

IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH BANGLADESH

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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CENTRE FOR WEST ASIAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI - 110067

1989



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SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

21 July 1989

DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled 'Iran's Relations with Bangladesh' submitted by Mr. Sankha Subhra Dev Barman in partial fulfilment for the award of the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge this is a bonafide work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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TO MY PARENTS

IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH BANGLADESH

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PREFACE	PAGE NO.
I	<u>HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</u>	
	A. IRAN AND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT	1
	B. IRAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR	21
II	A. IRAN'S RECOGNITION OF BANGLADESH AND ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS	38
	B. IRAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH	47
III	A. POLITICAL INTERACTION BETWEEN IRAN AND BANGLADESH	53
	B. ISLAM AS A FACTOR IN BILATERAL RELATIONS	68
IV	ECONOMIC RELATIONS	88
V	BANGLADESH'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR	108
VI	CONCLUSION	126
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	144

PREFACE

Professor Joseph Frankel pointed out that "the environment of foreign policy is limitless, it embraces the whole universe." He also added: "... in practice the environment is circumscribed.... by the range of interests and the limitation of every single state."

As a matter of fact, the objectives of the foreign policy of a state originate from its national interest, which is determined by geographical location, historical evolution and perception of world political environment. Other important inputs are ethnicity, tradition, socio-political set up and economic compulsions. At a given point of time, interaction between external and domestic factors and existing communications system determine the foreign relations posture of any state.

Iran's relationship with Bangladesh is a case in point. Earlier no work has been done on this subject. Various aspects of their bilateral relations have not been studied so far. The present study tends to be the first historical, interpretative and analytical essay of its kind in order to get an insight into their relationship.

Being a student of international relations I felt a strong urge to discover the various aspects of Iran - Bangladesh relations which are slightly more than fifteen years old. Investigation would take care of mutual compulsions, nature, scope and prospects of this inter state relationship.

I also felt that since both the countries under study belong to the trouble - ~~tern~~ Third World and my being a citizen of another Third World country, it was my duty to sort out the strength and shortcomings of bilateral relations between two developing states and also to explore the main stream of their relations.

I hope that this work would help in understanding the process of mutual interaction between two disparate developing countries.

During the course of my research work, I had to face some practical problems, such as the scarcity of documents, books and journals on this subject. However, on the basis of available sources, I attempted an integrated study. I would not have dared had my guide Professor A.H.H. Abidi not encouraged me to undertake this preliminary study. He devised the chapters for my research in a manner that clarified the ... contours of the subject to me. He even bore the pain to go through my

scribbled draft copies. Indeed working under Professor Abidi was a rare moment in my life. I am extremely grateful to him. I would also like to thank Professor K.R. Singh, Professor M. Sadiq and Professor P.C. Jain for their valuable suggestions.

Last but not the least, Mr. Devi Sahai, Professional Assistant in the Press clipping Section in the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, helped me a lot. He deserves my gratitude. Due to the non-availability of most of the documents on Iran's relations with Bangladesh, I heavily depended on secondary sources.

Lastly, the final responsibility of interpretation in the study is solely mine.

21 July, 1989

Sankha Subhra Dev Barman.
Sankha Subhra Dev Barman.

CHAPTER I
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. IRAN AND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Iran is strategically situated with Iraq & Turkey on the north-west. On the north, it is bounded by the Caspian Sea and by the Transcaucasian and Central Asian Republic of the Soviet Union. The Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean lie on its southern side. Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent lie on its east.

Traders and conquerors were always lured by the wealth of Iran. In the nineteenth century, it became an area of tremendous strategic significance. It has retained the same importance till now.

Britain created a chain of buffers in the West Asia region in order to secure its empire in India, from the challenges posed to it by Russia. Iran was thus enmeshed in the big powers' power game. Iran was regarded as the strategic frontier by the British Indian empire, but Russia looked upon it as the natural area for expansion. Consequently, Anglo-Russian rivalry became an important factor determining Iranian Foreign policy in the period under examination.

Except momentarily in the period 1907-'16, when the threat posed by Germany, compelled a reapproachment between Russia and Britain, the Anglo-Russian competition remained a persistent factor right upto the outbreak of the Second World War.

For sometime Iran did not play its traditional role of a buffer between Russia and Britain after the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907. Britain and Russia divided Iran into their spheres of influence and snatched away its previous freedom of action as a buffer and "it lost its independence for all practical purposes."¹

The perspective which Iran had of the Indian subcontinent was one imposed upon it from outside. Initially, the only reason for Britain's interest in Iran was the importance of British India. On the other hand, Russia had territorial ambition in the Southeast together with a strong urge to reach the warm waters of the Persian Gulf. The Tsar's directive in this respect was ... "In the decadence of Persia, penetrate as far as the Persian Gulf.... advance as far as India which is the store house of the world"² Iran, in this way, became the focal point of the Anglo-Russian rivalry and this factor put stringent hindrance on its foreign policy.

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1. Roullah K. Ramazani, The Foreign Policy of Iran. 1500-1941. (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville - 1966), p.302.
 2. Miron Rezum, The Soviet Union and Iran, (Netherlands, Sijthoff and Noordhoff. 1981) p. 172.

During the period under examination Iran enjoyed limited freedom of action. By employing a variety of diplomatic techniques and devices Iran's policy makers tried to make the best of their circumstances. So they sought to makeup for lack of military power and maintain their country's interest through diplomatic efforts. Playing off a third power against Britain and Russia was another tactic. Iran also tried playing one power off against the other and, whenever it could, it also used delaying tactics. The technique was obviously used in accordance with the circumstances whenever Iran found itself in a favourable atmosphere.

Thus Anglo-Russian rivalry was an "inescapable reality" and throughout the nineteenth century and even later Iran had to cope with this reality. In the Indian subcontinent the growth of British interests and subsequent Anglo-Russian rivalry severely affected Iran's domestic as well as foreign policies.

Britain regarded the Indian subcontinent as core of its imperial system and it was the confrontation with other big powers over the Indian subcontinent which dragged the ancient empire of Persia around 1800 A.D. into world political arena. (Officially the Hellenistic name of Persia was replaced by the indigenous name, Iran, in 1935).

With the progressing of nineteenth century, the crucial importance of Indian subcontinent was clear to Britain. The British empire in Indian subcontinent was not only the indication of 'Prosperity' but also of its perpetual status as a world power.

The Indian subcontinent was considered by the British Government as "the key of her position in Asia" and "corner stone" of its empire.³ "The loss of India.. would be a death blow to our prosperity, prestige and power"⁴ as, in 1901, one document of war office acknowledges the special place of India in Britain's foreign policy.

With the growing development of the British interest in India it became important for Britain to grasp Iran and the Persian Gulf alongwith Afghanistan under its control. The main motive was to keep these zones free from other big power so that for any possible invasion against India, these zones could not be used

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3. Valentine Chirol, Middle East Question on some Political Problems of Indian Defence (London, 1903), p.394.
 4. Military needs of the Empire in a war with France Russia. Secret, 1901, war office, 106/4B,EB/2. Quoted in R.L. Greaves, Persia and the Defence of India (London, 1959). p.25

by other big powers as military bases. Simply, Britain grappled with the policy not to let any rival power gain a dominant influence in any of these areas on the Indian border, so that Britain itself could dominate a vast colony like India. Therefore, throughout the nineteenth century, Iran was the "outer glacis of an extreme bastion".⁵ Because of its strategic location between the empires of the two great powers of the region, Iran became the centre of the struggle for sphere of influence. Therefore, Britain's imperial interest in India was an important consideration whether it was the Central Asian question, the Persian Gulf question or the Persian question. Consequently, Britain was persuaded to follow a more active policy towards Iran. As one Iranian Intellectuals observed Britain's deliberate policy was to make Iran weak since it was 'afraid' of Iranian cultural influence in India.⁶

At the time when the people of Indian subcontinent were awakening against the British exploitation and rule in this area, interaction on unofficial level between nationalists of different political shades on both sides

5. Hamilton to Curzon, PVT. 26 January, 1900 : PVT correspondence, Indian part, vol.5, Hamilton Papers. India Office Library. Quoted in Ibid.p.22.

6. Said Nafisi, Tarikh-i-Ijtima - va - Siyasi-i-Iran (Tehran, 1955) Cited in R.K. Ramazani, N.1 p.35.

continued between the people of Iran and India . Against the centuries - old British rule in India, the intense Indian nationalist movement, spearheaded by Gandhiji and his followers, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru got a momentum. In 1928, in the forty-third session, the Indian National Congress sought to disassociate itself from the British policy and passed a resolution "that the present Government of India in no way represents the people of India and their policy have been traditionally guided by considerations of holding India. The people of India have no quarrels with the neighbouring states or the other nations of the world and they will not permit themselves to be exploited by England to further her imperialist aims."⁷

The Congress representative, Jawaharlal Nehru, came into contact with delegates from Iran at an international congress against imperialism in 1927. Jawaharlal Nehru earnestly invited delegates in the next session of the Indian National Congress. However Iranian delegates could

7. Indian National Congress, Resolution passed by the Congress, the All India Congress Committee and the Working Committee 1920-26, 1927-28, 1930-46. (Allahabad, 1924), Edn. 1946, p.30.

not attend the session. After apologising for the absence, Suleiman Mirza, on behalf of the Persian Socialist Party, sent a cablegram, where in he wrote, "It goes without saying that Persia, owing to many historic and other bonds, is one of the countries which particularly shares your sufferings and will acclaim whole heartedly the independence of India."⁸

After Germany invaded Russia in the Second World War in 1941, Allied troops penetrated into Iran. Indian nationalists were upset due to the Anglo-Russian aggression in Iran. In 1946, the working committee of the Indian National Congress passed a resolution which read:

Noted with grave concern the growing tension in the international situation, resulting in open recrimination between the Great powers and attempts on their part to secure or hold on to colonial areas and vantage points and create satellite states which may lead to possible future conflicts.....Oil is still the lure of imperial domination and preservation

8. From Suleiman Mirza on behalf of the Persian Socialist Party, 18 November 1928, Quoted in Ibid., p.30.

of the so called lifelines of empire or strategic outposts are made the excuses for expansion as well as retention of colonial areas.....Imperialist policy has to be discarded not only in the interest of subject nations but also to rid the world of the peril that might overwhelm humanity. It has thus become urgently necessary to end foreign domination over the countries of Asia and Africa and for foreign armies to be withdrawn from Indo-China, Iran and Egypt. India still remains the crux of the problem of Asian freedom of many countries and the peace of world⁹.

Earlier, the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League, at its session in 1941, had passed a resolution against the aggression in Iran by Britain and the Soviet Union. Indian nationalist leaders were annoyed when the Soviet Union created the 'Azerbaijan crisis' in Iran, despite the fact that they had 'traditional relations' with the Soviet Communists.¹⁰

The Indian nationalist leaders systematically intensified the liberation movement against the British

9. Indian National Congress, N. 7, pp.152-53.

10. See, Ramesh Sanghvi, Aryamehr (London 1968)

imperialism. Due to the high velocity of Indian national movement, Britain was compelled to lower down its Union Jack in India. But before its departure from the Indian subcontinent, Britain divided the continent between India and Pakistan. The emergence of Pakistan became a new factor in the politics of the region. The exit of Britain from the Indian subcontinent created a vacuum, which influenced greatly Iran's foreign policy in the post Second World period.

During the period 1945-60, Iranian foreign policy under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who came to power after the abdication of his father in 1941, was chiefly a set of reactions to international developments. But the young Shah had to face other problems also in the domestic front. The Tudeh party's anti-monarchy movement was increasing. During the Azerbaijan crisis it even got full support of the Soviet Union. Although the Tudeh's separatist plan in Azerbaijan did not succeed it was a lesson to the Shah about the design of expanding communism in the weak states. While the Shah took a stern attitude towards the Tudeh party, a radical nationalist movement was growing up under the leadership of Dr Mohammad Mossadeq. Mossadeq emphasised on 'negative equilibrium' in Iran's foreign policy so that no foreign power could interfere

in Iran's domestic affairs. Therefore, Mossadeq sought to curb to the Shah's authority within the frame work of the Constitution. When Mossadeq came to power in Iran he refused to grant concession to any foreign power and subsequently he nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). Alongwith taking all these steps, Mossadeq sought to curb the Shah's power. However, in 1953, Mossadeq was thrown out by a royalist coup abetted by CIA and the power was restored to the Shah.

All these developments, compelled to the Shah to consolidate his position on the royal throne as much as possible. After the consolidation of power, the Shah paid more attention to make Iran militarily stronger so that it could equate the balance of power in the Gulf as well as in the Indian subcontinent. Earlier, in the wake of the partition of India and the birth of Pakistan in 1947, the latter became a major factor in Iran's foreign policy.

Since their independence, both India and Pakistan got involved in periodic confrontation in the questions of borders and Kashmir. A dark cloud of suspicion enveloped Indo-Pak relations. From the very beginning, Pakistan was sensitive and suspicious towards its big neighbour, India. At the same time, the intensity

and tension of the Cold War was at its peak. The United States, and its Western allies were looking for reliable allies in the Third World, which could be used to prevent the expansion of communism. The Baghdad Pact was the outcome of this western initiative. Although the United States was not a member of the Pact its natural ally, Britain, was a key member of the Pact.

Meanwhile, India, under the sterling stewardship of Jawaharlal Nehru, started to initiate a movement of non alignment amongst the developing countries. The main motive of this movement was to keep aloof from the gathering power rivalry and blocs. Pakistan for fear of India's influence did not join this movement . Iran was also suspicious of this movement. Iran's suspicion was confirmed when the Soviet Union supported the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement. Moreover, the Shah was afraid of revolutionary and radical movements in West Asia. It was a time, when a radical movement was brewing up in Egypt under the leadership of Nasser. Nasser was also one of the architects of the Non-Aligned Movement. Egypt's inclusion in the Non-Aligned Movement enhanced the Shah's concern.

In this context, on 11 October, 1955, when Iran and Pakistan declared their intention to join the Pact of mutual cooperation, known as the Baghdad Pact, their mutual friendship and alignment with the West became established facts. Previously, Iraq and Turkey had signed a bilateral pact on 24 February 1955. The Baghdad Pact originated out of the initiative of the United States of America. With the British departure from the Indian subcontinent and West Asia, a 'power vacuum' was deemed to have been created. In the midst of the Cold War, American foreign policy was aimed at filling up this vacuum. With the principal aim of throwing a 'cordon sanitaire' around the Soviet Union and its allies, America tried to set up a regional defence arrangement. Since majority of the Arab states were not willing to cooperate with this scheme, John Foster Dullas, the American Secretary of State, started working on another scheme - popularly known as the "Northern Tier" plan. After his extensive trip to West Asia, in his report to the nation on 1 June, 1953 Dulles introduced the concept of 'Northern tier'. Emphasising the importance of the 'Northern tier' he pointed out: "Many of the Arab countries are so engrossed with their quarrels that they pay little heed to the menace of Soviet Communism. However, there is more

concern where the Soviet Union is near."¹¹ Turkey, Pakistan and Iran were looked upon with great interest by America for their important geographical locations from where America, with its allies, could keep a watch into the depth of Soviet military defence.

Although, the Baghdad pact was initiated for the 'Russian containment' each of the countries of the Northern Tier had its own reason for joining the alliance. Iran was concerned with defence against the Soviet Union as the Shah of Iran was afraid of popular insurgency in domestic front, which, he thought, was backed by the Soviets. Pakistan never faced any threat from 'communist expansionism' by the Soviet Union in this area. Yet it allied itself with the Northern Tier countries. In fact, Pakistan was highly obsessed with defence against India.

Some understandings had already developed between Iran and Pakistan even before the signing of the Baghdad Pact. Regarding the Kashmir issue, Pakistan got full

11. Zubeida Hasan, "Iran, Pakistan, Turkey-Regional Co-operation for Development" Pakistan Horison (Karachi), vol. 17 (No.3), 1964, p.277.

support from Iran. Iran regarded Kashmir as an indivisible part of Pakistan and considered that it was Iran's responsibility to support Pakistan on the Kashmir problem since "ninety percent of the people of Kashmir are Muslim and have ties of common culture, tradition and relation with Iran. As such the Muslim world and in particular the people of Iran cannot remain indifferent to their lot."¹²

Iran and Pakistan signed a friendship treaty in 1950. Since there was no dispute between the two countries the growth of ties between the two countries was facilitated to a great extent. But both Iran and Pakistan were isolated in their respective zones. Iran's relations with the Soviet Union were not very cordial. Added to that, during Reza Shah's time, Iran's relations with most of the West Asian Countries were sour. On the other hand, Pakistan harboured misgiving against India and Afghanistan. Thus, through the Baghdad Pact they came close but their objectives were different from each other. Only one similarity was there that both Iran and Pakistan were in search of an

12. Sadai Mardum, 6th March 1955, Quoted in Shirin Tahir. "Iran and Pakistan : Co-operation in an area of conflict", Asian Survey (Berkeley, California), vol.17, No.5 (May 1977) p.476.

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external ally for protection against their perceived enemies. Above all, Baghdad Pact was an outcome of American design. It served the American needs while Iran and Pakistan played merely the second fiddle.

Regarding the Indian subcontinent, at the initial stage, Americans were guided by the British assessment of this region. Subsequently, they developed their own policy. As early as 1952, the 'Pentagon Papers' showed a U.S. intelligence assessment which stated that when the British domination in the West Asia started dwindling only Turkey and Pakistan would be able to withstand the tide of Communism.

Previously, a former ICS officer, once the Governor of the North West Frontier Province, Sir Olaf Caroe, formulated his thesis in his work - the Wells of Power - in which he stated that it was not India but Pakistan which was the key country for the defence of the West. With the advent of the air age, Britain had been looking for a reliable state in the region. This Search was completed by the partition of India, and the creation of Pakistan.

The United States thinking on this aspect was that "India is no longer an obvious base for Middle East defence; it stands on the edge of the periphery. Pakistan lies well within the grouping of South Western Asian as seen from the air."¹³ Under no circumstances was the United States ready to underestimate the importance of the potential role Pakistan could play in West Asia. Several Western War specialists also expressed their idea in unison about the potentiality of Pakistan. They argued that against "international communism" and Soviet design on the oil resources of West Asia, the contribution that Pakistan could make in establishing a belt of Muslim nations could be very valuable. American perception was that in case of any War, oil was essential and most of it lay deep in West Asia and America must keep the Soviet Union away from this area.

