

# ИСТОРИЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

## THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL CHANGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND RUSSIA (USSR) IN 1971—2014

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The article presents an overview of Bangladesh's foreign policy. It analyzes the main directions of Bangladesh's cooperation with its leading partners. The author studies the changing pattern of Bangladesh's foreign policy since it gained its independence in 1971 till the present. He focuses on the changing pattern of foreign policy of Bangladesh regarding bilateral relation with Russia during different regimes under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Sheikh Mujib), General Ziaur Rahman (Zia), General H.M. Ershad (Ershad), Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina and the Caretaker Government. The author seeks to link the domestic changes in the country in 1970—2000-ies, namely the change of governments and regimes, with the adjustment of the foreign policy priorities, including relations with Russia. The article shows dependence of Bangladesh's foreign policy priorities on interests of successive power political forces.

**Key words:** Foreign policy, Soviet Union, Russian Federation, India, Bangladesh, bilateral relation.

Foreign policy is formulated in dynamic process. It is based on certain elements such as history, geographic location, religion, ideology, ethnicity, culture and natural resources. Foreign policy rests mainly on the two pillars: security and development. Security covers not only territorial factor, but also energy, food, water, environment and human aspects. Development means creating the environment and infrastructure, where foreign investment, trade and official development assistance are aimed at eliminating poverty and malnutrition, ensuring primary health care, development of human resources and providing employment opportunities.

Foreign relations of Bangladesh are based mainly on the principles of the two regimes: the Sheikh Mujib Regime (1971—1975) and the Zia Regime (1976—1981). The Ershad regime (1982—1990) and Khaleda Zia regime (1991—1996, 2001—2006) took a lot after the Zia regime. The change occurred after the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina came to power in 1996, who, however, tried to follow the course adopted by the Sheikh Mujib regime. Since 2009 until the present Sheikh Hasina led government

keeping to the core principles of the Sheikh Mujib regime with certain and dramatic changes caused by the fall of the Soviet Union and the 15th amendment in the Bangladesh Constitution.

However, it has to be noticed that the basic element of foreign policy of Bangladesh is dependent on the interest of political parties and chief martial law administrators. It is very difficult to explain the evolution of Bangladesh's foreign policy in different regimes, but this article aims at studying the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Russia in different periods/regimes since the independence of Bangladesh (1971).

### **The Evolution of Foreign Policy in Terms of the Liberation war (1971)**

At the beginning of 1971 a provisional government was formed to lead the Bengali nation to achieving its independence in the absence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as he had been arrested by the Pakistan ruler. During the Liberation war, seeking support and recognition of the world community and drawing sympathy for struggling Bengali people were the main foreign policy objectives of the provisional government. Bangladesh's people fought the Liberation War in 1971 to achieve emancipation from deprivation and uplift their economic advancement to make the society egalitarian within a democratic and non-communal political entity, where multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-lingual people would live in peace and harmony.

The Soviet Union played a crucial role in 1971, and rendered invaluable and unwavering support to Bangladesh's liberation [2]. This immensely contributed to the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country.

In an attempt to thwart the March for liberation, international forces led by the US resorted to diplomatic and military. The US ordered its Seventh Fleet to steam into the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. To counter this threat, the USSR sent its nuclear-armed flotilla. The presence of the Soviet naval force prevented a direct clash between India and the US. During Bangladesh's Liberation war, the US tabled a ceasefire resolution at the UN Security Council with the clear objective of bringing the victorious march of the liberation fighters and friendly forces to the end. The Soviet Union used their veto power against the proposal. And it was the first great power to officially recognize the new-born country of Bangladesh [2].

### **Foreign Policy Trend under the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Regime (1971–1975): Emergence of Bangladesh and Diplomatic Maneuver to Seek Recognition**

The Indo-Soviet support had an impact on Bangladesh foreign policy after it gained its independence. Relations with India and the Soviet Union became more consolidated every day since then. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman paid an official friendly visit to Moscow in March 1972. Immediately after the birth of the country, Bangladesh sent its Ambassadors to India, the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and Yugoslavia, signaling Bangladesh's close engagement with these countries.

