principal Secretary:

I suggested to Mujib that the water problem should be solved as early as possible. But Abbas kept the water problem alive and continued to politicize it. So the water talks failed because of a conspiratorial approach and administrative bungling. But Mujib never believed that Abbas had any *mala fide* intentions.<sup>59</sup>

Whether there was any "conspiratorial approach" could be a matter for endless debate, but there seems to have been doubts within the JRC regarding Abbas:

Abbas never exposed the technical team to the decision makers. Therefore, on occasions, we doubted somewhat what Mr. Abbas told us about the opinions and decisions of the decision makers.<sup>60</sup>

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56. Ibid., p. 144

57. Interview, op.cit. (25)

58. Ibid.

59. Interview in Dhaka on 7 July 1985

60. Interview, op.cit. (25)

And, finally, Abbas himself stated that he was aware of his image in certain Government circles as a hawk on the water issue:

The then Finance and Planning Minister Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed was one person who clearly showed that he did not like my stand on the water dispute with India. Everytime he met me he would tell me to change my outlook.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps an additional reason why the issue was not tackled at the highest political level was because it

was being kept alive. We felt that we were never allowed to prepare a solid case in our defence. Not enough was done on our side.<sup>62</sup>

The above observation appears to be partly confirmed by Mrs. Gandhi's own recollections of her summit with Mujib in May 1974: "Sheikh Mujib felt that his experts should look again at the issue, and they were not here".<sup>63</sup> Echoing the same theme, a senior Bangladeshi official recalled:

Mujib was not well informed by the people he took with him. Mentally he was troubled. When he returned from the summit he chastized the officials that Bangladesh's officers could not reply to the Indian questions. Mujib had the impression that he was being undermined. When he returned he asked for a report to be prepared by people not connected with the Ministry of Power, Water and Flood Control.<sup>64</sup>

An alternate suggestion has been that the Farakka issue remained unresolved because the League Government was too busy with certain national concerns more fundamental than the Farakka issue, and accorded it a low priority. Tied to this was also the idea that the Government did not wish to appear indecent by demanding an immediate

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61. Abbas, op.cit. (1), p. 33

62. Interview, op.cit. (25)

63. Crow, op.cit. (34), p. 138

64. Ibid.



resolution of the Farakka issue even when Bangladesh was still largely dependent on India for financial, material and diplomatic help.

In retrospect, one could perhaps make a case that the Government did indeed attach a low priority to the Farakka issue. This would be borne out by the opinions of senior Government officials of that period. Kamal Hossain, Foreign Minister from March 1973 to August 1975 and Law Minister before that, recalled: "People forget now, but during those first three years we were preoccupied by so many urgent issues".<sup>65</sup> Abdul Malek Ukil, then Speaker of the *Jatiyo Sangsad* gives a more vivid picture:

During 1972 we could only think of reconstruction...India was doing everything for us, reconstructing bridges, giving us food, providing transport...India was giving us massively.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, there could very well have been the tendency, at least temporarily, to sweep it under the rug. One official associated with the Indo-Bangla negotiations from 1974 onwards had this to say:

Bangladesh ignored the basic facts which are underlying and are in direct conflict with the interest of India. As time passed they emerged. The Mujib-Indira declaration did not solve anything. In a wishy-washy manner they thought they could solve it.<sup>67</sup>

The last view seems to come close to the truth. When Bangladesh at that time had to rely so completely on India for its livelihood, it was politically difficult for it to take a strong stand on the Farakka issue.

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65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., p. 140

67. Ibid., p. 141

This would perhaps also explain Mujib's personal dilemma over India. That he was a nationalist and a patriot was accepted by the great majority of Bangladeshis as an article of faith. In fact, in moments of frustration his patriotic nature would show. According to Abbas, when India was unwilling to recognize Bangladesh's interest:

he turned to me and said that we should build a barrage on the Ganges on our side of the border and flood India. I replied, "Give me the money and I will do it."<sup>68</sup>

But Mujib was also the prisoner of his time. He could not detach himself from the political drama of which he was a central character. He could change neither the themes of the play nor the cast to suit his needs. He was in fact acutely aware of his limitations, and this weighed him down and made him procrastinate. According to one of his Private Secretaries:

Sheikh *shahib* was acutely aware of Mrs. Gandhi's all-out help for Bangladesh in those dark days. He would often recall how Mrs. Gandhi had requested many world leaders to intercede on his behalf to save him from being hanged by Yahya Khan [when Mujib was a prisoner] in Pakistan.<sup>69</sup>

To what extent this personal element affected his posture towards India is not known, but that he was to a certain degree politically handicapped is confirmed by Shamsur Rahman, Mujib's ambassador to the Soviet Union and his confidant:

On a number of occasions Sheikh *shahib* told me that his hands were tied, he could not do what he wanted to do because of the agreements reached in Mujibnagar.<sup>70</sup>

68. Interview with Abbas in Dhaka on 10 July 1985

69. Confidential interviews with one of Mujib's private secretaries in Dhaka on 15 July 1985

70. Interview, *op.cit.* (42)

Mujib was referring to the period of the war when he was in prison in Pakistan and Tajuddin Ahmed was the leader of the Provisional Government in Calcutta. When asked what were the agreements Mujib referred to, Rahman said that he did not ask and Mujib did not elaborate.

Those who stand opposed to the Awami League could cite this as evidence of the Mujib Government's subservience to Indian interests. The fact that the Bangladesh Government did not send a protest note to the Indian Government over the latter's violation of the agreement on the test run of the feeder canal, and the additional fact that Mujib had agreed during his summit with Mrs. Gandhi to allow India to commission the Farakka Barrage without a *quid pro quo*, would add to the arsenal of the Awami League's detractors.

Whatever may be the case, the general belief in Bangladesh is that India was less than forthcoming in the efforts to reconcile Indo-Bangladesh differences. In fact the majority view would be harsher and probably closer to the view expressed by a senior JRC official:

I do feel India wants to keep the issue alive and use it to bring political pressure on us. I am suspicious of Indian moves. I take their offers of talks with a grain of salt. India has been consistently rigid in its stand on the water issue and they could afford to do so simply because they control the upper reaches of the Ganges.<sup>71</sup>

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71. Interview, op.cit. (25)



Conclusion: It would seem that from the very beginning the Indian leaders were aware that the resolution of the water dispute would be a difficult task. Further, given the volatile nature of Bangladeshi politics, particularly where anti-Indian sentiments were strong and existed even within the senior leadership of the governing party, it is conceivable that India would be concerned about adverse political repercussions in Bangladesh's domestic politics should the water sharing talks fail. Thus, the inclusion of Article 7 in the JRC Statutes could be interpreted as a precautionary measure by the Indian Government to prevent any disagreement in the JRC from being aired publicly. This concern was particularly evident after the May 1974 summit that failed to resolve the issue of water sharing between the two countries. As Abbas reports, during the JRC talks held in Dhaka the following month, Mujib was under pressure from India not to highlight the meeting:

[ Mujib ] informed me that the then High Commissioner for India, Mr. Samar Sen, had just called on him...the Indian Government wanted that Bangladesh should go soft on publicity over the Indo-Bangladesh meetings. Sheikh Mujib advised me that at the end of the JRC meeting, whatever be the outcome, I should say that the discussions were held in a very cordial atmosphere. I told him that I would say 'cordial' but not 'very cordial'.<sup>72</sup>

Mujib's acquiescence in Indian advice also served his Government's

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72. Abbas, op.cit. (1), p. 37

interests, because the airing of continuous failure to resolve the issue would have been politically damaging.

Even before the water negotiations were underway, senior Indian officials unfailingly impressed upon Bangladeshi officials the virtues of joint investigation, joint planning and the desirability of avoiding third-party involvement in bilateral disputes. India, for instance, was less interested in World Bank overtures than Bangladesh was.

As the upper co-riparian state, India was not affected by any shortages in the Ganges flow; there was enough water in the Ganges River for Indian irrigation needs. It became an issue only when growing increases in the volume and frequency of unilateral withdrawals in the upper reaches of the Ganges began to cause shortages in the lower reaches, adversely affecting the economy of the areas through which the Ganges flows. Moreover, when the Farakka Barrage was built in response to the needs of the Calcutta Port, it became clear to the lower co-riparian state that India was less than concerned with the possible ill-effects downstream.

Bangladesh came into being within a year of the construction of the Farakka Barrage. It was too short a time for the Bangladeshi water experts to assess the full effects the commissioning of the barrage would have on Bangladesh. The issue was not taken up urgently by the two Governments because it had not become a dispute between them yet. The League Government, quite justifiably, attached greater importance to the immediate problems facing the new state, and accorded the Ganges water issue a low priority.

