

# **BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS : 1975-90**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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1997



जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय  
**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

NEW DELHI - 110 067

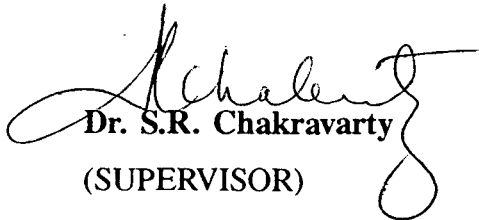
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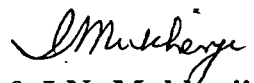
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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "**BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS: 1975-90**" submitted by Ms **TEMSUMENLA** in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is a bonafide work to the best of our knowledge. This work has not been published or submitted to any other degree of this or any other university

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

  
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For  
my father & mother

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## PREFACE

Following the independence of Bangladesh, positive attitude by China on Bangladesh is indicated only after its recognition by Pakistan in 1974. China, who strongly opposed the national liberation movement in Bangladesh is now highly regarded by the people of Bangladesh. China's attitude changed in the wake of the August 1975 coup, following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the President of Bangladesh. China's recognition of Bangladesh as a full independent nation in 1975, led to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nation states.

With Zia-ur Rahman as the new President of Bangladesh, the relation between Bangladesh and China underwent a tremendous change. Since 1977, strong diplomatic ties have been maintained between the two nations, which has grown more evident since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The purpose of this study is an attempt to understand and highlight the various factors which had helped in shaping up the relation between China and Bangladesh in the period between 1975 and 1990. This present study has laid greater emphasis on the political, economic and military relation between the two nations. The period between 1975-1990 is of vital importance, as it was during this period that the relation between China and Bangladesh took shape, which during the later stages has become a significant development in the political and economic dimensions of South Asia.

The present study is being pursued keeping in view the need to have an in-depth study of the relation between Bangladesh-China, as there has not been much research done on this subject. Much of the existing literature available on Bangladesh foreign policy gives only a general perspective of it, and as regards its relation with China it has been dealt marginally. In the absence of an intensive detailed study on this subject, this

present study is a modest attempt to substantiate the study of the foreign policy of Bangladesh. While preparing the dissertation I have consulted all published materials which have mention in the Bibliography, available in different libraries of Delhi.

In order to provide a proper perspective to the study under consideration it has been divided into five chapters.

Chapter one deals briefly with the historical background of Bangladesh-China relations.

Chapter two deals with the development of a new foreign policy with the accession of the two military regimes towards China. It also highlights the various trends which took place in their political relations during this period.

Chapter three deals with the economic interactions mainly at two levels - trade and aid. It studies the impact of the various agreements concluded between Bangladesh-China and explore the progress achieved in economic cooperation.

Chapter four highlights China's military aid to Bangladesh. The official visits of various leaders is taken into cognizance.

Finally, chapter five summarises the findings of the study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. S.R.Chakravarty, who has been a constant source of inspiration and through whose guidance, encouragement and support this work has been made possible.

I am also thankful to all the faculty members of the South Asian Studies Division for their valuable help and encouragement. I extend my gratefulness to all the staff members of J.N.U. Library, Nehru Memorial Museum Library and Sapru House for their kind assistance.

I am deeply indebted to Mr.T.M.Varghese for his meticulous typing of the script, as without his hard work it would have been almost impossible to have had submitted this work on time.

I especially like to thank my parents, sister and brothers for supporting me through their prayer and in every possible way, and most of all for believing me in my work.

A special gratitude to all my friends and colleagues for their valuable advice, suggestions and support.

21 July 1997  
JNU, New Delhi.

  
(TEMSUMENLA)

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The birth of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971 was an important development in the politics of South Asia, particularly of the subcontinent. The emergence of Bangladesh brought about a fundamental change in the geo-political and geo-strategic conditions of South Asia as this development broke some assumption and set forth new ones. The South Asian realities changed and the politics of the subcontinent took a new turn.

The role of big powers also became pertinent to evolution and conclusion of the conflict. At the close of the Indo-Pakistan conflict on Bangladesh, India emerged as a power to be reckoned with after a lapse of about a decade of ignominious defeat at the hands of China. The changed situation affected the Super Power politics in the subcontinent, and U.S.A. lost its political and military base in East Pakistan. China, whose policies during the crisis were not free of dichotomies and complications, suffered numerous diplomatic setbacks. On the other hand, on account of Indo-Soviet treaty, the Soviet Union had an edge over U.S.A and China in South Asia.

#### **Genesis of the Crisis**

The root of the East Pakistani crisis can be traced back to 1947, when Pakistan came into existence. The state structure of Pakistan was created on the basis of two nation theory. But a quarter century of her existence brought forth her internal contradictions - cultural, ethnic, linguistic and above all, political and economic - which

culminated in East Pakistan's struggle for emancipation which resulted in a successful fruition on 17 December 1971. The concept of two nation theory was not able to hold together the jury-built structure of Pakistanis state. There was an increasing realisation among Bengalis that the fact of geographical boundaries, language, culture and above all economic dictated a separate and autonomous existence for them, far away from the mainstream of dominant Pakistan national life. The structure of state power - political as well as administration were monopolised by Punjabi elites of West Pakistan. The alienation of the Bengalis from the Pakistani political system started almost immediately after independence as a result of the "politics of grievances."<sup>1</sup>

When Pakistan came into existence political power was virtually monopolized by West Pakistani refugee leaders settled there. Agony of the Bengali Muslim was not only confined to the deprivation of political power at the Centre. A deep sense of frustration and alienation began to take roots in the Bengali mind in the wake of Partition. This frustration prompted the Bengalis to form their own political organisation, the Awami Muslim League followed by the proliferation of other nationalist leftist, and secular political organisation in East Bengal. The state language issue i.e., the central government's determination to make Urdu the sole state language was crucial to its development. The language question became intertwined with the demand of full provincial autonomy for East Bengal as the Pakistani ruling elite was taking more and more authoritarian turn.

The grievances and frustration of the East Bengali population grew out of the obvious exploitation and the effort by West Pakistan to efface the cultural identity of East

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1      Mohammad Ayoob and K. Subrahmanyam, *The Liberation War* (New Delhi, 1972), p.31.

Bengal. This gave birth to the national movement, which initially began as a Protest against the imposition of Urdu (replacing Bengali as the official language) and gradually developed all over East Bengal and took the form of a mass struggle against economic exploitation.<sup>2</sup> The Muslim separation in Bengal was the result of deep-rooted economic causes which filtered down from the dispossessed landed gentry through the fledgling middle class to the poor tenant farmer, share cropper and landless labourers. It was this feeling of economic disinheritment that underlay East Bengal's firm vote in favour of partition despite the cultural linguistic affinity of the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. East Bengal's commitment to Pakistan was basically economic and political and not based upon the primarily religious mass hysteria that had been whipped up in upper India and the north-western regions of the subcontinent.<sup>3</sup>

East Pakistan was denied a position and status in proportion to their numerical strength. This tilt in power structure of Pakistan towards West Pakistan fringed poignant sense of political ineffectiveness. The formalization of the prevailing power structure heightened the feelings of alienation nurture by the East Bengali middle class and trappings of the remnant parliamentary institutions were scrapped away. So with them were removed the safety-valves of parliamentary facade which had let off a lot of simmering Bengali discontent.<sup>4</sup> During the Ayub era, East Pakistan's share of the Military officers was less than 10 percent. Its representation in the civil bureaucracy

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2 S.R.Chakravarty and Virendra Narain (eds.), *Bangladesh: Domestic Politics*, vol.II, (New Delhi, 1986), p.2.

3 Ayoob and Subramanyam, n.1, pp.3-4.

4 Mohammed Ayoob, *India, Pakistan and Bangladesh: Search for a New Relationship* (New Delhi, 1975), p.5.

never exceeded 30 percent, while Bengali presence in the important Central Secretariat positions was marginal.<sup>5</sup> During the long military rule of Ayub the disparity between the two parts of Pakistan reached such an appalling state that the Bengalis lost all hopes of attaining political power and economic emancipation. Pakistan's phenomenal industrial growth has marred by a slowed growth pattern to the advantage of west Pakistan only.

The economic imbalances were deliberately fastened between the two wings by the free growth of monopoly capitalism in the western wing to the detriment of the development of the East. The Eastern wing, while responsible for 75 percent of the export and foreign earnings consumed only 20-30 percent of imported goods, of development funds, the burgeoning industries of the western side representing 40 percent of the population received 77 percent of the import. In the income and production of the country, East Pakistan did never get its due share. The central government controlled imports and exports in such a way that East Bengal was forced to buy commodities from West Pakistan at a higher price. The foreign exchange earned out of exports from East Pakistan was diverted almost entirely to the industrial development of West Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> Thus the surpluses of East Bengal was spent to benefit west Pakistan. Majority of the industrial enterprises established by the Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation were located in West Pakistan and 80 percent of foreign imports connected with the industrialisation were utilised there.

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5 Rounag Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (New York, 1972), p.98

6 S.K.Chakrabarti, *The Evolution of Politics in Bangladesh* (New Delhi, 1978), p.87.

The deplorable economic disparity and the lack of Bengali representation in the upper crest of civil and military bureaucracies, which were in charge of running the country in the absence of democratic political process with an accompanying sense of utter frustration and ineffectiveness, contributed to the growth of militant Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan. The constitution that Ayub introduced and its ingenious electorate system assured the Bengalis "that they had the least chance of securing political power' in the existing system of Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> Besides, the sense of cultural arrogance of West Pakistan's ruling elite ruffled the Bengali sentiment and fuelled their intransigence. So a movement started for provincial autonomy which was purely an expression of a sense of political alienation and economic exploitation born out of sullen Bengali pride and resentment against the impervious central government.

Sheikh Mujib emerged as the new paladin of the throttled Bengali aspirations under the prevailing circumstances of East Pakistanis estrangement. He systematically advanced the Bengali demands in the famous 6-point formula which he termed the "charter of survival". The six-point programme envisaged a loose federal and parliamentary type constitution where central authority would be limited to only two subjects - defence and foreign affairs. This programme readily captured the imagination of the Bengali public particularly, the middle class. It immediately sparked a mass movement in East Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

The political stage in East Pakistan was taking an increasingly militant turn. The mass movement that dislodged Ayub also played an important role in the radicalization

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7 Fazal Muqem Khan, *Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership* (Islamabad, 1973), p.7.

8 For knowing detailed account of the six-point programme, see Talukdar Maniruzzaman, *Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Dhaka, 1980).

of the Bengali masses. The Awami League fought the 1970 elections and sought a clear mandate on the six-point so that the future constitution of Pakistan could be framed according to the autonomy principles embodied in the six-point programme. The election result was a spectacular victory of the Awami League. It won 167 out of 169 seats. The Awami League's maintenance to frame a constitution guaranteeing maximum autonomy for East Pakistan pushed the ruling junta in a difficult position. The postponing of the first session of the newly elected assembly set for 3 March 1971 by Yahya Khan to pressure Mujib to come to terms with Pakistani leaders, sparked into a spontaneously movement of an unprecedented magnitude. Yahya flew to Dhaka to hold talks with Mujib ostensibly to buy some time to launch military offensive in the East. Finally, the junta made the fateful decision to crackdown on the unarmed Bengalis on 25 March 1971 which ultimately resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh.

### **Bangladesh Crisis and the External Power Alignment in the Subcontinent**

The independence of Bangladesh in 1971 was preceded by intense international diplomacy which resulted in a conflicting, external power alignment in South Asia. Although the subcontinental crisis grew out of a domestic dispute the regional and external super powers was gradually drawn into the vortex of this quandary. "India, Pakistan, U.S., Soviet Union and China and their national interests came into striking juxta position in South Asia."<sup>9</sup> Their analysis of, and response to the crisis situation, was determined more by the need to maintain a favourable power configuration advantageous to their interests than with any genuine concern for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The pattern of their involvement in the Bangladesh crisis was a function

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9 William J. Bards, *India, Pakistan and the Great Powers* (New York, 1972), p.2.

of their mutual strategic relations and conditioned by perception of their respective national interests. Nevertheless, it is viewed, the strategic behaviour of the contending external great powers had actually helped, rather than hindered, the independence of Bangladesh.

The year 1971 marked a watershed in great power relations with the South Asian countries. It not only entailed a serious threat to the regional peace and security but also raised certain basic issues concerning the entire international system. The crisis became all the more intense in the context of the role played by major global powers. As stated by James Reston and quoted by Anjoo S. Upadhyaya, "back of all this, there was a power struggle between China and Soviet Union and a strategic struggle between Moscow and Washington."<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, the crisis saw the emergence of Pakistan-America-China collusion which expedited the conclusion of Indo-Soviet treaty.

Of all the external powers, which were involved in the developing crisis, India put a vital stake in the Bangladesh liberation struggle or perhaps more specifically in the dismemberment of Pakistan. A zero-sum strategic situation was thus developed in the region involving the two major regional powers, India and Pakistan. The external powers were drawn into this regional power contention, with Pakistan making special effort to draw the US and China to its support, while Bangladesh and India, apparently partners-in-struggle, endeavoured to cash in international support and sympathy against the brutality committed by the Pakistani forces. The U.S. and China re-opened their relations in 1971, with Pakistan, close to both, acting as an intermediary, yet neither powers virtually offered anything more than symbolic lip-services or at best offered token

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<sup>10</sup> Anjoo S. Upadhyaya, *Self-determination in World Politics, Emergence of Bangladesh* (Allahabad, 1984), p.123.

supplies to Islamabad in its military assault in Bangladesh, notwithstanding the apparent posture of alliance link each had maintained over the years with Pakistan. On the contrary, the USSR which for a number of years since 1965 assumed a mediation posture in regional conflict, had almost institutionalized an alliance relationship with India on the eve of the Bangladesh independence struggle.

Chinese strategy towards the freedom movement of Bangladesh can be understood in the context of a rapid survey of the 'power structure' in South Asia during the crisis. The period of the cultural revolution in China from 1966 to 1969 marked a predilection for an isolationist posture in Chinese foreign policy. China in the late 60s having suffered a great set back because of its self 'imposed isolation' during the Cultural Revolution, has been now trying to project a good image in Asia and abroad. Therefore, third world countries constitutes an important component in China's foreign policy calculations and conduct. China in the 1970s were apprehensive of the possible enlargement of USSR's influence in South and South East Asia. Thus the prime consideration of the Chinese policy makers in recent years has now to minimize the influence of the Soviet Union and to maximize China's strategic position vis-a-vis the Soviet union in the region. In a move to operationalize the grand strategy of sponsoring a global 'anti hegemony' front against the Soviet Union, China not only sought help from the third world countries and nations belonging to the second world but also accommodated her expanding security relationship with the other super power, the United States. The move for Brezhnev's "collective security system" in Asia, followed by Kosygin's proposal for regional economic cooperation between India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, accentuated China's irritation. China denounced the "collective security system" as "an anti-China military alliance which Brezhnev had picked up from the garbage heap of the



notorious Warmonger Dulles." The regional co-operation proposal was described as "nothing but a trap for setting up a military ring of encirclement against China and for political control and economic plunder of Asian countries."<sup>11</sup>

The announcement of Brezhnev Doctrine in June 1969 came on the heels of the Sino-Soviet border clash of March 1969. As already mentioned it envisaged the creation of a Soviet-oriented system of collective security in Asia, a concept that varied from arrangement for regional cooperation to a system of Soviet linked defence accords. Thus, the Kremlin not only plugged the gap created following the British withdrawal, but also tried to encircle China and bring Asia under the Soviet domination. China was especially concerned that Moscow would not solidify the southern flank of China in Asia and that "Soviet revisionism's tattered flag for an anti-China military alliance" did not succeed. Thus Beijing's reactions to the Sino-Soviet dispute had been played out in South Asia.<sup>12</sup>

In the beginning of the 1970s, the Nixon Administration adopted a new China policy to develop friendly ties with the PRC after nearly two decades of bitter hostility. President Nixon's decision to improve relations with China came as a great disappointment to the Soviet Union because its relations with China continued to remain hostile. Under the so-called "Nixon" or "Guam" Doctrine, the United States started providing China with opportunities to fill in the possible void around its periphery in the

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11 J.N.Mohanty, "China and the Emergence of Bangladesh: Role of Great Power Global Perceptions", *Indian Quarterly*, vol.39, no.2, January-April 1983.

12 Shirin Tahir-Kheli, "Chinese Objectives in South Asia: 'Anti Hegemony' vs 'Collective Security'", *Asian Survey*, vol.18, no.10, October 1978, pp.998-9.

wake of the American plan of reducing its presence in Asia.<sup>13</sup> For both the US and China, Soviet Union was the main rival. Hence, the United States which had been following a policy of containment of Communist China gradually found it irrelevant and, instead, tried to open a new dialogue for normalizing relations.

Amongst the major global powers it was only the Soviet Union which came forward to support the liberation of Bangladesh. The Soviet Union expressed concern for the cause of Bengalis in East Pakistan in the very first few weeks of the beginning of the crisis. This was evident in an official letter of President Podgorny addressed to President Yahya Khan dated 2 April 1971. In the letter, the Soviet, appealed for the adoption of the most urgent measures to stop the bloodshed and repression against the population in East Pakistan. He expressed hope for the adoption of "methods of peaceful political settlement." Porgony's appeal was significant in that it was not merely an appeal made on humanitarian grounds, but was a clear indictment by one of the world powers of the repressive measures adopted by a military regime to suppress a national upsurge.<sup>14</sup>

The U.S. policy was illustrative of abysmal insensitivity to nationalist and democratic aspirations of the third world. Instantaneous US response was "not to do anything" in spite of the urgency expressed by the US diplomats in Delhi and Dhaka for a prompt, prominent, and public denouncement. The official circles in the United States refrained from condemning Yahya Khan's regime for its military atrocities on the people of East Pakistan and, instead, regarded the East Bengal crisis as an internal problem of

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13 Mohanty, n.11, pp.138-9.