In 1952 The British Foreign Office had sent Caroe on a Lecture tour to the United States. Caroe succeeded in convincing the United States about the importance of Pakistan in geo-political terms. He pointed out that during a war, Karachi could be a huge American base.

13. Quoted in M.S. Venkatamani and Harish Arya, "United States' Military alliance with Pakistan", International Studies (New Delhi) vol.8.nos.1/2, (July/Oct 1966), p.83.

Later on, Caroe revealed in an interview in London in 1964 that, Article 1 of the Baghdad Pact merely stated that "the high contracting parties will cooperate for their security and defence" and that this co-operation "may form the subject of special agreements with each other." The Pact did not lay any compulsion on its members to regard an attack on one as an attack on all. In comparison with NATO, Baghdad Pact had no joint military command, no integrated infrastructure of bases and installation and no collective defence. In the field of military planning, training and collective exercise, under the Pact, the members' commitment went little beyond co-operation.

Notwithstanding that, it should be noted that the Baghdad Pact brought Iran more closer to Pakistan and it had inevitable effects on Indo-Iranian relations. Since its independence, India had sought to keep itself free of the two power blocs and followed a policy of non-alignment. India was against all kinds of military pacts. On 31 March 1955, the then Prime Minister of India expressed his aversion to the military alliances, in the Lok Sabha:

These military pacts far from being helpful are doing a lot of harm, far from bringing security and assurance of peace, they actually tend in opposite direction.¹⁴

Nehru further commented that the Baghdad treaty had weakened the Arab-League. He noticed that Yemen, Egypt and Syria were all opposed to the Baghdad Pact. Once again, on 29th March, 1956, in a speech in the Lok Sabha, Nehru underlined the reasons for India's opposition to military pacts; He observed.

It is clear that the approach of military pacts like the Baghdad Pact and the South East Asian Treaty Organisation is a wrong approach, a dangerous approach and a harmful approach. It sets in motion all the wrong tendencies from developing. Honourable Members know that the Baghdad Pact is said to be the northern or mid-tier of defence and presumably it is meant for defence against aggression if it takes place, against the Soviet Union But surely no one here imagines that the Pakistan Government entered into this Pact because it expected some imminent or distant invasion or aggression from the Soviet Union. The Pakistani newspapers and the statements of responsible people in Pakistan make it clear that they have joined this pact because of India. Either they are apprehensive of India or they want to develop strength, and as the phrase goes, speak from strength

My point is that people enter into these pacts with different motives. I am quite sure that the other members of the Baghdad Pact have no hostility to India I am equally sure that India was the motive of Pakistan when it entered this pact.¹⁵

14. Kessings Archives (Bristol) May 7-14, 1956 14187 A

15. J.L. Nehru, India's Foreign Policy : Selected Speeches, September 1946 - April 1961.
(New Delhi, 1971 p. 94)

Countering Nehru's statement, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali, argued that "Peace can be maintained only through a dynamic, positive, passive or neutralist attitude..... Since peace can be broken at any point..... it follows that world peace can be assured only if the smaller nations are protected against armed attack or internal subversion by an effective system of regional security."¹⁶ He asserted that mighty Pakistan would be an obstacle in the way of India's ambition to become the undisputable leader among the smaller nations of Asia.

However, despite their disagreement in the foreign policies, a treaty of commerce and navigation was signed between Iran and India on 15 December, 1954. A cultural agreement was signed in December 1956. Before that India gave warm reception to the Shah and Shahbanou during their state visit to this country. For each other's stand on foreign policy issues, a great deal of understanding was expressed by the two sides. In regard to the Baghdad Pact, at a state banquet in honour of the Shah, Dr. Rajendra prasad remarked: "The century-old friendship between India and Iran and the historical

16. Kessings Archives, July 7-14, 1956. 14961 A.

bond of fraternity could not only sustain the strain but iron out, through mutual talks and a friendly exchange of views."¹⁷ In response, the Shah expressed.

"Our thought and sentiments have been expressed many times in the same language, having always the same meaning - the meaning of responsibility for the human soul, responsibility for the right of the individual and also in different ways, responsibility for freedom and independence.

Having so many plans in common and having both peace and fraternity, you in your country in this part of the world, we in Iran in a slightly different geographical situation - I am sure are trying to do the something to preserve and continue the legacy of our ancestor and preserve independence and peace."¹⁸

Albeit, in Iran's foreign policy, soon, certain developments in the domestic as well as international sphere set the stage for wide ranging changes.

17. Times of India (Bombay), 18 December, 1956.

18. Ibid.

B. IRAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR

In the post-Second World War era, the Shah became the main architect of Iranian foreign policy. He was afraid of popular insurgency and communist expansion in West Asia. Therefore his main effort was to prevent all these forces so that they could not pose a threat to his throne. The Shah had characterized Iran's change to a more assertive foreign policy called "independent national policy" (Siyasat-i-mustaqill-i-milli).

Devising Iran's foreign policy, the Shah stated:

We pursue an independent national policy based on international understanding and co-operation while safeguarding our inviolable national rights and interests of other. We firmly believe that the principles of understanding and co-operation are indispensable conditions for peaceful advancement of societies in all parts of World today. In this regard we not only give credence to the necessity of peaceful co-existence but we also believe in peaceful co-operation among all nations of the world with differing social orders and systems of government. 1

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1. Extract from the Shah of Iran's speech on the occasion of the inauguration of the 22nd Majlis and fifth session of the Senate, 6 October, 1967. Taken from Iran's Foreign Policy: A Compendium of the Writings and Statements of His Imperial Majesty Shahanshah Aryamehr (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Press Department, Tehran.)

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Some changes took place simultaneously in the fall of 1971 in the regional environment of both Iran and the Indian subcontinent which led to a modification of Iran's perspective of the subcontinent.

After the British withdrawal from the Gulf, as well as the Indian Ocean, a power vacuum was created. The Shah's plan was to make Iran pre-eminent power in this region. But at the same time India was emerging steadily as a pre-eminent power in the subcontinent and it had maintained consistently good relations with the Soviet Union. Iran's concern grew up when India and the Soviet Union announced the signing of a twenty-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation on 9 August 1971. During the Indo-Pak war, Iran actively supported Pakistan, which was its natural ally. Iran felt that the further division of Pakistan will have a negative effect on Iran's military strategy in the subcontinent.

The Indo-Pak War of 1971 upset the equation between the two countries. Prior to the 1960s, through CENTO, Iran's policies towards the subcontinent primarily centred on its alliance with Pakistan. Iran's bilateral relations with the countries of the Indian subcontinent were linked to the global politics

of the Cold War. Against the wave of Arab radicalism, Iran's alliance with Pakistan through CENTO worked as an amulet for protection. In 1958, especially after the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy, this Pact also helped Iran to outflank a non-aligned state, Afghanistan.

Through its alliance with Pakistan, Iran was interested in keeping its eastern flank peaceful but it had obvious effect on India. From 1950 to 1965, throughout the period of active consideration of the Kashmir dispute, both outside and inside of the United Nations, Iran fully supported Pakistan. Iran categorically characterised India's actions as 'aggression' and Pakistan was morally and materially assisted by Iran in 1965 when war brokeout between India and Pakistan. Iran also tried to help Pakistan in other regional disputes. Through various efforts, the Shah also succeeded in bringing Pakistan and Afghanistan in a common front. Their broken relations, which were severed in 1961, were re-established on diplomatic and trade levels on 26 May 1963. At this time Iran's relations with Afghanistan also improved. That's why Iran was able to mediate between the two countries. As a matter of fact, the Shah's policy

was not to let Pakistan, a front line state for Iran, sink into the abysmal swamp of troubles. He knew that any type of political vicissitudes in Pakistan would affect Iran. So, regional stability was extremely necessary for Iran. Therefore, with the object of promoting regional integration, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey set up the 'Regional Co-operation Development' (RCD) in 1964.

But in early 1970s, Iran's most natural ally Pakistan went through one of its worst traumatic periods including bifurcation of the country. Pakistan was eventually compelled to acknowledge the birth of Bangladesh in its eastern wing. For a couple of years, Pakistan felt shy to recognize the independent and sovereign state of Bangladesh. Pakistan strove to convince other Muslim countries of West Asia against Bangladesh's liberation movement through systematic misgivings. These countries went along with Pakistan stance. Iran was one of the most vocal countries against the separatist and liberation movement in East Pakistan.

Let us look back at the background from where the dream for liberation of suppressed Bengali people got an indomitable spirit.

Pakistan 'Land of the Pure' was born amidst

religious strife on 14 August 1947; and it experienced intermittent strife and violence ever since. Much of it was generated by East Pakistan's demand for autonomy.

Since its birth, Pakistan was separated by India lying between its eastern and western wings. Political scientists and intellectuals always described the birth of Pakistan as an "impossible dream" and a "temporary phenomenon". The only tie between the two wings was the common belief in Islam. But other things were diametrically opposite. Language, culture, economy, race and even food habits, were also distinctly diverse and separate.

Ethnically speaking, fair-complexioned Punjabis, Pathans and Baluchis dominantly inhabit West Pakistan which is an extension of the arid West Asia. Their mother tongues also differed from the Bengali people of East Pakistan. West Pakistanis tried to impose Urdu all over Pakistan by making it the official language. But Bengalis in East Pakistan rejected this effort with great determination. There are other fields such as administration, National security and economy where West Pakistan always tried to dominate over East Pakistan.

Over the years the East Pakistanis felt that they always got no more than crumbs from the West Pakistani table and that they were being treated as second class citizens. West Pakistanis dominated the military, civil service, banking and business. The wealthy families were mostly West Pakistanis.

The honeymoon between the two wings of Pakistan was short-lived. Within a few years when West Pakistan started to grasp over East Pakistan, Bengalis realised the wide gulf between the western and eastern wings of Pakistan. Whatever ethnicity, cultural or race amidst common faith it may be the gulf between the two diverse groups of Pakistanis increased with every passing of years. Bengali Muslims rediscovered their cultural heritage. In the Pakistan National Assembly, a Bengali member, Abul Mansur Ahmed, in a speech, pointed out during the time of independence struggle against the British, the chief aim of protagonists of Pakistan was to create one nation out of two peoples. The two peoples, barring minorities, had a common religion and were linked by a common struggle for the achievement of Pakistan. "With the exception of these two things all other factors viz. the language, the tradition, the culture, the custom,

the costume, the dietary, the calendar, the standard time, practically everything is different. There is, in fact, nothing common in the two things, particularly in respect of those factors that are the sine qua non to form a nation".²

Although, the partition of India fulfilled the desire of Western powers alongwith the vested interests in the subcontinent, a large chunk of the intellegentia could not support the partition merely on the basis of religion.

It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religious affinity can unite areas, which are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different.....

No one can hope that East and West Pakistan will compose all their differences and form one nation .³

While the population of West Pakistan was an amalgamation of various nationalities, the Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan were culturally, linguistically and economically a homogenous group.

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2. D.R. Mankekar, Pak. Colonialism in East Bengal (Bombay 1971), p.35
 3. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India wins freedom: An autobiographical narration (Bombay 1959), p.227

It was religion about which provided the only bond of political unity in Pakistan. The stark reality was that religion could hardly have a Midas touch effect on the unity in Pakistan. Indeed, Pakistan was a multi-racial and multi-linguistic state.

The founding father of Pakistan, Jinnah's effort was to develop Pakistan into a linguistically homogenous state, while the two wings emotionally, culturally and geographically, were miles apart. Under the veneer of Islam as religion it was a futile attempt to set up a centralised administration. The real intention was the West Pakistan's domination over East Pakistan. Regarding the West Pakistan's intention, Ferdous Koreshi who was a Bengali intellectual explained it in one of his articles thus:

There is no longer any difference of opinion about the fact that they (West Pakistanis) tried to establish a highly centralised administration not for the sake of Islam or to safeguard the interest of the Muslim but to maintain their vested interests. They understood that to establish the domination in centre, the supremacy of one language was essential.⁴

In a nutshell, the use of Islam for maintaining the vested interests of West Pakistan, was not approved

4. Quoted from Ittefaq, a Bengali daily of Dacca, of 21 February 1971, in the book by G.P. Bhattacharjee : Renaissance and Freedom Movement in Bangladesh (Calcutta 1972), p. 63

by the Bengali nationalists, elite and intellectuals. For twenty long years, West Pakistanis main effort was to annihilate the language, literature and culture of the Bengalis.

The colonisation of the Eastern wing became a natural extension of the power base under the cover of a 'one nation state', as, once, the total power on the subcontinent was under the firm grip of feudal and capitalist forces. The strata of the dwelling middle class was formed in East Pakistan by the off-spring of surplus farmers and the middle peasantry. The lack of an indigenous bourgeoisie and large land-owning class which would have increased the capitalist class among the Bengalis, helped ~~middle~~ class petty bourgeoisie leadership to carry forward the liberation movement against the exploitation of West Pakistan.

The 'national question' became the rallying point for all classes of people in East Pakistan. Since the West Pakistanis considered themselves foreigners in East Pakistan they did not allow their Bengali collaborators to rise from the rank of 'stooges' and no independent thought was allowed to the Bengalis.

The predominantly Muslim population in East Pakistan was in search of cultural and national identity. East

Pakistan's separation from West Pakistan marks the culminating point of the search for such identity of Bengalis.

East Pakistan viz East Bengal went through a tumultuous phase in the early 1970s. In the general election which was held all over Pakistan from 7 December 1970 to 17 January 1971, the Awami League, the sole political party of Bengali nationalism in East Bengal, won 167 seats out of the 169 allotted to East Pakistan and secured a commanding position in a House of 313 members in the National Assembly. The 1970-71 election result rang the death knell of the religious ideological link between the two wings of Pakistan.

The Bangladesh liberation movement was a matter of great anxiety to the Shah of Iran. Here it should be mentioned that although undivided Pakistan was a member of the Baghdad Pact, East Pakistan had virtually nothing to do with this Pact. East Bengal was neither afraid of India's aggression as the western wing of Pakistan was because of numerous dispute with India nor was it concerned about the Soviet expansion in West Asia. So the eastern wing's inclusion into the Baghdad Pact became a farce. Therefore, Bangladesh liberation movement challenged Pakistan's foreign policy also. The Indo-Soviet Friendship

Treaty followed by the breakup of Pakistan was seen by the Shah as one factor which brought the Soviet influence closer to Iran's eastern border. In the Bangladesh liberation movement India's involvement was inevitable. India just could not remain apathetic towards the political upheaval in an adjacent state where people put up a gallant fight against the exploitation and social discrimination of West Pakistan. On 31 March 1971, the Indian Parliament unanimously passed a resolution. Through this resolution India expressed its profound sympathy and solidarity with the people of East Bengal.

India had to grapple with innumerable refugees who spilled over India from Bangladesh in the wake of the genocide by the Pakistani army. The Hindu community in East Bengal composed ten percent of the total population. The ruthless extermination of this minority community made India sad and India considered it as a 'demographic aggression'. India and USSR announced the signing of a twenty year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation on 9 August 1971. Under Article 9 of this Treaty India and USSR released a joint statement on 27 October 1971, in which both the parties fully agreed that Pakistan was about to launch a war of aggression in the subcontinent.

Eventually the Indian army intervended on 3 December 1971, in East Pakistan. Meanwhile, the United States wanted

the security council to pass a resolution calling upon India and Pakistan for a ceasefire and military withdrawal. But the Soviet Union foiled this attempt of the United States by using its veto power.

The Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, announced in the Parliament on 6, December, 1971, that after most careful consideration in the light of the existing situation, the Government of India had decided to grant recognition to the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty which was an outcome of the Bangladesh Liberation movement was a resounding response of the Soviet Union to the Baghdad pact. As Iran was worried about the Soviet activities, in the same manner the Soviet Union was also in extreme tension about the American activities in West Asia and in the Indian subcontinent. Obviously, the Indo-Soviet Treaty buttressed the Soviet position in the Indian subcontinent. Subsequently, it signed a Treaty with Iraq in April 1972. In another direction Iran suspected that the guerrilla activity in the Sultanate of Oman was surreptitiously supported by the Soviet Union. Moreover, constant Soviet naval visits to the Persian Gulf and the building of Soviet port facilities at Umm Qasr created a nightmare for Iran and it felt a 'Soviet pincer movement' by both land and sea from north to south. Iranian anxiety was understandable. There was a feeling in

Tehran that by elevating India to a dominant position in South Asia, the Soviet Union was working for a systematic design to breakup Pakistan. So the Shah made efforts to make Iran strongest military power in region so that by dint of military power it could foil the Soviet moves. Iran's military involvement in suppressing the guerrilla insurgency in the Dhofar region of Oman was part of Iran's concern and response to contain what it considered to be the expansion of Soviet influence in its neighbourhood. The Shah expressed his thinking in an interview with Asia week, which was later published in the International Herald Tribune. He observed:

We suddenly saw division crossing international borders, the dismemberment of Pakistan,....the United Nations once again paralysed and the powers sitting on their hands - and all these preceded by the Soviet-Indian Treaty. Brute force was used, territory was annexed and no one was able to do anything about it (.... we are talking about a dangerous precedent for the future that convinced me we could only rely on ourselves). Then there was the Soviet Treaty with Iraq a year ago - another alarm bell. Couple these with America's reluctance to play the role of gendarme even where its vital interests are concerned and anyone with a modicum of geopolitical sense will conclude we did not have much choice in the matter.⁵

So, Iran's fresh arms build-up started against this background although it exceeded the country's security perimeter. On 5 November 1972, the Shah said

5. International Herald Tribune (Paris) 14 May, 1973

on the fortieth anniversary of the Iranian Navy that the Iranian Navy's defence lines go beyond the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman into the Indian Ocean. Outlining his plans, the Shah said that

The striking power should increase several times over the next few years. Events of the world have taught us that the sea contiguous to the Gulf of Oman, and I mean the Indian Ocean, recognise no frontiers. We are not merely thinking of the Straits of Hormuz.... we are thinking of Iran's security perimeter and I am not speaking in terms of a few kilometers.⁶

Construction began in the early 1970s of a huge base at Chah Bahar which was close to the border with Pakistan. With a view to projecting Iran's naval power in the Indian Ocean, naval facilities were acquired in Mauritius in 1972.