It appears that timing was an important factor in the dispute. When a broad understanding could have been reached at an early stage, the issue then was not pressing enough, in comparison with other issues, to warrant Prime Ministerial attention to it. When it did become a dispute, the tenor of bilateral relations had left the two Prime Ministers little flexibility to resolve it in one sitting. It should be remembered that at the May 1974 summit, if Mrs. Gandhi was less than forthcoming on the Ganges issue, she did yield ground on the border issue. But by then, options for both Governments had diminished considerably. In India, the attitude of the West Bengalis towards Bangladesh had hardened because of the suspension of the border trade. The expected economic windfall was a mirage, and the West Bengalis were also blamed for smuggling. As West Bengal's stand on the Ganges issue hardened, Mrs. Gandhi's political flexibility correspondingly decreased.

Mujib, too, had to contend with growing anti-Indian sentiments at home. Though the reasons for most of the social, political and economic ills of that period are to be found in the internal dynamics of mis-government, it politically suited everyone to paint India as the scapegoat. The ruling Awami League was seen by many as obsequious to Indian interests. It was, therefore, necessary for Mujib publicly to appear unbending on the Farakka talks. In a sense, it was as though his Government's patriotic credentials depended on his stand on the issue.

Added to all this was governmental ineptitude. The choice of Mostaque to head the Ministry of Flood Control, Power and Irrigation,



and of Abbas to head the Joint Rivers Commission may have been a political move, but not an intelligent one. While both of them, known hardliners on India, may have served to signal Mujib's attempts to bring some balance within his 'pro-Indian' Cabinet, their inflexible stand on the negotiations may have worsened the dispute.

As apprehension and hostility between the interest groups of the two countries increased, both Governments were hard put to accommodate each other's needs. The heart of the matter was that Bangladesh could not accept India's proposal for augmenting the Ganges flow because it would have created additional acute problems for the country. And India refused to consider Bangladesh's proposal because it wished to reserve the Ganges waters for its own use.

In the case of sharing the waters of the Ganges, the influence theory may appear at a glance to be of peripheral relevance. The issue was of such political significance to important sections of the public in both countries, that neither Government could be seen yielding on it. In public the influence process appeared inoperative, but in private, the influence process seemed still to operate because of potential gains for both Governments.

However, it must be noted that influence is future-oriented, that is, actual outcomes may not be evident till later. Also, while influence attempts are issue-specific, influence outcome may manifest in different spheres. The very fact that neither Government could yield on the water issue could also influence each

Government to be less inflexible in other areas of contention, for the sake of amity. Thus, the failure of the influence process to operate overtly in a particular circumstance does not necessarily mean that influence theory is thereby invalidated.

## Chapter 9

## CONCLUSION

A. Summary of Findings

In the introduction to this study, a number of allegations in Bangladesh regarding Indo-Bangla relations were paraphrased as follows: the Provisional Government, in seeking Indian military assistance to rid Bangladesh of the Pakistan Army, had reached certain understandings with India which were inimical to Bangladesh's interests; after independence, the League Government had become a subaltern to Indian interests; and, the League Government's commitment to Indo-Bangla friendship had undermined Bangladesh's sovereignty. The findings of this study do not support any of these allegations.

Had the Provisional Government acceded to the demands of other parties to form a national united front comprising parties of various political persuasion, to give collective leadership to the independence struggle, perhaps the League would have been immune from the first charge. But the League's single-minded pursuit to consolidate its claim to the leadership of the Bangladesh independence movement, and India's underwriting of it, raised questions of its political motives and cast doubts on its patriotic



credentials. Though the secret wartime understandings between it and the Indian Government have not been made officially public, the nature of what little evidence has surfaced from interviews with people associated with those events, does not suggest anything injurious to Bangladesh's interests. These understandings appear to have dealt mainly with the technicalities of Indian military assistance to the independence struggle.

The second allegation also appears to be harsh and unjustifiable. While it could be argued with some justification that Tajuddin Ahmed was quite accommodating to the Indira Government during the crisis period, and also willing to kowtow to the Indian Government subsequently, this was definitely not the case with Mujib. Though Mujib often alluded to political constraints on his Government due to certain understandings between Indira Gandhi and the Provisional Government, there is no evidence to suggest that his Government at any time acted as a puppet regime.<sup>1</sup> The opposite appears to have been the case; Mujib fought tooth and nail to maximize his country's gain in its relations with India.

Similarly, the public articulation of friendship for India, often expressed in superlative terms, while it served important political purposes, did not in any way undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty. On the contrary, Mujib used it quite effectively to camouflage his Government's and his own motives.

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1. Mujib's decision not to fly from London to Bangladesh (after his release from captivity in Pakistan) in the jet aircraft provided by the Indian Government; not to stop in New Delhi on his way to or from the Islamic Summit in Lahore; and not to place the Bangladesh brigade under Indian military command are cases in point.

A number of what may be characterized as political themes emerge in the study of Indo-Bangla relations in the period under review. These are:

1. Independence of Bangladesh and the restoration of the Awami League to power;
2. Enhancement of India's strategic position in South Asia;
3. Restoration of political stability in the region;
4. Pursuit of mutually beneficial economic relations;
5. Resolution of outstanding disputes.

These issues did not all affect the interests of the two Governments in the same manner or to the same degree, but they, nonetheless combined to make up the fabric of bilateral relations of the time.

1. Independence of Bangladesh and the restoration of the Awami League to power. In the period between April and December 1971, the primary concern of the Indira Government and the Provisional Government was how to return the Awami League to power in an independent Bangladesh. This period was marked by a massive collective effort to externalize the struggle in order to gain the support of the world community, and, in this, India's political and diplomatic assistance was indispensable and invaluable.

Since the Provisional Government's survival was at stake, it repeatedly requested the Indian Government to grant sovereign recognition to Bangladesh, hoping to force its hand. It eagerly sought Indian military assistance to repel the Pakistan Army at the earliest instance, so that the leftist forces inside Bangladesh

would not be able to ride the tide of alienations resulting from the war, to mount a challenge to the League's claim to postwar leadership. To this end, the Provisional Government negotiated certain arrangements with the Indian Government to force India's formal commitment to its cause. Thus, if the Provisional Government appeared pliant and ingratiating to Indian interests, it was all with a political purpose. To what degree this accommodating posture was necessary is of course debatable, because India's interests in Bangladesh's independence and in the Awami League's accession to power were no less than those of the Provisional Government.

But even though the political objective of the two Governments was the same, there were the inevitable irritants. The Indian Government strongly supported the demand of a number of political parties from East Pakistan that the Provisional Government should comprise all the parties which supported the national independence movement, because it believed that broadening its base would, to that extent, elicit external support to the cause. The Provisional Government, however, refused to share the leadership of the movement, in order to reserve its singular claim to postwar leadership of Bangladesh, though it did acquiesce in the formation of the multipartite consultative committee.<sup>2</sup> Fearing a challenge to its

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2. As the resistance movement began to be coordinated, the Awami League leadership was suspicious of everyone outside its party fold. The non-Awami Leaguers, who were no less patriotic, were barred from guerrilla enrolment, thus creating bad blood between the League and the rest of the political forces in Bangladesh. This also meant that non-Awami League guerrillas did not have formal access to weapons given to the League guerrillas by India. See Far Eastern Economic Review, 18 December 1971, p. 8



leadership from the militant wing in the party, the Provisional Government also opposed, though unsuccessfully, the Indian Government's decision to train and arm the *Mujib Bahini*, which the latter saw as a form of strategic insurance perhaps for later.

The choice of an Indian general as the commander of the joint force, and the required acquiescence in Dhar's advice and political guidance, were two other minor issues that irritated a section of the *Mukti Bahini* and certain officials of the Provisional Government respectively. The dropping of Mostaque, who was the Foreign Minister in the Provisional Government and who had maintained unauthorized links with the US Consulate in Calcutta, from the delegation that was sent to New York during the 1971 General Assembly session to present Bangladesh's case privately to the delegations from other countries, did however serve the interests of both Governments.

### III

#### 2. Enhancement of India's strategic position in South Asia.

Intimately tied to, and providing the rationale for, India's military support for the Bangladesh cause was its long-term state interest of enhancing its strategic posture in the subcontinent. This state imperative was the paramount factor in India's calculations regarding both the East Pakistan crisis and subsequent relations with Bangladesh.