14 Upadhyaya, n.10, pp.124-5.

Pakistan. Joseph J.Sisco, US Assistant Secretary of State, added: "No issue is regarded as more intimately internal than the kind which confronts the Pakistanis. It is the kind of issue which can be settled only by the people of that country."<sup>15</sup> However, the press and some legislators in the United States criticized the role of the state administration in the crisis in East Bengal.<sup>16</sup> The rapprochement between the People's Republic of China and the United States and Pakistan acting as a typical go-between the two traditional rivals, brought about a volte-face in the American policy towards the subcontinent.<sup>17</sup> China's initiative obscured the visions of Nixon and Kissinger who were quietly engaged in negotiating with Beijing, something which senior officials of the state department were totally ignorant about Nixon's eagerness to open up with China heavily influenced US policy towards the Bangladesh crisis. Kissinger expressed "profound gratefulness" to Pakistan for its role as the channel to China. He maintains, "We had... every incentive to maintain Pakistan's goodwill. It was our crucial link to Peking and Pakistan was one of China's closest allies."<sup>18</sup> Pakistan's role as the channel to China figures most prominently in Kissinger's account of the crisis, it is mentioned at 18 different times. Whereas, the Bengalis struggle for independence and democracy finds no place in his aggressive defence of US policy.

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15 P.K.Sharma, *India, Pakistan, China and the Contemporary World* (Delhi, 1972), p.164.

16 Strongly condemning the administration's attitude to East Bengal crisis the Senator Frank Church (Democrat) said that the military assistance programmes had exacerbated troublesome situations before. The US journal also added that the Bengalis must also be entitled to human rights recognised under the UN Declaration of human rights.

17 Upadhyaya, n.10, p.129.

18 M.G.Kabir, "U.S. Policy and Bangladesh Crisis", *BISS Journal*, vol.9, no.2, 19-, p.205.

After Kissinger's visit to Beijing via Islamabad, President Nixon's historic 1972 visit to China was announced on July 15. India was greatly alarmed by the Sino-US detente, since it perceived China as the greatest threat to its security since the 1962 Sino-Indian war. Moreover, the Chinese support to Pakistan and the emerging Washington-Beijing-Islamabad axis was perceived by India as an impending threat to its own security and a great obstacle to the Bangladesh cause. The announcement of the Nixon trip pushed India to the Soviet Union completely and to enter into the Soviet alliance system by relinquishing its traditional neutrality. The signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty in August was described by Kissinger as a "bomb shell".<sup>19</sup> From September to December 1971, US policy towards the South Asian crisis was characterized by a high degree of concentration of power in presidential leadership. It seems that while the U.S. policy makers took a grim view of Indo-Soviet intention, they were nearly oblivious of the activities of the Bengali freedom fighters.

### **Sino-Pakistan Relations (Till 1970)**

In order to understand fully China's policy towards the Bangladesh crisis, it is necessary to study China's foreign policy relation to undivided Pakistan. This is

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19 Article IX of the Indo-Soviet treaty says: "In the event of either being subjected to an attack or a threat thereof, the high contracting partner shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threats and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries." This treaty was concluded at a historical juncture when India demonstrated a renewed willingness to develop a cooperative relationship with the United States.

because China's approach towards the struggle for Bangladesh stemmed from its foreign policy objectives in undivided Pakistan.

China's relationship with Pakistan began in 1955 at the Bandung Conference where Prime Minister Zhou Enlai went out of his way to befriend Pakistan. Pakistan, a state founded on the basis of religious nationhood, was the first Muslim country to recognise atheist China on 4 January 1950. When Pakistan joined Seato, China did not register even a formal protest with Pakistan,<sup>20</sup> which is indicative of her policy of keeping options open vis-a-vis Pakistan, irrespective of her membership in the military alliance against Peking. The Chinese might have sensed that, because the primary motivation of Pakistan's alliance policy was to acquire protection against India, and not China. Similarly, Pakistan's joining the Baghdad Pact in 1955 aroused little resentment in Peking.

At the Bandung Conference, Chou-en-Lai, after having discussion with Pro-West Mohammad Ali of Bogra, openly declared that China had no animosity against Pakistan despite the latter's joining the Western Military bloc and that China sincerely needed Pakistans goodwill and friendship. This feeling was also conveyed to Prime Minister Suhrawardy when he visited China in October 1956 and Zhou's in return visited within two months thereafter in the same year. On both occasions, stress was laid on cultural, trade and commercial ties, and the Kashmir issue was also emphasized. But contrary to Pakistani expectations Zhou Enlai did not commit China's outright support to the

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20 V.K.Tyagi, "China's Bangladesh Policy", *China Report*, July-August 1980, p.21.

Pakistan claim. China kept an apparently neutral attitude towards the Kashmir issue during a period when the India-China honeymoon was at its peak.<sup>21</sup>

With such mutuality of interests, the Sino-Pakistan relations became closer following the deterioration in Sino-Indian relations. The Sino-Indian war of 1962 and the subsequent American military aid to India accelerated the process of Sino-Pakistan relations. This enabled China to follow an uninhibited pro-Pakistan policy in matters involving India and it enabled Pakistan to follow a dependable policy towards China at a time when American's military aid to India had stopped.<sup>22</sup>

The new bonds between Pakistan and China were demonstrated in a series of agreements, the most important being the Sino-Pakistan border agreement of 1963. It implied, particularly for Pakistani interpretation, that China did not accept the legality of India's claim over the whole of Jammu and Kashmir. Following this, agreements related to trade and commerce were signed paving the way for export of jute, cotton, leather, cotton textile and newsprint machinery, etc. from China. Next a barter agreement was signed on September 1963 and the Chinese offered an interest free of \$60 million for Pakistan's economic development.<sup>23</sup> A civil aviation pact on 29 August 1963 and shipping agreement (1965) was also signed. Thus began a close friendship between Pakistan and China. In 1964, China's Prime Minister Zhou during a visit supported Pakistan's stand on the Kashmir dispute. This stand shocked New Delhi and

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21 For the Chinese stand on Kashmir, see, Government of India, White Paper on India-China, no.6, pp.96-102.

22 J.A.Naik, *India, Russia, China and Bangladesh* (New Delhi, 1972), p.56.

23 Shyamali Ghosh, "China-Bangladesh Relation: A Stable Relationship", in S.R.Chakravarty (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh*, p.301.

greatly pleased Islamabad. Like other major powers, China seemed to take advantage of the perennial Indo-Pakistan dispute.

China's attitude to Pakistan and India was dramatised during the Indo-Pak war in September 1965. From the very beginning of the war, Beijing gave an all-out support to Pakistan and condemned what it termed India's "naked aggression" to Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> It was on the compulsions of power politics and security considerations that the friendship between Pakistan and China developed, with objectives to check India's growing power potentials in the subcontinent.<sup>25</sup> The relationship between Pakistan and China flourished to the mutual advantage of both parties, Pakistan's obsession with India's aggressive designs brought her closer to China. In the wake of Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, China offered both military and economic assistance to Pakistan.

Since the Bandung conference, China was consistently giving moral and material support to Pakistan. China's open support to Pakistan in the Kashmir issue since 1964, its policy of shielding and aiding Pakistan in the Indo-Pak war of 1965, the settlement of the boundary question between the two countries in 1963, all these developments strengthened the already close relationship between them. This resulted in Pakistan's dependency upon China for its security against India.

China have shown persistent interest in Pakistan. It seems that they had visualised the strategic importance of Pakistan right from the beginning in their long-term policy planning toward their dominant neighbour - Soviet Union and India. The

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24 Dilara Choudhury, *Bangladesh and the South Asian International System* (Dhaka, 1992), p.150.

25 Anwar Hussain Syed, *China and Pakistan: Diplomacy of an Entente Cordiale* (London, 1974), p.7.

Pakistanis too followed a responsive policy towards China. Since both wings of Pakistan were in the neighbourhood of China, Pakistan's geopolitical importance for Peking was a constant determining factor in Chinese interest in Pakistan's affairs, notwithstanding the changing complexion of Pakistan affairs vis-a-vis big powers like the United States and Soviet Union.

Therefore, unlike the Pak-Soviet relationship, there is a long unbroken traditions of sustained involvement based on mutuality of interests in the Sino-Pak relationship. It was because of East Pakistan's far off existence from its Western wing, Pakistan's reliance on China had increased much more for protecting its eastern wing from India than what it other-wise would have been. Thus, China seemed to have had a vested interest in keeping Pakistan's two wings within one political unit, so long as it had a policy of retaining its influence in Pakistan. East Pakistan provided a strategic link for the Chinese to sustain their political influence in Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> To quote one scholar, their relationship has been regarded as "great diplomatic enigma and as a contemporary miracle of diplomacy."<sup>27</sup>

### **China Policy and Bangladesh War**

The Chinese more than any other people, were, from the very beginning, deeply involved in the Bangladesh crisis. Probably they realized, more than others, the strategic diplomatic importance of keeping Pakistan as their ally in this issue. With Pakistan on their side, the Chinese thought, they would be able to face more effectively their two

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26 Naik, n.22, p.57.

27 G.W.Choudhury, "Reflections on Sino-Pakistan Relations", *Pacific Community* (Tokyo), vol.7, no.2, January 1976, p.248.



dominant neighbours - the Soviet Union and India. The geographical position of Pakistan was of special advantage for China. Since the mainland of India lies between the two wings of Pakistan, China could create trouble for India in the west as well as in the east. Thus China extended its full support for safeguarding Pakistan's integrity and independence.

The 1971 crisis in Pakistan, however, put the People's Republic of China in a real dilemma. It now had only two alternatives. Either it had to support the ruling military regime of Pakistan led by Yahya Khan or the East Bengalis who were fighting for self-determination. Ideologically, though China was not in favour of suppressing a liberation movement, supporting the cause of Bengalis would result in hampering relations with Pakistan and helping Soviet design.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the Chinese in the beginning were quite reserved about the happenings in Bangladesh, no press comment was made available. The Chinese diplomats were asked to treat this issue as an internal affair and China did not believe in interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. The Bangladesh movement could be seen in Maoist terms as a classic case of peasant revolutionary military dictatorship.<sup>29</sup> China's action and policies during the war indicate that China did not regard the liberation movement under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League as a genuine liberation movement. It rather considered it a bourgeois revolution carried out with the aid of "reactionary" India and "expansionist" Russia.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Mohanty, n.11, p.141.

29 S.R.Sharma, *Bangladesh Crisis and Indian Foreign Policy* (New Delhi, 1978), pp.333-4.

30 Choudhury, n.24, p.152.

The first specific Chinese reaction against India's involvement in the liberation war of Bangladesh came in the form of a protest note, on 6 April 1971. The note accused India of "interfering in the domestic affairs of Pakistan". It further said that China herself has never interfered in the internal affairs of other countries. It also stated that the demonstrators were "slandering" China by accusing her of aiding the Pakistan government in its war on the "freedom-loving people of East Bengal."<sup>31</sup> The next reaction to the development in East Pakistan came on 11 April 1971, when the People's Daily carried a commentary on it and criticised the Government of India for interfering in Pakistan's domestic "affairs". It also pledged to "support the Pakistani government and people in their just struggle for safeguarding national independence, state sovereignty and against foreign aggression and interference."<sup>32</sup>

However, a definite change in China's attitude can be discerned in the Chinese Premier's letter of 11 April 1971, to President Yahya Khan. In the message, Chou En Lai stated, "unification of Pakistan and unity of the Peoples of East and West Pakistan are basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength." The letter came in response to "President Yahya Khan's frantic appeals to Peking for support as a counterbalance to Moscow's support for India." Chou also referred to a 'handful of persons' who wanted to sabotage the unity of Pakistan. The Chinese message proceeded to assure Pakistan that in an event of invasion of Pakistan, the Chinese government and people will, as always, firmly support Pakistan in their effort to safeguard state

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31 The reference "slandering" in the Chinese note indicated its desire of not taking sides on the Bangladesh issue. Upadhyaya, n.10, p.134.

32 Ibid.

sovereignty and national independence.<sup>33</sup> Beijing made it clear that its support was not entirely limited to words, for in May 1971, it offered Pakistan an additional \$20 million economic aid.<sup>34</sup> But in reality Zhou's letter was not an endorsement of Pakistan's brutal atrocities against the People of Bangladesh. The main theme of Zhou's message was to urge Pakistan's authorities to find a political solution to the crisis.<sup>35</sup> The Chinese, as their public statements indicated, considered the 'East Pakistan crisis' primarily in its international or superpower context, and acted with regard to the internal contradictions of Pakistan society.

From the very beginning China emphasized that the entire question of East Pakistan was Pakistani's internal affair which did not warrant outside interference. Radio Peking repeatedly warned that India and the Soviet Union would attempt to intervene to cause the break-up of Pakistan. No public statement was issued by the Chinese with regard to the military crackdown of March 25. The Chinese would have considered any such statement interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan. All their public comments focused purely on super power rivalries and India's expansionist drive within the region. No discussion of the national question or of Lenin's position on the right to self-determination under certain conditions of severe national oppression ever appeared in these commentaries.

The Pro-Chinese elements in Bangladesh were confused of China's support to Pakistan despite Yahya. Khan's military atrocities, which was apparently in conflict with

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33    *ibid*, p.135. Also see Lifschultz Lawrence, *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution* (London, 1979), p.23.

34    Quoted in Mohanty, n.11, p.142.

35    Choudhury, n.24, p.53.

the principle of revolutionary social change. China did not even consider it a real guerilla war, fought by peasants and workers, but a separatist movement launched not by the masses but by a handful of persons who wanted to sabotage the unity of Pakistan.<sup>36</sup>

With the signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty, Chinese reactions to the Soviet and Indian involvement in the Bangladesh issue became sharper. After the conclusion of the Indo-Soviet treaty in August 1971, the Chinese policy towards the sub-continent had remained unexpressed till that date, which had led to a lot of speculation. China's policy on Bangladesh was more clearly stated on the occasion of Bhuttos visit to Peking in the first week of November 1971. China's acting foreign Minister, Chin Peng-fei, publicly stated China's well-thought out policy in a welcome speech to the visiting Pakistani delegation under Z.A. Bhutto. He paid tributes to the Pakistani people for their "unremitting struggles against foreign aggressors, interventionists and domestic secessionists." He accused India of crudely "interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs" and carrying out "subversive activities and military threats against Pakistan by continuing to exploit the East Pakistan question." He also accused the Soviet leaders of "truculently exerting pressure on Pakistan by exploiting tension in the sub-continent, in a frantic attempt to realise their ulterior motives." He further said, "Our Pakistan friends may rest assured that should Pakistan be subjected to foreign aggression, the Chinese government and people will, as always, resolutely support the Pakistan Government and

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36 Quoted in MD Saghu Haider, "Bangladesh-Chinese Relations: A Review", *Regional Studies*, vol.9, no.2, Spring 1991, p.13.

people in their just struggle to defend their state sovereignty and national independence."<sup>37</sup>

The Chinese policy seemed to approve of a political settlement within the framework of Pakistan on the Bangladesh issue. Chi Peng-Fei believed "that the broad masses of the Pakistan people are patriotic and they want to safeguard national unity and unification of the country, oppose internal split and outside interference." However, he hoped that "a reasonable settlement" would be sought by the rulers in Islamabad with the people of East Pakistan.<sup>38</sup>

It is indicated that the failure of any suitable settlement of the massive exodus of refugees from East Pakistan into Indian territory forced the latter to join the struggle against West Pakistan. In the third committee of the United Nations General Assembly on 19 November 1971, commenting on the refugee problem faced by India, Fu Hua backed the Pakistani government, condemning India for exploiting the issue in order to interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs and obstruct the return of the East Pakistani refugees to their country.<sup>39</sup>

Bhutto led a Pakistani delegation to China on November 1971. The purpose of the visit was to seek Chinese support for Pakistan in Bangladesh crisis. China's acting foreign minister Chi Peng-Fei expressed the Chinese position in the speech he made at the banquet on 7 November 1971. It was stated that internal affairs are for countries to be "handled by its own people" and outside interference is not permissible. "It is our

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37 Quoted in Naik, n.22, p.60.

38 ibid, p.60.

39 Mohanty, n.11, p.143.

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hope that Pakistan people will strengthen unity and make joint effort to overcome difficulties and solve their own problems. India was accused of having "unduly interfered in Pakistan's internal affairs and carried out subversive activities and military threats against Pakistan." Then Peng-Fei suggested that "disputes between states should be settled by the two sides concerned through consultations and not be resorting to force" and in this context welcomed Yahya's proposal on troops withdrawal from border areas.<sup>40</sup>

When the war finally broke out in 3 December 1971, New China News agency issued a sharp attack on India. It severely criticised the armed aggression committed by India backed by socialist imperialism of the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> When the Indian government recognised Bangladesh, Peking radio termed it as an Indian act of "expansionism" and compared Bangladesh government with the Japanese puppet government in Manchuria, which was "recognised by the German and Italian fascists" only. Its attack on the Soviet Union was more blunt and accused Moscow of "trampling on the norms of international relations at will."<sup>42</sup>

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 was brought before the UN Security Council by the United States and introduced a resolution asking for immediate ceasefire to fighting and withdrawal of troops to the borders of India and Pakistan by their respectively governments. Such a resolution was brought thrice before the security council and the Chinese delegation voted for it on all occasions on 4 December 1971, the Hsinhua News

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40 A.M.A. Muhith, *Bangladesh: Emergence of a Nation* (Dhaka, 1978), p.354.

41 *ibid*, p.355.