India's security environment had considerably improved after the breaking up of Pakistan. It was the time that the Shah of Iran declared his ambition to make Iran as a pre-eminent power in the South Asian region. In a comparative look at the state of military preparedness, it could be observed that, during this period, Iran's enormous defence spending far outstripped that of India's. It is apparent in the following statistics:

6. Kayhan International (Tehran) 6 November, 1972.

Estimated GNP (1973) and defence expenditure
(1974-75) of Iran and India

<u>GNP</u>	<u>Defence expenditure</u>
Iran \$ 22.5 billion	\$ 3,225 million
India \$ 78.6 billion	\$ 2,443 million ⁷

With the emergence of Bangladesh, India was no more obsessed with Pakistan - a factor which had in the past inhibited it from playing a role in world affairs commensurate with its actual and potential power. Rather than being a mere "object" of world politics now it started to emerge as a "subject".⁸ All these factors led Iran to look at India as a potential threat that might partially explain Iran's pronounced slant towards Pakistan.

Iran gave material and moral support to Pakistan during the Bangladesh liberation war. Iran 'strongly advised' all powers to refrain from interfering in Pakistan's internal problem. Iran took a serious view of the use of force by India in changing the status quo in the subcontinent. Iran looked at the developments in East Pakistan as manifestations of a secessionist movement. At the same time there was warning which reflected a linking fear that something similar could

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7. Source: The military balance in South Asia, Foreign News features (1974-75), Vol.4., No.30, pp.3-4.
8. Mohammad Ayoob, "Indo-Iranian Relations - Strategic Political and Economic Dimensions", India Quarterly, (New Delhi), Vol.33, (No.1), January-March 1977, p.3.

develop and grow in the out lying provinces where the people had distinct sectarian, linguistic, cultural ethnic and economic diversities from the central Govt. in Tehran. In most of these provinces, there were embryonic indications of autonomy movements born out of a sense of deprivation and alienation. The contemporary developments in Baluchistan- Scistan were the case in point. Iran shared Pakistan's perception of India as an "aggressive power intent on wiping out Pakistan existence." Condemning the Indian involvement in the Bangladesh Liberation war the Shah commented:

We are 100% behind Pakistan and we are opposed to all interference in its internal affairs. ⁹

The Iranian Foreign Minister, Ardeshir Zahedi, on 16 January 1971, revealed that Iran is ready to mediate between India and Pakistan. But later, the Shah in an interview with the special correspondent of the French daily, Le Figaro, expressed his unwillingness to mediate between India and Pakistan since India had rejected his offer.

In 1973, details come to light as to how Iranian military helped Pakistan during the 1971 Bangladesh

9. IDSA News Service, W.A., October, 1971.

Liberation War. Iran offered material and technical assistance to Pakistan when oil depots in Karachi became targets of Indian bombing. Iran gave shelter to the Pakistani aircraft and also offered use of Iranian bases to fly essential supplies to Pakistan. In the midst of stormy Indian air and naval attacks and impervious Indian blockade, when the port of Karachi went out of action, Iran through Zahedan, sent essential supplies to Pakistan. Iran also supplied medicine, ammunition and spare parts and helped Pakistan in air reconnaissance.¹⁰

10. See, Iran News and Documents (New Delhi) 14 May, 1973.

CHAPTER II

A. IRAN'S RECOGNITION OF BANGLADESH AND
ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Like in some other West Asian countries, the birth of Bangladesh was not welcomed by Iran. Pakistan successfully persuaded these countries to ignore the existence of liberated Bangladesh for a considerable period of time. Not only did Iran disapprove of the war it actively aided Pakistan. Iran advocated for reunification of Pakistan in various forums including the recently formed Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Iran disapproved of the emergence of Bangladesh due to some reasons. First, Iran's calculation was that the emergence of Bangladesh would weaken a powerful Muslim ally, Pakistan. Secondly, Israel had supported the Bangladesh liberation movement. That created a suspicion amongst the rich countries of West Asia and Iran did not want to incur the wrath of these West Asian countries by giving recognition to Bangladesh. Thirdly, alongwith other Muslim countries, Iran did not approve of Dacca's emphasis on socialism and secularism as opposed to Islam.

The West Asian countries were divided into two broad groups on the issue of recognition of Bangladesh. Those countries which had close link with Pakistan and took a stern attitude towards Bangladesh were categorised as

rejectionist states. The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Libya were among this group. States as Algeria, Iraq and Egypt were in 'moderate' group and they adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards Dacca. Indeed, Iraq was the only country in West Asia which gave its recognition to Bangladesh on 8 June 1972. Iraq's bath party had maintained good relations with the Bangladesh liberation movement even during the war. Iran, under the Shah's rule, though neither a fundamentalist nor a moderate state did not approve of the emergence of Bangladesh. It had a long cherished dream to emerge as a pre-eminent power in the Indian subcontinent. But the fragmentation of Pakistan in the 1971 war was a severe blow to the Shah's dream. Pakistan was a reliable ally of Iran and its defeat at the hands of India was a clear indication of India's military superiority in the subcontinent. Moreover, infant Bangladesh's emphasis on 'socialism' was a matter of great anxiety to the Shah, as it could promote the Soviet influence in this region.

In spite of their hostile attitude, Bangladesh was keen to develop its relations with the West Asian countries. It was not difficult to get recognition from the Islamic countries in South-East Asia. But some countries in West Asia were not just ready to budge one inch from their earlier decision. Of course, they were

misled by Pakistan. So it was rather a difficult task for Bangladesh to earn recognition of the Islamic countries in West Asia.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, got an opportunity to have direct talks with Islamic countries in West Asia when the non-aligned summit was held in Algiers in September 1973. The positive outcome of the meetings between Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and some leaders of West Asia was the prompt recognition of Bangladesh by Egypt and Syria. Earlier, on 13 July 1973, Bangladesh got the recognition from Tunisia and Mauritania. Algeria and Morocco recognised Bangladesh in September 1973. Since during the Shah's time Iran was not a member of the Non-Aligned Movement there was no question of Iran's recognition of Bangladesh.

The Arab-Israel War of October 1973, provided Bangladesh with an opportunity to project its pro-Arab stance. Previously, "the independence movement of Bangladesh had attracted Israeli support. The leadership in Tel-Aviv voiced its sympathy for the new Republic and recognised it in early 1972 when Bangladesh was not yet recognised by any Arab country. Although Bangladesh categorically rejected the Israeli recognition and emphasised its unwillingness to have relations with Israel, it aroused considerable ire".¹

1. Times of India (New Delhi), 11 September 1972.

However, Bangladesh sent 100,000 pounds of tea to Egypt and a 32-members Army medical mission to Syria. These were Bangladesh's gesture of 'love' for the 'Arab brothers'. Subsequently, Bangladesh was successful in convincing Arabs of its supporting stance during the October 1973 war. Within a week after the end of the war, North Yemen, Kuwait and Jordan established their diplomatic relations with Bangladesh. Bangladesh's credibility was gaining ground among the West Asian countries and, in February 1974, it got the invitation to attend the Islamic Summit Meeting at Lahore. In that Meeting the main points of discussion were Israeli occupation of Arab territories, the future status of Jerusalem and the oil crisis. It was a summit meeting of heads of state and government of 38 Islamic nations. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as head of Bangladesh, confirmed his country's solidarity with Islamic countries. In his speech, Mujibur Rahman said: "we must regain our right over Jerusalem, we salute the brave martyrs and valiant heroes of the Ramadan war who, by their valour and their sacrifices, destroyed many myths and created new executive conditions with all promise that right and justice will eventually triumph".²

Before the summit meeting, the Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Hasan Al Tohamy, went to Dacca to invite Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to attend the

2. Bangladesh document, Vol.2, No.3, January-March, 1974, p.22.

Islamic Summit Conference as the first step towards recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan. However, unless Pakistan first recognised Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman refused to attend the summit meeting. Until then Pakistan had its reservation to recognise Bangladesh. Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, insisted that until Bangladesh publicly cancelled trials for 195 Pakistanis on charges of atrocities committed during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, Pakistan would not recognise Bangladesh. A Pakistani spokesman said although the conference would not deal with bilateral issues it could develop a favourable atmosphere for sorting out the differences between Pakistan and Bangladesh and if Sheikh Mujib did not attend it this opportunity would be lost.³

Although Al Tohamy's mission to Dacca was a damp Squib he did not give up. He persistently tried to persuade Bhutto to recognise Bangladesh. At last on 16 February 1974, Bhutto expressed his government's desire to recognise Bangladesh with a condition. The condition was that Bangladesh would give a guarantee to Pakistan that 195 Pakistani war prisoners would not be tried and this guarantee could be given by Bangladesh directly or through a friendly country on behalf of Bangladesh. But Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rejected the offer.

3. See Kessing's contemporary archives (London), March 25-31, 1974.

Muslim leaders who were present at Lahore for the Islamic Summit meeting, expressed their unanimous opinion that to bring a reconciliation between the people of Bangladesh and Pakistan, recognition was 'imperative' for Pakistan.

To remove the stalemate, Somalia, on 20 February 1974, proposed to the Foreign Minister of Islamic countries that in a last-minute attempt to persuade Bangladesh to attend the conference they should send a special mission to Dacca. They formed the mission with the representative of Somalia, Algeria, Kuwait, Senegal and Palestine Liberation Organisation. They were headed by Hasan Al Tohamy. The mission flew to Dacca on the following day. The members came back to Lahore on the morning of 22 February after talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. At a hastily summoned meeting of the Federal and Provincial Governors and Members of Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies, President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto announced his decision to recognise Bangladesh a few hours before the conference was due to open. The Pakistani President declared, "With the name of Allah on my lips, and in the name of the Pakistani Government, I now announce on behalf of the government that we recognise Bangladesh from today".⁴ On the following day, Bangladesh delegates arrived to participate in the conference.

4. Link (New Delhi), 27 February 1974, p.6.

At a press conference following Bhutto's statement Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced his government's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Pakistan and confirmed that the dropping of the proposed war crimes trials were not linked with Pakistan's recognition.

With the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan, Iran had no more objection against the sovereignty of Bangladesh. So, it also announced its formal recognition of Bangladesh on the same day (22 February 1974).

Some remarkable developments in the domestic field as well as in international arena led Iran to modify its previous attitude towards Bangladesh. It was a time when Iran's foreign policy was going through a process of change. The consolidation of Shah's monarchical position, lessening of dependence on the United States, gradual normalisation of relations with the Soviet Union and withdrawal of Britain from the Persian Gulf were significant inputs in Iran's foreign policy. Apart from these developments, the arrival of the Soviet fleet in the Indian Ocean, the Indo-Soviet treaty, the Indo-Pak war of 1971 leading to the birth of Bangladesh, Iraq-Soviet treaty, Arab-Israeli war of 1973, the process of detente between the Super Powers and the emergence of a new triangular equation between Washington, Peking and Moscow had directly or indirectly increased Iran's foreign policy

options. This inaugurated the era of diversification in Iran's foreign policy which paved the way for meaningful interaction between Iran and the subcontinent.

After 1973, Iran got an additional instrument to develop its relations with the subcontinent. That was the 'spectacular' rise in oil price and revenue. There was a considerable scope for bilateral trade between Iran and Bangladesh at a time when Iran was keen to diversify its foreign trade and Bangladesh needed to increase export of its raw materials to Iran to pay for the enhanced cost of imported oil.

From the Iranian standpoint, expansion of economic relations with the subcontinent in general and with Bangladesh in particular served also its political interests. Iran's generous offer of aid to Bangladesh was motivated by the desire to (a) counter balance the rise of Arab power in the west and (b) encourage Bangladesh's re-orientation towards the West and reduction of dependence on the Soviet Union. It was part of Iran's attempt to curb the growth of Soviet politico-economic influence over the subcontinent.

After the recognition of Bangladesh, Iran began to prepare itself for the establishment of diplomatic relation. Iran had started the process of normalisation even before the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Iran provided substantial relief in aid to the victims of the catastrophic flood, which occurred in mid 1974 in Bangladesh. The then Iranian Prime Minister, Amir Abbas Hoveida, had made personal appeal to the Iranians to donate generously in aid of the flood victims of Bangladesh.⁵

In the month of December, 1974 Iran announced appointment of Kiumars Vazin as the first Iranian Ambassador to Bangladesh. Earlier, Bangladesh opened its embassy in Tehran and A.R.S. Doha was sent as the first Bangladesh Ambassador to Iran.

After the establishment of Iran's diplomatic relations with Bangladesh complete normalacy was provided to bilateral relations. It goes without saying that without Iran's recognition, Bangladesh might have faced some difficulties in having good relations with the Islamic countries of West Asia. Iran's recognition of Bangladesh was a major breakthrough in respect of sovereignty and foreign policy of Bangladesh. Being an influential member of the OPEC, Iran's economic voice was also solid. So the recognition of Bangladesh by Iran and subsequently the establishment of diplomatic relations gave Bangladesh a prestigious place in West Asia.

5. Bangladesh Times, Dacca, 31 December, 1974.

B. IRAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh emerged as an independent state on December 16, 1971, after a bloody war of liberation. But unfortunately, immediately afterwards, independent Bangladesh had to pass through a series of traumatic events. It was a time when Bangladesh desperately grappled with its internal and external problems.

In August 1975, a coup d'état led by a small number of middle ranking military officers overthrew the Government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and he was assassinated alongwith his family members. Martial Law was proclaimed and Khondkar Mushtaq was made President. On 3 November , 1975, a counter coup led by a senior army officer seized power but, on 7 November , 1975, an upsurge among the soldiers in the army, navy and air force crushed the coup leaders and they effectively put Ziaur Rahman of the helm of affairs. Due to the frequent coups d'état, the general impression was that the country was on the verge of a civil war.

When Bangladesh was facing political upheavals in the domestic front, its relation with its big neighbour-India were also deteriorating. Bangladesh's honeymoon with India was shortlived despite the fact that India was directly involved in the war of independence of Bangladesh

and offered help in all possible ways. In 1972, India and Bangladesh had concluded a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace.¹ Bangladesh, meanwhile, developed a "threat perception" due to India's attitude in the share of Ganga waters and the border question between the two countries. There was scepticism in the air that India was making effort to consolidate its 'advantage' in Bangladesh. It was alleged that "throughout Bangladesh's brief history, Indian policy has been directed towards consolidating the initial advantage it gained by virtue of its military intervention which had proved to be decisive in the emergence of Bangladesh".² Earlier, in April, 1975, Dacca's attempt to lease out 5,000 square miles of its territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal to some American oil companies for oil exploration had evoked a strong Indian reaction.³

Iran, still under the Shah's regime, was very anxious about continuous and growing Soviet and Indian influences in Bangladesh. Moreover, the emphasis of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on secularism and socialism did not comfort the Shah. When the new government, headed by Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmed, was formed after the assassination of Mujibur Rahman, Iran recognised the new government in Bangladesh within a short period.⁴

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1. See, Indian Journal of International Law, Vol.12, (1972), p.134.
 2. Dawn (Karachi), 22 November, 1975.
 3. Ibid.,
 4. Bangladesh Times, (Dacca), 20 August, 1975.

But the coup of November 1975 was a turning point in the relationship of Bangladesh with Iran as well as with other countries in West Asia. In fact, the November coup created a favourable atmosphere for developing relations between Iran and Bangladesh. Iran's support, alongwith other countries of West Asia, was very significant to the new regime because of its threat perceptions both from internal and external sources, particularly from the immediate neighbour, India. Some important steps in Bangladesh including changes in some fundamental clauses of the Constitution of 1972, comforted some quarters in West Asia and they also satisfied the sentiments of the bulk of the Islamic constituency within the country. Thus, secularism, a basic principle of the state, was replaced by "absolute trust and faith in the almighty Allah".⁵

Although since 1974 Iran displayed considerable flexible attitude and was in favour of steady development of relations with Bangladesh, until the violent political change in 1975 in Bangladesh, the relations had not developed in real terms. President Ziaur Rahman was successful in convincing the Shah that under no circumstances Bangladesh was moving towards secularism or socialism under the influence of India or the Soviet Union. In May 1976 in a public meeting Ziaur Rahman declared his intention to strengthen Bangladesh's relations with the Muslim countries in West Asia.

5. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972. The Proclamation (Amendment) Order, No. 1 of 23 April 1973, Article 8, p. 153

To dispel the cloud of doubts even if there was any in the mind of the Shah, Ziaur Rahman paid a four-day official visit to Iran in March 1977 which, in fact, laid the foundation stone for the further development of Bangladesh's relations with Iran. During the discussions about their bilateral relations, Ziaur Rahman urgently sought the active help of the Shah of Iran to normalise his country's relations with India. Ziaur Rahman tried to gain the Shah's support vis-a-vis by saying that "the problem of River Ganges is very important to us and with the attitude that India has adopted hundreds of tons of crops are being destroyed because they have actually closed the flow of water. We sat round a table a few times and talked about it, but unfortunately have achieved no result".⁶

The Shah of Iran expressed Iran's concern on the Farakka issue and repeated border infringements between India and Bangladesh. Earlier, in the Islamic Foreign Minister Conference at Ankara, Bangladesh succeeded in gaining Iran's sympathy for its stand on the Farakka barrage issue.

But, with the changing scenario in the international political arena, Iran was no more willing to be at cross with India by supporting Bangladesh on the Ganga waters

6. Bangladesh Observer (Dacca), 29 March, 1977.

problem and border infringement. In pursuit of its own interests, through conciliatory moves, Iran tried to improve its relations with India and, as a matter of fact, at that time Iran's bilateral relations with India were getting a consolidated shape. During Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Iran in April 1974, a basket of agreements were signed between the two countries and Iran began to consider India as a 'major trading partner'. The Shah soon reciprocated the visit in October 1974. At that time he promised to give India a loan of \$1,000 millions (about £430 millions) on easy terms to pay off its oil imports, as well as trading opportunities such as the sale of large quantities of iron ore, which will make it a far more important business partner than Iran's blood brother, Pakistan".⁷

Therefore, in this situation, in the face of "serious threat" posed to Bangladesh by India as a result of Farakka issue and repeated border infringement, Iran requested Bangladesh to solve the problem in a "peaceful and amicable manner".