India had not been able to exercise a political role in South Asia commensurate with its size and potential. The crisis in East Pakistan in 1971 provided India with the opportunity to acquire the

political and military status it sought in the subcontinent, and if there were any qualms about realizing it through military means, these were dispatched with the argument that "the so-called international norms have never deterred any major power from taking action to protect its own interests".<sup>3</sup> India's interest, in this case, was to reorder the balance of power in South Asia in its favour.

The single most important factor which had obstructed India's strategic ascendance in the region had been Pakistan; its dismemberment in December 1971 removed that obstacle. The defeat of its Army brought democratic governments to power in Pakistan and in Bangladesh - an expressed desire of the Gandhi leadership - which, theoretically, reduced also the likelihood of military adventurism that had plagued subcontinental relations since 1947.

The independence of Bangladesh considerably enhanced the security of India's turmoil-stricken eastern region. First, a friendly government was restored to power in Bangladesh. Its proclamation of eternal friendship for India meant, at the least, considerably reduced border tension in the east. Also, the prevalent sentiment within the League being against a large standing army, it meant that Bangladesh would not be a security threat to India's eastern flank. The Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty was not only a guarantee to that effect, it also increased India's military options in the region.

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3. Remark by K. Subrahmanyam, Director of India's Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis. The National Herald (Delhi), 6 April 1971.

Second, the secessionist movements in Mizoram and Nagaland which had been abetted by Pakistan would no longer get training, arms and sanctuary in Bangladesh, and would be forced to seek political accommodation with the Union Government or atrophy. And, third, the League Government could be counted on to stamp out any extremist movement within Bangladesh's borders, thereby denying any intellectual or spiritual sustenance to similar movements in its periphery.

Thus, by 1972, India liquidated the military threat in the east; considerably weakened it in the west; curbed the secessionist movements in its far eastern states; and entered into treaties with Bangladesh and the Soviet Union to attain political and military supremacy in South Asia. Its objective of enhancing its strategic posture in the region was realized.

#### IV

3. Restoration of political stability to the region. This comprised three interconnected issues: consolidation of the new *status quo* in the subcontinent; prevention of extremist and radical politics; and prevention of external interference in the affairs of the region. The two Governments were equally concerned with these overlapping issues, though for different reasons.

Consolidation of the new *status quo* in the region within the shortest possible time was of utmost significance to both leaderships. It may be noted that the primary reason why Mrs. Gandhi restrained the Indian Army on the western front was to avoid direct



superpower intervention in the crisis,<sup>4</sup> for this would have undermined India's strategic objectives. After the dismemberment of Pakistan, Mrs. Gandhi adroitly used the Simla Talks of 1972 to consolidate swiftly the new realities in the region, to present to the world - particularly to the United States and China, the two adversary powers with political stakes in the region - a *fait accompli* regarding these new political arrangements. An additional benefit for India was the permanent freezing of the three decade old Kashmir issue, which had been the cause of several Indo-Pakistan wars before 1971.

In the east, the first joint task had been the return and rehabilitation of the refugees who had fled to India from then East Pakistan. The Indian Government had also offered senior administrative officers to assist the new Government in Dhaka to hasten the League's administrative control of the country.

The eradication of radical or extremist politics from the region was a necessary corollary to the preservation of the new *status quo*. It is to be noted that during the nine month long crisis, the Indian Government had eliminated many Naxalites, and members of the CPI (Marxist) and other extremist groups in West Bengal and Assam,<sup>5</sup> thereby dealing a heavy psychological blow to the leftist forces in Bangladesh. To minimize challenges to its

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4. It should be noted that the dispatch of the USS Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal, ostensibly to assist in the withdrawal of American citizens from East Pakistan during the December 1971 war, was to deter a full-scale Indian military invasion of West Pakistan. See the "Anderson Papers" The New York Times, 6 January 1972.
  5. Vancouver Sun (Canada), 27 November 1971; Le Monde, 30 November 1971; Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay), 4 December 1971.

political authority in the absence of Mujib, the Provisional Government also banned a number of religion-based parties, and this ban was not lifted even upon the return of Mujib, who had consistently and publicly espoused the democratic rights of the people. The Provisional Government did not, again for security reasons, object to India's taking away of the surrendered weapons, though this alienated the rightist faction within its party, and the Bangladesh Army, and played into the hands of the anti-Indian forces, such as Toaha's East Pakistan Communist Party (EPCP), which rejected the legitimacy of the League's leadership. But Indian interests were well served; both the Bangladesh Army and the anti-Awami League political forces were denied those weapons.

When tribal insurgency unexpectedly broke out in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southeastern Bangladesh at the end of March 1972, troops from the Indian Army, which had formally withdrawn from Bangladesh's soil on 13 March, once again responded to the League Government's request for assistance in quelling it; this conduced to the interests of both Governments, despite the risk of Pakistani and Chinese propoganda. It may be noted that the only significance of the friendship treaty at the time was the extent to which it signalled the Indian Government's commitment to the viability of the League regime.

The *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini*, created ostensibly to assist the police in the maintenance of law and order, was appropriated to function as the armed wing of the party and liberally used to destroy political dissent. India's intelligence establishment

had readily responded to the League's request to train this force, as it was also in India's interest to see to the consolidation of the League's political authority over Bangladesh. But the insecurity of the League Government increased as the opposition met violence with violence, and by 1975 Mujib was obliged to install a one party dictatorship with himself as the lifelong president. Though this was the antithesis of what the League and the Congress stood for, Mrs. Gandhi, for reasons of security, supported the move.<sup>6</sup>

The third issue relating to the restoration of political stability was the need to cordon off the region from external interference, a dilemma the Indian leaders have had to contend with since 1947. Since the natural order in the subcontinent - meaning Indian hegemony - had been assiduously sabotaged by external interests, it had been the Indian policy to insist on bilateralism on regional issues, and this was very much evident throughout the period in review. For instance, India refused to allow UN observers on the East Pakistan border fearing that it would prolong a solution to the conflict, or undermine the solution desired by India. India also opposed outside mediation in the crisis, and insisted that it could be resolved only if the Pakistan Government agreed to negotiate with Mujib.

After independence, the virtues of bilateral talks were repeatedly stressed. Haksar and Swaran Singh never tired impressing upon Bangladeshi Government officials the need to keep the World Bank and other external interests outside the Ganges water talks.

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6. Far Eastern Economic Review, 7 February 1975, p. 13



When Bangladesh leased out maritime areas to American oil companies to explore for oil, Mrs. Gandhi privately cautioned:

You do not know the American game. It is their plan to create rift between India and Bangladesh. I won't be surprised if they [Ashland Oil] withdrew unilaterally when enmity does not come about between us.<sup>7</sup>

Nor were the Indian leaders comfortable with the League Government's decision to extend the stay of the Soviet Navy's salvage team (headed by Admiral Zuenko) beyond the initial contract period,<sup>8</sup> for they saw this as an intrusion into India's sphere of influence. The Indian leaders also discouraged the League Government's attempts to restore diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. Once again, it was to prevent the Chinese - India's most important adversary outside South Asia - from establishing an additional political base in the region, and to deny the pro-Chinese forces in Bangladesh a new lease on life. Since the presence in the subcontinent, in whatever form, of the US, or the USSR, or the PRC, did not conduce to India's view of regional security, it behooved Indian leaders to obviate external machinations.

Mrs. Gandhi's Government was also against Bangladesh's membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Bhutto's ingenuity in linking Bangladesh's membership in the OIC and its participation in the Islamic summit in Lahore in early 1974, to the granting of Pakistan's recognition to it, was a deliberate attempt

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7. Confidential interview with a Minister in Mujib's second cabinet, Dhaka, July 1985.
  8. Interview with Foreign Secretary S.A. Karim in New York on 23 March 1985. However, Mujib did reject the Soviet request for permission to hold the October Parade in the port city of Chittagong. Source: confidential interview with one of Mujib's private secretaries in Dhaka in July 1985.

to undermine the League Government's secular pretensions, and to remind India of the Islamic character of the Bangladeshi people. Mrs. Gandhi feared that this would strengthen Islamic forces within Bangladesh with at least two adverse effects. First, Mujib's secularist policies would increasingly come under attack, which would affect the interests of the Hindu minority in the country. Second, the scope for Muslim countries' interference in Bangladesh's domestic politics would increasingly draw it closer to Pakistan; neither of these would redound to Indian interests.