The foreign policy in the post Liberation war period was pro-Indian and pro-Soviet to a great extent. The guiding principle of Bangladesh's national policy under the Mujib regime were the "principles of liberation war", i.e. nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy that were proclaimed as basic in the Constitution [1]. The Mujib government continued to deepen the relations with India and the Soviet Union, as they were the main donor countries since the Liberation war period. The Indian political and administrative support set the new government in Bangladesh. So Mujib and Indira signed the Indo-Bangladeshi Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace in 1972 [6. P. 297].

Bangladesh was helpless in the face of the Western bloc, but the Soviet Union initially provided considerable relief and rehabilitation aid to Bangladesh. Mujib's Secular State ideology and a socialist development strategy contributed to the strengthening of relations with India and the Soviet Union. Thus, the relations with these countries were indispensable for the process of reconstruction the war torn country.

India and the Soviet Union with its allies lent their support to the War of Liberation of the people of Bangladesh, while China and the US Nixon administration supported Pakistan. Naturally, the provisional government had aligned with India and the Soviet Union and its allies in the East European countries. Bangladesh government leaders and people were grateful to those countries for the assistance they provided for them during the War of Liberation.

Sheikh Mujib declared that Bangladesh would be the "Switzerland of the East" and by this he meant that Bangladesh would steer clear from the Cold War and would remain non-partisan in the tug of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union.

However, the non-partisan policy lost its urgency with the conclusion of the 1972 Indo-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty. The Treaty was counter to this concept of distancing from the two great rival powers, because India signed a similar Treaty with the Soviet Union in August 1971 and as a result, Bangladesh was perceived by the Western countries to be within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union [10]. During that period, Bangladesh was confronted with the four main foreign policy issues: (a) repatriation of Bengali civilians and military officials, held up in Pakistani camps, to Bangladesh (b) recognition by foreign states (c) admission to the UN and (d) a trial of the 195 Pakistani military prisoners of war, alleged to have committed genocide and crimes against humanity on Bengali population. Except the trial of the Pakistani military officials, Bangladesh steadily and patiently pursued a pragmatic policy to integrate the country into the international community as an equal partner. With the admission of Bangladesh into the UN in September 1974 with the help of the Soviet Union, the country's leaders succeeded in asserting the state on the international stage.

### **New Directions of Foreign Policy under the General Ziaur Rahman Regime (1976—1981)**

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Sheikh Mujib) and most of his family members were assassinated on 15th August 1975 by mid-level army officers and replaced by military regime; this dampened relations between the Soviet Union and Bangladesh.

After the tragic assassination of Sheikh Mujib the course of foreign policy drastically altered. With the change of government, Saudi Arabia and China recognized Bangladesh. The emphasis of foreign policy shifted from the Indo-Soviet alliance to the US, China and Islamic countries. Political vacuum was created in the country since the assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his system, which had pro-Soviet elements, was buried.

The basic principle of foreign and national policy in the regime of General Ziaur Rahman was completely different from that of the Mujib Period. The ideology of absolute faith and trust in the Almighty Allah became the core, as well as nationalism, democracy and socialism in the meaning of economic and social justice with the declaration of building new relationships with Muslim countries on the basis of Islamic solidarity. The relations between Bangladesh and the Indo-Soviet bloc were deteriorating day by day with constitutional, political, economic and other changes in state policy. This played into the US hands because of Zia's position against the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the important role in terms of Iran Hostage crisis in 1979. Most of the reformation actions taken by Gen. Zia went against the interest and ideology of the Soviet Russia.

Relations with the Soviet Union worsened when Bangladesh protested some of the "undiplomatic activities" of the Soviet Embassy and expelled many Russian diplomats during President Zia's regime. During that time Bangladesh's relations with India and the Soviet Union reached the bottom.