42 Naik, n.22, p.59.

Agency released a polemical dispatch which charged that the "Indian government's aggression" against Pakistan was "approved and supported by the Soviet government".<sup>43</sup> On 5 December 1971 in the Security Council, the Chinese representative voted against USSR's draft resolution calling for a political settlement in East Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> The Chinese representative Huang Hua, while opposing the Soviet proposal of allowing the representative of Bangladesh to present its case, sternly pointed that, "this is stark interference in Pakistan's internal affairs and temples on the UN charter with which all countries upholding justice cannot agree."<sup>45</sup> A resolution was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 7, and another by the Security Council on December 21. Both the resolutions called for an immediate end to the war and withdrawal of troops on both sides. China though voted for both the resolution, was annoyed by the failure of resolutions to take note of "Indian aggression" and make a call supporting Pakistan.

When the Indo-Pak war was moving towards its end, China termed the problem as a Soviet bid to fish in troubled waters and described Bangladesh as the brainchild of the Soviet Union which had been created to harm China, weaken China's trusted friend, Pakistan, and strengthen China's hostile neighbour, India.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the Indo-Pak war came to an end on 16 December 1971 as the Pakistan armed forces unconditionally

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43 Speech in the House of Representatives, 3 August 1971, *Bangladesh Documents*, vol. 1, p.586, quoted in Mizamur Rahman Shelly, *Emergence of a New Nation in a Multi-Polar World: Bangladesh* (Dhaka, 1979), p.104.

44 Mohanty, n.11, p.143.

45 *Xinhua Selected News Items* (Hongkong), 13 December 1971, p.14, quoted in *ibid*, p.143-4.

46 Haider, n.36, p.74.

surrendered to the allied Indo-bangladesh forces and East Bengal became free from Pakistan occupational forces. China assured its support to the Pakistan government and people in their struggle against aggression, division and subversion on the eve of Indo-Pak ceasefire. It maintained: "we not only are doing this politically, but will continue to give them material assistance."<sup>47</sup> The Chinese government issued a statement blaming India for launching a "war of aggression against Pakistan with the active encouragement and energetic support of the Soviet Union." It said that "hence-forth there will be no tranquillity for it (the Indian government) on the South Asian subcontinent. He who plays with fire will be consumed by fire. The Indian expansionists and their backstage manager will surely eat the bitter fruit of their making."<sup>48</sup>

China characterised the concluded Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 as the "barbarous war of Indian reactionaries" and warned that "fall of Dacca is not a milestone towards victory but the starting point of an endless war in Asian subcontinent." At the same time Bangladesh government was described as a "pepped regime."<sup>49</sup>

China's suspicion of and opposition to the Soviet Union and its ally India was the most powerful determinant of her stand on the Bangladesh question. During the years 1963 and 1971 when neither the Soviet Union nor the United States was friendly to China and India was an adversary, the government in Islamabad served vital state interests of China. It is clear that China's responses during the Bangladesh crisis. have

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47 Mohanty, n.11, pp.144, 74.

48 Shelly, n.43, p.105.

49 Sukhbir Choudhury, *Indo-Pak War and Big Power* (Delhi, 1972), p.53.



to be viewed, as being motivated by geo-political interests rather than ideological considerations.

### **China's Stand on Independence of Bangladesh in United Nation's Forum**

The consequent Indo-Pakistan war on Bangladesh was a great disappointment for China's global image and its influence in South Asian strategy during the period. The dismemberment of Pakistan by the Indian army, backed by the Soviet Union, was not very pleasant to China as Pakistan was a strategically important ally of China in South Asia. It proved to be a great diplomatic setback for the PRC because the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state was a tangible victory for Soviet influence in the region and with India augmenting its power potentials in South Asia. Hence, immediately after the country's liberation, there was an undisputed predominance of Indo-Soviet influence in Bangladesh. All these developments in the power structure of South Asia posed serious problems to Chinese foreign policy-makers. It could neither support Pakistan fully nor oppose a popular uprising against a military regime and therefore, China was caught in a great dilemma.

China being secured with the veto power played a very crucial role in the United Nations. China gave more attention to the interests of Pakistan in the United Nations debates which supported Bangladesh's entry. Therefore, the issue remained unsolved till 10 June 1974.<sup>50</sup>

China's opposition to Bangladesh's application for membership in the UN was a source of great setback to Bangladesh. However, the newly born state of Bangladesh

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50 Mohanty, n.11, p.145.

could not afford the hostility of any neighbouring country as it needed support from all quarters to built up its shattered economy and meet the aspirations of its people. Forgetting the role China played during its struggle for freedom, Bangladesh foreign minister, Abdus Samad Azad wrote a letter to Chinese Premier Zhou En-lai indicating his country's desire to have good-neighbourly relations with China as with any other country and expressing hope that China would reciprocate "the sincere feeling of the people and government of Bangladesh".<sup>51</sup> But China did not respond to the call of Bangladesh; rather, it refused to recognise its newly independent status. China's blocking of Bangladesh's entry into the United Nations was an attempt to hinder any durable settlement in the Indian subcontinent, and to sabotage the Simla agreement between India and Pakistan that followed the 1971 conflict.

On 10 August 1972, when the Security Council in a meeting, discussed Bangladesh's application for UN membership, China voted against the inclusion of Bangladesh's application on the agenda. China made it clear that she would continue to do so until and unless the 90,000 Pakistani soldiers captured in Bangladesh and kept in India as prisoners of war were repatriated and that the issues leading to the Indo-Pakistan war in 1971 be settled peacefully.<sup>52</sup> China's intransigent attitude towards Bangladesh was further seen when China on 25 August 1972, exercised its first veto, preventing the

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51 *India Quarterly*, vol.39, no.2, April-June 1983, p.146, quoted in Choudhury, n.24, p.163.

52 Shelly, n.43, p.107.

entry of Bangladesh to the UN body.<sup>53</sup> Huang Hua put forth the following argument while justifying China's veto against Bangladesh. He stated:

Taking into consideration the specific conditions and situation in which Bangladesh came into being it is quite obvious that the question of Bangladesh's application for membership in the UN can in no way be examined in deviation from the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council concerning last years (1971) war of aggression on the South Asian subcontinent.<sup>54</sup>

Naturally, the Chinese action caused much disappointment among the Bangladeshis. In reaction to the Chinese exercise of veto of Bangladesh admission in the Security Council, the Bangladesh foreign minister, Abdus Samad said in August 1972, "China was playing the role of a big power in blocking the entry of Bangladesh into the United Nations."<sup>55</sup>

In 30 October 1972, China somewhat changed its position. It said in the UN General Assembly at its twenty seventh session, that it cherishes friendly sentiments for the people of "East Bengal". However, it made it clear that it would not "retreat" from its earlier stand against the admission of Bangladesh into the world body. Qiao Guanhua further sought to clarify China's opposition of Bangladesh entry into the UN,

China's stand for postponing the consideration of the question does not mean that we are fundamentally opposed to the admission of 'Bangladesh' into the United Nations. China cherishes friendly sentiments for the people of East Bengal and has no prejudice against Mujibur Rahman. We stand for postponing the consideration of this question in order to promote a reconciliation among the parties concerned and the implementation of the United Nations resolutions which are of immediate concern.<sup>56</sup>

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53 The issue of the proposal for the admission of the Bangladesh's membership came before the Security Council through a joint draft resolution sponsored by India, the Soviet Union, Britain and Yugoslavia.

54 *Beijing Review*, 1 September 1972, p.6.

55 *Statesman* (New Delhi), 28 August 1972.

56 *Indian Express*, 21 November 1972.

India not only defeated Pakistan in the Indo-Pak war on Bangladesh in 1971 but India also occupied certain territories in West Pakistan and held 90,000 Pakistani soldiers as prisoners of war. Bhutto sought support from China to get back the Pakistani prisoners of war (POWs). It can be observed from the above stated statement of Qiao Guanhua that China wanted to reaffirm its relation with Pakistan by supporting the latter in getting back POWs. The only way China could help was to use its Veto Power to prevent Bangladesh's entry into the United Nations and thereby put pressure on both India and Bangladesh for the repatriation of POWs.

Despite China's strong opposition to Bangladesh entry into the United Nations, the latter had maintained a flexible policy towards it. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, though regretted to have said: "We do not want to maintain hostility with our neighbour China. We have nothing against the biggest country in the world."<sup>57</sup> China, now tried to soft-peddle its earlier rigidity by harping upon the POW issue and assured to Bangladesh that China was ready to recognize Bangladesh if the Dhaka administration would honour the UN resolution, return the Pakistani POWs, and develop genuine independence status.<sup>58</sup>

Chinese reservations towards Bangladesh started to soften in 1974 following the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan on 22 February 1974 and the agreement to repatriate the Pakistani POWs from India. All these developments in the subcontinent paved the way for normalization of relations between China and Bangladesh. Subsequently, when the issue of Bangladesh's membership of the United Nations was

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57 Mohanty, n.11, p.150.

58 Ibid.

again brought before the Security Council on 10 June 1974, China refrained from using veto and Bangladesh became a member of the United Nations.

Thus, a period of acute tension in the nascent relationship between Beijing and Dhaka was removed, with the withdrawal of the veto by China in the UN. Although there were contacts between the two countries, China did not recognise Bangladesh until the fall of the Mujib regime in 1975 despite the latter's increasing efforts in this direction. During the period 1972-74, due to non-existence of diplomatic ties, direct political contacts were kept at low profile. Hence, meetings between the diplomats of the two countries took place in a third country.<sup>59</sup> These contacts were hailed in Bangladesh as steps in the process of normalisation of relations with China.

Although full diplomatic relations were not established until 1975, China did make some unofficial gestures to Bangladesh indicating its eagerness to develop friendly relations with the new nation. China's first gesture of goodwill towards Bangladesh came in August 1974 by the Chinese Red Cross Society in the form of flood relief goods, including 5,000 tonnes of rice, worth \$1 million and 40,000 cotton blankets and 2,00,000 Yuan. China for the first time, invited a Bangladesh trade delegation to the Chinese trade fair at Canton in April 1975 and trade agreements were signed between the two countries. According to the agreement, China was to purchase jute worth £10,000 from Bangladesh and was to supply 20,000 tonnes of cement at \$15 per ton against the prevailing rate of \$28 to 30 per ton in the international market. Under this agreement, Bangladesh was to import coal, cement, electrical equipment and stationary goods. China in return was to purchase hides, jute and other leather products and suitable

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59 The Chinese Vice-Premier Chin Xilian met Bangladesh foreign minister, A.R.Mallick in Nepal, See *Hindustan Times*, 28 February 1975.

commodities.<sup>60</sup> It is indicated that the Chinese had offered to establish a trade mission in Bangladesh, but prior to Beijing's recognition, the latter refused the offer. It may be added here that Beijing first encouraged Islamabad to recognise Bangladesh before it itself did despite its friendly gesture towards Dhaka. Pakistan recognised Bangladesh in 1974.

### **The Recognition of Bangladesh in the aftermath of 1975 Coup**

Then came the August 1975 coup. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his entire family and a few of his political colleagues were done to death, and a new government was installed with Khondaker Mushtaque Ahmed as the head of state. This tragic event in Bangladesh seems to have provided reasons to Pakistan and China to celebrate. China, which did not recognise Bangladesh though Pakistan had done so in 1974, was no doubt happy at the news of the change of government in Dhaka. The disappearance of Mujib and the installation of Khondaker Mushtaque Ahmed received added momentum towards normalization in Sino-Bangladesh relation. The new President of Bangladesh expressed that his country would improve good relations with countries who have not been their friends, meaning Pakistan and China. China responded to its call for better relations and welcomed the new regime.

China recognised Bangladesh on 31 August 1975, a fortnight after the coup. Beijing's prompt recognition of the still instable regime in Bangladesh has strongly motivated the new regime's desire for closer ties with Beijing and Islamabad and less dependence on India and the Soviet Union.

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60 J.N. Mohanty, "China in the Third World: A Case Study of Bangladesh", *China Report*, vol.20, no.2, March-April, 1984, p.7.

## CHAPTER II

### DEVELOPMENT OF BANGLADESH-CHINA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Bangladesh entered into a new chapter of its history following the coup of 1975. The powers in Bangladesh passed under the control of military. It initiated a drastic change in the sphere of Bangladesh's international relations. International powers which were hitherto reluctant to recognise Bangladesh promptly came forward to help her in salvaging her economy and protecting her political independence from what they termed as threat from Indo-Soviet axis. China hailed the events of 1975 and promised whole hearted support for Bangladesh fight against alleged Indo-Soviet hegemonism. The changed political scenario in Bangladesh following the coup of August 5, 1975 took a new turn in Bangladesh-China relations, which thereafter began to radically develop in the subsequent years. China recognised Bangladesh on August 31, 1975 and subsequently, the formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established.

Here an attempt is being made to identify the development of Bangladesh-China diplomatic (Political) relation under the military regimes (1975-1990). For the sake of convenience political relation are divided into the two phases, viz, part I as Zia-ur Rahman Phase (1975-1981) and Part II as H.M. Ershad Phase (1982-90)

#### **I. Zia-Ur-Rahman Phase (1975-1981)**

Having won its independence with the help of India<sup>1</sup> and with the active support of Soviet Russia, Bangladesh's foreign policy had a very obvious tilt towards India and

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1 Sabiha Hasan, "Foreign Policy of Bangladesh", *Pakistan Horizons*, Winter 1982, P.1.

the Soviet Union in its early years. Consequently, the foreign policy direction and orientation of the new state was almost a foregone conclusion.<sup>2</sup> Given the Awami League's disinclination towards the Western alliance system, and the experiences of the independence struggle itself which had put the United States and China against an independent Bangladesh, the foreign policy of the nascent state was bound to be aligned with the Indo-Soviet axis, writes, Shaukat Hassan.<sup>3</sup> Dhaka's admiration of the Indo-Soviet bloc were certainly not pleasing to either the US or China. The displeasure of perceived Soviet penetration in Bangladesh were evidenced by the delay in US recognition of Bangladesh and in the closure of the Chinese consulate at Dhaka the day Moscow recognised Bangladesh. Bangladesh's relations with China, an adversary of both India and the Soviet Union, was not established until the overthrow of the Mujib regime. It was not so much because of the lack of interest from both sides but because of China's acrimonious relationship with Moscow and New Delhi. Beijing considered Bangladesh under Mujib to be totally subservient to Indo-Soviet bloc and allied with Pakistan by vetoing Bangladesh's entry to the United Nations. China's suspicions were confirmed when Bangladesh, under Indo-Soviet Pressure, declined China's offer of establishing trade missions and trade links. With the agreement, Sino-Bangladesh relations froze until China recognised Bangladesh as an independent nation in 1975.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Shaukat Hassan, "Bangladesh Foreign Policy : Introductory Remarks", in M.G.Kabir and Shaukat Hassan, eds., *Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy* (Dhaka, 1989), p.1.

3 *ibid.*

4 Zillur Rahman Khan, "Bangladesh and Multi Polar Politics in Asia", *International Relations*, vol.4, no.5, May 1974, p.494, cited in Dilara Choudhury, *Bangladesh and the South Asian International System* (Dhaka, 1992), p.13.



The change of government in Dhaka in August 1975 heralded a new phase in Dhaka's foreign policy orientation. The new regime opted for a more independent policy with a pro-west orientation, accompanied by closer identification with the Muslim world and friendly ties with China. The military regime of Ziaur Rahman embarked upon a course of total reversal in the country's foreign policy. According to Shaukat Hassan,<sup>5</sup> "With the advent of the government of Ziaur Rahman, the political pendulum swung more towards the right and the effect on foreign policy was to move away from the Indo-Soviet axis in order to consolidate the ties with the West. Such a policy shift was, of course, inevitable. Thus by the end of the 70s, Bangladesh's foreign policy was no longer hostage to the dictates of socialism or secularism or even to the whims of nationalistic fervour as evidenced in the immediate post-independence years.

The new regime's foreign policy orientation were not to the liking of New Delhi and Moscow. The August Coup of 1975 was considered to be a "slap in the face of India".<sup>6</sup> The deteriorating relationship with the other bloc the US, China and the Muslim countries including Pakistan began to change for the better.

On assuming the office of President in April 1977, Ziaur Rahman made some fundamental amendments to the 1972 Constitution. He dropped the principle of secularism in favour of Islam, and the new provision that was incorporated placed "complete trust and faith in Almighty Allah."<sup>7</sup> Socialism, another state principle, was

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5 Hassan, n.2, p.2.

6 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 November 1975, as quoted in Dilara Chowdhury, n.4, p.14.

7 Jayasree Biswas, *US- Bangladesh Relations: A Study of the Political and Economic Development During 1971-81* (Calcutta, 1984), p.54.

redefined to conform to the Islamic ideas of social justice and economic equality. In foreign policy too, the state was called upon to "endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity."<sup>8</sup>

The end of the Awami League rule brought about the wide-spread emergence of strong Islamic and anti-Indian forces in Bangladesh. Under the new situations improving relations with Pakistan (apart from other reasons) became on the one hand, an Islamic responsibility, while the support of the leftist factions and the merger of the Pro-Peking National Awami Party (NAP) with the ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP) ensured the government. On the other hand to maintain favourable relations with China.

China not only accorded immediate recognition to the military regime that seized power in Dhaka in 1975, but also expressed readiness to provide it with political and military help and support. China's support was crucial to the new regime for three reasons:<sup>9</sup>

- (1) Recognition from a major power like China would help the regime to establish credibility and legitimacy both at home and abroad.
- (2) It helped to neutralize radical, extremist pro-Chinese groups and parties (which were powerful and influential) in the country.
- (3) It helped to balance the counter growing threats from India, and served as an insurance chip against the Soviet Union.