## V

4. Pursuit of mutually beneficial economic relations. Initially, there was almost a strident anti-Western bias in the economic philosophy of the League Government.<sup>9</sup> The Indian leaders were pleased that socialism was declared a state principle of the League Government, for it indicated that Bangladesh's economy would follow a non-capitalist path of development. Whether this would mitigate Bangladesh's economic backwardness was of little concern to the Indian leaders; what mattered to them was the political advantages to be had, namely, a closer alignment with the non-capitalist forces in the world and consequently less dependence on the West.

From the outset, the Indian leaders emphasized the complementarity of the two economies even when these were highly competitive,

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9. Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed had rejected publicly aid from those countries which had been against Bangladesh's independence - meaning mainly the United States. Far Eastern Economic Review, 19 February 1972, p. 18; 15 November 1974, p. 34

and urged Bangladesh to open up its water, road and rail facilities and its border to allow unimpeded commerce and trade within the region. Great hopes were pinned on a jute community, a customs or a trade union, a common electric grid, and on coordinated planning and mutual sharing of the resources of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna water basin. To channel the resources of the region in the desired direction, the Indira Government was able to convince the League Government, quite early in their relationship, of the need for regular "talks, consultations and visits of delegations", and for the setting up of appropriate machinery for that purpose. The periodic meetings of the two planning commissions and a number of other parallel agencies of both Governments were institutionalized through bilateral agreements to give effect to this coordinated approach, and the signing of the border trade pact, agreements on industrial collaboration, and India's commitment to finance Bangladesh's First Five Year Plan, were all means to that end.

But India was unable to sustain its level of aid to Bangladesh, nor did Bangladesh's economic needs lessen with time, and by 1973, the League Government was prepared to ask for a Western aid consortium.

In addition, there were a number of other developments that undermined Indo-Bangla economic relations. Smuggling was the single-most important factor that poisoned the relationship between the two peoples, and the inability of the two Governments to stop it, led to the suspension of the much-needed border trade within six months of its implementation.



Since the Provisional Government espoused a socialistic development pattern, it was an unwritten assumption before Bangladesh's independence that private trade between the two countries would be banned, Marwari capital would not be allowed into the country, and state trading would be imposed. The policies implemented after independence fell short of the mark; private trade was not banned, and state trading was so ineptly handled and so corruption-ridden that it hardly furthered the Government's socialistic aims.

The proprietary attitude of the West Bengalis towards Bangladesh was a further blow to the Union Government's economic objectives. While the latter saw Indo-Bangla relations primarily in political terms, with economic gains flowing from it, West Bengal's attitude towards Bangladesh was shaped solely by economic motives. In general, the Indian bourgeoisie saw in Bangladesh great economic opportunities waiting to be tapped, but the new entrepreneurial class in Bangladesh saw the Indian bourgeoisie as a new exploiting class, out to deny it the opportunities that were finally realized after twenty-four years of struggle.

Mrs. Gandhi's Government took a number of precautionary measures to check the drift towards the breakdown of economic relations between the two countries, such as suspending border trade, insisting that only surpluses from Bangladesh would be imported, and requesting Bangladesh to issue higher specifications for textile imports from India. But unabated smuggling with its concomitant effects - depletion of foreign exchange earning resources,

domestic scarcity of essentials, higher prices of consumerables - on Bangladesh's economy, continued to sour bilateral relations.

## VI

5. Resolution of outstanding disputes. One last theme that appears in this study is the attempts of the two Governments to negotiate a number of bilateral disputes which directly impinged on the tenor of their relationship. The three unresolved issues inherited by the League Government were: delimitation of certain sectors of the land border; agreement on the maritime boundary; and agreement on the sharing of the waters of the Ganges.

Neither Government was under any compulsion to seek an early resolution of these outstanding issues, because the immediate concerns of both Governments were the consolidation of the League's authority in Bangladesh, and Bangladesh's economic viability. The strategy of the League Government was to consolidate first the positive aspects of the bilateral relationship and to leave potentially conflicting issues for later discussion, so that the benefits of the relationship of the early years would have a positive influence on these negotiations later. This had mixed results.

The land border delimitation talks led to an agreement in favour of Bangladesh, but the other two issues remained unresolved, primarily because of the crucial nature of the national interests at stake. Though negotiations, difficult as they were, continued and the areas of disagreement were being continually narrowed down, the forcible removal of the League Government left these disputes unresolved.

## VII

In addition to the general themes that dictated the evolution of Indo-Bangla relations in the first five years after Bangladesh's independence, the various factors of alienation must also be noted. Even as the independence struggle took shape, three issues alienated important sections of the Bangladeshi elites. First, the overwhelming political support that the League had received in the national elections in December 1970 was an expression of support for its unequivocal demand for political autonomy for East Pakistan; it was not a mandate for the League to seek the political dissolution of united Pakistan. Second, the Provisional Government's request to India for its assistance in the anti-Pakistan struggle did not sit well with various political groups. Third, the banning of political parties was attributed by the rightists to Indian machination.

After independence, yet other elite groups were alienated. Assumptions in India that it could dictate to Bangladesh the size and requirements of its military, and that India should be the sole provider of training and arms were resented by Osmani and the high command. Further, New Delhi's efforts to convince Mujib not to take back the repatriated military personnel into the Bangladesh Army, and its request to place a Bangladeshi brigade under Indian command during the latter's counter-insurgency operations in Mizoram and Nagaland in mid-1974, also alienated Mujib; had Mujib acquiesced in the latter, the resulting *primus inter pares* status of the Indian military command would have undermined



Bangladesh's sovereignty. The Indian Defence Ministry's initial refusal to return the Chinese-made weapons captured in East Pakistan had also greatly alienated the Army command. While too much importance should not be attached to these events, their political significance should not be summarily dismissed either.

The underlying reason for such Indian behaviour was the false perceptions of Bangladesh in India. A large section of the informed public and many in the Indian Government, including Dhar, seemed to believe that Bangladesh should be eternally grateful to India for its assistance in the struggle, and this gratitude should translate into unhindered access to Bangladesh: the Bangladesh Army should be at the disposal of the Indian Government; Bangladesh's external policies should take into account Indian interests; Bangladesh's national planning and policies should be coordinated with those of India; Bangladesh should be a market for Indian manufactured goods; India should be given the first choice to import primary goods from Bangladesh; Bangladesh's currency should be tied to the Indian rupee; etc. Bangladesh, on the other hand, also erred in assuming that there would be no *quid pro quo* for the Indian assistance given in its creation.

#### VIII

We now turn to the questions raised in the Introduction about the cause of deterioration in Indo-Bangla relations. The findings of this study suggest that while the League Government faced considerable difficulty in articulating its secularist policies, it

did nevertheless succeed in preventing communalism from becoming a political factor. In this regard, two decisions of the League Government were of considerable impact: the banning of religion-based parties; and Mujib's refusal to allow the Hindus who had fled East Pakistan during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War to return and repossess their properties. This would have dispossessed those who had acquired the abandoned properties legally or illegally, and caused resentments of a communal nature. Religion, therefore, was not a factor in the deterioration of relations between the two peoples.

However, the evidence indicates that economic factors played the predominant role in the souring of relations. By and large, both Governments failed to appreciate the sensitivity with which Bangladeshis viewed their economic relationship with India. Contradictory inclinations in both countries complicated it further. As already stated, while the Union Government saw Indo-Bangla relations in a long-term perspective and sought permanent economic arrangements through institutional setups that would endure, the West Bengalis were guided by more parochial considerations of immediate gains for their state. And in Bangladesh, Finance Minister Tajuddin Ahmed's and first Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad's uncritical approach to economic relations with India clashed with the economic philosophy of Commerce Minister M.R. Siddiqui, who represented the interests of the rising bourgeoisie.

It is likely that Bangladesh's initial dependence on India was by compulsion and not by choice. At that early stage, the only country that could underwrite Bangladesh's economic viability was India, and the nature and extent of Indian assistance in that

period amply demonstrate that. However, the political implication of such dependence was not lost on Mujib. To reduce or balance off this dependence, and in the absence of other sources of aid, Mujib made an unsuccessful bid to secure a Soviet commitment to assist in Bangladesh's economic recovery. When, in the second half of his administration, Mujib was forced to turn to the West for economic assistance, this switch also demanded of him a certain degree of ideological readjustment, a drifting away from socialist rhetoric, and a reorientation of the Governmental apparatus. It is quite likely that this triggered a reappraisal of India's relations with Bangladesh in New Delhi, and the difficulties experienced by Bangladesh in the negotiations on the maritime boundary and the Ganges issues in the years 1974-75 may have been a reflection of that.