### **Foreign Policy under General H.M. Ershad Regime (1982—1990)**

After the assassination of General Ziaur Rahman, General H.M. Ershad came into power in a bloodless military coup on 24 March 1982. The pattern of foreign policy of Zia regime was continuing and strengthening by incorporation of Islam as the state religion in the Constitution through an amendment to satisfy the Middle Eastern countries and the local Islamic leaders. At that time the objective of foreign policy was to strengthen relations especially with the US, China, Japan and Islamic countries.

Gen. Ershad aimed at developing close relations with the USA, China, the Muslim world and Japan while remained indifferent to the Soviet Union, continuing the logic of Zia's period. He amended the Constitution stating that "the State religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony". Ershad's government criticized the Soviet Union for the invasion in Afghanistan and the intervention in Kampuchea by Vietnam, a Soviet ally [4, Article-2A]. During Gen. Ershad's regime the relationship with Russia remained rather lukewarm. 'The Islamic Factor' was amplified during Gen. Ershad's rule.

### **Foreign Policy under Khaleda Zia Regime (1991—1996)**

After the fall of Gen. H.M. Ershad the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) Chairperson Khaleda Zia (Wife of late Ziaur Rahman) came to power in free, fair and impartial elections in February 1991, when the world order drastically changed with the demise of the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union, which had existed for 70 years. With

the demise of the Soviet Union the cold war also ended, and a new international order led by the US emerged.

Basically, Khaleda Zia followed the foreign policy pattern of her husband Gen. Ziaur Rahman, which was the policy of strengthening bilateral relations with the USA, China, Japan and Islamic countries. Furthermore, balance was restored in relations with both Iraq and Iran.

The relations between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation (successor of the USSR) in the Khaleda Zia's regime was the same as during Gen. Ershad's regime. She did not take any initiative to improve the relations with Russia, which had slightly deteriorated during Zia's regime.

The then government launched a foreign policy course to strengthen bilateral relations with the US, China, Japan and Muslim countries ignoring Russia. It was just a copy of the Zia regime foreign policy, although ties with Russia were maintained.

### **Bangladesh's Foreign Policy during Sheikh Hasina Regime (1996–2000/2001)**

After 21 years in 1996 the Awami League returned to power. Sheikh Hasina (daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) was elected to be the Prime Minister. She followed the foreign policy of the Sheikh Mujib regime (1971–1975). The relations between Bangladesh and Russia were reestablished. Sheikh Hasina signed some pacts with Russia. A 124 million dollar deal for 8 MIG–29 fighters was one of them. As a result, Bangladesh bought Special MIG–29 fighting airplanes from Russia, which indicated strong diplomatic ties between the two countries [12].

### **Foreign Policy during Four Party Alliance Regime Led by Khaleda Zia (2001–2006)**

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came into power in 2001 again and formed a coalition government with the Islamic parties. Bangladesh's relations with Russia and India again started to deteriorate. But Russian support and cooperation continued. Everybody remembered that in 1976–81 with the assistance of the USSR construction of the Thermal Power Plant of Ghorashal proceeded (the second block of power 55 MW became operational [13].

Previously, Sheikh Hasina's Government bought 8 MIG–29 airplanes from Russia, but Khaleda Zia's Government put MIG–29 airplanes to tender to sell these airplanes claiming that Bangladesh cannot afford the costing of them. This caused problems in relations with Russia.

Relations between India and Bangladesh were also in decline as the then government tried to develop ties with Pakistan, China, USA, Japan, Muslim countries, Korea, etc.

### **Foreign Policy during the Tenure of Caretaker Government (2007–2008)**

With a lot of causalities, political violence and with the ray of hope for fair election a Care Taker government was formed. Most of the political leaders said that it was a puppet government of the Bangladesh army. The key decision came from the military and

it tried to maintain good relation with the USA, China, India, and Muslim countries. But as it had no legality, it could not implement a strong political course like a democratic regime, as it was busy with election procedure. “Friendship to all, malice to none” — the principle was proclaimed by the Care Taker government, which in fact was a US ally.