However, during this time a broad similarity of views of Iran and Bangladesh emerged on political issues, many of which affected the region itself. Their stands on vital matters at time were non committal. Although,

7. Guardian, 15 October, 1974.

internationally Iran and Bangladesh declared their commitment to peace and stability in their own regions and elsewhere in the world Bangladesh noticed that "the furtherance of regional peace is not a one sided affair".⁸ Iran deliberately refused to take a stand on the merits of the Indo-Bangladesh's dispute on the Farakka Barrage. Further "Iran expressed the hope that it would be solved through peaceful and amicable manner. The Iranian posture should be seen in the context of General Zia's press statement in Tehran in which he disclosed that several countries are mediating between India and Bangladesh. The joint communique also recorded his tribute to the Shahan Shah's role in the process of normalisation of relations in the region".⁹

Indeed, normalisation in the subcontinent was not only essential for the newly emerged Bangladesh. It was equally essential for Iran which was keen to maintain balanced relations with the countries of the subcontinent. Iran was more concerned that its economic relations with the subcontinent were not jeopardised because of the oil crisis in 1970s.

8. Bangladesh Times, 18 March 1977.

9. Dawn, 13 March, 1977.

A. POLITICAL INTERACTION BETWEEN
IRAN AND BANGLADESH.

After the successful visit of President Ziaur Rahman, Iran's relations with Bangladesh got a momentum. Bangladesh's dramatic shift towards "Islam" in place of "secularism" confirmed to Iran. Bangladesh's real intention to rally with the traditional Islamic fraternal countries in West Asia. This marked development ushered in a new period of understanding between the two countries. Bangladesh got an assurance of generous aid from Iran. Along with a number of cultural and economic pacts, both countries shared a common view regarding the regional and international scenario. This view remained unchanged even after the establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. By and large, the outcome of their common view regarding the regional and international political development was a sheer expression of mutual cooperation of two developing countries.

Since the Shah's time, both Iran and Bangladesh emphasised the need to ensure that developing countries exercise their sovereignty and full control over the natural resources. They agreed on their unremitting efforts to work towards "a new international economic order based on a fair and adequate price for the products

of the primary goods producing countries in the Third World".¹

Bangladesh assumed that any chaos in the Gulf would hamper flow of aid from West Asia. The same truth was applicable to Iran also. It was heavily dependent on sea route for keeping trade relations with other countries. Therefore, for the free passage of ships through the Gulf, both countries agreed that the peace and security of the region should be the main concern and responsibility of the littoral states and there should be full cooperation among them to achieve these objectives without outside interference.

Regarding the situation in West Asia, both countries came to a conclusion that the cherished peace could be brought with the Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territories in accordance with the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 and the realisation by the Palestinian people of their legitimate national rights and aspiration. They were of the view that continued occupation of Arab lands by Israel poses a serious threat to world peace.

Bangladesh was not only concerned about West Asia. It was also concerned about the 'Nuclear race' in the

1. Bangladesh Times (Dacca), 11 March 1977.

subcontinent. On several occasions, Bangladesh expressed its reservation towards 'Nuclear race' and, in a subtle manner inspite of India's objection, it pledged to make the subcontinent a 'Nuclear-free' zone. Apparently, Bangladesh's intention was no secret. At that time its relations with India were strained and, earlier at least two marked developments tangibly displayed Indian military superiority in the subcontinent. First, the clearcut victory in the Indo-Pak war of 1971 paved the way for India's emergence as a pre-eminent power in the Indian subcontinent. Secondly, a couple of years after the war, India successfully exploded a nuclear device in 1974 which militarily installed India along with a few N-powered countries. One writer observed: "The Bangladeshi apprehension of Indian intention gathered momentum with ominous turn of certain events. In 1974 the unilateral Indian decision of Nuclear Test explosion came as a shock".²

Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh was never ambitious to match its military power with India. But it had to live with the constant threat perception. India's nuclear capability pushed Pakistan into a hectic arms build up which ultimately created a more severe tension in the subcontinent. This tense situation in the subcontinent

2. M. Abdul Hafiz . "Bangladesh Pakistan Relations: Still Developing?" Bis Journal, Volume 6, Number 3, July 1985, Daçca, pp.350-351.

was not palatable to Bangladesh since it was bustling with economic development. A nuclear-free zone, where no arms race prevails, was more desirable to Bangladesh.

About the same time some Western countries had begun to propagate that Iran was making all efforts to build a nuclear bomb. Iran denied this allegation. During his five-day official visit to Paris, at a Luncheon given by the diplomatic press, the then Iranian Prime Minister, Amir Abbas Hoveida firmly said that "Iran had no intention of manufacturing the atomic bomb."³ Further, he pointed out that Iran was a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty".⁴ Iran was determined to make West Asia a nuclear-free zone and it got Bangladesh's active support. "Bangladesh reaffirmed its support to Iran's initiative in declaring West Asia a nuclear-free zone and expressed the hope that this trend would widen so as to cover all other regions where tension prevails".⁵ Although,⁶ this announcement did not make any specific mention of South Asia where Bangladesh is located, it was clear that through this announcement Bangladesh tried to extend the nuclear-free zone initiative into the Indian subcontinent."⁶

3. Dawn (Karachi), 30 May 1976.

4. Ibid.,

5. Bangladesh Times, 11 March 1977.

6. Dawn, 13 March 1977.

Both Iran and Bangladesh shared the same opinion on the Indian Ocean also. Although since early 1970s Iran's relations with the Soviet Union had improved Iran could not give up its reservation towards the Soviet Union. The Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean was a matter of deep concern for Iran. Moreover, the Shah, at that time, took some ambitious steps to make Iran a considerable naval force. "The Shah of Iran pressed ahead with massive naval expansion program worth more than 5,000 million dollars that will double the size of his fleet, consolidate his control of the Gulf, and extend the Iranian naval presence into the Indian Ocean".⁷ But without the active cooperation of the littoral states it was not feasible to achieve the goal. Bangladesh, being a littoral state could help Iran achieve its goal. But, for the regional stability, the restoration of peace in the Indian Ocean was necessary. During President Ziaur Rahman's visit in Iran, the Shah expressed his anxiety over the Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean. In a joint communique both Iran and Bangladesh supported the declaration of "the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace as envisaged in the UN resolution 2832".⁸

In this context both Iran and Bangladesh agreed that there was imperative need to strengthen regional

7. Indian Express, 27 March 1978.

8. Bangladesh Times, 11 March 1977.

cooperation in the area among littoral states. Indeed, the Shah of Iran had an "ambitious view" to make the Indian Ocean free from the Super Powers' rivalry. In late 1974, in an extensive tour, the Shah of Iran visited Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and India. His main purpose behind the visit was to establish "economic and political cooperation between the Indian Ocean States" to be followed by "some kind of military understanding" and if they were achieved, he argued, they could go to the USA and USSR and "ask them to keep away from the Indian Ocean simultaneously".

As a last part of his tour the Shah visited India where he gave a glimpse of the ambitious view he had of Iran's future role in Asia. In New Delhi, the Shah advocated "gradual promotion of economic cooperation, leading to political solidarity. It would be natural to go on from there - to cooperation in the field of security to ensure the safety of sea lanes".⁹

In spite of Iran's advocacy for mutual economic cooperation among the littoral states in the Indian Ocean, the Shah's dream remained unfulfilled due to the differences among the littoral states regarding the withdrawal of Super Power from this ocean. Australia, New Zealand and Pakistan did not see any harm in the

9. Tribune (Chandigarh), 5 October 1974.

presence of USA's naval force in the Indian Ocean. Especially, Pakistan considered the USA's presence in the Indian Ocean as an insurance for its security against India's "aggressive design" to destabilise Pakistan. But, contrary to this fear, India envisaged the whole situation in a different manner. It believed that behind the prevailing unrest in the Indian Ocean, was the USA's presence in the ocean and, consequently, it was followed by the Soviet naval appearances. Therefore, India argued that peace could be restored in the Indian Ocean once the US naval forces were withdrawn from there. The Soviet Union would follow the same. In these broad disagreements, it was not feasible for the Shah to make his plan into a corporeal form. But another littoral state, Bangladesh, had no problem like India or Pakistan. Therefore, Iran could get Bangladesh as a faithful ally in the Indian Ocean. Explaining the Bangladesh stance on the Indian Ocean, Ziaur Rahman affirmed: "Our policy is always clear in the matter, we want peace in this Ocean and only the cooperation among the countries of this region can bring stability and peace in the Indian Ocean".¹⁰

These were the most remarkable factors in their relations. In fact, defying the bitter past, both Iran and Bangladesh enthusiastically interacted with each

10. Bangladesh Observer (Dacca), 29 March 1977.

other in such a manner which obviously created a unique example in respect of relations of the Third World countries. "The growing friendship and cooperation strengthens the unity of the Third World, the Islamic Conference and the promotion of regional and international peace. Bilaterally, these relations, based ... on mutual understanding and sincerity of feeling ..., augmented the efforts of both the countries towards optimum utilisation of domestic resources. Moreover, Bangladesh had acknowledged "the special political and economic role Iran ... now acquired in the region".¹¹

However, the Shah's ambitious dream remained unrealized because, within a brief period, he was toppled down from his monarchy and left the country for ever.

In late 1970s Iran was a boiling pot of anti-Shah movement. The anti-Shah movement had spread over Iran like a wild fire. The situation was going out of control day by day. It was about that time the Shah of Iran was preparing to visit Bangladesh on an invitation from the Bangladesh's President, Ziaur Rahman. But the tour had to be cancelled on account of increasing mounting tension at home. One writer pointed out the anti-monarchy movement started "from the very first day the Shah came in power".¹²

11. Dawn (Karachi), 13 March 1977.

12. Tulsiram, "Persia to Iran" One Step Forward Two Steps Back", New Delhi, p.65.

In March 1975 the Shah, dissatisfied with the prevalent structure of party politics in Iran and wanting to put together all those who supported the principle of his 'White Revolution policy' announced the formation of a single party, the Iran Resurgence Party (Rastakhiz), with Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveida as its Secretary General. By 1978 it became clear that the single party system did not solve the problem of internal opposition in Iran.

ADVENT OF REVOLUTION IN IRAN

During 1977 and 1978, demonstrations and political violence built up in Iran. All the Shah's attempts to control the situation by greater liberalisation and then by firm suppression proved of little avail. In August 1977 Dr. Jamshid Amouzegar, who had become Secretary General of Rastakhiz, replaced the long-serving Amir Abbas Hoveida as Prime Minister but he resigned a year later. In August 1978, Jaafar Sharif Emami was appointed Prime Minister and, in response to the emerging mood of the country, he promised that his government would observe Islamic principles. But the opposition leaders could not believe in his assurances. So unrest continued. At last, in November, the Shah set up a military government headed by the army chief of staff, General Gholamerza Azhari. But, defying the imposed censorship, the strikes

in the oil industries and public services were continued. As a last effort to reconcile the agitated Iranians the Shah brought Dr. Shapour Bakhtiar, a former deputy leader of the National Front as a last chance government. But the anti-Shah movement got such a height that the Shah was compelled to take a decision to leave the country and on 16 January 1979 he left Iran for ever.

By the time the Shah left Iran, opposition from the left and the more liberal National Front had been overshadowed by the success of opposition coming from the exiled religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, who conducted his campaign from France where he had arrived in early October 1978. For fourteen years Khomeini was in exile in Iraq. He had unfavourably opposed the Shah's White Revolution, because it conflicted with traditional Islamic values, and special privileges to the Americans as they humiliated the Iranians.

While in Paris, Khomeini formed an Islamic Revolutionary Council in January, 1979 and pressed for his return to Iran. The Bakhtiar government tried to delay his return but in the midst of a jubilant welcome from the Iranian masses Khomeini ultimately arrived in Tehran on 1st February. On the 6th, he announced a Provisional Revolutionary Government headed by Dr. Mehdi Bazargan. So, for a short period, there appeared two governments in Tehran, either claiming legitimacy on

different grounds. It soon became clear that real power rested with Khomeini's 15-men Islamic Revolutionary Council. Bakhtiar refused to recognize it. But after several demonstrations and outbreak of violence, the army withdrew its support to the Bakhtiar government and, on 11 February 1979, he resigned and fled from Iran.

Throughout the period of turmoil in Iran Bangladesh tried to maintain a balanced attitude towards the revolutionary developments in Iran. It had close relations with the Shah's government but it also did not have malice towards the opponents of the Shah. Bangladesh's delicate concern was to maintain correct relation with Iran irrespective of the emerging conflict between the two systems and ideologies. Hence, after the Shah's ouster and the fall of the Bakhtiar government, Bangladesh promptly recognized the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Iran headed by Dr. Mehdi Bazargan. Once again when Ayatollah Khomeini declared the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Bangladesh reiterated its 'traditional Islamic bond' with Iran. Immediately after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, "Khomeini sent Ayatollah Hossin Noori on a special mission to contact Muslims in the Indian subcontinent".¹³ In his special mission he visited India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

13. Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 20 January 1980.

and conveyed Khomeini's message that Iran wanted strong relations with Muslim countries.

A few months later, 'the hostage crisis' in Iran pushed Bangladesh into an uncomfortable situation. With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iran's relations with the USA soured. Khomeini considered the USA as the master mind behind all exploitation, sorrows and tragedies in Iran and the Shah as mere a puppet in the hands of the USA. One writer pointed out that "The United States had itself been the cause of the hostage crisis. It conspired to destabilise Iran. Apart from successive tactics, the U.S. annoyed the Iranian government and people when it allowed Muhammad Raza into the United States. Consequently, the Iranians had to find a means of preventing it. Taking Americans in the Embassy in Tehran as hostages secured an effective means to counter US moves".¹⁴

On 4 November 1979 some agitated Iranian students occupied the US embassy in Tehran and held fifty-two American hostage. "The Islamic regime demanded the return of Muhammad Reza to stand trial for his crime, as well as the return of Iranian funds deposited in US banks."¹⁵

14. Asaf Hussain, Islamic Iran, Revolution and Counter Revolution, (1985, London,) p.173.

15. Ibid., p. 174.

In the wake of the hostage crisis, the USA imposed economic sanctions against Iran. In such a situation the Bangladesh government expressed its deep concern for Iran. When, in December 1979, the Security Council met for solving the stalemate in Tehran the Bangladesh Government made efforts to persuade Iran to release the American diplomatic personnel held in Tehran in accordance with the international laws and conventions.¹⁶

As Bangladesh was nurturing its embryonic relations with the West Asian countries in general and Iran in particular, the issue of American hostages held in Tehran by Irani students contained the potentials of straining Bangladesh's relations with the United States or Iran or both. Meanwhile, in order to clarify the Iranian stance to Bangladesh, Khomeini's special envoy and religious leader, Ayatollah Hossein Noori, during his Bangladesh visit had an 'urgent consultation' about the hostage crisis with Bangladesh's President, Ziaur Rahman. After an initial period of confusion Bangladesh categorically urged Iran to release the American diplomatic personnel held in Tehran. At the same time Bangladesh did not forget to express its discontent over the US proposal to impose economic sanction against Iran.

16. See statement made by Bangladesh at the Security Council Meeting on 31 December 1979. Bangladesh document vol-3, No.2, October-December 1979, p. 30.

The new basis of relations between Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran was the commitment of the two governments to Islam. The shift in Bangladesh position had occurred in 1975 after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The proclamation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 gave an ideological momentum to their relations. Their affirmed commitment to the unity of 'the Islamic Ummah' was a new development in their relations.

It was a time when Iran felt itself a subdued and isolated country in the world political arena. The United States along with its western allies put severe political and economic pressure on Iran and at the same time the Soviet Union penetrated Afghanistan and posed a serious threat to the existence of Iran.

During this period, Iran was being subdued not only by the Super Powers. It faced the same problem in its own region also. "Arab countries feared that the Iranian type of Muslim fundamentalism would penetrate their borders."¹⁷ And virtually Iran became an isolated country. In this context, Bangladesh's balanced relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran helped the latter to overcome to some extent the diplomatic isolation in the international political arena. After all Bangladesh was "an important member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference".¹⁸

17. The Hindu, 18 May 1987.

18. Hindustan Times, 31 March 1988.

Bangladesh's continuous process of Islamisation and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, based entirely on Islamic ideology, gave an unprecedented fillip to their 'traditional' relations. In the following section, an attempt has been made to discuss as to how Islam played a crucial role in their relations.

B. ISLAM AS A FACTOR IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

Religion is an important social category. It can play an influential role in politics. Throughout the world and in all ages, religion being a social category, always played and is playing its part in politics. The Khomeini movement in Iran was against the social and political evils in the Shah's regime.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran was a dynamic proclamation of the victory of Islam as a politico-religious power. Further, it proved that defying the innumerable suppressions in various forms how potential it was for mass mobilization. Undoubtedly, the Islamic Republic of Iran was a classic example of this phenomenon. One writer observed that one of the most significant events in this century was "the establishment of an Islamic State in Iran in 1979, displacing American interests in the country. The Islamic state did not lean towards the United States or the Soviet Union. It submitted only to Islam. In other words, it declared that sovereignty of God was supreme in Iran".¹

The revolution brought massive changes in Iran's domestic as well as foreign policy. A draft Constitution

for the Islamic Republic of Iran was published on 18 June 1979. It was submitted to a Council of Experts, elected by popular vote on 3 August 1979, to debate the various clauses and to propose amendments. The amended Constitution was approved by a referendum on 2-3 December 1979.

The Constitution stated that the form of Government of Iran was that of an Islamic Republic and that the spirituality and ethics of Islam were to be the basis of political, social and economic relations. However, the amended Constitution contained a significant change from the earlier draft. It provided for a Wali-Faqir (Religious Leader) who, in the absence of Imam Mehdi (the hidden twelfth Imam) carried the burden of leadership. Article 107 gave Ayatollah Khomeini these powers for the rest of his natural life.