However, the nature of economic relations was not the sole cause of deterioration in bilateral relations. A myriad of factors, varying in political significance from eyebrow raising incidents to those that tended to undermine the sovereign expression of the Bangladeshi people, coalesced to adversely affect Indo-Bangla relations. Despite Mujib's enviable hold over the people, which afforded him a measure of immunity in political action, he failed to consolidate the gains accruing from Indo-Bangla relations, or to build upon them. Nor did he make any effort to explain to the public the benefits to be had from a stable political relationship with India, and this is perhaps because he himself was not convinced of these. As a result, his Government failed to capitalize on a promising relationship



and, in this sense, Indo-Bangla relations were a victim of the League Government's ineptitude and shortsightedness.

#### B. Validity of Influence Theory

In order to assess the validity of influence theory in India-Bangladesh relations, it is necessary first to ascertain whether the context in which the influence process can operate existed; in other words, we need to recall the determinants of the influence process. The first prerequisite for an influence attempt, we noted, was the preception by Indian leaders that India and Bangladesh would be "in a relationship of significant interdependence" and that Bangladesh's "future behaviour consequently could well be such as to exercise either a harmful or beneficial impact on" India. The nature and degree of India's assistance in the creation of Bangladesh, Bangladesh's initial reliance on India, and the sealing of their relationship with a treaty amply demonstrated to both countries that the relationship was going to be one of "significant interdependence". Based on this, Indian decision makers made a number of assumptions regarding Bangladesh's role in the region, and, therefore, India had to be sensitive to Bangladesh's future behaviour, lest it went contrary to Indian interests. The first prerequisite, therefore, was present.

The second determinant was the predictions of India's decision makers regarding the nature of Bangladesh's future behaviour; what was Bangladesh likely to do in the absence of any conscious influence attempt by India? Given Bangladesh's Muslim population, was

it plausible that Bangladesh's decision makers would want to maintain a strong link with the Muslim *Ummah*? How would that affect secular politics in Bangladesh? Also, given Bangladesh's foreign policy principle of 'friendship for all, malice to none', to what extent Bangladesh would be willing to accommodate the interests of external powers, particularly the United States and China, and to what degree that would compromise India's interests in Bangladesh, were also matters of great concern to the Indian leadership.

This tied in with the third determinant - that an influence attempt would result if India developed certain preferences regarding Bangladesh's current or future behaviour. India did have fairly extensive preferences regarding Bangladesh; for instance, it wished Bangladesh to have a pro-Indian Government, a secular approach to politics, a non-capitalist development pattern, a token military, to join India in developing the water resources of the entire eastern region, and periodically to exchange ideas on major issues affecting the interests of both countries. Given these preferences, it was more than likely that India would attempt to influence the formulation, or continuation, of Bangladesh's policies in a certain direction.

The fourth determinant was that the frequency of influence attempts would depend on the level of interaction between the two states. As is clear from the preceding chapters, the level of interaction between the two was indeed high and it stretched across the entire gamut of relationships and over the whole period.

The fifth determinant was that influence attempts by one

state would depend on the degree and quality of responsiveness of the state to be influenced. For instance, during the discussions on the land border delimitation, certain key issues seemed to have been resolved by Mujib's extraordinary gesture to Mrs. Gandhi to draw the border as she pleased. If Mujib was not fairly sure that such a gesture would pay off, he would not have gambled. In this case, Mujib's influence attempt - to make Mrs. Gandhi accept Bangladesh's definition of the border - was based on his estimation of the type of response he would most likely get from Mrs. Gandhi.

## II

We now turn to the actual instances of influence that were manifest in the course of Indo-Bangladesh relations. It is important to note, at this point, that the definition of influence - it is manifest when one actor affects, through non-coercive means, directly or indirectly, the behaviour of another actor in the hope that it redounds to the policy advantage of the first actor - is not concerned with motives; whether the reaction of the actor affected was out of self-interest or not, the fact that its behaviour was affected to suit the interest of the first actor is sufficient to suggest the manifestation of influence. Keeping this in mind, six criteria for identifying instances of influence were laid down previously. The first criterion with which to judge whether influence was manifest was observing shifts, changes or modification of behaviour or stands of an actor. It appears that both countries modified their stands on a number of



issues of bilateral importance. Despite the Indian desire to maintain border trade, Mujib was able to influence Mrs. Gandhi to agree to its suspension at the first bilateral review. On the issue of returning the Chinese-made weapons, although there was resistance from Dhar, Jagjivan Ram and the Indian Defence Ministry, Mrs. Gandhi did change her Government's position and returned the weapons to Bangladesh on its request. During Mostaque's visit to New Delhi for talks on the Ganges issue, he managed to secure the Indian Government's commitment that the Farakka Barrage would not be commissioned without Bangladesh's prior approval. And on the issue of land border delimitation, Mujib was able to bring about a shift in the Indian Government's position on the disputed areas. These are some examples of Bangladesh's success in influencing shifts in India's declared positions on those issues.

There are also examples of Bangladesh accommodating Indian requests. For instance, the date for receiving the diplomatic credentials of Subimal Dutt was advanced so that the Indian High Commissioner might become the dean of the diplomatic corps in Bangladesh. And on the critical issue of augmentation of the Ganges waters, despite the World Bank's readiness to assist the two countries in whatever manner possible, Mujib acquiesced in the Indian desire to keep third parties uninvolved in bilateral problems. Though Mujib could have secured World Bank assistance for related water projects inside Bangladesh, he was willing to forego the option.

A second criterion that was suggested as a means of identifying instances of influence was the sharp improvement in a country's

ability - such as, expansion of its diplomatic presence in the host country, greater access to its decision makers, the frequency and level of interstate visits - to carry out transactions in the host country. A number of examples of influence can be cited by applying this criterion. For instance, when the Provisional Government took its seat in Dhaka, Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed, aware of Mrs. Gandhi's strong dislike of Mostaque for his pro-US and Islamic outlook, dropped him from the post of Foreign Minister which he held in Calcutta, and appointed the pliable Abdus Samad Azad as the new Foreign Minister. While Tajuddin himself distrusted Mostaque, his awareness of Mrs. Gandhi's sentiments reinforced his desire to replace Mostaque with someone readily acceptable to both leaders.

It was the direct contact between Mujib and Mrs. Gandhi that led to the settlement of the land border issues, but other contentious issues like the allocation of the Ganges waters had been left to two hawkish ministers. After the May 1974 summit, Mujib's acceptance of Samar Sen's advice not to publicize the continued disagreements on the water talks, and to have Abbas declare that the talks with the visiting Indian delegation were held in a very cordial atmosphere, is another example of influence through high level access. And one can only speculate to what extent the Indian defence attache's unencumbered access to the General Headquarters in Dhaka reinforced the Army command's desire to prevent the repatriated officers from being absorbed into the Bangladesh Army.

The third criterion - the nature and extent of the general level of involvement between the two governments - and the fifth

criterion - any sudden and significant increase in the quantity, quality and variety of resources committed by one country to another country - in some sense overlap. Both these criteria can be applied to Indo-Bangladesh relations to cite examples of influence flow. For instance, one could argue that the nature and degree of Bangladesh's reliance on India, both before its independence and after, were such that the League Government acquiesced in the Indian desire for "regular talks, consultations and visits of delegations...between the two countries"; the setting up of "appropriate machinery...where necessary, to promote close cooperation in the fields of development and trade"; and for periodic meetings between "the officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Planning Commissions and the Ministries and Departments dealing with economic, commercial, cultural and technical affairs of the two Governments".

The League Government's decision to turn to India for military assistance to quell the insurgency in southeast Bangladesh, and also to train the *Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini*, would suggest a certain degree of attractiveness India held for it, thus indicating influence flow. Also, Pakistan-trained repatriated military officers were sent, for the first time, to India for military training; the best example being General Ershad himself - the current strongman in Bangladesh - who spent the years 1974-76 at the National Defence College in India. Bangladesh, on its part, was able to effect India's diplomatic spearheading of its admission to the Nonaligned Movement and the Commonwealth.



The fourth criterion for influence flow was the level of responsiveness of one country to the needs of the other. Once again, Mrs. Gandhi's willingness to shelve the border trade; her yielding to Mujib on the land border issues; her public commitment that the Farakka Barrage would not be commissioned without Bangladesh's agreement; and Mujib's acquiescence, despite the JRC's advice to the contrary, in the Indian desire to test run the barrage, are examples where one party to the dispute either conceded or lowered the ante so that sound bilateral relations could be maintained or achieved. Thus, in each case there was a display of a certain degree of responsiveness to the needs of the other leadership.