Bangladesh's relation with China was built at the common platforms of anti-Sovietism and anti-Indianism. China became an important partner of Bangladesh in

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8     ibid.

9     Golam Mostafa, *National Interest and Foreign Policy: A Study of Soviet-Bangladesh Relations* (New Delhi, 1995), pp.110-11.

terms of its political, military and security interests. Clearly ideology did not matter, because China was a Communist country and the Chinese were as atheistic as the Soviets. According to S.R.Chakravarty,<sup>10</sup> anti-Indian posture of the new rulers of Bangladesh has attracted hitherto hostile China, and now the two countries have established sound relationship. Sino-Bangladesh relations were described as "cardinal feature of Bangladesh's foreign policy",<sup>11</sup> and the government firmly advocated the need to forge "permanent and intimate relations with China".

Following recognition by the Chinese, the two countries moved rapidly to strengthen their ties,<sup>12</sup> and high-level official visits between the two countries became a regular phenomena. Finally in a joint communique in New York, the two countries consented to establish diplomatic relations as from 4 October 1975 and to exchange ambassadors, on the basis of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs and equality and mutual benefit.<sup>13</sup>

Welcoming this the *People's Daily* editorial on 8 October 1975 commented:

The decision reflects the common desire of the two People's and is in accord with their common interests.<sup>14</sup>

It further added:

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- 10 S.R.Chakravarty (ed.), *Bangladesh Under Mujib, Zia and Ershad: Dilemma of a New Nation* (New Delhi, 1995), p.92.
  - 11 Virendra Narain, "Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: Evolution and Prospects", in S.R.Chakravarty, ed., *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh* (New Delhi, 1994), p.53.
  - 12 After immediate recognition, the Chinese government expressed willingness to purchase 4,000 tonnes of Bangladesh Jute worth 20 million Taka from Bangladesh. See *Bangladesh Observer*, 2 September 1975.
  - 13 R.K. Jain, *China, Pakistan and Bangladesh: vol.II, Basic Documents 1947-80* (New Delhi, 1981), pp.254-55.
  - 14 *ibid.*, p.255.

We are firmly opposed to hegemonism pushed by the Super Powers in international affairs and their interference in the internal affairs of others, firmly opposed to the big nation bullying the small and a strong nation bullying the weak. The Chinese People firmly support the policy of neutrality and non-alignment pursued by the Bangladesh government, firmly support the Bangladesh People's struggle for defending national independence and state sovereignty and firmly support the peoples of South Asia in their struggle against hegemonism and expansionism.<sup>15</sup>

In conclusion, the editorial expressed the belief that friendly relations between China and Bangladesh, founded on the five principles of peaceful co-existence, could develop further.

The above passage cited is a certain exposition of China's interests and her sensitivity to Soviet influence in the region. China regarded the diplomatic link a right step to keep Bangladesh away from the Soviet Union's orbit and to isolate India by befriending her neighbours to pursue her own independence foreign policy.

The beginning of Ziaur Rahman rule witnessed a marked back slide in Indo-Bangladesh relations. China's growing support for Bangladesh was juxtaposed by India's fall in the eyes of her neighbours. Contrarily, China was being cultivated as a bullwark against hegemonistic design of India. Political opinions in Bangladesh is of the view that Bangladesh should form an entente along with the countries with similar security problems in Sino-indian periphery whereby Nepal, Burma, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh realise the benefits of cooperation for forestalling the hegemonistic designs wherever they emanate from.<sup>16</sup> "This drawing together of lesser powers can have immense value if and when it requires positive support from a major regional power, and

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15     *ibid*,,p.256.

16     Basically, Bangladesh was hinting at India's hegemonistic design.

this power can only be China",<sup>17</sup> In fact, over the years China has emerged as a patron of Bangladesh.

The new regime described China as "being a major power with enlightened and humane attitude towards neighbouring countries", expected to play a role "in case of a threat to peace from some adventurist nation in this region."<sup>18</sup> It appears that reaction and counter revolutionary fervour had completely blinded the new rulers of Bangladesh to the realities of Chinese role with regard to her neighbours.

Once the diplomatic relationship was established in 1975, Sino-Bangladesh ties grew in depth and warmth by exchanging goodwill visits, and trade delegations. In May 1976, two goodwill delegations from Dhaka visited Beijing. Earlier in November 1976, China and Bangladesh signed a two-year trade and payment agreement. China happily contributed to Bangladesh's need for external economic aid because the latter was in desperate need of economic help.<sup>19</sup> Thus a steady and closer relationship was established before the end of 1970s.

With the mending of fences, China began to get a foothold in Bangladesh and supported her in various bilateral as well as multilateral issues of concern to Bangladesh. China stood behind Bangladesh on the latter's Farakka dispute. A commentary in the *People's Daily* illuminated the Chinese stand on this issue. It stated, the Ganga, was an

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17 Inayat Rasul, "Our Search for a Foreign Policy: A Policy of Survival", *Bangladesh Times* (Dhaka), 21 February 1977.

18 Virendra Narain, "Bangladesh-China Relations: An Analysis of Objectives and Attitudes", in Ramakant, ed., *China and South Asia* (New Delhi, 1988), p.145.

19 For instance, the Chinese offer of trade in 1975, almost immediately after recognition, was made at a time when Bangladesh was in an unprecedented economic crisis and there was a shortage of essential items for mass consumption. In November 1975, Dhaka signed a contract agreeing to supply 10,000 tonnes of raw jute to China.

international river, the water resources of which 'should be rationally distributed and utilized by countries in both the upper and lower reaches.' It added: "The water issue is one of the many instances in which Bangladesh is bullied by India."<sup>20</sup>

China's foreign minister Qiao Guanhua declared unequivocal support to Bangladesh when the latter took the issue to the United Nations General Assembly to internationalize it and pressurize India into agreeing to what Dhaka considered as its rightful share of water during the season. On 5 October 1976, the Chinese foreign minister, Chiao Guanhua, in a firm and forthright statement before the U.N. General Assembly said: "We firmly support the reasonable position taken by Bangladesh on the question of sharing in the water of the Ganges river."<sup>21</sup>

Ziaur Rahman's announcement of his foreign policy objective that "Bangladesh wanted to build up equal relations with all, and strongly disfavours any idea that bigness of a nation makes it more equal than the small ones," and subsequently, his virulent attack against the bigger countries in the non-aligned conference in Colombo in August 1976,<sup>22</sup> paved the way for better understanding of relation between Bangladesh and China.

The foundation of the Bangladesh-China friendship society under official patronage was a very important step in Sino-Bangladesh relations. It was hailed that the people and government of China had always supported Bangladesh's struggle against

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20 Survey of People's Republic of China Press, Hongkong, 27 February 1976, p.170; as quoted in J.N.Mohanty, "China in the Third World: A Case Study of Bangladesh", *China Report*, vol.20, no.2, March-April 1984, p.10.

21 *Bangladesh Observer*, 6 October 1976, as quoted in *ibid.*

22 *Bangladesh Times (Dhaka)*, 14 August 1976.

colonialism, imperialism, expansionism, hegemonism and for the consolidation of national freedom.<sup>23</sup> Thus the elements supporting the new regime in Bangladesh, projected China as their main source of inspiration in their fight against "Indian expansionists" and for this the assistance of China was imperative. Ziaur Rahman in reciprocity, in his condolence message, regarded Mao-Tse-Tung, as "one of the great leaders of mankind, 'we salute you.'" They became bold and assertive in their anti-Indian and anti-Soviet tirade and the need to bring Bangladesh under, what they called, Sino-U.S.-Islamic umbrella in order to launch a "thousand years resistance against interventionist power".<sup>24</sup>

The first high-level goodwill delegation between the two countries since the establishment of diplomatic ties took place when General Ziaur Rahman, paid a state visit to China on 2 January 1977.<sup>25</sup> In a gesture of goodwill Chairman Hua Kuo-feng, personally welcomed him at the airport in Peking and was given a red carpet reception. At a banquet in his honour Li Hsien-nien (Vice Premier) said that his country 'firmly supports the government and the people of Bangladesh in their just struggle to safeguard their national independence and state sovereignty and resist foreign interference.'<sup>26</sup> During this occasion, he also made a thinly veiled attack on the Soviet Union which, he

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23 The meeting was held under the Chairmanship of Mirza Golam Hafiz, President of the Chinese recognition of Bangladesh. See *Bangladesh Times* (Dhaka), 1 September 1976.

24 Virendra Narain, n.18, pp.150-1.

25 *Bangladesh Observer*, 6 May 1976.

26 *Bangladesh* (Dhaka), vol.1, no.4 (15 January 1977), p.5 cited in Iftekhar A. Chowdhury, "Strategy of a Small Power in a Subsystem: Bangladesh's External Relations", *Australian Outlook*, vol.30, no.1, April 1980, p.91.

said, hoped to "control and enslave South Asia".<sup>27</sup> "Sino-Bangladesh friendship was also in the interests of the unity of the third world against hegemonism."<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Zia while speaking at a banquet said: "We believe that only in an environment of stability, free from outside interference, can we consolidate our independence and state sovereignty. The people of Bangladesh are determined to continue their struggle and in concert with the people of third world will expansionism and hegemonism."<sup>29</sup>

Describe as a 'complete success' by leaders of both countries, Zia's visit to China had opened a new chapter in Bangladesh's foreign policy as the Chinese gestures were viewed by Bangladesh to be those of friendship and cooperation on equal footing free from any desire to dominate.<sup>30</sup> The visit provided an opportunity for the new Chinese leadership to establish personal rapport with the Bangladesh government at highest level. The Bangladesh paper *Holiday* wrote, "the main achievement of General Zia's China visit lies in the fact that it has opened up, finally the vista of mutual cooperation in many fields between the two neighbours".<sup>31</sup> It has given the Bangladesh-China friendship a clear cut direction.

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27 *Hindustan Times*, 5 January 1977.

28 "Search for Identity", *Link*, 27 March 1977, p.28.

29 R.K. Jain, n.13, p.266.

30 For a country that had been feeling threats of being dominated by its bigger neighbour, India, mainly because of the disparate size and power potential, this opening of being treated on the basis of fraternal equality by another big neighbour, China, was a significant achievement.

31 *Holiday* (Dhaka), 9 January 1977.



The Chinese resolute support for Bangladesh, that was plainly discernible from Chinese vice-premier, Li Hsiennien's statement, gave a much needed relief to Bangladesh as far as its perceived external threat was concerned. Likewise, Zia's statement provided an added impetus to China's policy of fighting the Soviet "hegemonism" and the Indian "expansionism" in South Asia. It could be inferred from these observations that the threat to Bangladesh's national independence and sovereignty was deemed to be from India, and China assured Bangladesh of its active cooperation to frustrate such threats. In fact, Peking tried to drive a wedge between Bangladesh on the one hand and India and the Soviet Union on the other.

During this period, China's support to Bangladesh on the Farakka issue was recalled and the traditional friendship between the countries reiterated. The former was hopeful that with the latter's support the Farakka issue with India would be settled to their advantage, and other issues favourably resolved. The Bangladesh newspaper *Ittifaque*, advocated improvement of Sino-Bangladesh cooperation and went to the extent of regarding Chinese as the saviour of the small nations. It wrote:

... it needs no mention that China can play a significant role in protecting the independence and sovereignty of the small countries of this region against the aggressive designs of an up-and-coming power in the neighbourhood and in issues of peace and stability in the region in general.<sup>32</sup>

The verbal support of such ideas in Bangladesh led China to encourage close cooperation between Bangladesh and other South Asian countries excluding India. Thus, the Sino-Bangladesh relation developed on the basis of common perception about India's role in South Asia.

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32 Quoted in Chintamani Mahapatra, "Implications of Increasing Sino-Bangladesh Relations," *Strategic Analysis*, vol.11, no.12, March 1988, p.1418.

Before Zia's visit to Beijing, the Soviet Union Deputy Foreign Minister Firyubin made an unexpected visit to Bangladesh. This was the first visit by a Soviet emissary after the Coup of August 1975. Firyabins' mission to Dhaka was aimed at improving Russia's relation with the post-Mujib regime in Dhaka and to ensure that Bangladesh did not become too close to China. However, his overtures of friendship and cooperation strengthen General Zia's bargaining position in his negotiations with the Chinese and extract his country from Indo-Soviet alignment.

However, the flow of high level visits between Bangladesh and China continued. President Ziaur Rahman's visit to China was reciprocated by similar visits by Li Hsiennien in 1978 and by the Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Xiang in 1981. During the Vice Premier Li Hsiennien visit to Bangladesh, he was given a grand reception by the Bangladeshis. There was a wide range of discussion on economic, political and military matters between leaders of the two countries. These visits by the Chinese leaders further consolidated the existing mutual relation between the two countries.

During the early 80s, Sino-Bangladesh relations blossomed, but the high-level Bangladeshi leaders and government officials often targeted Moscow. In 1981 Mirza Golam Hafiz, the speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament, described China 'as a trusted friend of Bangladesh', and claimed that 'she will stand like a rock behind us in times of our need.'<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the Chinese press widely covered the anti-Soviet stand and policies taken by the Bangladesh government including the 1982 expulsion of Soviet diplomats from Dhaka. The Chinese press refuted that, "... to safeguard Bangladesh national security it has expelled two members of the Soviet embassy in Dhaka for their

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33 *Bangladesh Observer*, 5 September 1981.

nefarious activities.<sup>34</sup> Bangladesh valued Chinese support for the causes of its national interest and security. On the other hand, Bangladesh's anti-Indian and anti-Soviet postures served China's interests. For geo-political and strategic reasons, Chinese influence in any South Asian countries was deemed to be detrimental to both Indian and Soviet interest in the region.

The cordial relations between the two countries continued with both holding similar views on most of the international issues. The relationship was further strengthened between the two countries due to more hostile attitude of Bangladesh towards USSR. The compatibility of mutual interest became clearly manifest soon after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and invasion in Kampuchea. The Chinese leaders were put into a miserable predicament as they were concerned about the expansion of Soviet Union and its South East Asia ally, Vietnam. During this crucial period, President Ziaur Rahman made his second trip to Beijing in July 1980. Zia gave full support to China in condemning the Soviet and Vietnamese intervention which he described as a 'violation of the Principles of the UN Charter and of Non-aligned Movement.'<sup>35</sup> Bangladesh criticism of the Soviet and the Vietnamese action was praised by Zhao Ziyang during his visit to Bangladesh in 1981.

At this juncture, Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang made a three-nation trip to the South Asian subcontinent, visiting Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, to reassure them of China's support against the increasing Soviet influence in the region. The Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang's arrival in Dhaka, at a time when the nation was in turmoil after

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34 *Beijing Review*, vol.25, no.33, 1982, p.4.

35 J.N.Mohanty, n.20, pp.12-13.

the assassination of Ziaur Rahman, was regarded by Bangladesh as Chinese support for the regime's effort to maintain and stabilize the constitutional and democratic rule in the country. The Chinese Premier's gesture was greatly appreciated by the people and press of Bangladesh and it demonstrated that the Sino-Bangladesh relationship could survive any political crisis in either of the country.

After a short upheaval, Lieutenant General H.M.Ershad seized power in a bloodless coup in March 1982 and established his own military dictatorship in the country.

## II. H.M. ERSHAD PHASE (1982-90)

Ershad after assuming power through a bloodless coup in 1982, in a 5-minutes interview to the *New York Times* on March 24, termed Russians as "crude and untrusty." As he put bluntly: "We cannot trust them so much. They are very crude. They have such a mighty military machine... we are really scared about what they (Russians) may do next."<sup>36</sup> It is clear that such a description of Moscow by Ershad was very much in favour of Beijing which found in it a clear green signal of the continuity of past relations between China and Bangladesh. The very mental make-up that Ershad exposed in the said interview suited the temperament of Chinese leaders and the relationship between Bangladesh and China began to develop on the basis of mutual interests, and friendliness.

Like many other countries, China was initially uncertain about the new military regime's policies but General Ershad soon demonstrated that he was determined to follow

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36 *Sipri Year Book: World Armaments and Disarmaments* (Stockholm, 1980), p.29, as quoted in Abu Tamer Salahuddin Ahmed, "Bangladesh-China Relations: An Assessment", *BISS Journal*, vol.13, no.2, April 1992, pp.282-83.

his predecessors pro-China policy. Ershad followed three basic guidelines of foreign policy determined by Ziaur Rahman.<sup>37</sup> Firstly, Bangladesh should seek to maintain excellent relations with its giant neighbour India, no excuse should be given to it for interference in the internal affairs of Bangladesh. Secondly, the basis for relationship with other nations should be perceived need of foreign economic assistance, not ideology. Thirdly, close political and economic relations should be maintained with neighbouring Asian countries particular China and Muslims states to reduce dependence upon India.<sup>38</sup>

Foreign policy under H.M.Ershad did not significantly, diverge from what it was under Zia-ur-Rahman's dispensation. Anti-Indian, anti-Soviet Union plank was maintained, though verbal expression against India and the Soviet Union had lost their sting. Ershad went a step further than Ziaur Rahman in exploiting Islam for his political ends. Foreign policy of Bangladesh was used by him to get both military aid and economic aid from China and USA.

General H.M.Ershad's continuation of late Ziaur Rahman policy of maintaining close relations with China, his diplomatic recognition of the exile coalition Kampuchean government, led by Norodin Sihanouk and above all the new government's decision to expel two members of the Russian Embassy in Dhaka were a testimony of their close relationships.

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37 Alex Duffy, "Bangladesh in Search of Stability", *World Today* (London), vol.39, no.78, July-August 1983, p.301.