On the other hand, Iran started to initiate a new foreign policy which was based on Islamic ideology. The core message of its foreign policy was 'Neither East nor West, Islam is the Best'. The Iranian Foreign Minister, Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, in a conversation with a reporter of the Hindu, specified the foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran. The conversation was as follows:

The Hindu - What are the basic tenets or principles of Government's foreign policy since the revolution? Is Shia expansionism

to neighbouring countries part of, or implicit in, it?

Dr. Velayati - In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate, our foreign policy after revolution can be summarised in one word and that is an independent policy in real sense. With regard to Shiaism, I should say that what forms and makes the basis of our belief in the revolution and the ideological requirements in this revolution is Islam, the basis of Islam and the entity of Islam and we consider all Muslim brothers whether Sunni or Shia, as a unified entity. And the Islamic Republic of Iran is actually a tremendous and great movement in order to revive the Islamic values and norms in the present century.²

Iran's earlier foreign policy was moulded by the Shah's threat perception and he was the main architect of Iran's foreign policy. His main policy was how to create a preventive bloc against the communist expansionism. In doing so he sought assistance from the USA and subsequently the USA and its other western allies had consolidated their influence in Iran.

But the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was strikingly different from the Shah's policy. Now, it emphasised cooperation among the Third World countries, especially with the Muslim countries. The chief aim of its foreign policy was to help the deprived nations and cooperating with the liberation movements in their struggles for truth and justice which its policy makers considered a "divine and Islamic obligation". In Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, these points were stated as follows:

2. The Hindu, 17 January 1985.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the negation of all forms of domination and submission thereto, the preservation of the independence and territorial integrity of the country, the defence of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment before dominating powers and mutual peaceful relations with non-aggressive States . 3

Discussing Iran's foreign policy, one writer analysed and found out which were the guiding principles for the conduct of it's Islamic foreign policy. These were:

- (1) Rejection of 'dependency' on either the West or the East; (2) identification of the United States as the 'principal enemy' (doshman-e asli) of the Islamic Revolution; (3) struggle against super powers and the 'Zionist power'; (4) close relations with all oppressed peoples, especially those in Muslim countries; (5) liberation of Jerusalem and opposition to pro Israel states; (6) anti-imperialism and (7) support everywhere for oppressed people (Mustazafeen)⁴.

In conclusion, Professor Ramazani made it clear that these 'principles' represented a completely different view from the Shah's foreign policy. During the Shah's regime, Iran's main concerns was "(1) reliance on the West, especially the United States, as a means of maintaining the Shah's regime and the territorial integrity and political independence of Iran; (2) identification of the

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3. "Islamic Revolution Future Path of the Nations"- published by the External Liaison Section of the Central Office of Jihad-e Sazandegi, Tehran, 1982, p. 176.
 4. R.K. Ramazani, "Khumayni's Islam in Iran Foreign Policy" in Adeed Davisha. ed., Islam in Foreign Policy, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 21-22.

Soviet Union and Communism as the main sources of threat; and (3) friendship with pro-Western and anti-Soviet States".⁵

From the above discussion two things emerge as main factors in Islamic Iran's foreign policy. The first one is the guiding principle of the Islamic Republic of Iran was Islam. "The relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran with foreign countries are based on Islamic ideology" - (President Ali Khamenei)⁶ and, secondly, Iran put much emphasise on its relations with Muslim countries. That is why it adopted "a foreign policy which would build brotherly relations with all Muslim countries".⁷

Therefore, within a short period of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ayatollah Khomeini sent Ayatollah Hossein Noori for the purpose of consolidating its relations with other Muslim countries in the sub-continent and elsewhere. Leading a special mission in January 1980 he visited the Philippines, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh for the purpose of contacting Muslims in these countries. He stayed for a few days

5. Ibid., p. 22.

6. Keyhan International (Tehran), 7 August 1984.

7. Asaf Hussain, n.14, p.138.

in Bangladesh and showed great concern with the social plight of Muslims in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, after its emergence as an independent state, had gone through a spectacular process of Islamization. The Muslims in Bangladesh were not a silent observer of the post-Shah developments in Iran. They expressed their solidarity with the Iranian people. "In Bangladesh, the student organisation, Islamic Chatra Shibir, considered Iran the only true Islamic State and derived hope from Khomeini's rise".⁸

Bangladesh, being a Muslim country, maintained good relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was remarkable in the sense that Iran, at that time, was confronted by two Super Powers. The relations with USA were becoming bitter and bitter day by day and on its eastern flank, the neighbouring state of Afghanistan was penetrated by the Soviet soldiers which was considered by the Islamic Republic of Iran as a serious threat to its security. On the other hand, its relations with Arab countries were deteriorating. "These States (Arabs) which had come to view a pro-western Iran as a source of stability were now forced to revise their own threat perceptions. Ethnic uprising amongst the Kurds, the

8. Daniel Pipes, In the Path of God, Islam and Political Power, New York, 1986, p-325.

Baluchis and Arab Iranians in Khuzistan aggravated the mutual sense of distrust".⁹ So, in this context, its warm relations with Bangladesh which became an important Muslim country in the world helped Iran to remove its diplomatic isolation to some extent.

Bangladesh also had made all efforts to keep good relations with all brotherly Muslim countries since its independence. This process had been started in Bangladesh since Mujibur Rahman's time. The founding father of Bangladesh, Mujibur Rahman, was the first Bangladeshi leader who attended the OIC summit at Lahore in 1974 and firmly proclaimed Bangladesh's commitment towards the Islamic values. Incidentally, the OIC summit meeting at Lahore in 1974 was a remarkable development in Iran-Bangladesh's relations. It was the same summit during which Iran recognised Bangladesh and established its full-fledged diplomatic relations with that country. It was the "Islamic bond" which helped the two countries to come closer to each other. Although the Shah was against any kind of Islamic revival in his country but at the same time for the sake of regional development and mutual cooperation he brought Iran into the various Islamic groups from where it could deal with other Muslim countries

9. Sepehr Zabih, Iran since the Revolution, London and Canberra, 1982, p. 175.

Meanwhile Bangladesh started to take all initiatives to make its relation firm with other Muslim countries in West Asia. After the change of 1975 one Bangladeshi writer pointed out "Islam became the basic philosophy of our (Bangladesh) policy programme".¹⁰ It is true that in 1977 the changes in Bangladesh's Constitution gave an impetus to its relations with Muslim countries. But in fact, this change was not an overnight overture towards Islam. As one writer observed, even during Mujib's regime "despite Article 12 of Bangladesh Constitution which provided for secular policies, the Government retained the study of Islamiyat and Arabic in the school syllabus introduced during Pakistan days. Islamic Academy, a research and publication organisation on Islam, also continued to function and get government's financial support".¹¹

But the August coup in 1975 was a turning point in Bangladesh's relations with Muslim countries. Secularism, a basic principle of the state was replaced by "absolute trust and faith in almighty Allah".¹² Thus, the then President, Ziaur Rahman, dropped the word "secularism" and

10. Bangladesh Times, 5 June 1983.

11. Akmal Hussain, "Bangladesh and Muslim World" Emajuddin Ahmed (Ed) Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: A Small State's Imperative, The University Press, Dacca, 1984, p. 87.

12. The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh 1972. The Proclamation (Amendment) Order, Order No. 1 of 23 April 1977. Article No. 8, p. 153.

substituted a paragraph which said the high ideals of absolute trust and faith would remain in the almighty Allah. He also added Bismillahir-Rahman ar-Rahim (In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful) before the preamble in the Constitution.

A new clause was also added to Article 25 in the Constitution relevant to external relations. It expressed solidarity with fraternal Islamic countries. The clause read : "The State shall endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity".¹³ The new leadership also repeatedly expressed its solidarity with the Muslim countries and willingness to improve relations with them. Bangladesh's President, Ziaur Rahman, paid a four-day official visit to Iran in 1977, which ushered in a new era in their relations. The most notable thing was just after this significant visit in March 1977, Bangladesh Government made the famous constitutional change in April 1979. In place of Secularism, faith was restored in the Almighty Allah.

On the other hand, although the Shah was not in favour of Islamic revivalism he was keen to maintain good relations with the Islamic countries in the subcontinent. Since early 1970s, the Shah was ambitious to set up mutual cooperation among the littoral states in the Gulf and in the subcontinent. But regarding the super Powers' presence, there were some differences among the littoral

13. Ibid, .

states which made it difficult for Iran to create a congenial atmosphere for mutual cooperation. Against this background, Iran found another Islamic country, Bangladesh, as a reliable friend in the subcontinent who could help Iran fulfill its ambitions. The ambitious Shah could exploit the sentiments of Islam to keep Bangladesh in Iran's side. On the other hand, the dramatic change in the Constitution of Bangladesh in 1977 clearly indicated its intention to bring itself more closer to other Islamic countries in the world. At least upto the Shah's time, militarily, Iran was the strongest country among the Muslim countries. Its commanding position had assured Bangladesh to form a uniform Islamic unity against the big as well as Super Powers' dominance.

But the Shah's ambition remained unfulfilled as he was toppled down by the Islamic revolution. The new Islamic Government in Iran threw up the Shah's policy and adopted completely new measures to evolve special relations with Islamic countries, not for any military ambition but for the 'unity of Ummah' and for the export of Islamic revolution to other Islamic countries. It was mentioned earlier that immediately after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini had sent Ayotollah Hossein Noori who was an important spiritual leader, to Bangladesh on a special

mission. On the occasion of the third anniversary day of the victory of the Islamic revolution the Bangladesh government sent a delegation to Tehran for conveying its solidarity with the Islamic government in Iran. In response to Bangladesh delegation's visit to Tehran, a seven-member 'goodwill' delegation arrived in Dacca on 10 February 1982 which was led by Ayatollah Jannati. According to a Bangladesh daily, which brought out report of the proposed visit of Iranian delegation, Jannati was "a member of the Majlish-e-Shoora of Iran and a close associate of Imam Khomeini".¹⁴

During his visit to Bangladesh, Ayatollah Jannati conveyed the message of Ayatollah Khomeini to the Bangladeshi leaders of "the need for the Islamic countries to resist the forces that were trying to divide the Islamic world"¹⁵. Bangladesh government also subscribed to this view. Thanking the leader of the Iranian delegation, the then Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Professor Mohammad Shamsul Huq, said: "it was important that our combined efforts are directed towards achieving the goal of greater unity and solidarity among the Islamic countries in the true spirit of Islam's message of peace, unity and brotherhood "¹⁶

14. Bangladesh Times, 2 February 1982.

15. Bangladesh Times, 11 February 1982.

16. Ibid.,

At that time, Bangladesh's continuous efforts to emerge as an important Islamic country alongwith other Islamic countries in the world reached its peak. Earlier, it was a member of OIC, now it became a member of World Islamic Council also. Bangladesh's desperate move to identify itself with a genuine Islamic character irritated Bangladesh's opposition leaders. In 1980, in a session of the Parliament, they accused the Bangladesh government of "one way traffic". However, the Bangladesh government rejected this allegation. "Foreign Minister refuted the opposition charge that Bangladesh's effort for winning friendship of Islamic countries was an "one way traffic". He termed the allegation totally incorrect and declared that there was no dearth of reciprocity in matters of promoting fraternal relations and mutual cooperation"¹⁷.

Since 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran was entirely isolated from the "influential" Arab countries in West Asia. But Bangladesh had maintained very sophisticated and restrained relations not only with the Islamic Republic of Iran but also with other Islamic Arab countries in West Asia. Shortly after the visit of Ayatollah Jannati, Bangladesh government sent "Maulana Mohammad Hafezi Huzur, a highly revered and popular Bangladeshi religious political figure to Iran and Iraq"¹⁸.

17. Ibid., 1 March, 1980.

18. Tehran Times, 12 September 1982.

Here it should be noted that during the Gulf war, Iran was almost isolated and almost all Gulf countries morally or materially supported Iraq. So, at this juncture, Bangladesh's emphasis on relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and true Islamic spirit was significant. The visiting ninety-five year old Bangladeshi religious dignitary expressed his happiness for getting a "clear view" of Iranian revolution and he pointed out that the Islamic Republic was working assiduously to promote the unity of Muslims, a unity that was essential for confronting the bitter foes of Islam and a unity essential towards overcoming the many problems and difficulties faced by Muslim countries".¹⁹

He further said what they had witnessed in Iran was very different from what was presented to them and he felt pity since the Western propaganda had confused the world about the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Regarding the international political scenario, both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Bangladesh shared same views. In July 1983, Bangladesh Foreign Minister, A.R.S. Doha, paid an official visit to Iran. During their discussions, both countries found out broad similarities in respect of international political scenario. Doha's visit to post-revolutionary Iran was significant. After Ziaur Rahman's visit to Iran, Doha was the highest Bangladeshi

19. Ibid.

official who visited that country in the last five years. Ziaur Rahman's visit to Iran had ushered in a new era in Iran-Bangladesh relations. In the same manner, Doha's visit to Iran in 1983 gave an accelerated pace to Bangladesh's relation with the new Islamic regime in Iran and during the discussions between the two Foreign Ministers "the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to the unity of the Islamic Ummah"²⁰.

It should be mentioned that with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, one major change had taken place in its foreign policy. During the Shah's time, Iran was a faithful ally of the United States against communist expansionism in the world. But the new Islamic Republic in Iran not only severed its relations with the United States, it also got involved with the Non-Aligned Movement, a movement which was a matter of irritation to the United States. Earlier, Bangladesh was already a bonafide member of the Non-Aligned Movement and Iran's inclusion in this movement brought the two countries together in a new ideological forum.

On the Indian Ocean and the struggle of Palestinian people both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Bangladesh reiterated their common views and commitments for the liberation of all occupied Arab and Islamic lands from

20. Bangladesh Observer, 17 July 1983.

Zionists. This time the new regime in Iran did not have any plan as once the Shah envisaged to set up an economic cooperation body amongst the states in the subcontinent which subsequently would be converted into a military alliance. Bangladesh which believed in the 'unity of Islamic Ummah', remained an important ally of Islamic Republic of Iran.

Earlier, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 had posed a serious threat to the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran had actually supported the Muslim fundamentalist Mujahedin guerrillas who were fighting against the communist government in Afghanistan.

In the subcontinent, although India had sought a peaceful solution of the Afghan crisis through political means, the other two Islamic countries - Pakistan and Bangladesh - were extremely vocal against the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Apart from Pakistan, Bangladesh was deeply concerned about the Soviet activities in Afghanistan. From the very beginning of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Bangladesh persistently condemned the Soviet military interference in Afghanistan. The then Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Shah Aziaur Rahman, in 1979, had charged the Soviet Union with flagrant violation of international laws for its military

intervention in Afghanistan. He said that "the crimson horizon of Afghanistan posed a threat to world peace and security and called for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from that country".²¹

Some scholars have pointed out that the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran posed a serious threat to the internal stability in the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was wary of the rapid growth in its Muslim population in the Central Asian Republics, where Islam was firmly rooted could not be weeded out despite massive Sovietization. Therefore, "the influence on Soviet Islam of the events in Iran may be deeper .."²² Iran supported the right of the Afghan people to determine their own political destiny. Iran proposed the setting up of an Islamic Peace Keeping Force and establishment of the Islamic Council which would supervise the Soviet withdrawal. On 11 November 1981, Iran urgently sought unconditional Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Bangladesh, wholeheartedly supported the Iranian move towards a settlement in Afghanistan. Following the official visit of Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.R.S. Doha, in a joint communique, Iran and Bangladesh "expressed concern over the situation in Afghanistan and reiterated

21. Bangladesh Times, 29 February 1979.

22. Alexandre Bennigsen, et. al. The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State, London, Croom Helm, 1983, p.116.

the need of the immediate withdrawal of all forces of aggression and occupation from that country to enable the Muslim people of Afghanistan to determine their own future".²³

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, President Ershad had taken some steps to make Islam as the state religion. "Bangladesh's progress towards Islamization especially after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination in 1975 was steady".²⁴

The Bangladesh Parliament passed a bill that amended the Constitution so as to make Islam the state religion. "The bill submitted by President Hussain, M. Ershad's Jatiyadal party was approved by a 254 to 0 vote in 300-member Parliament known as the eight amendment bill."²⁵

However, Islam as state religion triggered off a hot debate evidently weighing in favour of the regiments opponents in Bangladesh. The response from the Muslim countries was unknown. The lone Muslim country which

23. Bangladesh Observer, 17 July 1983.

24. Hindustan Times, 31 June 1988.

25. International Herald Tribune, 8 June 1988.

welcomed the move was Iraq. The Islamic Iran maintained a posture of silent observer.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran was keen to export its 'holy revolution' to other Muslim countries yet unlike other countries in West Asia, Bangladesh, being predominantly a Sunni country, never bothered about the Iranian type of Islamic revolution in Bangladesh. This was despite Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration that all Muslims should try hard to export our revolution to the world..... because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently as it is the supporter of all the oppressed people of the world. On the other hand, all the powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat. We should clearly settle our accounts with the powers and the super-powers and should demonstrate to them that despite all the grave difficulties that we have, we shall confront the world without ideology".^{26.}

26. W. R. Campbell and D. Darvich, "Global Implication of the Islamic Revolution for the Status Quo in the Persian Gulf" Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, S.No.1, Fall 1981, p-45.

In unison with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the spiritual leaders of Bangladesh believed that the true Islamic principles should be implemented in all Islamic countries. During his visit to Iran in 1982, the Bangladeshi spiritual leader, Maulana Mohammad Hafezi Huzur, optimistically said : They were able to see that the revolution was brought about to establish Islamic principles which should be established in all Muslim countries throughout the world. Because as true Muslim they believed that:

Islam is neither 'Shia' nor 'Sunni' for Prophet Muhammad was a Muslim. He was a messenger of God and preached Islam a submission to God. Any difference between the Shias and Sunnis were not doctrinal. Both the Shias and the Sunnis believed in God, the prophethood of Muhammad and the Koran, the Shias and Sunnis were all Muslims.²⁷

Iran's Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, also made it clear that the Islamic revolution was not after any thing " but revival of Islamic norms and values. And when we say Islam, we mean all the Muslims and the entity of the Islamic world and we don't want to escalate and add fuel to the divisions and sects. Certainly, if our revolution shakes the Muslims and wakes them the Islamic world as a third power will be

27. Asaf Hussain, n. 14, p. 22.

able to stand up to the two dominating and prevailing superpowers of the world.²⁸

Perhaps velayeti's vision of Islamic unity with other Muslim countries was a corporeal reflection of another small state Bangladesh's earnest urge for solidarity on the basis of Islam among the Muslim countries. During his visit to Iran in 1983, Marshal Sultan Muhmud, Bangladesh Minister for Energy, argued that "if we are imbued with the true spirit of brotherhood and teaching of Islam, it would be possible to contain the forces that tend to divide us and pose a threat to our security".²⁹

If Iran and Bangladesh are capable to continue this relation on the true spirit of Islam, it may set a classic example of Islamic unity in the Third World. Their unique Islamic solidarity will help widen the cooperation and unity in other Islamic countries. Consequently, it will lead to the emergence of a third force which will be an insurance of the Third World countries against the Super Power dominance.