The sixth criterion was: the extent to which India's strategic position in South Asia improved would be an indication of influence flow. The friendship treaty with Bangladesh and the liquidation of the eastern front; Bangladesh's assistance in containing the secessionist movements in India's eastern states; and the overall reduction of defence and security problems in the region, are concrete manifestations of India's improved strategic posture in the subcontinent, to which Bangladesh willingly and substantially contributed.

### III

Finally, it is necessary to point out the several themes emerging in this study that are specific to the influence relationship between India and Bangladesh. First, influence primarily flowed from India to Bangladesh when the latter was dependent

solely on the former. This was the case during the nine month crisis period, when the Provisional Government existed and functioned in Calcutta at the pleasure of the Indira Government, and was obliged to be guided by Indian advice. The Provisional Government's dependence on India at the time was so complete that it had no bargaining position whatsoever; its only value to India was the promise of a pro-Indian leadership in the future Bangladesh.

The second theme is that influence primarily flowed from Bangladesh to India when the former had reduced its dependence on the latter. This is illustrated particularly in the period 1973-75, when Bangladesh had succeeded in securing alternative sources of assistance. While India's importance to Bangladesh correspondingly diminished, Bangladesh's importance to India remained at a high level. Since Bangladesh wanted to regain its independence of action, it sought to minimize the effects of what little dependence it had on India by directing the power it did possess towards resisting the incompatible influence of its benefactor. Though Bangladesh was still willing to cultivate India's patronage - as indicated by Mujib's personal letter to Mrs. Gandhi seeking Rs 1000 million (US \$138 million) for food imports during the famine in 1974<sup>10</sup> - it was equally prepared to resist any influence which it found inimical to its interests. In the event, since India wished to maintain its dominance over the South Asian political system by promoting tranquility and stability in the region, it was obliged to be receptive to Bangladesh's needs; this accrued to Bangladesh's ability to influence outcomes in India.

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10. According to Mujib's Private Secretary at the time. Confidential interview in Dhaka in July 1985

The third theme is that the receptivity of influence was conditioned primarily by coincidence of interests. The political values and philosophy of the Awami League and the Congress Party being similar, throughout the period in review, there were a number of instances of interests in tandem, such as, a democratic form of government, secular politics, socialist bias in economy, token army, and the recalling of the Indian Army to quell the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Fourth, the influence process was affected by interests defined not by some abstract notion, but by inter-group rivalry. The League Government was not able to articulate policies *vis-a-vis* India according to a simple formula, because its leadership comprised people of diverse political persuasion, ranging from Azad's communist background to Mostaque's Islamic ideology, and who were easily subjected to political pressures and influences from the domestic political process. For instance, the pro-Indian lobby within the Government argued for greater accommodation with India on the Ganges issue and argued against Bangladesh joining the OIC, while the pro-West lobby argued for a tough stand on the Ganges negotiations and for Bangladesh joining the OIC.

The last theme that emerges in this study is that institutionalization of influence was counterproductive. Where attempts were made to formalize the relationship, these worked to the disadvantage of bilateral relations. For instance, the regular "talks, consultations and visits of delegations", or the periodic meetings of the various ministries, reinforced the growing suspicion in Bangladesh that the country was being subjected to



increasing Indian interference. And the friendship treaty, contrary to the expectations of both its supporters and detractors, undermined Indian influence over Bangladesh. Given the imbalance of power between the two countries, one assumes that the act of formalizing the treaty would have institutionalized Indian influence. But, in reality, the act of formalizing it exacerbated factional tension within the country, and indeed within the party itself, which in the long run diminished India's ability to influence desirable outcomes in Bangladesh. It may also be argued that, in the act of formalizing the treaty, Mujib demonstrated his strength, whereas Mrs. Gandhi displayed a kind of weakness: in order to placate certain influential sections of the public, she needed the treaty more than Mujib did, and Mujib, because his writ ran across the country, was in a position of strength to concede it. In this sense, the influence theory was stood on its head.

As has been demonstrated in the previous pages, however, the notion of influence can serve as an acceptable framework of enquiry into the conduct of relations between India and Bangladesh during the League Government. Perhaps this was possible because of the asymmetric and contiguous nature of the two states. If these were absent, to ascertain whether the notion of influence building in the third world would still be relevant, would require separate case studies.

APPENDIX I

Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Peace  
Between India and Bangladesh

INSPIRED by common ideals of peace, secularism, democracy, socialism and nationalism,

HAVING STRUGGLED together for the realization of these ideals and cemented ties of friendship through blood and sacrifices which led to the triumphant emergence of a free, sovereign and independent Bangladesh,

DETERMINED to maintain fraternal and good-neighbourly relations and transform their border into a border of eternal peace and friendship,

ADHERING firmly to the basic tenets of non-alignment, peaceful co-existence, mutual co-operation, non-interference in internal affairs and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty,

DETERMINED to safeguard peace, stability and security and to promote progress of their respective countries through all possible avenues of mutual co-operation,

DETERMINED further to expand and strengthen the existing relations of friendship between them,

CONVINCED that the further development of friendship and co-operation meets the national interests of both States as well as the interests of lasting peace in Asia and the world,

RESOLVED to contribute to strengthening world peace and security and to make efforts to bring about a relaxation of international tension and the final elimination of vestiges of colonialism, racialism and imperialism,

CONVINCED that in the present-day world international problems can be solved only through co-operation and not through conflict or confrontation,

RE-AFFIRMING their determination to follow the aims and principles of the United Nations Charter, the Republic of India, on the one hand, and the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on the other, have decided to conclude the present Treaty.

#### Article I

The High Contracting Parties, inspired by the ideals for which their respective peoples struggled and made sacrifices together, solemnly declare that there shall be lasting peace and friendship between their two countries and their peoples, each side shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other side.

The High Contracting Parties shall further develop and strengthen the relations of friendship, good-neighbourliness and all-round co-operation existing between them, on the basis of the above mentioned principles as well as the principles of equality and mutual benefit.



Article 2

Being guided by their devotion to the principles of equality of all peoples and States, irrespective of race or creed, the High Contracting Parties condemn colonialism and racialism in all forms and manifestations and are determined to strive for their final and complete elimination.

The High Contracting Parties shall co-operate with other States in achieving these aims and support the just aspirations of peoples in their struggle against colonialism and racial discrimination and for their national liberation.

Article 3

The High Contracting Parties reaffirm their faith in the policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence as important factors for easing tension in the world, maintaining international peace and security, and strengthening national sovereignty and independence.

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Article 4

The High Contracting Parties shall maintain regular contacts with each other on major international problems affecting the interests of both States, through meetings and exchanges of views at all levels.

Article 5

The High Contracting Parties shall continue to strengthen and widen their mutually advantageous and all-round co-operation in the economic, scientific and technical fields. The two countries shall develop mutual co-operation in the fields of trade, transport and communications between them on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the most-favoured nation principle.

Article 6

The High Contracting Parties further agree to make joint studies and take joint action in the fields of flood control, river basin development and the development of hydro-electric power and irrigation.

Article 7

The High Contracting Parties shall promote relations in the fields of art, literature, education, culture, sports and health.

Article 8

In accordance with the ties of friendship existing between the two countries, each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declares that it shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party.

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall refrain from any aggression against the other party and shall not allow the use of its territory for committing any act that may cause military damage to or constitute a threat to the security of the other High Contracting Party.

Article 9

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall refrain from giving any assistance to any third party taking part in an armed conflict against the other party. In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to take appropriate effective measures to eliminate the threat and thus ensure the peace and security of their countries.

Article 10

Each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declares that it shall not undertake any commitment, secret or open, toward one or more States which may be incompatible with the present Treaty.

Article 11

The present Treaty is signed for the term of twenty-five years and shall be subject to renewal by mutual agreement of the High Contracting Parties.

The Treaty shall come into force with immediate effect from the date of its signature.

Article 12

Any differences in interpreting any article or articles of the present Treaty that may arise between the High Contracting Parties shall be settled on a bilateral basis by peaceful means in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

Done in Dacca on the nineteenth day of March, nineteen hundred and seventy-two.

INDIRA GANDHI  
Prime Minister  
for the Republic of India

SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN  
Prime Minister  
for the  
People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Source: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publications Division, Bangladesh Documents, Vol. 11, New Delhi: Patiala House, 1972, pp. 645-648.