38 Bangladesh, created in 1971 through direct intervention of India with the active support of Soviet Russia, soon found itself in a position of a dependent state of India in the early period. But after the coup of August 1975, the government has been improving relations with other countries of the third world, particularly China, to counteract. For details of dependence upon India, see Talukdur Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh in 1976: Struggle for Survival as an Independent", *Asian Survey* (Berkeley), pp.191-4.

Ershad made his first pilgrimage to Beijing in November 1982. As with his predecessor, Zia, Ershad was given a red-carpet reception and the Bangladeshi delegates complimented China as a true friend of Bangladesh.<sup>39</sup> During these visit, Ershad made it clear that like his predecessor he would take steps to further improve relations with China.

The leaders of both the countries emphasized that their countries shared identical views on a wide range of issues and expressed confidence over the prospects for developing relations between the two countries. They also emphasized on their determination to continue their cooperation in economic, cultural, trade and other fields.<sup>40</sup> The Chinese leaders also gave an impression that they would help Bangladesh to safeguard its independence and sovereignty and to develop the national economy, and oppose aggression and expansion. The improvement of relations between the two countries was steady and consistent.

The Ershad regime not only regarded China as a friend of the small states against the "hegemonism" and "expansionism" of the big states but also attempted to influence other states to buy the absurd logic. For instance, foreign minister Shamsud Doha, assuming the role of the Chinese propaganda minister, told the Bhutanese officials that it was "absolutely essential for the small nations in the subcontinent to maintain a merely formal relationship with India and simultaneously cultivate warmer relationship with China."<sup>41</sup>

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39 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 2 December 1982; also see *Statesman* (Calcutta), 2 December 1982.

40 *Hindu* (Madras), 2 February 1984.

41 Chintamani Mahapatra, n.32, pp.1419-20.

The China-Bangladesh relations is based on warmth and cordiality with both holding identical of views on major international and regional issues, including Afghanistan, Kampuchea, the Middle East, including the Palestinians right of self-determination, Namibia, South Africa, North-South dialogue, South-South Cooperation, a new international economic order, and fair dealings with the third world countries. They expressed complete satisfaction with the developments of friendly relations between the two countries with both advocate strict adherence to the principles of nonalignment. China has, also extended its full support to the concept of regional cooperation mooted by Bangladesh.

The deepening of Sino-Bangladesh relation has been amply reflected in the exchange of visits by the top dignitaries.<sup>42</sup> After assuming the powers of the President, General Ershad paid a visit to China in July 1985. Again, there was the usual expression of mutual admiration and friendly feelings from both sides. Welcoming Ershad, the then President, Li Xiammian, said that Bangladesh is a friendly close neighbour of China, with the joint efforts of the two sides on the basis of five principles of peaceful co-existence, Sino-Bangladesh Cooperation in the political, economic, trade, cultural and other fields would become even closer and more fruitful in the forthcoming decade.<sup>43</sup> Chinese President Li promised Bangladesh initiative in organizing the South Asian Association of Regional cooperation and the two countries expressed confidence that the first summit of South Asian countries in Dhaka (in December 1984) would significantly

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42 Late President Ziaur Rahman made two trips to China, once as the Chief Martial Law Administrator and the second one as the President. The Chinese Vice-Premier Li Liennian visited Bangladesh in March 1978 and Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang in June 1981.

43 *New Nation* (Dhaka), 5 July 1985.

strengthen regional cooperation and harmony. Li Xiammian also praised Bangladesh for "upholding justice, opposing expansionist and power politics and working to develop friendly relations with other countries."<sup>44</sup> Li concluded by saying: "Chinese people cherished most friendly sentiments towards all the South Asian Peoples, and China was striving to develop good neighbourly relations with countries in the region." Thanking China for assistance, Ershad on his part spoke highly of the two countries friendship. He stated: "Over the years, our friendship has been reinforced and fortified by one shared outlook, common aspirations and commitments, and above all, by our belonging to the Third World."<sup>45</sup>

Ershad described his visit with the Chinese leaders as 'very fruitful' and the Chinese leaders also reiterated that China would continue to work for closer cooperation among the developing countries under the fold of South-South cooperation.<sup>46</sup> A number of agreements were concluded during those period which had enabled the two countries to forge mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields. The most spectacular was the agreement to construct a highway bridge, to be known as Friendship Bridge, over the Buriganga river, which was to be financed by China as a token of her friendship with Bangladesh. Speaking on the occasion of the laying of the friendship foundation stone on 3 May 1985, President Ershad described the bridge as an excellent manifestation of effective bilateral relations between the three developing countries. It was completed within four years and was inaugurated on 14 March 1985.

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44 Rodger East (ed.), *Keesings Record of World Events* (London), vol.31, no.28, 1985, p.5.

45 *New Nation* (Dhaka), 12 July 1985.

46 POT, *Bangladesh Series*, vol.10, no.136, 6 July 1984, pp.1086-87.



The two countries were cooperating with each other in various International organisations and forums. Dhaka sought China's support in getting positions in other international organisation such as Industrial Development, Board of UNIDO and the World Food Council. Similarly, Bangladesh won the election for the Presidency of the forty-first General Assembly session of the UN in 1986 with China's support. On China's part, she sought Bangladesh's support for its admission to the Asian Development Bank for its candidature for the UNESCO Executive Board in 1985. All these mutual cooperation and support in International forums made Sino-Bangladesh relation deeper and deeper.

With the significant improvement in Sino-India relation (and also Sino-Soviet) in the late 1980s, it has caused some concern to the smaller South Asian countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, but China goes out of its way to assure these smaller South Asian countries that its rapprochement with New Delhi, if any will never be at the cost of its strong friendship with countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>47</sup> The minister is of the view that the latter should reach a long-term agreement with the former on the Ganga-Brahmaputra river system. However, by asking Dhaka to patch up with New Delhi, the minister amply indicated that Beijing would avoid getting embroiled in the Indo-Bangladesh river water dispute.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, China conveyed the message that any significant assistance to Bangladesh for anti-flood measures was dependent on the latter's river waters. However, there was full cooperation on other issues between the two countries.

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47 Suchita Ghosh, *China-Bangladesh-India Tangle Today: Towards a Solution* (New Delhi, 1995), p.13.

48 Ibid.

Chinese President Li Xiannian's visit to Bangladesh in March 1986 was of great significance for the entire South Asian region. The visit was ostensibly to further consolidate the existing close relations between the two countries. Li Xiannian gave the assurance that his people would remain forever the reliable friends of Bangladesh people in their just cause of maintaining national independence and state sovereignty.<sup>49</sup> Ershad described China as a "Time-Tested friend" and repeated that the Sino-Bangladesh relationship was based on a common outlook and common aspirations.

The high level contacts and exchanges as well as the conclusion and implementation of a number of agreements on cooperation in various fields have made significant contributions towards deepening and widening of their cooperation in international fields. Apart from these high-level visits, there have been frequent visits by delegates from the two countries at various level. According to Bangladesh Media *Ekata*, China at this time was showing increasing concern in the well being of Dhaka.

Lt. General H.M.Ershad, the President of Bangladesh made his third trip to China in July 1987. He was accorded a warm welcome when he arrived on a six day state visit to China at the invitation of Chinese president Li Xiannian. Such frequent visits at the summit level suggested that Sino-Bangladesh relations had developed enormously in both depth and warmth. As in the past, this time also China has assured Bangladesh of continued friendship, support and goodwill.<sup>50</sup> The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Humayun Rasheed Choudhury who accompanied Ershad, said that the relation between the two countries had reached "a historic peak", and described the President's visit as "a

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49 *New Nations* (Dhaka), 9 March 1987.

50 *New Nation* (Dhaka), 9 July 1987.

complete success". Deng Xiaoping and President H.M. Ershad reaffirmed their desire to further intensify the already existing bonds of friendship and cooperation between Bangladesh and China to the mutual benefits of the two peoples. Deng Xiaoping told President Ershad, "we are old friends, we have met many times. This is your fourth visit to China and we have many channels to pursue our friendship." President Ershad reiterated Bangladesh's attitude towards China: "We are indeed good friends, we are like brothers and Bangladesh and China will continue to work together in the coming days."<sup>51</sup>

It is indicated that the two countries also exchanged views on Sino-Indian relations and the discussions between New Delhi and Beijing. China seems to have conveyed Bangladesh its perception on the Sino-Indian relations. But, the foreign minister, Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, however, declined to give any details of the discussions. The relationship between the two countries are excellent. The Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping described Bangladesh "as not only a friend but almost like a relative of China",<sup>52</sup> and this indicate the extent of the friendship existing between Bangladesh and China.

A robust political movement was started by all the leading opposition parties on 10 November 1987 against the Ershad regime and demanded his resignation and bringing about democratic reforms in the political structure of the nation. At this time Ershad sought the support of China for his regime and sent his Deputy Prime Minister, Shah Muazzem Hossain, to China. The General Secretary of the Communist Party of China,

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51 *Bangladesh Observer*, 5 July 1987.

52 *Asian Recorder*, vol.33, no.32, 6-12 August 1987, p.19584.

Zhao Ziyang extended his support to Ershad and expressed his concern at the disturbances in Bangladesh. Zhao said: "We can understand the measures taken by President Ershad for restoring peace and stability in Bangladesh and we support them."<sup>53</sup> Fortunately, Ershad survived the political disruption in the country and continued his friendly policy towards Beijing.

Once again, in October 1988 when Bangladesh suffered its worst flood, Dhaka turned to the international community for help to solve the problems on a permanent basis. President Ershad paid a two-day visit to China in November 1988 mainly to seek China's cooperation in flood mitigation in Bangladesh. The Chinese expressed sympathy and extended their support to Ershad in finding a permanent solutions. They agreed to set up a joint Bangladesh-Chinese experts group to explore the possibilities of conducting cooperation between the two countries in flood prevention and water harnessing.<sup>54</sup> However, as in the past, this time also the Chinese were reported to have told Ershad that the key to achieving a permanent solution of the flood problem lay in Indo-Bangladesh understanding on the issue. It seems the Chinese took a Pragmatic attitude in private conversation.<sup>55</sup>

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53 Quoted in Dilara Choudhury, n.4, pp.177-8.

54 The agreement was reached at the formal talks between President Hussain Muhammad Ershad and Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng held at the Diaoyutai State Guest House in Beijing. *Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 11 November 1988.

55 Dilara Choudhury, n.4, p.178.

A number of visits at various levels including summit and ministerial took place both ways between Bangladesh and China.<sup>56</sup> The visits at different levels helped to further strengthen mutual understanding and to explore new areas of cooperations between the two countries. When the Chinese Premier Li Peng paid a visit to Bangladesh in November 1989, he once again assured Bangladesh that China would always stand by the latter in its struggle for protecting national independence and sovereignty and to achieve economic progress.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, the repercussion of the end of the cold war were not ignored by the Asian countries. The global scenario in the 1990s have acquired increasing importance in determining international and internal relations. During H.M. Ershad's trip to Beijing on 29 June 1990, the two countries emphasised on peace and stability in South Asia and South East Asia. The Chinese Premier Li Peng stressed that South Asia and South-east Asia were China's close neighbours, and that China sincerely hopes for peace and stability in this region.<sup>58</sup> Both the countries were enthusiastic to cooperate to make efforts in this regard. The President's five-day visit to Beijing had strengthened the bilateral relations and brought the two countries closer together. During this visit, despite of anxiety to global developments, the two countries signed three agreements and

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56 General Ershad after assuming political power paid six trips to Beijing. He had visited China first in 1979 as Chief of Army Staff, again in 1982 as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and as President in July 1985, July 1987, November 1988, June 1990. In addition during this period quite a number of Bangladeshi Ministers visited China. Similarly, several top-ranking Chinese leaders paid trips to Dhaka. In 1982 and 1986, Mr.Li Xiannian, the President of China visited Bangladesh. And Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng visited Bangladesh in November 1989. *Far Eastern Economic Review, Asia Year Book*, 1986, p.110.

57 Nihefun Choudhury, "Sino Indian Quest for Rapprochement: Implications for South Asia", *BISS Papers*, no.10, July 1989, p.50.

58 Cited in Suchita Ghosh, n.47, p.18.

two exchanges of letters that covered new areas of co-operation, institutionalizing periodic consultation between officials of foreign ministers of the two countries and building a bridge by China on the River Mahananda in northern Dinjapur district.<sup>59</sup>

It can be deduced that with the change in governments in Dhaka and the policies pursued in the wake of this change, the scenario in South Asia was transformed to a considerable extent. The diplomatic setback China suffered in 1971 with "loss" of East Pakistan, seems to have been fully reversed by the growing relationship of the new nation of the subcontinent. China succeeded in making Bangladesh a party to her own political positions. With every change of regimes since 1975, Bangladesh and China have firmly established their relations and both nations promote their ties further for their mutual benefits.

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59 Ibid.,p.18.

## CHAPTER III

### BANGLADESH-CHINA ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The 1971 War of liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan, entitled Bangladesh with one of the most under-developed agrarian economy in the third world.<sup>1</sup> With an area of 55,598 square miles, Bangladesh was one of the poorest and the eight most populated country in the world,<sup>2</sup> and ranked third position only after Bhutan and Kampuchea in terms of poverty and per capita income.<sup>3</sup> Since its emergence, Bangladesh has often been described as an international 'basket case' and has been beset with insurmountable Politico-economic problems and crises.<sup>4</sup> War had created havoc with an already neglected economy. The economic condition was further deteriorated when majority of the businessmen left Bangladesh after 1971. "A vacuum was created in large areas such as modern industry, banking, insurance, foreign and domestic trade, inland water transport and shipping... owing to total withdrawal of the West Pakistan based bourgeois which had dominated the urban economy".<sup>5</sup> Bangladesh had to revive its economy right from it's grassroot level. The precarious economic condition drew world-wide attention,

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1 For details of Bangladesh economy after its independence see A.R.Khan, *The Economy of Bangladesh*, (London, 1972), and V.K.R.V.Rao (ed.) *Bangladesh Economy; Problems and Prospects* (New Delhi, 1972).

2 Kamaluddin Ahmed, "Economic Situation : Some Trends", in S.K.Chakravarty, Virendra Narain, (eds.) *Bangladesh, vol.2, Domestic Politics* (New Delhi, 1986), p.1.

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*

5 Rehman Sobhan, *The Crisis of Internal Dependence; The Political Economy of Foreign Aid to Bangladesh* (London, 1982), p.2.

and soon after its liberation, Bangladesh came to be treated with an almost unparalleled generosity by the developed countries.

As an under-developed country with a poor resource base and low Per Capita income, economic interest became the Primary concern for the regimes in power in Dhaka. Political stability in the country and the regime's survival often depended on the performance of the economy and sufficient inflow of foreign aid. Bangladesh is among the many countries which depends heavily on the global aid. About a sixth of the country's food requirements and more than 80 percent of the development budget come from external sources,<sup>6</sup> and half the imports depend on foreign aid and loans. External resources are equivalent to 9 percent of the gross national product of the country. As such, no developmental work in the country can be visualised without these external resources.<sup>7</sup> Foreign policy was subservient to economic interests.<sup>8</sup> Foreign policy pattern and behaviour of the State was designed to achieve economic goals and objectives viz., foreign aid and expansion of trade. With the changes in foreign policy formulations by different regimes, the relations with China, particularly the economic relation got affected.

The base of international economic relationships lies not only in differential resource endowments but also more importantly in the nature of Political relations that

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6 Dr. Raisul Awa Mahmood, Bangladesh's External Economic Relations, *BISS Journal*, vol. 13, no. 4, October 1992, p.451.

7 Government of Bangladesh, *Flow of external Resources into Bangladesh*, External Relations Divisions, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, December 1987.

8 Rahman Mizanur, Golam Mostafa and Rezaul Haque, "Foreign Policy and Nation-Building in Bangladesh", in Abdul M. Hafiz, and others, eds., *Nation-Building in Bangladesh, Retrospect and Prospect* (Dhaka, 1987), pp.230.250.



obtain among the nations. At the very outset, Mujib regime was faced with a formidable challenge in both internal policies and external relations. The inclusion of socialism and secularism in the Constitution marked a substantial departure from the previous state of affairs and notwithstanding the class character of the ruling party. Those policies were forced upon by the dominant left wingers both within and outside the party. The internal opposition forces continued to influence both domestic and foreign policy. This political imperatives led the Mujib regime to build warm relations with India and the socialist bloc (excluding China). Because of China's pro-Pakistan role during the war of liberation, it's relation with China came under serious strains. During this period, due to non existence of diplomatic ties, there was no scope for direct trade between Bangladesh and China. It is indicated that trade were conducted through third countries and a number of unofficial delegations used to visit China to participate in trade fairs to explore possibilities for the expansion of commercial ties between the two nations. In fact the economic relation between Bangladesh and China were virtually non-existent during Sheikh Mujib's period, as China gave no project or commodity aid to Bangladesh baring a small amount of food aid as grant.<sup>9</sup>

The military regime of Ziaur Rahman brought fundamental changes in the economic policies and priorities. The socialist rhetoric in the economic disappeared. Merely defined economic interest of Bangladesh were clear to move gradually towards free market economy by de-nationalizing industries, giving incentives to Private investors, to encourage foreign investment, to improve relations with the West in order to receive more aid and investment, and to expand and promote trade. Economic and

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9 Md.Zaghul Haider, "Bangladesh-China Relation : A Review", *Regional Studies*, vol.9, no.2, Spring 1991, p. 75.

political changes compelled the military regime to reform and redefine foreign policy goals and orientation, and to maintain friendly relations with the western countries. Relationship with Peking improved considerably so much so that China began its aid commitment to Bangladesh during these period.

The Government of H.M.Ershad continued to uphold the policies and principles, both domestic and external that had been set out by the previous regime. Relations with China, which improved during Zia's period, was further cemented. China came up with increased aid projects during this regime. China committed aid projects worth US \$ 71.6 million in 1985 to 1986,<sup>10</sup> which reflects the relation existing between the two countries.