28. The Hindu, 17 June 1985.

29. Bangladesh Times, 13 April 1983.

CHAPTER IV
ECONOMIC RELATIONS

It was mentioned earlier that several factors are playing important roles in Iran's relations with Bangladesh. But it will not be any exaggeration to say that the economic relations between the two countries were most crucial factors in their overall relations. The Shah took the initiative to extend Iran's market to the the Indian subcontinent. It was the time when Iran was economically flourishing due to the oil boom of early 1970s and it became capable enough to enlarge its market. Since then, economic co-operation between Iran and Bangladesh also progressed steadily in several fields. Even the Gulf War could not disrupt this progress. In spite of the war, Iran was able to maintain its economic relations with Bangladesh. In fact, it was the compulsion of the Gulf war which created a favourable environment for continuous economic co-operation between the two countries. Due to the devastating war, not only Bangladesh but most of the countries of the world, were more or less affected. In the wake of the

turmoil of the revolution, followed by the trauma of the protracted war, Iran found itself in a difficult economic situation. The condition of Iraq was even worse. The so-called "international basket"¹ Bangladesh - the second poorest country in the world, was heavily dependent on these Gulf countries for its economic reconstruction and that was the main reason why Bangladesh took active interest in seeking an end to the war. Despite the destruction of war, it should be noted that both Iran and Bangladesh continued their economic co-operation. As compared to other West Asian countries Iran kept up its relations with Bangladesh in some economic fields.

The economic relationship between Iran and Bangladesh goes back to the mid - 1970s. This particular aspect was so much central in their relations that both the countries tried to develop all kinds of relations. The infant state of Bangladesh was keenly interested in developing its economic ties with the oil-rich West Asian countries for improving its war-ravaged as well as heavily damaged economy due to the frequent floods.

1. The term "international basket case" was applied to Bangladesh by the former U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to describe the poor economic condition of the country in 1974. The Statesman (Calcutta), 18 November 1978.

Moreover, Bangladesh's honeymoon with India was short-lived. Although, immediately after its independence, Bangladesh had got some economic assistance from India, it was not adequate for the demands and that too was stopped when their relations started to become bitter. Bangladesh never had considerable economic relations with the Soviet Union. Also, the threat perception of Bangladesh underwent significant changes leading it to develop close linkage with the countries of West Asia.

On the other side, it was a time when Iran began to look around for a new market beyond its boundaries and was anxious to find new markets for its industries. Apart from this, Iran had some other political designs to develop its economic relations with the subcontinent. Iran tried to remove the Soviet influence by giving generous aid to the countries of the area. Bangladesh too stood to benefit from Iran's economic aid. Iran also made efforts to scratch the stigma of selling oil to the Third World countries at an exorbitant price.

As Bangladesh developed its relations with West Asian countries, including Iran, these states became a

major source of the country's external assistance.²

In 1977, Major General Ziaur Rahman, the Chief - Martial Law Administrator of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on his own initiative, paid an official visit to Iran which was a "significant milestone". Dacca emphasised on 'mutual beneficial' results which would eventually follow from such "high level contacts". Indeed, Ziaur Rahman's four-day official visit to Tehran was meaningful and successful. He signed a number of economic pacts with Iranian leaders. During his visit, along with a cultural agreement, an economic and technical agreement was signed between the two countries. Both Iran and Bangladesh emphasised "the need to ensure that developing countries exercise their sovereignty and full control over their natural resources. They pledged their unremitting effort to work towards a new international economic order based on a fair and adequate price for the products and the primary goods of the producing countries in the Third World".³ On the part

2. Seven Years of External Assistance to Bangladesh, External Resources Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, June 1978, p.3.

3. Dawn (Karachi), 12 March 1977.

of Iran, its leaders showed keen interest in promoting Bangladesh's economic recovery and development. Earlier, Iran being a member of the Aid-to-Bangladesh Consortium, sold 300,000 tonnes of crude oil on reasonable terms to Dacca besides providing a 15 - million dollar loan to finance a fertiliser plant in Bangladesh. President Ziaur Rahman welcomed Iran's aid and economic assistance and admitted the fact that the people of Bangladesh "have been benefited from aid. They can not forget the great role that the Shahinshah played to help countries like us (Bangladesh) and deeply thankful for this."⁴

The Shah of Iran agreed with Bangladesh's request for the establishment of a refinery project as a joint venture at Chittagong, and the establishment of air and sea links between the two countries were proposed.

Following the visit of the Bangladesh President, Iran sent a trade team along with the delegation of National Oil Company in Bangladesh to help in exploring oil and reserves. Iran, being an important

4. Bangladesh Observer (Dacca), 29 March 1977.

member of the OPEC, assisted in efforts at optimum utilisation of gas. Bangladesh also contributed to Iran's accelerated industrial programmes by sharing its technology and skilled personnel, particularly in the field of jute, textiles, leather processing, construction and shipping. The Bangladesh President was quite optimistic regarding the steady trade relations with Iran. In an interview with Iranian journalists, he commented: "We have many natural resources and considering their cheap prices compared to other countries, Iran can be a valuable partner and a good buyer for us. On the other hand, we have in mind good terms for the foreign investors"⁵

In fact, there were a number of areas in which Iran and Bangladesh could cooperate to their mutual advantage.

The human resources of the two countries could be fruitfully utilised for mutual benefit. Both countries emphasised on recruitment of skilled manpower from Bangladesh for employment in Iran. Sudden oil boom gave an extended opportunity to Iran to expand its industries. In order to sustain the momentum of industrialisation Iran could not rely for the skilled manpower on the highly developed West as it experienced the latter's lop

5. Ibid

sided rigid conditions and exploiting attitude towards the developing nations. That was the reason why Iran emphasised on importing skilled manpower from other developing countries including Bangladesh. Moreover, importing of manpower could have given a new positive dimension to Iran's relations with other Muslim as well as developing countries. There was also one more advantage which Iran could gain. Countries like Bangladesh were able to export their manpower to foreign countries at a cheaper price. Bangladesh had export its skilled manpower due to some obvious reasons. Bangladesh was not an industrialised nation and due to the high explosion of population it was compelled to diversify its skilled manpower. By exporting manpower it could earn foreign currency which would support Bangladesh to built its national economy. At the same time, by exporting its manpower, it could strengthen its ties with the West Asian countries. Co-operation with an oil-rich country like Iran "Led to strengthening of the existing ties of friendship and goodwill between the peoples of the two countries who are bound by religious, historical and social bonds." ⁶

6. Bangladesh Times (Dacca) 14 May 1976.

Iran admitted the fact that the presence of a large number of Bangladeshis serving in Iran was beneficial to it. Amir Ghassem Moini, the then Iranian Minister for Labour and Social Welfare, assured the Bangladeshi delegates, "we are exploring avenues for further transfer of such manpower to our country".⁷

However, despite the emphasis on export of manpower in comparison with other West Asian Countries, Bangladesh's manpower employment in Iran's industrialised sector was not very high. Bangladesh is exporting its manpower to Iran since 1976. In statistical terms, it could be seen that from 1976 to 1985, the total number of Bangladeshis employed in Iran was 2288 which was even less than in Iraq. On going through the statistics one can gather that Iran's domestic political uncertainty stopped the inflow of Bangladeshi manpower. In fact, since 1979, the export of Bangladeshi manpower to Iran steeply decreased. In 1979, only 4 Bangladeshis and in 1980 only 2 Bangladeshis were employed in Iran and from 1981 to 1983, there was no Bangladeshi employed in Iran. However, in 1984, a reasonable number of Bangladeshis (534) entered Iran for employment. The total number would have enhanced had the export of Bangladeshi

7. Ibid., 20 October 1977.

manpower not stopped. But it will be wrong to assume that the flow of Bangladeshis in Iran was halted due to the Gulf War. Had it been the case with Iran, then another belligerent state, Iraq, also would have faced the same problem. Statistics upto 1986 showed that in the list of total alien manpower employed in the 12 countries of West Asia, Iraq's position was fourth, whereas Iran's position was ninth. In other West Asian countries the strength of Bangladeshi manpower was considerable.

Iran not only emerged as a major source of external aid to Bangladesh, it also gradually turned as a potential market for Bangladeshi labourers - both skilled and unskilled. The Bangladesh government failed to adopt any appropriate policy on overseas employment. Thus it lost about half a decade to enter into Iran's labour market. And, as a late comer, it had to face a number of difficulties in seeking jobs for its nationals in Iran. If Bangladesh had succeeded in exporting its manpower overwhelmingly to Iran it could have covered a higher degree of foreign exchange remittances.

Table - I
Manpower employment in Iran.

Table number & identification

Year	Saudi Arabia	Algeria	Bahrain	Iran	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Libya	Oman	Qatar	UAE	Year
1976	214	-	338	281	587	-	643	173	113	1221	1989	-
1977	1379	11	870	339	1238	-	1315	718	1492	2262	5819	-
1978	3212	17	762	982	1454	-	2243	2394	2877	1303	7512	-
1979	6490	25	827	4	2362	73	2289	1969	3777	1383	5055	-
1980	8695	3	1351	2	1927	127	3687	2976	4745	1454	4895	-
1981	13384	-	1392	-	13153	66	5464	4162	7351	2268	6418	-
1982	16341	21	1993	-	12898	220	7244	2071	8248	6253	6862	-
1983	12942	-	2470	-	4932	127	10302	2215	11126	7561	6616	296
1984	20587	-	2325	534	4701	-	5677	3386	10111	2763	5302	491
1985 (upto June)	17311	-	1634	146	1469	-	3860	452	4264	2385	4325	156
Total:	100555	77	13962	2288	44721	613	42724	20416	54104	28854	54793	886

8. Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, Dhaka, 1976.

In addition to employment of doctors, nurses, technicians, truck drivers and domestic aids, Iranian government welcomed applications of Bangladeshis for vacancies in Iran in the field of public administration, finance and banking.

Due to the involvement in the Gulf War the pace of Iran's economic development was rickety. Iran did not have much time or resources to develop its economic condition. But with the end of war in August 1988 Iran took various initiatives to build up its war-ravaged economy and "the Organisation of Arab petroleum Exporting Countries were said to have agreed to provide 100 billion dollars for the reconstruction of Iran and Iraq".⁹

With the vast experience of the past two decades at their disposal, the planners in Iran can certainly assess the labour supply from various countries and hire at the most competitive rates. The Bangladeshi workforce will positively be in demand in the post war reconstruction of Iran but definitely not with the same wages like in the 1970s.

9. Times of India (New Delhi), 14 August 1988.

Therefore, unlike in the 1970s and early 1980s, Bangladesh is likely to face stiffer competition from Indonesia and the Philippines this time for its share in the traditional labour market. However, a substantial number of Bangladeshi are expected to be employed in Iran in the near future.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between Tehran and Dacca, their economic cooperation also got consolidated. Bangladesh received reasonable aid from the OPEC countries. Iran, a rich member of the OPEC, assisted Bangladesh by giving generous aid from time to time. Bangladesh received the following aid from the OPEC countries in million US dollars from 1971 to 30 June 1984:

Table 2

	Grant	Loan	Total	2 as % of 4
OPEC	463.5	226.9	690.4	67.1 ¹⁰

And commitment and disbursement of aid from Iran as a member of OPEC to Bangladesh, from December, 17, 1971 to 30 June, 1983, in million US dollar was:

10. Source: Bangladesh Aurthanaitik Zarip 1984/85
(Bangladesh economic survey) 1984/85, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, p.222-225.

Table 3

	<u>Commitment</u>			<u>Disbursement</u>			7 as% of 4
	Grant	Loan	Total	Grant	Loan	Total	
Iran		12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	100.0". ¹¹

The most characteristic feature of the aid received from Iran is that major share of the aid comes as commodity aid and it is tied to projects. Bangladesh is utilising the aid, which comes from Iran in important projects and improvement of its national economy. with the aid received from Iran, Bangladesh improved its industrial planning as in the cases of the Chittagong Urea Factory, Jaipur Limestone Mining Project, Power Project, Ashuganj Fertiliser Factory, Machine Tools Factory, Railway Rehabilitation Project, Jamuna Multi purpose Interconnector (bridge), Manu River Project and so on.

During the Shah's time, both Iran and Bangladesh decided to set up joint collaboration in various fields. A proposal was taken to set up a joint collaboration

11. Source : Flow of external resources into Bangladesh June 30, 1983, External Resources Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, Dacca, p.99

between Arya (Iran) Shipping Corporation and Bangladesh Shipping Corporation. Apart from these, Iran decided to study "proposal for participation in the proposed Satnol Urea Plant or any other' project related to utilisation of natural gas for increased food production. Iran undertook to study proposals for joint venture in those fields which would provide for long-term supply of goods particularly food items required in Iran. It also engaged itself in the balancing, modernisation of major Bangladesh industries, particularly jute and also is favourably considering and examining proposals for assistance from the OPEC fund in respect of projects involving physical infrastructure and power development."¹²

Bangladesh imports mainly petroleum and petroleum products from Iran. It receives "three lakh tons of crude oil annually from Iran."¹³ Although the share of import from Iran is not so high in Bangladesh's total import bill, trade with Iran is very significant and important for Bangladesh. "A major share of the import bill is paid through loans and grants."¹⁴.

12. Bangladesh Times (Dacca) 28 July 1976.

13. Bangladesh Times (Dacca), 6 March 1977.

14. Annual Import Payment 1983-84, Statistical Department, Bangladesh Bank, Table 11, pp.48-156.

Following statistics give a picture of Bangladesh's import from Iran:

Table - 4

(Taka in Lakhs. cash, loans and grants)

	1975-76	76-77	77-78	78-79	79-80	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84
Iran	4410	7662	9085	2815	2179	4412	4227	109	5165

15

On the other hand Iran's import relationship with Bangladesh is tremendously higher than any other West Asian country. Iran imports from Bangladesh mainly tea, hides and skin, newsprint and paper, jute and jute goods, fish and fish preparations, fruits, vegetables, live animals, sanitary fitting and readymade garments. Following statistics indicated Bangladesh's brisk export relation with Iran.

Table 5

(Taka thousand/rate of exchange)

	1975-76	76-77	77-78	78-79	79-80	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84
Iran	178961	207936	213380	191729	573756	796949	566764	618618	2531997

16

15. Annual import payments 1983-84, Statistical Department Bangladesh Bank, pp.162-67
16. Source: Annual Export Receipts 1983-84, Statistical Department, Bangladesh Bank, pp. 201-212

As Bangladesh's prime objective in its relations with Iran was to ensure the inflow of more aid and to increase the remittances by seeking more jobs for its nationals, the trade sector was either neglected or did not get proper attention. However, initiatives at different levels were taken to increase the volume of trade with Iran and the attempt succeeded because, since the middle of 1970s, Iran tried to diminish its trade dependency on the West. Especially, after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it really looked around for exploring new market in the Third World countries. Consequently, Iran improved its economic ties with different countries of the Indian subcontinent including Bangladesh. Bangladesh also entered into "general technical or economic and technical cooperation agreement with Iran."¹⁷

During the Shah's regime, Iran stressed on industrialisation, and agriculture was left aside. "In the Shah's days, the state in Iran was the most powerful economic factor in production, investment and demand. Later, the Islamic Republic of Iran paid much more attention to agriculture which had been neglected"¹⁸.

17. Bangladesh Observer, 11 December 1984.

18. Lutz Meyer, "The Iranian economy since the revolution," Aussen Politik 35 (3), 1984, p.295.

Therefore, if Iran wanted self-sufficiency in food-stuff, it had to develop the agricultural sector. Since Bangladesh is predominantly an agricultural country, Iran could share Bangladesh's experience in agriculture fields.

Both Iran and Bangladesh have tremendous scope to develop their economic relations. The Islamic Republic of Iran "stressed upon forming an Islamic Common Market"¹⁹ with other Muslim countries. Bangladesh, being the second largest Muslim populated country in the world, has enough potential to form an 'Islamic Common Market' with Iran. But at the primary level, the two countries should fulfil the primary condition of the steady and efficient trade relation. Their communication system is poor and negligible. They can not rely on air traffic and economically it is not feasible. The introduction of regular bimonthly shipping services between Bangladesh and Red Sea Port in early 1985, undoubtedly, was an important development, which helped the countries of West Asia to increase their trade relations with Bangladesh. Iran also gained some advantages from this sea link. But still the transportation system between Iran and Bangladesh is poor and inadequate to meet the growing requirements.