APPENDIX 2

Trade Agreement Between India and Bangladesh

28 March 1972

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND  
THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH,

CONSCIOUS of the urge of their two peoples to enlarge areas of mutual co-operation;

DESIROUS of strengthening economic relations between the two countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit;

RECOGNIZING that the common people of both countries should be the beneficiaries of close co-operation between the two Governments in the fields of trade and development;

AWARE that this objective can best be secured by organizing trade between the two countries on a State-to-State basis as far as possible;

HAVE AGREED as follows:-

Article 1

The two Governments recognizing the need and requirements of each other in the context of their developing economies undertake to explore all possibilities for expansion and promotion of trade between the two countries on the basis of mutual advantage.

## Article 2

The two Governments agree to an *interim* trade agreement as set out in Schedule 'A' attached to this Agreement.

## Article 3

Imports and exports of commodities and goods produced or manufactured in India or Bangladesh as the case may be which are not included in Schedule 'A' and, in the case of commodities and goods included in that schedule, imports and exports in excess of the values specified therein shall be permitted in accordance with the import, export and foreign exchange laws, regulations and procedure in force in either country from time to time.

## Article 4

In order to meet the day to day requirements of the people living within a sixteen kilometre belt of the border between West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram on the one hand and Bangladesh on the other, and with a view to providing facilities to these people to dispose of their goods, border trade shall be allowed in specified commodities in accordance with Schedule 'B' attached to this Agreement.

## Article 5

The two Governments agree to make mutually beneficial arrangements for the use of their waterways, railways and roadways for commerce between the two countries and for passage of goods between two places in one country through the territory of the other.

## Article 6

Each Government shall accord to the commerce of the country of the other Government treatment no less favourable than that accorded to the commerce of any third country.

## Article 7

The provisions of Article 6 shall not prevent the grant or continuance of:

- (a) privileges which are, or may be, granted by either of the two Governments in order to facilitate frontier trade,
- (b) advantages and privileges which are, or may be, granted by either of the two Governments to any of their respective neighbouring countries,
- (c) advantages resulting from a customs union, a free-trade area or similar arrangements which either of the two Governments has concluded or may conclude in the future,
- (d) advantages or preferences accorded under any scheme for expansion of trade and economic co-operation among developing countries, which is open for participation by all developing countries and to which either of the two Governments is or may become a party.

## Article 8

The two Governments agree to co-operate effectively with each other to prevent infringement and circumvention of the laws, rules and regulations of either country in regard to matters relating to foreign exchange and foreign trade.



Article 9

The two Governments agree to accord, subject to their respective laws and regulations, reasonable facilities for the holding of trade fairs and exhibitions and visits of business and trade delegations sponsored by the Government concerned.

Article 10

In order to facilitate the implementation of this Agreement, the two Governments shall consult each other as and when necessary and shall review the working of the Agreement at the end of six months from the date of signature.

Article 11

This Agreement shall come into force from 28th March 1972, and shall remain in force, in the first instance, for a period of one year.

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L.N. MISHRA,  
Minister of Foreign Trade,  
Government of India.

M.R. SIDDIQUI,  
Minister of Trade and Commerce  
Government of Bangladesh.

## Schedule 'A'

1. The two Governments agree that licences shall, where necessary, be granted in accordance with the laws, regulations and procedures in force in either country from time to time to permit the import or export of the commodities and goods in Lists I and II below, up to the value mentioned against each with a view to balanced trade in commodities of special interest. [Lists I and II deleted.]

2. For the purpose of giving effect to the provisions of paragraph 1, the Local Head Office of the State Bank of India at Calcutta and the bank designated by the Bank of Bangladesh, Dacca, shall open special accounts with each other, to be utilized solely for the purpose of making payments to exporters in either country by the bank incorporated and resident in that country on behalf of its correspondent in the other country. Subject to the laws and regulations as in force in the two countries from time to time, overdraft facilities shall be given by either bank to its correspondent in the other country. In the event of the overdraft in either account being in excess of the limit stipulated by the relevant law or regulation as applicable to or in relation to that account, the Government of the country in which the account is maintained will grant a special loan to the bank concerned provided that the total amount of such loan or loans together shall not be in excess of five crores of Indian rupees or five crores of Bangladesh takas. The said loan shall be granted free of interest by the two Governments. In exceptional circumstances the two Governments will agree to increase the limit of the loan in order to facilitate the continuance of trade. Such excess over rupees five crores will carry a rate of interest of six per cent. The amount

outstanding on the expiry of the agreement shall be settled in Pounds Sterling or in any other manner mutually agreed upon. The local Head Office of the State Bank of India at Calcutta will, in consultation with the bank designated by the Bank of Bangladesh, Dacca, finalize the details of the banking arrangements in pursuance of the provisions of this article which would *inter alia* provide for adjustments of the overdrafts periodically.

3. In the event of a change in the parity rate of either the Indian rupee or the Bangladesh taka, while these arrangements are in force, the two Governments will consult each other with a view to reaching an agreed solution to the problem of adjustments.

4. Imports and exports of the commodities and goods in lists I and II above which are in excess of the values shown against them and of commodities and goods which are not included in those lists shall, subject to import, export and foreign exchange laws, regulations and procedures in force in either country from time to time, be financed through authorized dealers in foreign exchange in either country acting through their correspondents in the other country. Subject to the provisions of the exchange regulations in force in the two countries, an authorized dealer may grant to the correspondent in the other country an overdraft to such extent and on such terms and conditions as may be permitted by the Reserve Bank of India or the Bangladesh Bank as the case may be. The settlement of amounts due to from an authorized dealer from or to the correspondent in accordance with these arrangements will be in Pounds Sterling. The



Reserve Bank of India and the Bangladesh Bank will in consultation with each other endeavour to provide the maximum facilities possible for facilitating the flow of trade in accordance with the provisions of Article 3.

5. Subject to such exceptions as may be made by mutual agreement between the two Governments, commodities and goods imported into one country from the other shall not be re-exported to a third country.

#### Schedule 'B'

Provisions relating to border trade referred to in Article 4 of the Agreement.

1. These facilities shall apply to the trade across the land customs frontiers between West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram on the one hand and Bangladesh on the other.

2. These facilities shall be available only to persons living in areas, other than municipal areas, within sixteen kilometres of the land customs frontiers and holding special permits issued by their respective competent authority.

3. Every person holding such a special permit may carry across the border in each sector only such goods and commodities and in such quantities as are specified, in the annexure to this schedule, and for this purpose may cross the border only once a day in each

direction on any two specified days of a week and only through such routes as may be authorized in this behalf. If market conditions in a locality justify relaxation of the number of days in a week on which persons holding special permits may cross the border in that locality, the additional days shall be mutually agreed between the concerned competent authorities in the two countries.

4. The carriage of such goods shall be free from import, export and exchange control restrictions as well as customs duty and customs formalities.

5. Each person may carry in cash a sum not exceeding rupees one hundred in Bangladesh or India currency when crossing the border from either country into the other.

6. Either Government may maintain such checks and take such preventive measures including the right to search as are considered necessary to ensure that these concessions are not exceeded or abused.

7. These arrangements shall be subject to review after a period of six months to consider whether they should be extended or amended in any way. If even before the expiry of this period of six months either country feels the need to withdraw or modify the facilities under this Agreement, it would enter into immediate consultations with the other country taking such measures as it may consider necessary.

[Annexure to Schedule 'B' deleted]

APPENDIX 3

Land Boundary Agreement

TEXT OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA CONCERNING THE DEMARCATION OF THE LAND BOUNDARY BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND INDIA AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS SIGNED ON MAY 16, 1974.

The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Government of the Republic of India,

bearing in mind the friendly relations existing between the two countries,

desiring to define more accurately at certain points and to complete the demarcation of the land boundary between Bangladesh and India,

have agreed as follows:

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Article I

The land boundary between Bangladesh and India in the areas mentioned below shall be demarcated in the following manner:

1. Mizoram-Bangladesh Sector:  
Demarcation should be completed on the basis of the latest pre-partition notifications and records.
2. Tripura-Sylhet Sector:  
Demarcation which is already in progress in this area on the agreed basis, should be completed as early as possible.



3. Bhagalpur Railway Line:  
The boundary should be demarcated at a distance of 75 feet parallel to the toe of the railway embankment towards the east.
4. Sibpur-Gaurangala Sector:  
The boundary should be demarcated in continuation of the process started in 1951-52 on the basis of the District Settlement Maps of 1915-1918.
5. Muhuri River (Belonia) Sector:  
The boundary in this area should be demarcated along the mid-stream of the course of Muhuri river at the time of demarcation. This boundary will be a fixed boundary. The two Governments should raise embankments on their respective sides with a view to stabilizing the river in its present course.
6. Remaining portion of the Tripura-Noakhali/Comilla Sector:  
The demarcation in this sector should be completed on the basis of Chakla-Roshanabad Estate Maps of 1892-1894 and the District Settlement Maps of 1915-1918 for areas not covered by the Chakla-Roshanabad Maps.
7. Fenny River:  
The boundary should be demarcated along the mid-stream of the course at the time of demarcation of that branch of the Fenny River on Survey of India Map sheet No. 79M/15, 1st Edition, 1935, till it joins the stream shown as Asalong C on the said map. From that point on, downstream, the boundary should be demarcated along the mid-stream of the course of the Fenny River at the time of demarcation of the boundary. The boundary in this sector will be a fixed boundary.