### **Foreign Policy of the Current Government Led by Sheikh Hasina (2009 — till date)**

In the general election held at the turn of 2008 the Awami League Party won and formed a coalition government (2009) led by Minister Sheikh Hasina. She signed the agreement “On cooperation in the field of the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes” with Russia in May 2010 [9]. Today the objective of Bangladesh’s foreign policy aims at maximizing national, human and natural endowments in pursuing cooperative policies with countries in the region and beyond it, and it seems to follow Lord Palmerstone’s doctrine that there are no permanent enemies or eternal allies and what is permanent is national interests. During the Hasina regime the cordial relationship between Bangladesh and Russia has reached a new height. The bilateral trade turnover stands at almost 700 million USD in 2012. In regards to education cooperation, nowadays approximately 100 Bangladeshi students come to Russia annually to study at Russian universities under the Russian government scholarship [5].

The cultural interaction between the two countries is also increasing these days. In 2012—14 several Bangladeshi dance and cultural groups visited Russia to take part in different international festivals (Yakutsk, Krasnoyarsk). Prominent Bangladeshi artist Ms. Gulshan Hossain became the winner of the International Art Symposium held in 2011 in the city of Penza, Russia. One of the famous Russian artists Mr. A.K. Sytov took part in the 15th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh (held December 2012, Dhaka) [5].

Political ties between Bangladesh and Russia are getting stronger day by day. Russia and Bangladesh share the same approach towards many international problems and support each other on the international arena.

Hon’ble Foreign Minister of Bangladesh H.E. Dr. Dipu Moni visited Moscow in May 2010, April 2011 and November 2012 and had meetings with her counterpart Hon’ble Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation H.E. Mr. S.V. Lavrov.

Hon’ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh H.E. Sheikh Hasina visited St. Petersburg, Russia, to attend the first World Tiger Summit in November 2010. During the visit Russian Prime Minister V. Putin (now President) met Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the sidelines. That time the two leaders agreed to intensify cooperation on a number of key issues and outlined the dimensions of further Bangladesh-Russian partnership. Hon’ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Moscow on 14—16 January, 2013. This visit became a milestone in the relations between Bangladesh and Russia. It was the first official visit of Bangladesh’s Prime Minister in the recent 40 years. One of the most important outcomes of the visit was a nuclear deal between the two governments. Russia also allocated a 500 million dollar loan to Bangladesh aimed at realizing the first stage of constructing the country’s Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). The project envisages the construction of two power units, each with capacity of 1000 MW [5].

According to intergovernmental agreement on the NPP construction, Russia will supply nuclear fuel for the NPP in Bangladesh for the entire period of its exploitation. Experts from Bangladesh will be able to intern and train in Russia. Apart from that, a series of documents was signed between different ministries of the two states, including Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Culture, Agriculture, Education, Public health, Law and Justice, etc. [5].

To sum it up, the Sheikh Hasina government attaches much importance to its relations with Russia and expects greater cooperation from this time-tested and friendly country, which it trusts.

Therefore, in the light of the above mentioned background, many foreign policy experts in the country say that Bangladesh has no “foreign policy” but only “foreign relations” that respond only to external situations as they arise. Our analysis clearly demonstrates that Bangladesh’s foreign policy towards Russia has been mainly following the principles introduced by the two regimes of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1971—1975) and Ziaur Rahman (1976—1981). Gen. H. M Ershad (1982—90) and Khaleda Zia (1991—1996, 2001—2006) adhered to almost all the principles of Gen. Ziaur Rahman, while Sheikh Hasina (1996—2001, 2009 till date) maintains mostly the course of the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman regime. At the same time the Care Taker Government regime (2007—2008) was in fact balancing between the regimes of Sheikh Mujib and General Zia.

Foreign policy ought to be formulated on the basis of respect, justice and goodwill of a particular country, and its national interest has to be kept the highest priority.

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