### **Bangladesh-China Economic Dimensions**

Due to Bangladesh's poor economic condition, it became heavily dependent on the aide given by China. Bangladesh was increasingly pulled by China's external economic policy which is not generally believed to be detrimental to the economy of the partners. Chinese assistance, because of its high political components, is usually tailored to the benefit of the recipients. The terms of the repayment are extremely favourable and Chinese expatriate experts claim no higher emoluments than their local counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Abdul Bayes, "Foreign Policy and External Economic Relations of Bangladesh : Direction Nature and Implications", in M.G.Kabir, Shaukat Hassan (eds.), *Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy* (Dhaka, 1989), p.180.

11 Wolfgang Barthe, *China's Economic Aid*, Translated from the German by Waldrant Jarke, (Hamburg, 1975), pp.8-24, as referred in Abu Taheer Salubuddin Ahmed, "Bangladesh-China Relations :Assessment", *BIISS Journal*, vol.13, no.2, April 1992, p.272.

It is found that China's economic aid projects have been very highly acclaimed for their relevance to the needs of developing countries. The reason being that China's projects had mainly focussed on agriculture, simple construction projects, high industry, and infrastructure development. China's projects were also implemented faster than Soviet projects,<sup>12</sup> and its technical assistance continued as the most widely praised aspects of China's aid programme. Beijing seem to have supplied more technicians a dollar than any other Communist donor.

It is estimated that the external assistance contributed nearly about 40 percent of Bangladesh government resources, 50 percent to total investment and close to 55 percent of import payments.<sup>13</sup> The major countries like United States and Japan are the principal donors, the other being a few West European countries and multilateral agencies, such as Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. China joined the donor group to compete with India for the privileged position of being one of the few third world countries to provide economic aid. China's economical living standards and their competence have gone a long way in strengthening Beijing's relations with developing countries and consequently it has substantiated its claim to third world leadership. All these positive aspects of China's foreign aid policy strongly pulled Bangladesh to China's aid programme. China was also aware of Bangladesh's demand for buying chinese goods for which Bangladesh offered a reasonably big market. The trend is similar in China's trade with Bangladesh. It may

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12 Anne Gilks and Gerald Segal, *China and the Arms Trade* (London, 1985), p.167 as referred in *ibid*, p.273.

13 Quoted in, Chintamani Mahapatra, "Implications of Increasing Sino-Bangladesh Relations", *Strategic Analysis*, vol.11, no.12, March 1988, p.1420.

be added here that trade between India and Bangladesh was carried on in foreign exchange, while trade between China and Bangladesh was on a barter basis, which relieved Dhaka of its acute problem of foreign exchange.

China seems to have perceived correctly that Bangladesh's basic problems was socio-economic and its urgent need for economic development. Therefore, there has been a steady and satisfactory growth of economic co-operation between the two countries since 1975.

#### **i. The Role of Chinese Aid in the Economic Development of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh needs massive international economic assistance to encourage her economy. The Assistance that she got from foreign sources for economic development may be limited, but for an economy as poor as that of Bangladesh, substantial aid was vital.<sup>14</sup> The importance and frame of Bangladesh-China relation can be understood adequately in the context of economic assistance offered by China to Bangladesh.

A number of agreements were signed between the two countries in order to promote economic co-operation. The first formal bilateral contact on economic assistance was made in April 1976. The signing of the first agreement on economic and technical cooperation between the two governments took place during late Ziaur Rehman's first visit to China in January 1977. This agreement was first named as Trade and Payment Agreement (TPA). However, replacing the TPA, a long term trade agreement was signed in Dhaka in 1980. There were indications that the economic and technical co-operation agreement involved the furnishing of assistance by China for the

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14 Just Faaland and J.R.Parkinson, *Bangladesh : The Test Case of Development* (London, 1977), p.9.

modernization of Bangladesh's agriculture.<sup>15</sup> In 21 March 1978, China and Bangladesh signed two separate agreements when Li Hsien visited Bangladesh. The first one was the economic and technical cooperation agreement under which China provided approximately 100 million RMB (equivalent to about Taka 850 million) interest free loan repayable in ten years with a grace period of twelve years for the purpose of a urea factory, a water conservancy plant, and some commodity procurement. The second one was a scientific and technological agreement valid for five years, providing for exchange of experts and expertise between China and Bangladesh for mutual benefits in the field of science and technology. Further China's aid was pledged in the fields of road building, agriculture, and rural electrification.<sup>16</sup>

China had also extended know-how for the utilisation of the vast unskilled and unemployed human resources. On July 24, 1980 another two agreements were signed for bilateral economic cooperation and establishment of air services between these two countries. Under the first agreement, China would provide an additional loan of 50 million RMB (about 43.85 million dollars) to Bangladesh. This, along with the earlier unspent balance of 80 million RMB, raised China's loan to Bangladesh to 130 million RMB. The other agreement concluded was on introducing air services between the two countries.

In spite of China's economic difficulties, it provided Bangladesh with 10 million Yuan (about 5 million US dollars) on soft term credit. On 4 December 1982, China had also offered to provide Bangladesh with a soft term loan of 25 million Yuan (12.5 million

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15 *Asian Recorder*, vol.23, no.6, 5-11 February 1977, p.13577.

16 *Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 2 March 1978.

US dollars) as a token of goodwill and friendship towards Bangladesh.<sup>17</sup> Since 1978, China extended approximately Taka 2,660 million interest-free loan to Bangladesh. A major part of the loan was earmarked for financing the import of Chinese capital equipment for the Polash urea fertiliser factory and the Sunderban Textile Mills, the latter has since been completed and gone into production. A portion of the loan was also allocated for importing essential commodities and intermediate goods from China.

The establishment of Joint Economic Commission (JEC) between Bangladesh and China on November 2, 1983 in order to co-ordinate cooperation between the two countries in the sectors of economic trade and scientific and technical was an important landmark in that it opened up the avenues to hold meetings in each other's capital in alternate years. During the meetings, the Commission identifies possibilities of bilateral cooperation in the areas assigned to it, reviews the progress of implementation of projects, and over-sees the functioning of relevant protocols. The Joint Economic Commission was the forum through which all economic assistance from China to Bangladesh was channelized, and it was this forum that helped in removing hurdles of any kind in matters of project implementation. Six session of the JEC have thus far been held for which the last one took place in Dhaka from 7th to 11th April 1991.

The first meeting of the Sino-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission had expressed "optimum of widening the existing bilateral economic, trade scientific and technical co-operation between the two countries."<sup>18</sup> The Chinese authorities indicated to supply 20,000 tonnes of rice including 5,000 tons of food as food aid for the flood

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17 *Bangladesh Times* (Dhaka), 5 December 1982.

18 *Bangladesh Observer*, 10 September 1984.

victims under credit and barter programmes. Successful economic reforms in China have opened up new doors of economic recoveries for developing nations like Bangladesh. China's experiences of low cost technology may have a far reaching effect in creating economic infrastructure and enhancing uplift.

China has expressed keen interest in further expansion of the economic collaboration in all sectors in Bangladesh as would be mutually determined.<sup>19</sup> China has so far provided to Bangladesh \$ 156 million in assistance and \$ 12.07 million as suppliers credit which includes \$ 10 million to the textiles and about \$ 2.07 million to the power sector.

In November 1989 Chinese Premier paid a visit to Bangladesh. During the visit four accords were signed between the two countries. Under the first accord, China agreed to provide 50 million Chinese Yuan (14 million US dollars) as soft loan to Bangladesh over a period of five years with repayment schedule of 20 years. Under the second, both sides agreed to abolish visa system between the two countries for official visits. In the third accord, Bangladesh agreed to supply 1-2 lakh tons of urea every year for a period of 3 years from Bangladesh to China on Cost Payment basis. Last one was a new-five year (1990-1995) trade agreement beginning in 1990. An agreement on building a 210,000 Kw thermal power station at Raozan, Pahartali in Chittagong with Chinese assistance was also signed.<sup>20</sup> Table 1 and 2 shows China's foreign aid commitment and disbursement to Bangladesh during the period under consideration.

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19 *New Nations* (Dhaka), 20 March 1985.

20 *Bangladesh Observer*, 19 November 1989.

**Table-1**  
**Chinese Foreign Aid Commitment to Bangladesh 1975-90**  
(in million US \$)

Year	Food aid Commitment		Commodity aid Commitment		Project aid Commitment		Total
	Grant	Loan	Grant	Loan	Grant	Loan	
1974-75	1.000	--	--	--	--	--	1.000
1975-76	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1976-77	--	2.000	--	--	--	--	2.000
1977-78	--	4.000	--	9.300	--	52.500	65.800
1978-79	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1979-80	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1980-81	--	--	--	--	--	8.868	8.868
1981-82	--	2.457	--	--	--	--	2.457
1982-83	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1983-84	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1984-85	1.170	--	--	--	19.047	--	1.170
1985-86	--	--	--	--	--	52.557	71.604
1986-87	--	--	--	--	--	10.358	10.358
1987-88	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1988-89	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1989-90	--	--	--	--	--	12.959	12.959
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2.170</b>	<b>8.457</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>9.300</b>	<b>19.047</b>	<b>137.242</b>	<b>176.216</b>

Source: Flow of External Resources into Bangladesh, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 18 August 1991 (as of June 1990) and 24 December 1990.



**Table-2**  
**Chinese Foreign Aid Disbursement to Bangladesh 1975-90**  
(in million US \$)

Year	Food aid Commitment		Commodity aid Commitment		Project aid Commitment		Total
	Grant	Loan	Grant	Loan	Grant	Loan	
1974-75	1.000	--	--	--	--	--	1.000
1975-76	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1976-77	--	2.000	--	--	--	--	2.000
1977-78	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1978-79	--	4.000	--	--	--	--	4.000
1979-80	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1980-81	--	--	--	--	--	8.514	8.514
1981-82	--	--	--	2.667	--	11.347	14.014
1982-83	--	--	--	2.862	--	16.010	18.872
1983-84	--	--	--	3.771	--	19.040	22.811
1984-85	1.170	2.457	--	--	--	6.238	9.865
1985-86	--	--	--	--	--	1.539	1.539
1986-87	--	--	0.537	--	34.258	--	34.795
1987-88	--	--	--	0.300	2.902	3.333	6.535
1988-89	--	--	--	0.735	0.578	2.610	3.923
1989-90	--	--	--	--	--	6.363	6.363
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2.170</b>	<b>8.457</b>	<b>0.537</b>	<b>10.300</b>	<b>37.738</b>	<b>74.994</b>	<b>134.231</b>

Source: Flow of External Resources into Bangladesh, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 24 December 1990 and 18 August 1991 (as of June 1990).

In tables 1 and 2 it is noticed that during the period 1975-90 Chinese foreign aid commitment to Bangladesh was US \$ 176.216 millions and disbursement was US \$ 134.231 millions. From tables 1 and 2, it is evident that China's aid priority was on project aid commitments and disbursements, and Chinese food aids to Bangladesh, the smallest component which was in the form of grants, while commodity and project aids came in the form of loans.

Since 1976, Bangladesh has received \$ 115 million from China as interest-free loans under seven credit agreements. Under the credit, six projects including construction of a bridge, urea fertiliser plant, cotton textile mill and rehabilitation and renovation of an ordinance factory were completed. President H.M.Ershad opened on March 15 the biggest, 847.32 metre long Bangladesh-China friendship bridge built at a cost of \$34 million with China contributing \$ 18 million in the form of grants and loans. No less than 149 Chinese experts took part in the construction of this massive bridge, completed 14 months ahead of schedule.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from the economic assistance the Chinese government also provided substantial humanitarian relief to Bangladesh in the form of food aid (1984, 1987), landing crafts (1985) and garments for children.

An agreement was signed in Dhaka on 27 February 1988 for the development of Silk industry in the Country.<sup>22</sup> Under the agreement, China send a five member team to Bangladesh. The team examined the possibilities of developing and modernising Rajashani silk industry of Bangladesh silk board and submitted an effective

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21 *Asian Recorder*, vol.35, no. 19, 7-13 May 1989, p.20561.

22 *Bangladesh Times*, 28 February 1988.

recommendation in this regard. Bangladesh and China signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the shipping sector in Beijing on 30 May 1988.<sup>23</sup> The memorandum was signed following two days of official talks between the two countries. The memorandum provided for greater cooperation between Dhaka and Beijing in promoting and strengthening of the national shipping lines of Bangladesh.

In 29 June 1990, Ershad paid a visit to Beijing. During his visit they signed three agreements and two exchanges of letters that covered new areas of cooperation, building of a bridge by China on the river Mohananda in northern Dinapur district and institutionalising a periodic consultation between the officials of the foreign ministries of the two countries. In technical cooperation they would exchange experience, scientific cooperation, data and personnel. It may be recalled that China had given assistance to build the young navy of Bangladesh and other wings of the armed forces.

## **ii. Sino-Bangladesh Trading Pattern**

Bangladesh's trade relation with China was conducted on clearing basis, through barter and free transactions. Official trade between the two countries began in late 1974 but formal trade agreements was signed in late 1976. Trade relation between Bangladesh and China began to develop during Zia's regime. The Chinese brought from Bangladesh products like sugar and newsprint, thereby helping Bangladesh diversify its exports. China also demonstrated keen interest in non-traditional items, thus assisting Bangladesh's goal of diversifying its exports. To the advantage of both the countries, a large volume of trade took place on barter terms. The goods and commodities that

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23 *New Nation* (Dhaka), 31 May 1988.

Bangladesh and China exchange with each other under barter agreements are given in Table 3.

**Table-3**  
**List of Exchangeable Commodities Between Bangladesh and China**

No.	List of Export from Bangladesh to China	List of export from China to Bangladesh
1.	Raw Jute	Coal
2.	Leather Products	Cement
3.	Hides and Skins	Pig-iron
4.	Jute goods	Rape Seeds
5.	Newsprints	Oil Gas
6.	Paper and paper products	Edible oil
7.	Molasses	Dyes and chemicals
8.	Rayon	Machinery and tools
9.	Spices	Spare parts for textile mills
10.	Fertilizer	Native produce
11.	Electric cable	Metals and Minerals
12.	Telephone cables	Cereal and food stuffs
13.	--	Liquid industrial products

Sources: Compiled from different newspapers.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between Bangladesh and China, the two governments have concluded a number of agreements on economic cooperation. The first agreement was trade and payment agreement (TPA) signed in January 1977 during Ziaur Rahman's first visit to China.

However, replacing the TPA, a long-term trade agreement was signed in Dhaka in 1980 and 1984. Besides these, other agreements concluded between the two countries were the joint commission on economic, trade, scientific and technical cooperation (November 1983), shipping agreement (1978), Air transport agreement (1980, 1988), and finally scientific and technical cooperation (1979). Following the establishment of diplomatic relation between the two countries in 1975, Bangladesh has been exporting

to China items like raw goods, jute goods, jute yarn, hide and skin. The import from China include items like diesel oil, machinery, equipment, scientific investments and hardware, dyes and chemicals, and lubricating base oil.

Barter trade between the two countries is carried out under the trade and payments agreement of 1977, and subsequently long-term trade agreement of 1980. Since 1977, as many as eleven barter protocols have been signed and implemented. Under the barter trade protocol signed on December 1978, Bangladesh would import from China steel billets, coal, cement, mechanical equipment and light industrial goods. And China was to import "large quantities" of jute and jute products, hides, sugar and newsprint from Bangladesh.<sup>24</sup>

A five-year trade agreement was signed on 1 March 1980. This agreement listed the commodities to be exchanged between the two countries and stipulated on each way trade of US \$250 million each way during the period of the agreement.<sup>25</sup> It further provided for most favoured-nation treatment, and detailed the mode of payment, facilitates the exchange of trade delegations and included a mechanism for periodical review of the progress of bilateral trade. The trade agreement also provided that the trade between the two countries should be on a barter basis. Under the agreement, Bangladesh exports to China would include Jute, Jute products, hide and skin, timber, tobacco, fertilizer and some non-traditional items. In turn, China would sell coal, pig-iron, dyes and chemicals, light industrial products, textiles, machinery, hardware and handicrafts. The two sides also signed the fourth barter trade protocol for the current

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24 *Asian Recorder*, vol.25, no.2, 8-14 January 1979, p.14683, also see *Statesman* (New Delhi), 12 December 1978.

25 *Bangladesh Observer*, 2 March 1980.

year within the framework of the five-year trade agreement with provision of bartering goods worth \$ 31 million each.

Under the long-term pact of 1980, Bangladesh and China signed the sixth barter protocol, envisaging purchase of commodities worth 60 million US dollars (about Teka 1,320 million) both ways for 1982-1983.<sup>26</sup> Under the protocol Bangladesh would export about 55 percent of its finished and semi-finished products to China, and will import about 70 percent of industrial raw materials from China. The two sides also reviewed the progress and implementation of the stipulation of the fifth barter protocol, including the trade between the two countries. The seventh trade protocol signed on December 1983 provides for exchange of goods worth US \$ 62 millions. The commodities includes new items, namely, high-speed diesel, lubricating base oil, manufactured jute products and jute yarn, finished and crust leather, etc. Import of raw cotton from China had also been arranged for the first time under the extender barter protocol number sixth.

By 1984, a number of protocols were signed under the trade agreement. In December 1984, the second long-term trade agreement (1985-1989) with the Peoples Republic of China was signed, envisaging exchange of goods worth 200 million dollars to 250 million dollars each way during the five-year period.<sup>27</sup> Under the five umbrella agreement, the eighth barter protocol between the two countries covering a period of one year beginning January 1985 for exchange of commodities worth 32 million dollars each way was also signed.

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26 *Bangladesh Observer*, 12 August 1980.