8. Rest of Tripura-Chittagong Hill Tracts Sector:  
The boundary will follow the mid-stream of that branch of the Fenny River, referred to in para 7 above, upto Grid reference 009779 (maps sheet as in para 7 above) from where the boundary will follow the mid-stream of the eastern-most tributary. From the source of this tributary, the boundary will run along the shortest distance to the mid-stream of the stream marked Bayan Asalong, on the map referred to above, and thence will run generally northwards along the mid-stream of this river till it reaches its source on the ridge (indicated by grid reference 046810 on the map referred to above). From there it will run along the crest of this ridge upto Boghoban Trig Station. From Boghoban Trig Station upto the tri-junction of the Bangladesh-Assam-Tripura boundary (Khan Talang Trig Station), the boundary will run along the watershed of the river systems of the two countries. In case of any difference between the map and the ground, the ground shall prevail. The boundary will be a fixed boundary in this sector.
9. Beanibazar-Karimganj Sector:  
The undemarcated portion of the boundary west of the Umapati village should be demarcated in accordance with the agreed basis of demarcation, leaving Umapati village in India.
10. Hakar Khal:  
The boundary should be demarcated in accordance with the Nehru-Noon Agreement of September 1958, treating Hakar Khal as a geographical feature distinct from the Ichhamati River. The boundary will be a fixed boundary.

11. Baikari Khal:  
In the Baikari Khal, the boundary should be demarcated on the agreed basis and principles, namely, that the ground shall prevail, *i.e.*, as per the agreement reached between the Directors of Land Records and Surveys of West Bengal and erstwhile East Pakistan in 1949. The boundary will be a fixed boundary.
12. Enclaves:  
The Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and the Bangladesh enclaves in India should be exchanged expeditiously, excepting the enclaves mentioned in paragraph 14 without claim to compensation for the additional areas going to Bangladesh.
13. Hilli:  
The area will be demarcated in accordance with Radcliffe Award and the line drawn by him on the map.
14. Berubari:  
India will retain the southern half of South Berubari Union No. 12 and the adjacent enclaves, measuring an area of 2.64 square miles approximately, and in exchange Bangladesh will retain the Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves. India will lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh an area of 178 metres x 85 metres near 'Tin Bigha' to connect Dahagram with Panbari Mouza (P.S. Patgram) of Bangladesh.
15. Lathitilla-Dumabari:  
From point Y (the last demarcation boundary pillar position), the boundary shall run southwards along the Patharia Hills RF boundary upto the point where it meets the western boundary of Dumabari Mouza.



There, along the same Mouza boundary upto the tri-junction of Mouzas Dumabari, Lathitilla and Bara Putnigaon through the junction of the two mouzas Dumabari and Lathitilla. From this point it shall run along the shortest distance to meet the mid-stream of Putni Chara. Thence it shall run generally southward along the mid-stream of the course of Putni Chara at the time of demarcation, till it meets the boundary between Sylhet (Bangladesh) and Tripura (India).

#### Article 2

The Governments of Bangladesh and India agree that territories in adverse possession in areas already demarcated in respect of which boundary strip maps are already prepared, shall be exchanged within six months of the signing of the boundary strip maps by the plenipotentiaries. They may sign the relevant maps as early as possible and in any case not later than the 31st December 1974. Early measures may be taken to print maps in respect of other areas where demarcation has already taken place. These should be printed by 31st May 1975 and signed by the plenipotentiaries thereafter in order that the exchange of adversely held possessions in these areas may take place by the 31st December, 1975. In sectors still to be demarcated, transfer of territorial jurisdiction may take place within six months of the signature by plenipotentiaries on the concerned boundary strip maps.

#### Article 3

The Governments of Bangladesh and India agree that when areas are transferred, the people in these areas

shall be given the right of staying on where they are, as nationals of the State to which the areas are transferred. Pending demarcation of the boundary and exchange of territory by mutual agreement, there should be no disturbance of the status quo and peaceful conditions shall be maintained in the border regions. Necessary instructions in this regard shall be issued to the local authorities on the border by the two countries.

Article 4

The Governments of Bangladesh and India agree that any dispute concerning the interpretation or implementation of this Agreement shall be settled peacefully through mutual consultations.

Article 5

This Agreement shall be subject to ratification by the Governments of Bangladesh and India and Instruments of Ratification shall be exchanged as early as possible. The Agreement shall take effect from the date of the exchange of the Instruments of Ratification.

Signed in New Delhi on May 16, 1974, in two originals each of which is equally authentic.

For the Government of the  
People's Republic of Bangladesh

(SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN)  
Prime Minister of Bangladesh

For the Government of  
the Republic of India

(INDIRA GANDHI)  
Prime Minister of India

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Source: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, External Publicity Division, Bangladesh Documents, vol. 2, #4, April-June 1974, pp. 14-16.



APPENDIX 4

Statute of the Indo-Bangladesh  
Joint Rivers Commission

Chapter I

THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

Pursuant to the relations of friendship and cooperation that exist between India and Bangladesh,

DESIROUS of working together in harnessing the rivers common to both the countries for the benefit of the peoples of the two countries,

DESIROUS of specifying some questions relating to these matters,

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS

Chapter II

Article I

There shall be established an Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission, hereinafter referred to as the Commission,

Article 2

i) The Commission shall be constituted by each participating Government appointing a chairman and three members; of these two shall be engineers. The chairman and the three members shall ordinarily hold office for a period of three years,

- ii) Each participating Government may also appoint such experts and advisors as it desires,

### Article 3

The Chairmanship of the Commission shall be held annually in turn by Bangladesh and India,

### Article 4

- i) The Commission shall have the following functions, in particular:

- a) to maintain liaison between the participating countries to ensure the most effective joint efforts in maximizing the benefits from common river systems to both the countries,
- b) to formulate flood control works and recommend implementation of joint projects,
- c) to formulate detailed proposals on advance flood warnings, flood forecasting and cyclone warnings,
- d) to study flood control and irrigation projects so that the water resources of the region can be utilized on an equitable basis for the mutual benefit of the peoples of the two countries, and
- e) to formulate proposals for carrying out coordinated research on problems of flood control affecting both the countries;

- ii) The Commission shall also perform such other functions as the two Governments may, by mutual agreement, direct it to do.

## Chapter III

### SUPPORTING STAFF AND SECRETARIAT ASSISTANCE

## Article 5

Each Government will provide appropriate supporting staff and Secretariat assistance to its representatives in the Commission to enable them to discharge their functions in an effective manner.

## Chapter IV

### SESSIONS

## Article 6

- i) Subject to the provisions of this Statute, the Commission shall adopt its own rules of procedure,
- ii) Meetings may generally take place alternately in the two countries, subject to the convenience of the two Governments,
- iii) Special meetings of Working Groups or Ad-Hoc Expert Groups duly nominated by the respective Governments may be arranged, by the mutual consultation of the Members.

## Chapter V

### RULES OF PROCEDURE

The Ordinary sessions of the Commission shall be held as often as necessary, generally four times a year. In addition special meetings may be convened any time at the request of either Government.

## Article 7

All meetings shall be closed meetings unless the Commission desires otherwise.



## Chapter VI

## GENERAL PROVISIONS

## Article 8

The Commission shall submit confirmed minute of all meetings to the two Governments. The Commission shall also submit its annual report by the 31st January, next year.

## Article 9

Decisions of the Commission shall be unanimous. If any differences arise in the interpretation of this Statute, they shall be referred to the two Governments to be dealt with on a bilateral basis in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

DONE in Dacca on the Twenty-fourth day of November, Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Two.

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT  
OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF  
BANGLADESH

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT  
OF INDIA

Signed/-

(SHAFIQL HUQ)

Secretary, Ministry of Flood  
Control and Water Resources.

Signed/-

(SUBIMAL DUTT)

High Commissioner for India  
in Bangladesh

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Source: Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission, Record of Discussions of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission, Dhaka, May, 1985, pp. i-iii.

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