19. Keyhan International (Tehran), 12 September 1984.

Another major obstacle in developing trade between Iran and Bangladesh is that both countries did not adequately explore markets, for their goods and in fact, Iran is still not much familiar with Bangladesh goods and services. Iran may have to take some measures to familiarise itself with Bangladeshi goods and products. At the same time Bangladesh should also try its level best to establish more developed economic relations. Frequent visits of trade delegations at different . . . levels may also be helpful in exploring new areas of economic cooperation and promotion of trade. After the "successful" visit of President Ziaur Rahman to Iran in 1977, frequent visits of trade delegations of both countries have been taking place. The Iranian outlook has not changed even after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran set up a Joint Commission at the ministerial level to "explore further avenues of strengthening the overall economic relationship between the two countries".²⁰

During the Shah's time, Iran always looked towards the West for expanding trade relations. This attitude was changed in early 1970s, but still Iran had

20. Bangladesh Times (Dacca), 9 March 1987.

major trade relation with the West. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it tried to promote trade relations with the developing countries, particularly with the Muslim countries. In this context, Bangladesh, being the second poorest country in the world, should utilize this opportunity and it could take steps to explore all possible avenues to expand its trade relations with Iran. Bangladesh cannot allow the growth of Western influence in its socio-economic set up by seeking abundant assistance nor can it hobnob with the socialist countries through "excellent trade relations". But, at the same time, for its socio-economic development Bangladesh direly needs external aid with increased volumes. The remittances can also play a vital role in its national economy and for this purpose Bangladesh should consolidate its economic relations with natural allies, like Iran, through its proposed "Islamic Common Market"²¹ Iran will undoubtedly continue to play a considerable role in the future economic development of Bangladesh. Here it should be mentioned that, unlike other Muslim countries, Bangladesh is not afraid of Iranian influence. Especially after the establishment

21. On several occasion both Bangladesh and Iran jointly emphasised on the importance of a new international economic order, as they were not happy with the present international economics situation.

of Islamic Republic of Iran, some Muslim countries became concerned about the export of Islamic revolution in their countries. Indeed, these countries have their own problems, i.e., the so-called Shia-Sunni conflicts, separatist movements etc. Uptill now, Bangladesh has not faced any of these problems. Almost all muslims in Bangladesh belong to the Sunni sect. So, there is a socio-political uniformity in the Muslim population in Bangladesh which can not be changed by an imposed Islamic revolution, sponsored by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Rather, through its own initiative, the Bangladesh government is trying to restore the Islamic values and ideas in the country.

Iran emphasised its policy to cultivate economic relations with the Third World as well as Muslim countries. Through this process Iran can keep a safe distance from the Super Powers, who always played havoc with Iran in the past. Therefore, if Iran's economic cooperation with Bangladesh can generate some positive results then obviously it will usher in a new era in the state of cooperation among the developing countries having disparate economies.

CHAPTER VBANGLADESH'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Since its birth, Bangladesh has had to face formidable challenges both of political and economic nature. The frequent political vicissitudes in Bangladesh led to the economic disaster. Moreover, the innumerable annual floods rubbed salt into the dilapidated economic wounds in Bangladesh. The country needed national cohesion, political stability and undisrupted flow of external aid for national reconstruction. The close relations that had developed for a short while after independence with India and the Soviet Union alongwith other Socialist countries in Europe apparently fell short of meeting Bangladesh's growing needs of external assistance. Bangladesh had to make desperate efforts to broaden its external support base by developing friendly relations with the other group of countries. Priority was given to develop relations with the West Asian countries for a number of reasons. Of course, among these economy was the most important factor. Bangladesh made constant effort to keep balanced relations in West Asia without involving itself into any kind of local squabbles.

Therefore, when the Gulf War broke out between Iran and Iraq, Bangladesh was caught in an uncomfortable and unpleasant situation. With its dilapidated economy and

being the second largest populated Muslim country in the world, Bangladesh had to maintain a very cautious posture regarding the Gulf War. Neither Iran nor Iraq was its enemy, nor did it have any political or ideological conflict with either of these countries. Both Iran and Iraq helped Bangladesh to build its economy with huge economic assistance from time to time. Bangladesh always put priority on solidarity among the Islamic countries and peaceful resolution of all conflicts in West Asia. But the Gulf War made Bangladesh uneasy. It was a war between two Muslim and its donor countries. Bangladesh was afraid, because if the flow of economic aid from West Asia dried up it might create fresh complications and might even strangle the economy of the country. Apart from this, with regard to the devastating Gulf War, Bangladesh knew that "Iraq and Iran are slowly but surely committing suicide without knowing it".¹

Therefore, from the very beginning of the war, Bangladesh persistently made all efforts to defuse the conflagration and solve the dispute through peaceful negotiations. Apparently, the devastating effect of the

1. Khaleej Times, Dubai, 10 January 1987.

war
 Gulf stirred up all Bangladeshis as well as newspapers and the Government so much that they condemned the meaningless bloodshed in the Gulf in unison. Criticising the sole negative outcome of the Gulf war, one newspaper, which generally reflected the official attitude and thinking, commented thus:

The whole things looks like an organised self-butchery without precedent. The devastating effect of it on the economy of both countries will work out to billions of dollars on either side.

It look as if the massive oil wealth accumulated over the beaming years of oil trade and the prosperity built in it would go up in flames in trice. Ostensibly there is nothing or no one to rein in those bent on this kind of self-destruction. Since, at this height of passion, neither party can be expected to listen to reason and think of ending the war, it must need be left to other to do the same for them. 2

Since the outbreak of the Gulf War Bangladesh tried to bring about an immediate cessation of hostilities and a just and honourable settlement through different peace-making forums (such as Organisation of Islamic Conference, Islamic Peace Committee, United Nations and Non-Aligned Movement) in accordance with

2. Bangladesh Observer (Dacca), 19 January 1987.

internal law.

Bangladesh, being a Muslim country, took active initiative through the Organisation of Islamic Conference, and the Islamic Peace Committees in order to extenguish the burning rage. More specifically, Bangladesh made desperate efforts to stop the Gulf War through the Islamic Peace Committee. At the third Islamic Summit Conference in Taif, Saudi Arabia, 25-28 January 1981, Bangladesh proposed concrete measures to bring about an immediate cessation of hostilities and honourable settlement of the dispute in accordance with international law. The then Bangladesh President, Ziaur Raghman, addressed the Conference and earnestly requested the belligerent states to solve the dispute through peaceful negotiations. It was decided at the conference, on the insistence of Bangladesh, that priority should be given the issue of Iran-Iraq war. A committee of five nation was constituted to visit the warring states. The Conference also proposed a simultaneous ceasefire from midnight of March 12, 1981, to be followed by Iraqi withdrawal of troops in a week's time, while a committee to assist both states in negotiating a comprehensive settlement was to be set-up. A special Islamic Court was to be constituted for working out a reasonable settlement with regard to the Shatt al-Arab. The truce and Iraqi withdrawal . . .

were to be supervised by observers drawn from the OIC states with the approval of both states. However, while Iran refused to meet the peace mission, Iraq insisted on a new border treaty which would restore the status quo-ante - 1937 regarding the Shattal - Arab. Since the outbreak of the war, President Ziaur Rahman made various attempts to bring about cease fire between Iran and Iraq and, on several occasions, he expressed his deep concern about the war. He saw this war as an obstacle in the path of Islamic unity. He appealed to the "brotherly Iran and Iraq to stop their senseless war immediately and said that the war would not only destroy the two countries, but also destroy the unity of Muslim nations."

Unfortunately, when President Ziaur Rahman was assuming to play a greater role for bringing the peace in the Gulf, in a sudden coup, he was assassinated. Then another army officer, General Hossain Mohammad Ershad, seized power through a bloodless coup in March 1982 and formally took over as President in December 1983.⁴

The new President also showed an earnest desire to stop the Gulf war through peaceful solution.

3. Bangladesh Observer, 4 January 1982.

4. B. Uday Shanker, "Ershad on the Upswing," Strategic Analysis, vol.IX, No. 9. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, December 1985, p.875.

Meanwhile, in March 1982, a high-level committee meet at Jeddah, under the Chairmanship of Sekou Toure of Guinea and a five-member team was formed with the active support of Bangladesh to visit both countries. This proved a damp squib. The fourteenth meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the OIC at Dacca, in its resolution, made reference to UN resolution for a ceasefire and to earlier OIC goodwill mission. They proposed "a peace mission which consisted of the Foreign Ministers of Guinea, Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia and Bangladesh and a representative of the Islamic Secretariat".⁵

Bangladesh reposed great hope in the success of the OIC's peace initiatives. On January 26, 1987 Bangladesh again joined in the OIC Summit which was held in Kuwait. It had an optimistic attitude towards the Iran-Iraq war and it hoped that the Summit "under the auspices of a world Islamic body could provide the only opportunity to sort out the problem of the Gulf War."⁶ However, due to the rigid stances of both Iran and Iraq, the adopted proposal for bringing peace in the Gulf could not be implemented. Iran had some reservations and it

5. Emirate News, (Abu Dhabi)9 January 1984.

6. Bangladesh Observer, 19 January 1987.

questioned the credibility of Kuwait in hosting the Summit meeting of the OIC. Iran considered that Kuwait was not neutral in the Gulf War and it had supported and helped Iraq. Earlier, talking to Islamic Republic News Agency, Iranian Prime Minister, Hussain Musavi, pointed out that "it was unrealistic for the Organisation to hold the Summit in Kuwait. Kuwait is not neutral in the Gulf War and if the Summit was held in Kuwait. It would certainly gain no fruitful results."⁷ Moreover, Iran wanted the removal of Saddam Hussain from power in Iraq, whom Iran considered a "great obstacle of peace."

Pursuing the OIC's peace plan to bring about reconciliation between Iran and Iraq, Bangladesh made another initiative. It was for setting up an Islamic Peace Committee (IPC) in 1981. It comprised representatives of nine countries(Pakistan, Malaysia, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Turkey, Senegal, Guine, Gambia, Bangladesh and OIC Secretary General). Gambian President, Sir Dewada Karaba Jawara, was elected as IPC Chairman, President Jawara said that the IPC was ...

7. Bangladesh Observer, 6 January 1987.

"alive to its responsibilities and determined to carry out the mandate given to it by the OIC, for an honourable settlement of the war."⁸

In the eighth meeting of Islamic Peace Committee in 1985 in Jeddah, Bangladesh sent a four-member delegation team, headed by President H.M. Ershad. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, was a member of the team.

Addressing a press conference at the Royal Conference Palace in Jeddah, President H.M. Ershad said; "We should make all possible efforts to end the Gulf War at the earliest for bringing peace in the region. We aspired to see the war ended, further consolidation of the Islamic solidarity and building up unshakable cohesion among the OIC member-states for promoting the cause of Ummah".⁹ He argued for exploring every possible avenue by all Muslim countries to resolve the crisis between the two warring nations. Being an active member of the Islamic Peace Committee, he promised that, on the basis of true spirit of Islam, Bangladesh was ready to do whatever was required to bring to an end the seemingly unending spilling of blood.

8. Bangladesh Times (Dacca), 13 September 1985.

9. Bangladesh Observer, 13 September 1985.

In the eighth meeting of the Islamic Peace Committee in September 1985, President Ershad expressed his deep anguish at the contamination and periodic escalation of the Iran-Iraq war. He proposed the formation of a high-level group assigned to establish contacts with Iran and Iraq before finalising a comprehensive peace plan. He supported a suggestion by the OIC Secretary General, Sharifuddin Pirzada, that the IPC's new plan should be an improved version of various peace proposals submitted to both Iran and Iraq by the Committee.

President Ershad also suggested that "the group be headed by Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, with OIC Secretary General, Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, and Foreign Ministers from two other countries as members."¹⁰

Moreover, the Committee undertook a comprehensive review of the war situation as well as previous decisions and agreed to accelerate and intensify efforts to bring about peace between Iran and Iraq founded on Islamic principles and international law as mandated by the Makkah-Al-Mukarramah/Taif and Casablanca summits of 1981 and 1984 respectively. The Committee agreed on certain

10. Saudi Gazette, (Riyadh) 12 September 1985.

guidelines for its future course of action. It decided to entrust to the Chairman with the authority of using all available ways and means to establish immediate contacts with both sides in order to promote a constructive dialogues at a high level for a just and honourable peace on the basis of the guidelines defined by the committee.

Apart from OIC and IPC, Bangladesh lent its support to the Gulf co-operation Council's efforts to the end of the Gulf War. It welcomed the GCC's peace plan when "leaders of the GCC States, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman said in a final communique closing their summit talks (on 10 November 1986) that they would continue to seek peace for the region."¹¹

Bangladesh also endorsed the UN's peace initiative regarding the Gulf War. Bangladesh's Permanent Representative in the UN, Justice B.A. Siddiky, expressed Bangladesh's trust in UN's efforts to end the war. He appreciated the UN Secretary General Perez de Cueller's and the Security Council's efforts, to bring peace in the region. When Iraq started to use poisonous gas in the battlefield, Bangladesh expressed its deep concern and condemned in UN "use of chemical weapons in Gulf war."¹²

11. Bangladesh Observer, 11 November 1986.

12. Bangladesh Observer, 27 April 1985.

The UN's prescription to the belligerent States was that the warring parties should "implement all Security Council resolutions for a total ceasefire, withdraw forces from each other's territories, exchange prisoners of war and start comprehensive negotiations."¹³ Since the outbreak of the Gulf War, the UN had adopted a number of resolutions arrived at stopping the war and bringing peace. These resolutions were as follows: 479 (1980); 514 (1982); 522 (1984); 540 (1983); 552 (1984) 582 & 586 (1986); and 598 (1987). When the UN came out with its peace plans for the mutual and peaceful solution in the Gulf War, Bangladesh expressed its confidence over these peace plans. But, it was careful enough about the sensitivity of both the belligerents. According to Bangladesh, the UN proposed peace plan should have been implemented under proper guidance. Otherwise, it feared, the UN initiative would face the same fate as befell all the previous peace plans of other forums Bangladesh saw the UN Charter as a fine document but when it came to settling bilateral disputes - like war in this case - the adjudication had to be guided by justice obtained from the sorting out of the relevant points. Any attempt to impose the provisions of the UN Charter, even as a last resort, may not only be easy to push through. The non-aligned members of the Security Council had already started saying that the UN plan had

13. The Hindu (Madras), 18 May 1977.

raised more questions than it answered. It may instead repeat the failure experienced in dealing with such disputes elsewhere or in the past. One Bangladesh daily suggested a way out. It wrote:

When all is said the more effective way to handle the Gulf situation seemed to include four steps: one, stopping the tanker War immediately for both bilateral and international reasons. Non-belligerents had to pay so heavily because of the belligerents trying to cripple each other and it made no sense; Two, keeping a low profile on the military presence in and around the Gulf and trying to assess accurately reactions to anything looking like a menace; three, the UN Security Council taking the pain of examining objectively the facts hitherto skipped, and holding the balance straight and appearing to be doing so as a world arbitration body; four, decoupling the Gulf from pressure tactics, overt to covert, dictated by regional or global policies. ¹⁴

In spite of its slight disagreements, Bangladesh, by and large, supported UN's peace initiative to end the Gulf War. Earlier, Bangladesh supported the UN Security Council's resolution 582 (1986) which had asked the belligerent states to observe an immediate ceasefire. On 20 July 1987, Bangladesh unanimously supported the UN's Security Council's new resolution 598 which ordered the warring states to immediately stop their fighting in the war and withdraw their troops to recognised boundaries.

14. Bangladesh Observer, 30 June 1987.

Although both the warring states - Iran and Iraq - had some reservations regarding this resolution, after some consideration both agreed to observe the ceasefire from August 20, 1988. Expressing his happiness, President Ershad, on behalf of the Bangladesh government, commented: "This ceasefire will restore peace in Gulf".

To observe the ceasefire and supervise implementation of the Security Council resolution Bangladesh sent fifteen - member contingent to the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIMOG). Bangladeshi Officers had earned special attention of the UN for their excellent services. Lt. Coloner Fazte Elahi Akbar, leader of the Bangladesh contingent, was appointed Deputy Chief of Operations for the Iraqi Zone. No other officers of the rank of Lt. Colonel from any other country had received such honour.¹⁵

Although Bangladesh is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) it made little effort to stop the Gulf War through this movement. Since the subject matters of the summit meetings of the NAM were broader,

15. Bangladesh Observer, 23 August 1988.

it could not bring out an exclusive peace plan for the Gulf War. Moreover, Bangladesh had to deal with some other problems in this forum. Therefore, it could not use the NAM as an exclusive platform for sorting out the disputes over the Gulf War.

Regarding the devastating Gulf War Bangladesh's concern was genuine. On several occasions, President Ershad's speeches reflected Bangladesh's earnest desire to end the Gulf war through various peaceful means. Once he said:



We should make all possible efforts to end the Gulf war at the earliest for bringing peace in the region. We aspire to see the war ended, further consolidation of the Islamic solidarity and building up unshakable cohesion among the OIC member states for promoting the cause of Ummah.¹⁶

Bangladesh sincerely tried to bring to an end the hostilities in the Gulf through various peaceful means but it was thwarted in its efforts. Continuous spilling of blood in the prolonged Gulf war distressed Bangladesh. It was pained to find that inspite of the professed fraternal bonds of faith, the Islamic world did not present any constructive homogeneity. Bangladesh shared the thought that it was time for all Muslim nations and the Organisation of Islamic Conference to focus more attention towards their problems and

16. Bangladesh Observer, 3 March 1985,

Particularly to exert in bringing the protracted war to an end. Finally, Bangladesh urged in a pathetic tone (as was reflected in the newspapers) to stop the mutual destruction in the Gulf War; It urged :

We - the people and the Government of Bangladesh - have consistently, asked for an end to be brought to the Gulf killing. We report the same with an appeal to the leaders of both Iran and Iraq to heed not only our humble wish but also to the anguished voice of one billion Muslims in the world over. The war across the Gulf is a major wrench in their hearts.¹⁷

The Gulf War outraged the world opinion generally and that of the Muslim world in particular. Bangladesh, being a Muslim country, reflected this anguish.