27 *Bangladesh Observer*, 12 December 1984.

The long term agreement which gives most favoured nation treatment includes holding of trade fairs in each other's countries and exchange of trade delegations. Besides, the agreement incorporated a mechanism for a time-to-time review of the progress of the bilateral trade and conclusion of yearly barter protocol. A balanced development of trade between the two countries on the basis of south-south cooperation was emphasised in the agreement along with due importance to expansion and diversification of trade. Light industrial products like electrical wires and cables will be exported for the first time to China during the eighth barter period. The share of non-traditional items in the barter for export to China has significantly increased over the years. From a mere 8 percent in fifth barter, the share of non-traditional goods for export to China has increased to 37 percent in the current barter. Barter trade between the two countries began in 1977 with an annual exchange of goods worth 14 million dollars each way. The cumulative (1-7 barter) trade figure for exchange of goods stood at 188 million dollars each way. The ninth barter protocol between the two countries signed in Beijing in November 1986, envisages an exchange of goods worth \$ 43.5 million each way, but according to sources, that unless more goods are taken by China, the imbalance is even larger if the cash trade and trade under wage earners scheme is also taken into consideration.

Imports from China showed a healthy growth over the years while exports from Bangladesh to that country declined. Bangladesh's narrow export base and the wide range of importable Chinese goods accentuated this trend.<sup>28</sup> A paper entitled "Problems and Prospects of Trade with China" presented by Ghulam Rahman, Deputy

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28 *Daily News* (Dhaka), 4 September 1986.

Secretary, ministry of Commerce in a two day seminar on "Trade China" which took place in Dhaka on 3 September 1986, stated that Bangladesh shipped as much as 4.84 percent of her global exports to China in 1978-1979. But it came down to less than 1 percent in 1984-1985. The paper further stated that on the import side, China supplied less than 2 percent of global imports in 1977-1988 but in 1984-1985, her share was more than 5 percent. Bangladesh has barter trade as well as trade in convertible currencies with China. During the period from 1973-1974 to 1984-1985, the cumulative trade imbalance against Bangladesh was taka 10,355.86 million. The yearly trade increased from Taka 171.9 million in 1976-1977 to Taka 2,103.2 million in 1984-1985.

The barter protocol-10 signed between the two countries in Dhaka on 17 November 1986, stipulated \$ 44 million trade volume each way.<sup>29</sup> It was the third protocol concluded under the 5 year long-term trade agreement signed between the two countries in 1984. The official figures indicate that during the first 11 months of 1985-1986, Bangladesh exports to China amounted to Taka 710.83 million compared to Taka 230.82 million during 1984-1985. On the other hand, Bangladesh imports from China during the same period of 1985-1986 mere Taka 22,174.93 million of which barter imports were Taka 745.39 million. Barter exchange accounts for more than 99 percent of Bangladesh exports to China while cash transaction dominates the import trade. Larger economic base and price and quality-wise competitiveness of Chinese goods account for large imports from China.

At present, there is a long term trade agreement (LTTA) between Bangladesh and China for a period of five years (1990-1995). The LTTA which provides for a broad

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29 *Daily News*, 18 November 1986.



spectrum of trade ties between the two countries, has the provision for automatic renewal. It specifies the most favoured nation treatment related to shipping, tariffs etc., and covers barter trade and trade in convertible currencies. Further more, arrangements for payment and year review are also incorporated in it.

Table 4(a) indicates Bangladesh's trade with China from 1979-1980 to 1981-1982. During this period Bangladesh's total imports from China amounted to US \$ 284.52 million, while exports from Bangladesh to China amounted to US \$ 65.98 million. Thus, the trade imbalance against Bangladesh amounted to US \$ 218.54 million. Table 4(a) further shows that about a quarter (24.56 percent) of the import of Bangladesh from China was under wage earners scheme (WES) and a slightly more than a quarter (28.45 percent) of the import was done in cash. By contrast, during the period 1979-1982, 98.39 percent of Bangladesh's export to China were under barter while percentage of export in cash was 1.61 percent for the same year. Table 4(b) shows that during the period 1975-1981, Bangladesh's import from and export to China constituted 3.86 percent and 3.48 percent of the global import and export trade of Bangladesh respectively. However, Bangladesh's trade with China in terms of both exports and import during the period 1975-1976 was at a very low level, 1.15 percent and 0.85 percent of its total global export and import respectively. The share subsequently picked up although the rise in the share of export was relatively lower than that of import.

**Table 4(a)**  
**Bangladesh's Trade with China, 1979-80 to 1981-82**  
(in million US \$)

Year	IMPORT				EXPORT			Balance of Trade	Export Import
	Barter	Cash	WES	Total	Barter	Cash	Total		
1979-80	12.69 (18.58)	24.02 (35.17)	31.75 (46.49)	68.29 (100.0)	22.68 (7.21)	0.65 (2.78)	23.33 (100.0)	-44.96	34.16
1980-81	27.57 (24.37)	28.65 (25.32)	56.91 (50.30)	113.12 (100.0)	29.22 (99.05)	0.28 (0.94)	29.50 (100.0)	-83.62	26.07
1981-82	29.62 (28.72)	28.30 (27.44)	45.22 (43.85)	103.11 (100.0)	13.02 (99.01)	0.13 (0.98)	13.15 (100.0)	-89.96	12.75
Total	69.88 (24.56)	80.97 (28.45)	133.88 (47.05)	284.52 (100.0)	64.92 (98.89)	1.06 (1.61)	65.98 (100.0)	-218.54	23.18

Note:

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.

Source:

Bangladesh Bank Report (as tabulated in External Resource Division, Brief on Bangladesh-China Economic Relations), July 1987, pp.50-51; Bangladesh, Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, vol.9, no.6, Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bangladesh (Dacca, June 1980).

**Table 4(b)**  
**Proportion of Imports from and Exports to China,**  
**1975-81 in Relation to Bangladesh's Total Global Trade (in %)**

Year	Import	Export
1975-76	0.85	1.15
1976-77	2.16	1.62
1977-78	2.21	3.81
1978-79	4.70	4.56
1979-80	4.55	4.31
1980-81	5.71	3.74
Total	3.86	3.48

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Note: Calculated from the data published in the above mentioned source.

The volume of trade continued to grow during the period 1983-1991 (January) between Bangladesh and China, so did the deficit in trade against the former. Table 5(a) shows that during the period 1983-1984 to 1988-1991 January, Bangladesh imported from China goods worth Taka 20552.4 million, while the value of export was Taka 4,961.2 million which left a cumulative negative balance against Bangladesh for the period at Taka 15.562 million. As in the previous period (1979-1980 to 1981-1982), barter transaction continued to dominate Sino-Bangladesh trade. Table 5(b) shows that during the period 1981-1990, Bangladesh's import from and export to China constituted 4.24 percent and 1.92 percent of the global import and export trade of Bangladesh.

**Table 5(a)**  
**Bangladesh's Trade with China, 1983-84 to 1990-91 (January)**  
(Taka in million)

Year	Imports under cash & Barter	Imports under loan & Grants	Total Imports	Total Exports	Balance of Trade	Export-Import Ratio
1983-84	1687.70 (79.09)	446.00 (20.90)	2133.7 (100.0)	313.4 --	-1820.3	14.69
1984-85	2077.90 (89.09)	256.1 (10.97)	2334.4 (100.0)	230.8 --	-2103.2	9.89
1985-86	2155.65 (100.0)	--	2155.65 (100.0)	727.10	-1428.55	33.73
1986-87	1912.85 (100.0)	--	1912.85 (100.0)	527.54	-1357.31	27.58
1987-88	2555.58 (100.0)	--	2555.58 (100.0)	701.69	-1853.80	27.46
1988-89	2700.86 (100.0)	--	2700.86 (100.0)	871.56	-1829.27	32.27
1989-90	4148.32 (100.0)	--	4148.32 (100.0)	602.34	-3545.96	14.52
1990-91 (Jan.)	2611.08 (100.0)	--	2611.08 (100.0)	986.77	-1624.31	37.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>1989.94 (95.58)</b>	<b>702.1 (3.41)</b>	<b>20552.4 (100.0)</b>	<b>4961.2</b>	<b>-15562.7</b>	<b>24.14</b>

Source: External Resources Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, October 1989, and January 1991.

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

**Table 5(b)**  
**Proportion of Imports from and Exports to China, 1981-90 in Relation to Bangladesh's Total Global Trade (in %)**

Year	Import	Export
1981-82	6.04	2.79
1982-83	3.85	3.53
1983-84	4.63	1.69
1984-85	4.40	0.89
1985-86	3.76	2.72
1986-87	4.59	1.61
1987-88	3.79	1.46
1988-89	4.14	3.30
1989-90	2.41	0.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.24</b>	<b>1.92</b>

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Note: Calculated from the data published in the above mentioned source.

It is observed that China's position as Bangladesh's trade partner remained more or less at the same level as during the period 1975-1981, both in terms of export and import. The ratios of both import and export remained much below 5 percent of Bangladesh's total global import and export although there have been some erratic variations from year to year.

Eleven barter protocols were signed between the two countries during the period 1975-1990. The barter protocols identifies the amount of trade and items to be traded on barter. The amount of trade, provided for in the protocols, each way, varies from year to year. The performance of the barter protocols since 1982, has always remained below the target. This is due to the poor performance of Bangladesh in utilization of allocation meant for essential items which have in fact, been imported under cash arrangement from elsewhere including China. This in turn, has slowed down the temp of Chinese import from Bangladesh due to lack of funds under barter. On the other hand, on Bangladesh's side, there are good reasons to channel imports under barter instead of cash payment. But the reluctant mood on the part of certain Chinese exporting corporations in accepting the letter of credit (L/C) under barter has stood as a hurdle in this regard, which can be removed through mutual understanding. It is important to note that Bangladesh financed approximately 78 percent of its total imports from China under cash, foreign exchange and the rest 22 percent are financed under barter system.

During this period, a large number of Chinese-assisted projects was completed, as presented in Table 6. It shows both the completed and on-going projects respectively. A number of joint-venture projects have also been taken up in association with China, and some others are in the process of negotiation. Some projects in the private sector include; Cock Brand Mosquito Coils Co. Ltd.; Bangladesh Iron and Steel Products Ltd; China Fulgidh Shah Wood Pencil Factory; Bangladesh China Steel Glass Industry Ltd; the Magura Paper Mills; and the Eastern Pulp and Paper mills.

**Table 6**  
**Chinese Aid Projects to Bangladesh**

S. No.	Completed Project		Ongoing Project	
	Name of the project	Cost (in Chinese YMB)	Name of the project	Cost
1.	Renovation of equipment of Rifle and Ammunition plant of B.O.F.	5.00 million	Consultancy services for flood control project	2.50 mill US \$
2.	Construction of Bangladesh-China friendship over the River Buriganga	58.57 million		
3.	Restoration of Project of the Rifle Ammunition plant of Bangladesh Ordnance Factor (BOF)	7.36 million	Thermal power plant in Chittagong	133 mill US \$
4.	Construction of Shambugong Road Bridge at Mymensingh	52.00 million		
5.	Rupganj North Water Conservancy Project (1.15 million as grant)	11.57 million	Mahananda Road Bridge at Nawabganj	--
6.	Potash Urea Fertilizer Factory/ Plant	77.32 million	Renewick and Co. Ltd. (BMRE)	2.39 mill RMB
7.	Sundarban Cotton Textile Mills	10.09 million		

Source: Quoted in Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmed, "Bangladesh-China Relations: An Assessment", *BISS Journal*, vol.13, no.2, April 1992, p.293.

Further more, Bangladesh and China signed 13 memorandum of understanding (MOU) which strengthen the two countries relations. Besides, the two countries also agreed to establish a Bangladesh-China joint venture urea plant in Bangladesh. China further agreed to provide Bangladesh soft-term supplier's credit for purchasing nine new ocean - going vessels at concessional price. An investment forum was also established to help promote joint venture projects in Bangladesh.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Quoted in Abu Taheer Salahuddin Ahmed, "Bangladesh-China Relations; An Assessment", *BIISS Journal*, vol.13, no.2, April 1992, p.294.



## CHAPTER IV

### BANGLADESH-CHINA DEFENCE RELATIONS

Bangladesh has developed healthy relation with China not only in the political and economic fields but also in the military field. China which was hostile to the birth of Bangladesh and was the last country to recognise it now enjoys the status of a best friend in the perception of the Bangladeshi ruling elites.

China recognised Bangladesh on 31 August 1975. During the short lived regime of Khondkar Mustaque Ahmad diplomatic relations between the two countries was initiated on 4 October 1975.<sup>1</sup>

The warming up of the relationship began in January 1977 when General Ziaur Rahman, the Chief Martial Law administrator went to China for a five days visit.<sup>2</sup> Beijing's expression of solidarity and support in Bangladesh's struggle to 'protect its sovereignty and independence against the forces of hegemonism and expansionism' and the convergence of the Security Perception of the post-Mujib regimes in Bangladesh and China provided the sound basis for the progressive growing of the Sino-Bangladesh relations.<sup>3</sup> After Zia-ur Rahman's visit, China supplied fighter planes and training team to Bangladesh. It further consolidated the Bangladesh-China relations.

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- 1 See Jitendra Nath Mohanty, "China in the Third World: A Case Study of Bangladesh", *China Report* (Newbury Park), vol.20, no.8, March-April 1984, pp.8-9.
  - 2 *Asia Year Book*, 1989, p.132.
  - 3 News from *Xinhua News Agency*, 18 October 1975, as quoted in Jitendra Nath Mohanty, n.1, p.9.

China maintains military attaches in eight Asians, ten Africans and six Latin American countries.<sup>4</sup> In December 1985 the 'Liberation Army Daily' reported that between 1979 and 1985 that People's Liberation Army established friendly contacts with over 50 (fifty) nations around the world.<sup>5</sup> As China increases its strategic relationships with the countries of Asia and Africa, Bangladesh also figures in the calculations of the policy makers in Beijing.<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh is one of the eight Asian countries in which China maintains military attache,<sup>7</sup> and it is indicated that Bangladesh along with Pakistan and North Korea, is a principal recipient of Chinese arms.

Though Dhaka's problem of national security was not as urgent or acute as those of Pakistan vis-a-vis India, Bangladesh wanted to build up an effective defence system. The post- Mujib regimes did not want Bangladesh, as a self respecting nations, to be bullied by any powerful neighbour. At this time China was the only source of military supplies for the Bangladeshi army (with the exception of some modest help[ from Indonesia). Because of this Military aid from Beijing, China's friendship was very much coveted by the Bangladeshi army, which has been in power, directly or indirectly since 1975. Bangladesh armed forces are equipped with some light weapons and equipment.

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4 Chintamani Mahapatra, "Implications of Increasing Sino-Bangladesh Relations", *Strategic Analysis*, March 1988, p.1421.

5 *ibid.*

6 In Africa, Somalia, Tanzania, Zaire, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Congo, Mali and Guinea Bissane have received significant amount of military equipment from China. Egypt, Iran and Iraq and West Asia are also buyers of Chinese military equipment, *Asia Year Book*, 1987, quoted in *ibid.*

7 Dilara Choudhury, *Bangladesh and The South Asian International System* (Dhaka, 1992), p.173.

Some of the arsenals are unserviceable due to shortage of spares. 11.2 percent of the central budget was expanded on defence in 1986.<sup>8</sup>

China's military assistance to Bangladesh has been quite generous,<sup>9</sup> even when arms have been sold commercially. According to a source, until 1979 and 1980 all arms supplied by China were free of charge, either as direct grants or as interest-free loans.<sup>10</sup> This was an incentive strong enough for Bangladesh to be attracted to Beijing's military aid policy. Beijing became a major arm supplier to Dhaka from 1975 onwards,<sup>11</sup> following a rupture in relations between Moscow and Dhaka. In 1977, Bangladesh received 10 F-9 fighters from China.<sup>12</sup>

In late 1979, General H.M.Ershad, as the Chief Bangladesh Army Staff, visited China as the leader of the military goodwill delegation. Ershad's visit was clearly connected with the emerging Sino-Bangladesh relationship. Again in December 1982 Ershad visited China. He and top ranking leaders of China repeatedly emphasised that their countries shared identical views on a wide range of issues, and expressed complete satisfaction, with the development of friendly relations between the two countries. Bangladesh, values its friendship with China and viewed it as a positive factor in

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8 Iftekharuzzaman, "The Chimera of Disarmament in South Asia", *South Asia Journal*, (New Delhi), vol.2, no.4, p.398.

9 Shyamali Ghosh, "Bangladesh and China : A Stable Relationship", in S.R.Chakravarty, (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh* (New Delhi), 1994, p.307.

10 *Bangladesh Observer*, 1 December 1978, as quoted in Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmed, "Bangladesh-China Relations: An Assessment", *BISS Journal*, vol.13, no.2, April 1992, p.280.

11 Md.Zaglul Haider, "Bangladesh-China Relations : A Review", *Regional Studies*, vol.9, no.2, Spring 1991, p.77.

12 *ibid.*

maintaining peace and stability in South Asia.<sup>13</sup> The relationship developed during Zia's regime further expanded and intensified during the Ershad era.<sup>14</sup>

Contacts and co-operation in the realm of Bangladesh's defence increase over the years to a considerable extent. By the early eighties China and Bangladesh were engaged in military talks. The government of both the countries have held several rounds of talks on how to reach the arm supplies to Bangladesh. During Zia's visit to China in eighties, an agreement on the arms purchase was signed. Saudi Arabia is believed to have agreed to extend to Bangladesh aid worth Taka 40,000 million for purchasing one squadron of MIG-19 planes from China. During October 1981, two Chinese military teams visited Bangladesh to discuss the supply of Chinese arms.<sup>15</sup> Beijing's military assistance to Dhaka was further increase at this time.<sup>16</sup>

China was becoming a major source of military hardware and training for Bangladesh. According to sources, Bangladesh received in 1981 one squadron of Chinese-built MIG-21s, transport, planes and a squadron of Chinese-manufactured T.59 tanks.<sup>17</sup> Batches of Bangladesh military personal came to China regularly for training. It is reported that about 400 officers of the Bangladesh army are now in China and an

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13 The Friendship between Bangladesh and China is based upon the Principles of Panchashila and non-interference in the internal affairs of each other and mutual respect for sovereignty.

14 Kamal Siddique, "Dimensions of Bangladesh-China Relationship", *Holiday*, 21 October 1988.

15 The first delegation returned to China via Bangkok after a stay of merely 24 hours. The second delegation arrived in Dhaka on 6 October. This delegation stayed for 20 hours and returned on 7 October, *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 9 October 1981.

16 *ibid.*

17 *Asian Recorder*, vol. 28, no.37, 10-16 September 1982, p.16785.

equally large number in Pakistan to secure training in sabotage and transborder operation.<sup>18</sup> Besides, China is helping Bangladesh to set up arms factories and upgrading naval dockyards. China had also set up an ammunition plant at Jaydevpur on the outskirts of Dhaka before Bangladesh was born.<sup>19</sup> In the issue of the official weekly Beijing Review observers noted a favourable commentary on "Bangladesh under the military rule".

The friendship visit on 23 January 1984 for a week to China by the Bangladesh Chief of Staff, Deputy Martial Law Administration and Minister for energy and Mineral Resources, Air Vice-Marshal Suchtar Muhammad, was described by the official Xinhua news agency as highly successful.<sup>20</sup> These were indications of Chinese cooperation in and help for the modernisation and strengthening of the Bangladesh Air Force. During General Ershad visits to China on July 1985 after assuming the powers of the President, he said that China's programme of modernization, including that of its armed forces, "is very important for all of us".

Visits of high level military delegation became a regular phenomena. During 1983-1984 the Chiefs of the Bangladesh Navy and Air Force visited China, and the Commander-in-Chiefs of the Chinese navy and Air Force paid 'goodwill' visits to Bangladesh. According to sources, Chinese warships also visited Bangladeshi ports in 1985.<sup>21</sup>

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18 *Statesman*, 25 January 1993.

19 *Asian Recorder*, vol.28, no.37, 10-16 September 1982, p.16785.

20 *The Hindu* (Madras), 2 February 1984.

21 The report was published in Krasnaya Zvezda, *The Red Star*, 19 November, 1985.

On 7 January 1987 a high powered Chinese Military delegation came to Bangladesh reflecting the importance attached by the two countries to the growing bilateral ties.<sup>22</sup> After the visit of the delegation the Bangladesh Army was raised and developed on the Chinese pattern and trained and fully equipped with Chinese arms,<sup>23</sup> and the navy procured two chinese gun-boats.<sup>24</sup> One of the country's first division, the 33 infantry division, with its headquarters at Comilla, is called the Chinese division. It was headed by G.D.C Major General Samad. The 24 division garrisoned at Chittagong is the second chinese infantry division headed by G.O.C Major General Manom. There is also a training centre at Sylhet Cantonment where Chinese experts provide training. The arms ordinance factory at Jay Dumpar built by China near Dhaka, is supervised and maintained by Chinese explosive experts and ammunition specialists. The factory produces ammunition for the arms supplied by China.<sup>25</sup>

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22 The Chinese military delegation was led by General Yag D.Zhi, Chief of General Staff of the Peking Liberation Army. It held extensive talks with the Bangladesh Chief of Army Staff, Lt.General Atiquan Rahman. The Chinese military delegation left the country on 21 January 1987, *The Times of India* (Bombay), 13 January 1987.

23 *Asian Recorder*, vol.38, no.1, 1-17 January 1990, p.29938, as quoted in, Suchita Ghosh, "Impact on India of the China-Bangladesh connection : Locational significance of Bangladesh to China and India", *Strategic Analysis*, August 1994, p.611.

24 *Asian Recorder*, vol.36, no.37, 10-16 September 1990, p.2133, as quoted in, *ibid.*

25 Suchita Ghosh, *China-Bangladesh-India Tangle today : Towards a solution* (New Delhi, 1995), p.16.

A number of high level military visits took place during the post-Mujib regime.<sup>26</sup> In the field of defence, exchange of highlevel visits contributed to the promotion of understanding between the Bangladesh armed forces and the People's Liberation Army. China has given valuable assistance to Bangladesh defence sector by providing arms and equipment, technical assistance and training facilities. Bangladesh pilots had gone to Beijing for training.

As mentioned, China was the single largest supplier of arms and ammunition to Bangladesh army, Air forces and Navy. According to some sources, by 1987, the Bangladesh army, possessed 20 Chinese T-59 tanks, the Air Force had 18 Shenyang J-6 FGAs (Fighter Ground Attack) and CJ-6 training aircraft and the navy was equipped with 14 Chinese-built FACPs (Fast Attack Craft Guns)-0.24 Hegu with 2 HY-2 SSM.<sup>27</sup> The incentives of the Chinese arms supply are to gain influence, to protect national security and economic. The terms and conditions of the arms supplied by China were easier than

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26 Apart from Zia's and Ershad's visits to China, the other prominent visitors from the Bangladesh Armed Force, were the (late) Deputy Chief Martial Law Administration, and Chief of the Navy in 1983, the Deputy Chief Martial Law Administration and Chief of the Air Force in 1984, the Chief of the General Staff of the Army in 1985 and the Assistant Chief of Air Staff in 1984, Chief of Air Staff, A.V.M. Mumtazuddin Ahmed visited China in September 1989 and Army Chief, Lieutenant General Noor Uddin visited China in April 1991. The Chief of Naval Staff Rear Admiral Sultan paid a visit to China in April 1987 at the invitation of the PLA (Navy). Commander Admiral Liu Hua Qing, from the Chinese side, high ranking visitors included the Deputy Chief of General Staff (1979 and 1982) and the Commander of the PLA (Air Force) in 1984 and 1990, the Commander of PLA (Navy) in 1983 and 1989. Chinese Defence Minister General Qin Jiwei paid a visit to Bangladesh in February 1990.

27 Chintamani Mahapatra, n.4, p.1422.

the Soviets. Chinese arms supply to Bangladesh increase after 1979 happenings in Afghanistan and Kampuchea as a reflection of the shared concern of the Soviet threat.<sup>28</sup>

Besides supplying arms and training to Bangladesh, China also took over Bangladesh Soviet built MIGs which the Kremlin refused to service after the assassination of Mujib.<sup>29</sup> Some of the arms supplied by China are second hand. Although second hand, Bangladesh received for the first time from China a Romeo Submarine in 1984.

Table 7 shows the flow of Chinese Military aid to Bangladesh.

**Table 7**  
**Flow of Chinese Military Aid to Bangladesh**

Year (ordered)	No.	Item	Comments	Year (delivered)
1976	50	F-6 (Fighter)	14 delivered	1977
1977	10	F-9	36 delivered	1978
1977	70	Advisors		
1978	36	F-6	24 delivered	1979
1978	50	Advisors		
1978	10	BT-6	New	
1979	12	BT-12(Trainer)	12 delivered	1979
1980	36	Type-59 (MB-T)	18 delivered	1980
			18 (2nd hand)	1981
1980	48	F-7 (Fighter)	48	1981
1981	4	Hainan Class(FAC)	1	1982
1981	48	F-7	Reburished	
1981	4	Shanghai 11		
1982	4	P-4 Class (FA C)	4 delivered	1983
1983	20	Type-54 (SPH)	20 delivered	1984
1983	6	Romeo Class (Submarine)	1 delivered	1984
		Hainan Class (FAC)	(2nd hand)	
1984	3	F-6 (Fighter)	3 delivered	1984
1985	36	F-7 (Fighter)	Negotiating	
1989	16		16 delivered	1989

Sources: *Sipri Yearbook: World Armaments and Disarmaments* (Stockholm, 1977-1990); Anne Gilhs and Gerald Segal, *China and the Arms Trade* (London, 1985), appendices, p.197; Michael Brzosha and Thomas Ohlson, *Arms Transfer to the Third World 1971-1985* (New York, 1987), pp.148-9; quoted in Srikanta, Mahapatra, "National Security and Armed Forces in Bangladesh", *Strategic Analysis*, vol.14, no.5, August 1991, pp.597-9.

28 Anne Gills and Gerald Segal, *China and the Arms Trade*, (London, 1985), pp.115-118.

29 Abu Taher Sahabuddin Ahmed, n.10, p.280.



It is evident from Table 7 that the Chinese military aid given to Bangladesh during the period 1975-'90 was in two forms; (1) Weapons (2) Military advisors. The inflow of hardware appeared to have been increasing in the latter part of the period.

During Ershads visit to Beijing in 1990, it may be recalled that China had assisted in the building up of the wings of armed forces and young navy of Bangladesh. He said that the training facilities provided by China to Bangladesh would enable the country to raise trained manpower who would be able to operate sophisticated machines. The visiting President thanked the country's close ally for the continued assistance to modernise Bangladesh defence forces, particularly the navy. During his visit they signed three agreements and two exchanges of letters covering new areas of cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

China's approach towards Bangladesh, their close and cordial relations and the assistance to the latter is one of great importance to the countries of the region of their economic, political and strategic security. Bangladesh being a small, weak country, almost wholly surrounded by India, has to depend a lot on the donor countries for the continued supply of food, financial help and other forms of assistance. China according to Shaukat Hasan and quoted by Suchita Ghosh, not only provides psychological security against India which however intangible does soothe an Indophobic Bangladesh, it is also a major arm supplier to Bangladesh.<sup>31</sup> However, it is to be noted that despite consistent policy of supply of arms and other form of aid between the two countries, Bangladesh and China have not entered into any security pact and indications of an early move in this direction are not evident on the part of either country.

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30 *The Hindu* (Madras), 4 July 1990.

31 Suchita Ghosh, n.24, p.21.

China will continued to remain a very important country for Bangladesh not only in terms of economic and military assistance. But mainly for political and diplomatic support. Policy makers in Dhaka seem to have grasped fully the potential of the People Republic of China (PRC) as an emerging military and economic power.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

International relations are concerned with interaction among states which seek to enhance their national interests by means of cooperation or confrontation. It should be emphasised here that it is national interest over and above all other considerations which is the guiding factor of a country's foreign policy postures. It can be deduced from the present study that ever since China's strong opposition to the recognition of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation, the relation between the two countries had undergone several stages, which subsequently resulted in better understanding and greater cooperation between them in the areas of political, economic and military relation.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the creation of Bangladesh was opposed by China and the United States. India's assistance to East Pakistan at the time of the liberation movement and Russia's proxy war resulted in bringing Bangladesh within the Indo-Soviet orbit. The Chinese hostility towards the national liberation movement in Bangladesh emanated from the perception she had come to entertain owing to the strong stand taken against India and the Soviet Union. China's response to the Bangladesh crisis have to be viewed, as being motivated by geo-political interests rather than ideological consideration. China's attitude towards Bangladesh began to undergo changes in 1974, after Pakistan recognised Bangladesh's sovereignty. Though China's attitude had changed it still did not recognise Bangladesh as a nation at the time when Mujib was at the helm of power. Although formal recognition was withheld, China did make some unofficial gestures towards Bangladesh. China made a liberal relief aid of goods to Bangladesh when she was drastically devastated by heavy flood.

The dramatic political scenario in Bangladesh following the disappearance of Mujib and the accession of Major General Ziaur Rahman to power added momentum towards building of Bangladesh-China relations. It not only provided China an opportunity to recognize Bangladesh but also paved the way to extend her hand of friendship and co-operation towards Bangladesh. At this time it had become clear to Beijing that relations between Bangladesh and India had drifted apart, and that the former's attitude towards the latter was positively hostile. When Zia-ur-Rahman visited Beijing in January 1977 Chairman Hua Ku broke protocol by personally receiving him at the airport. It was clearly evident that Bangladesh obtained Beijing's support vis-a-vis India.

China has since the death of Mujib in 1975 actively supported Bangladesh. Common enmity towards India was one of the reasons which reinforced their relationship. It is known that the China-Bangladesh stand on issues like the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and Kampuchea are identical. China's approach towards Bangladesh, their close and cordial relations and the assistance to the latter are of great importance to the countries of the region in terms of their economic, political and strategic security.

During the regime of Ziaur Rahman, Bangladesh moved away from India and the Indo-Soviet rim, and tilted towards the West. Since then she began to identify herself more closely with the Islamic states. A clause was added to Article 25 of the Constitution which read: "The state shall endeavour to consolidate, warming of relations with Muslim countries and delimiting of relations with India." It was during Zia's regime that the foundation of close ties between Bangladesh and China was laid and co-operation accelerated in all aspects - political, economic and military.

Following recognition by the Chinese, the two countries moved rapidly to strengthen their ties and high level official visits between the two countries became a regular phenomena. In a joint communique in New York, the two countries consented to establish diplomatic relations as from 4 October 1975 and to exchange ambassadors, on the basis of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non interference in each other's internal affair, equality and Mutual Benefit.

Zia's visit to China in January 1977 unfolded a new era in Bangladesh's foreign policy, and provided an opportunity for the new Chinese leadership to establish personal rapport with the Bangladesh government at the highest level. On the Farakha issue with India, China fully supported Bangladesh. Bangladesh valued China's support for the causes of its national interest and security. On the other hand, Bangladesh's strong stand against India Soviet Union served China's interests. For geo-political and strategic reasons, Chinese influence in any South Asian countries was deemed to be detrimental to both Indian and Soviet interest in the region.

Foreign policy under H.M.Ershad did not significantly diverge from what was Zia-ur-Rahman's dispensation. Ershad went a step further than Ziaur Rahman in exploiting Islam. Ershad made his first pilgrimage to Beijing in November 1982 and was given a red-carpet reception as was his predecessor, Zia.

Following the 1971 liberation war, Bangladesh inherited a precarious economy. Its most urgent need was to secure foreign aid to revive her devastated economy. The realities of economic compulsions drove Bangladesh to establish closer relations with Western donors, the Islamic states and China. Over the years China has emerged as one of the most reliable economic partners of Bangladesh. A number of agreements were signed between the two countries in order to promote economic cooperation. A good

number of Chinese assigned projects have also been completed during this period. Among the projects, Bangladesh-China friendship Bridge is the largest so far funded by the Chinese. During the period 1975-90 total Chinese foreign aid commitment to Bangladesh was US \$176.216 and bilateral have also been taken up in association with China during this period.

Bangladesh is one of the eight Asian countries in which China maintains a military attachment. Presently, China is a major arm supplier to her. It is reported that about 400 officers of the Bangladesh Army are now in China and an equally large member are in Pakistan to secure training in sabotage and transborder operations.

Bangladesh being a small and weak country, almost wholly surrounded by India, she has to depend a lot on the donor countries for the continued supply of food, financial help and other forms of assistance. The United States plays an important role in the disbursement of aid to Bangladesh from the international agencies. Important among other countries from which she receives aid are Japan, Canada and Australia. China is primarily involved in trade and supply of arms to Bangladesh apart from other forms of assistance. In view of the natural calamities to which Bangladesh is subjected intermittently, acquisition of external assistance is essential. Here the gestures of goodwill and support from China, among other countries, have been quite valuable.

Notwithstanding the fact that these two countries have strengthened trade and supply of arms and other forms of aid between them, Bangladesh and China have yet to enter into any security pact and indications of an early move in this direction are not evident on the part of either country.

With the coming of a democratically elected government under Khaleda Zia there has been no basic change of Bangladesh attitude towards China. During her visit to

China in 1991, the Chinese Premier Li Peng assured her that China's important relationship with her country would not undergo any change. However, with regard to the Ganges water issue the Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen told the Bangladesh Press in February 1994 that Bangladesh had not officially asked for Chinese mediation and added, "I do not think it is appropriate for China to take up the Farakka issue and I believe this problem should be resolved between Bangladesh and India bilaterally."<sup>9</sup> This indicated lack of Chinese enthusiasm for internationalism of the dispute. It was a clear sign that better Sino-Indian relations may not necessarily endanger Sino-Bangladesh friendship.

It can be concluded from the discussion that relation between Bangladesh and China are placed in firm foundations and that the two are committed to promote their ties further for their mutual benefit. It is essentially the dictates of national interest that have over the years drawn the two closer to each other. For Bangladesh, besides its enormous economic needs, factors of political interest, particularly the imperatives of a regional balance have been paramount. And in all likelihood such factors are likely to prevail even in the changing international and regional scenario so that imperatives of the close ties of Bangladesh with China would remain in the foreseeable future. China for its part will be cautious enough not to antagonize India for its ties with Bangladesh. Nevertheless, obvious from the above, Beijing's relation with Dhaka already has a dynamics of its own and the two countries are likely to combine their efforts in developing it further and adjusting it to the changing international and regional situation.

The period under review was marked by growing Bangladesh-China relations and conflict and cooperation in the Indo-Bangladesh relations. The political change in

Bangladesh following the general elections in 1996 has replaced the conflict and cooperation by cooperation and realization in the Indo-Bangladesh relations.

Newly elected governments in both New Delhi and Dhaka have taken initiatives for better understanding and closer ties between the two countries. This relation has recently been improved to a great extent following an agreement on the Farakka issue and improvement of trade and commerce. The step taken by the new government headed by Sheikh Hasina to flush out Northeast insurgent groups operating from Bangladesh has been acknowledged by New Delhi as this region is strategically important from India's national security perspective.

Now it remains to be seen if whether the advent of goodwill relation between India and Bangladesh will effect the Bangladesh-China relation?



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