Apart from stirring up of the world opinion, Bangladesh could not make "great" progress in stopping the war in the Gulf. But its concern and commitment were genuine and highly admirable. Through its limited power, Bangladesh tried its best to end the spilling of blood in the fratricidal war. Iran also praised Bangladesh for making efforts for the peaceful solution of the Gulf - war. The Iranian Charged Affairs in Bangladesh, Mohmound Sadad Maharshah admitted "the great role Bangladesh played for the cause of bringing peace between Iran and Iraq as a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference peace Mission."¹⁸ In fact,

17. Bangladesh Observer, 19 January 1987.

18. Bangladesh Times 2 Feb

both Iran and Iraq were firm on their decision not to budge one inch from their rigid positions. Looking at the Scenario of the Gulf, an Indian Scholar commented thus:

The Gulf war presents an interesting spectacle of international diplomatic demarches as regards issues and mediation. This was the first occasion when the international community made diplomatic efforts at three different levels - U.N. Non-aligned and Islamic - to bring about peace. However, although the decision in these forums ranged from calls for ceasefire to withdrawal from occupied territories, the aggressor was not named. The belligerents themselves adopted rigid positions. ¹⁹

As regards their attitude towards the Iran - Iraq war, the West Asian states were clearly divided into two camps. Iran was almost isolated. While Syria backed Iran in the war, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, comprising Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman generally favoured Iraq. Iran's relations with some of the GCC countries deteriorated sharply in mid-1980s. Once, the Iranian Prime Minister Hussain Musavi said that "our policy in relation with these countries (Gulf states) is one of tit for

19. A.H.H. Abidi, "The Iran-Iraq War - A balance Sheet" in R.C. Sharma;(ed.) Perspective on Iran-Iraq Conflict. (New Delhi) p. 86

tat blows. We will never forgive a country which has helped our enemy and will take revenge upon them."²⁰ Due to some obvious reasons, Bangladesh was neither in favour of military solution in the Gulf war, nor did it intend to tie itself with Iraq or the Saudi Arabian camp. At the same time it remained reticent on the question of supporting Iran in the Gulf-war. If there were any efforts made by "internationally isolated" Iran to seek total support from Bangladesh, the latter would have soundly refused that kind of move. For example, when Radio Tehran, in its broadcast on 1 September 1987, carried the news that the Bangladesh President, Hussain M. Ershad, expressed his country's solidarity with Iran on the Gulf War, the Bangladesh Government immediately contradicted the "totally fabricated news of Radio Tehran". Clarifying the misunderstanding, a spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh said:

Bangladesh's position on the Gulf war which was referred to in "Radio Tehran" report was well known and reiterated on many occasions both at home and abroad. The Government of Bangladesh has taken serious view of this mischievous and concocted report. The Iranian Ambassador was called to the Foreign Office and was apprised of the 'displeasure' of the Government.²¹

20. Bangladesh Observer, 6 January 1987.

21. Bangladesh Times, 4 September 1987.

Bangladesh always put high priority on solidarity among the Islamic countries. It preferred peaceful resolutions of all conflicts in West Asia. As Bangladesh is overwhelmingly dependent on external aid, it can not afford to annoy or dissatisfy any of its donors. A peaceful, Politically stable and viable West Asia can promote and guarantee Bangladesh's interest both in maintaining peace and security and in accelerating the pace of socio-economic development.

CONCLUSION

Since ancient times Iran had religious and cultural relations with the Indian subcontinent. But it was the Anglo-Russian rivalry during the nineteenth century which brought Iran politically closer to this subcontinent. Undivided India was the largest colony of the British empire and the British government's sole concern was to protect this vast colony so that it could not be influenced by other external powers. But another big power of that time, Russia also, envisaged plan to expand its empire as far as India and the Persian Gulf.

Tsarist dream to expand Russian empire towards the Indian subcontinent was a bit older than the British colonisation there. In the reign of Peter The Great (1682-1725) of the Romanov dynasty, Russia began its political and military adventures in Iran and this Russian thrust into West Asia was continued in the later centuries also. Britain was never happy with the Russian forward movement in this region because it could have jeopardised British interest in the Persian Gulf and its prime colony India. Whereas Russia looked upon Iran as a natural zone for expansion, Britain regarded this country as strategic frontier of its empire in India. As both Russia and Britain tried to enhance their influence in Iran, it had to contend

with the Anglo-Russia rivalry throughout the nineteenth century and even later. Consequently, Indian subcontinent became an important factor determining Iran's foreign policy.

But in early twentieth century some major developments in international political arena helped to extinguish the embers of tension between Britain and Russia. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the communist government in Russia rescinded all previous Tsarist agreements with Iran. The establishment of Pahlavi dynasty in Iran marked a new era in Iran's foreign policy. On the other hand, the war-ravaged British ruling throne was in a staggering condition due to the high velocity of Indian nationalist movement. A vacuum was created in the Indian subcontinent when the British Government was compelled to roll up its empire in India. India got its independence but, before departure, the British government divided the colony between India and Pakistan. Pakistan which was carved out of India on the basis of "two nations" theory, emerged as an important factor in Iran's foreign policy.

Although the Communist government in Russia had transformed its attitude towards Iran, the New Shah (Reza

Shah Pahlavi) of Iran was very anxious about the Soviet 'design' vis-a-vis Iran and the Indian subcontinent. The Shah was in favour of statusquo in these regions. He was against any kind of liberal movement in West Asia and felt that the Communist thrust, backed by the Soviet Union, would endanger the statusquo.

The post-Second World War era was marked by the Cold War between the two Super Powers, viz, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The United States government initiated a new policy to contain the Soviet advancement in the vulnerable regions of West Asia and the India subcontinent. The newly initiated policy of containment culminated in the signing of the Baghdad pact in 1955. The regional members were Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan. The chief aim of this Pact was, to prevent Soviet expansion in West Asia.

Although the chief aim of the Baghdad Pact was to contain the Communism each member-state of the Pact joined it for its different reasons. While Iran was anxious about radical and Communist movements in West Asia, Pakistan was afraid of its big neighbour India.

Under their alliance in the mutual security pact, Iran remained a ~~sta~~ staunch supporter of Pakistan. On the

Kashmir issue, Pakistan got solid support from the Shah of Iran. In 1965, and 1971 when the wars broke out between India and Pakistan, the Shah declared Iran's solidarity with Pakistan and helped Pakistan in various ways.

Some significant changes during the 1970s in the Indian subcontinent led to a corresponding shift in Iran's policy towards this region. India emerged as a prominent power in the subcontinent at about the time when Iran also nursed its ambition to become the pre-eminent power in the Gulf and the India Ocean regions. In early 1970s there were some other developments also which put Iran into a tight corner. The most important of these were the Indo-Soviet and Iraqi Soviet treaties and the growing Soviet naval presence in Indian Ocean. India's security environment also considerably improved. All these developments led Iran to look upon India as potential threat to its security. Therefore, when Bengalis the then East Pakistan declared their struggle of liberation against the suppression of West Pakistan, Iran rendered both political and material support to the latter. Pakistan was considered a natural ally by Iran and it felt that the further division of Pakistan would weaken Iran's military strategy in the subcontinent.

With India's active assistance, Bangladesh earned its independence through a bloody war of liberation. For a considerable period of time, due to Pakistan's continuous misgivings Bangladesh could not get the recognition of some West Asian countries including Iran, which was the most influential country in West Asia. Iran not only rendered political and material support to Pakistan during the Bangladesh liberation war, it further advocated reunification of Pakistan in various international forums including the newly formed Organisation of Islamic Conference. Iran did not approve of the existence of independent Bangladesh due to some reasons. First, Iran calculated that the emergence of Bangladesh would weaken a powerful Muslim ally, Pakistan. Secondly, Israel supported the Bangladesh-liberation movement. Thirdly, Iran did not approve of Dacca's emphasis on 'secularism' and 'socialism'. The Shah thought that Dacca's emphasis on secularism would help to strengthen the radical movement and the 'socialism' would enhance the Soviet-influence in this region. Finally Iran found that the seeds of cultural and linguistic disparity which sprouted into the movement of self determination and separatism

in East Pakistan were also to be found in its own out-lying provinces. So, developments in the eastern wing of Pakistan had the potentiality of encouraging secessionist movements in Kurdish, Azar, Baluchi and Arab areas of Iran.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh made continuous efforts to earn recognition from the countries of West Asia. The most notable thing was that although Israel was one of the few countries which granted immediate recognition to Bangladesh, the latter spurned the offer and expressed its solidarity with the Arab and Muslim countries of West Asia. Bangladesh was motivated to develop its relations with Iran alongwith other West Asian countries for a number of reasons. These were as follows:

- 1) India and the Soviet Union could not fullfil the growing needs of external assistance to the war-ravaged Bangladeshieconomy. Inspite of India's direct involvement in the liberatiOn war, warmth in bilateral relations was short lived. Subsequently, Bangladesh developed a threat perception that led it to strengthen its relations with Iran alongwith other West Asian countries.

In 1973, due to the sudden oil boom, Iran emerged as a potential donor providing aid to the developing

countries and it also turned into a lucrative market for skilled and unskilled labour. Bangladesh with its huge surplus manpower, looked towards Iran as a possible market for employment. Bangladesh was convinced that development of relations with fellow-Muslim countries, such as Iran, might ease its economic hardship.

2) Traditional Muslims in Bangladesh demanded development of close relations with West Asian Muslim countries including Iran.

3) Iran had a considerable influence over Pakistan, therefore Bangladesh thought that Iran would be an effective intermediary in securing repatriation and division of assets from Pakistan.

In 1973, when the Arab-Israeli war broke out, Bangladesh wholeheartedly supported the 'Muslim brethren' and condemned the aggression of Israel. As a 'token of love', Bangladesh sent tea and medical missions to Muslim countries which were fighting against Israel. After the Arab-Israeli war, Bangladesh earned the recognition of more Arab countries. But still, there were some 'rejectionist' countries in West Asia which were averse as indifferent to the existence of independent Bangladesh.

Bangladesh was invited to attend the Summit meeting of the newly set up Organisation of Islamic Conference, which was going to be held in Karachi (1974). But the Bangladesh government pointed out unless Pakistan give its recognition to Bangladesh it would not attend the Summit meeting. However, after sorting out some initial problems, the then Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, on behalf of Pakistan, announced (22 February 1974) his government's decision to recognise Bangladesh. Iran also announced its recognition on the same day. As Iran was the most influential country, its recognition gave a prestigious place to Bangladesh in West Asia.

Some developments which took place in the domestic field as well as in international arena led Iran to improve its relationship with Bangladesh. After 1973, the massive rise in Iran's oil revenues led to ambitious programme of industrialisation. In foreign affairs, through generous offers of economic aid, Iran hoped to ~~offset~~^{set} the Soviet influence in the Indian subcontinent, counter balance the Arab influence in its West, and neutralize the adverse effect of oil price increases on developing countries. All these developments led Iran to improve its relations with Bangladesh also. Apart from those, at that time, the Shah was planning

to evolve a mechanism for joint economic cooperation with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean which could eventually be turned into a military alliance.

In 1976, for the first time, Iran and Bangladesh exchanged high-level official visit regarding the agreement on trade, technology, and cultural affairs. This relationship was developed more effectively after the four-day official visit of the then Bangladesh President, General Ziaur Rehman, in March 1977. The Shah of Iran also accepted an invitation from President Ziaur Rahaman for visitng Bangladesh.

Previously, the August coupd' etat in 1975, had created more favourable atmosphere in Bangladesh for developing relations with the Islamic countries, including Iran. 'Secularism' a basic principle of the state was replaced by "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah". A new clause was also added to Article 25 of the Constitution dealing with external relations. It expressed solidarity with the fraternal Islamic countries.

In 1979, when the Shah of Iran was ousted by the Islamic Revolution, Bangladesh promptly recognised the

establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and reiterated its "fraternal relation" with Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran also expressed its earnest desire to strengthen its solidarity with Bangladesh. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini sent Ayatollah Hossein Noori as a special envoy to visit Bangladesh. During his visit, Ayatollah Noori conveyed Iran's "goodwill" to the people of Bangladesh.

With the change of regime in Iran, its previous foreign policy also changed. Now the Iranian government started to emphasis on solidarity among all Muslim countries on the basis of Islamic ideology and actively upheld the export of Islamic revolution into other countries. Consequently, its neighbouring states felt uncomfortable or threatened and Iran's relations with these countries deteriorated. The devastating Iran-Iraq war also started almost at the same time. Moreover, Iran severed all its relations with the United States, a Super Power which was the most reliable ally of Iran during the Shah's regime. In the Islamic Republic of Iran's judgement it was the United States which was responsible for all the miseries in Iran. When the United States put pressure and imposed economic sanction on Iran, another Super Power, the Soviet

Union, invaded Afghanistan which was an immediate neighbour of Iran. The Soviet penetration in Afghanistan posed a serious challenge to Iran's security. When such developments pressurized Iran, Bangladesh's recognition partly helped it to break its diplomatic isolation in the international political arena. During this period, the relationship between Iran and Bangladesh was one of "unity that was essential towards overcoming the many problems and difficulties faced by Muslim countries". In fact, henceforth, Islam began to play a "pivotal" role in their relations.

Since 1977, Iran and Bangladesh expressed their common views on the regional and international issues and proclaimed their determination to preserve an independent foreign policy that corresponded with the Charter of the United Nations Organisation and the objectives of the Organisation of Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement. Earlier, during the Shah's time, Iran was not a member of the Non-Aligned Movement. But after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran wholeheartedly joined the Movement.

The two countries were not only in agreement on regional and international issues they also held

that this understanding, friendship, and spirit of co-operation was in their own interest as well as international peace.

Iran has played constructive role in Bangladesh, especially in the field of natural gas and in establishing oil refineries. Earlier, Iran as a member of AID TO BANGLADESH consortium; Iran helped Bangladesh to develop various national projects. Iran not only imported skilled manpower from Bangladesh for its industrial sector, with its huge petro-dollars it also bought a variety of traditional and non-traditional commodities such as jute, textiles, leather, and material for construction and ship building. Both countries are now emphasising on more avenues to improve their economic relations. On several occasions the Bangladesh government acknowledged the fact that Iran played an important role in the development of Bangladesh's economic conditions. Iran also derived some advantages out of its economic relations with Bangladesh since the latter's raw materials were considerably cheaper in comparison with other countries. This factor helped Iran to boost its industrialisation.

During the Shah's time, agriculture was neglected

in Iran. Bangladesh, being a pre-dominantly agricultural country, could help Iran develop its agricultural sector. But inspite of some short comings both countries have adequate potentialities to improve their economic relations. Due to the lack of good communications system, their economic cooperations did not flourish as much as the potentialities warranted. Another problem has been the poor management system. Both Iran and Bangladesh will have to work out to explore more possible avenues for improving their economic relations.

Since the Shah's time, Iran expressed its disappointment regarding the international economic system and on several occasions, Iran made efforts to promote economic cooperation among the countries of the Third World. The Shah's chief aim was to offset the developed countries' economic influence in the Third World. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran called for an Islamic Common Market. Bangladesh also shared the view with Iran.

Apparently, Iran-Bangladesh economic relations are a reflection of the Third World countries' earnest desire to become economically self-sufficient through mutual

cooperation and stop the exploitation of developed countries. If Iran and Bangladesh, sorting out some initial problem, can go ahead with their economic cooperation, then it will set a good example before the developing countries.

With regard to the Iran-Iraq war, from the very beginning of out break of the war, Bangladesh called both the parties to cease hostilities and solve the dispute through peaceful negotiations. Bangladesh always put high priority on solidarity among the Muslim countries and peaceful resolutions of all conflicts in West Asia. Bangladesh is the second largest Muslim populated and second poorest state in the world. For economic reconstruction, Bangladesh is heavily dependent on external economic assistance. Both Iran and Iraq helped Bangladesh to build its economy with huge economic assistance from time to time. So, when the Gulf war broke out, Bangladesh thought that the major source of external economic assistances, which come from both Iran and Iraq would dry up. Therefore, Bangladesh made all efforts to end the hostilities between Iran and Iraq. Whenever Bangladesh got an opportunity it tried to bring peace between Iran and Iraq through international organisations.

Bangladesh made its peace efforts through the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), Islamic Peace Committee (IPC), United Nations Organisation and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). But Bangladesh mainly emphasised on the OIC's Peace initiative and, later on, as a member of the Islamic Peace Committee, it continued to call for an end to hostilities in the Gulf. The late President Ziaur Rahman's efforts to bring about cessation of hostilities between Iran and Iraq earned the praise of Iranian leaders. Later on, President Ershad personally went to attend the eighth meeting of the Islamic Peace Committee in Jeddah hammering a formula for ending the Gulf War.

Apart from OIC and IPC's efforts to secure ceasefire in the Gulf War, Bangladesh supported the UNO's peace resolutions regarding this war and it also endorsed the NAM's initiatives to stop the Gulf War. Bangladesh's efforts in the direction of peace making were highly commendable .

In sum, the major aspects of Iran-Bangladesh relations are the following. Iran and Bangladesh remain close to each other despite their geographical distance. Iran maintains special relation with Bangladesh which,

in course of time emerged as an important Muslim country. Iran regularly broadcasts from Radio Tehran the 'Bengali Service' for Bangladeshi listeners. Their "traditional bond" has been continuous. However, a review of these two countries bilateral relations reveals a commonalty in their threat perceptions. Apparently, like an any other countries of the Third World both Iran and Bangladesh carried a sense of insecurity. This is born out of the question of existence of the small states against the global hagemony of Super Powers.

In fact, whatever comfort provided by stress on Islamic unity or economic cooperation 'threat perception' plays a key role in the various aspects of their relations. Mere unity in faith or economic power and development cannot guarantee national security. For improving the environment of national security, a country needs mutual cooperation with another country, which bears the same mood. Thus, for the purpose of co-operation and consolidation, the two countries look for common avenues and means. This theoritical frame work applies to Iran's relations with Bangladesh.

Inspite of the fact that both the countries have

emphasised more on some specific aspects in their relations, such as 'Islam' and 'economy', it was their 'threat perception' which was central in bringing Iran and Bangladesh closer to each other. Iran was a constant victim of foreign powers' interferences in its soil. This started since the nineteenth century. Bangladesh owed its independent statehood to external intervention. Then, its poor and shattered economy made the country destitute looking for subvention from outside. This minus factor not only made Bangladesh as inviting land for foreign intervention it also made its rulers over sensitive to threats from outside. Thus, fear of the foreign power was deeply ingrained on both sides and it pushed the two towards with other.

For a insecure country, whatever its size or strength may be, the chief aim remains unity on the basis of mutual and equal cooperation with other countries. Bangladesh, which won its independence through a bloody liberation war was also a long sufferer of Pakistani exploitation. After independence, Bangladesh periodically condemned its big neighbour India's "self-styled policeman's attitude". Although Bangladesh is the second poorest country in the world, it could not blindly rely on the capitalist world, nor could it fully open its door to socialist countries

for its economic developments .

If the Third World countries really intend to develop their overall conditions without the Super Powers interference then organic unity and coordination are essential among them. Iran's relations with Bangladesh can set an ideal example of cooperation on the basis of complementarity among the countries of the Third World. Whatever position they may have in the international political arena does not matter. What is incumbent is mutual trust, understanding and urge for concerted action. These factors can help them to develop themselves in their own way without the Super Powers' interference.

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