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**PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH: FROM  
CONFLICT TO COOPERATION**

**Dr. Moonis Ahmar**

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Number 19

March 2003

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**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies**  
**Dhaka**

**biiss papers**

Number 19, March 2003

**Published by**

Bangladesh Institute of International  
and Strategic Studies, Dhaka.

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**Price**

Taka 50.00/US\$4.00

**For correspondence please contact**

Publication Officer

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies

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Fax : 880-2-8312625

Email : [habib@biiss.org](mailto:habib@biiss.org)

Website : <http://www.biiss.org>

**Printed by**

Asiatic Civil Military Press

43/10 C, Swamibag, Dhaka-1100

Tel. : 7120428, 9554613, Fax : 880-2-9667359

E-mail : [asiatic@bangla.net](mailto:asiatic@bangla.net)



**BIISS PAPERS**  
**Number 19, March 2003**

**Pakistan and Bangladesh: from Conflict to  
Cooperation**

**Dr. Moonis Ahmar**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1-11</b>
Overcoming the Barriers	2
Post-1971 Situation	7
 <b>CHAPTER TWO : AREAS OF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL COOPERATION</b>	 <b>12-24</b>
Trade and Commercial Ties	13
Cultural and other Areas of Cooperation	20
 <b>CHAPTER THREE : AREAS OF POLITICAL CONFLICT AND COOPERATION</b>	 <b>25-38</b>
Areas of Political Conflict	26
Areas of Political Cooperation	34
 <b>CHAPTER FOUR : EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DIMENSIONS</b>	 <b>39-45</b>
External Dimensions	39
Internal Dimensions	43
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE : STRATEGIES FOR MEANINGFUL TIES</b>	 <b>46-59</b>
President Pervez Musharraf's Visit to Bangladesh	46
Short Term Strategies	56
Long-term Strategies	57

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Geography plays a significant role in formulating relations between states. In an era of globalization and information technology, major requirements for a meaningful interaction at the official and non-official levels also include political will, determination and commonality of interests. Pakistan-Bangladesh relations could be defined in the dichotomy of geographical reality and various common and divisive issues.

Pakistan and Bangladesh are separated by 1,000 miles of distance but the two countries, despite being distant neighbors, also share numerous interests and objectives not only because of common history for around quarter of a century but also in religious, economic, commercial, political and social areas. After the separation of East Pakistan on December 16, 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign state, relations between Dhaka and Islamabad have passed through various phases of conflict and cooperation. The unity of the two wings of Pakistan from August 14, 1947 until December 16, 1971, despite geographical, cultural and other areas of contradictions, seemed remarkable. The emergence of Bangladesh as a result of the events of 1971 and a long history of unjust and bitter relations between the two wings determined the future basis of interaction between Pakistan and the new state of Bangladesh. It is also remarkable that despite the bitterness of the past, both Dhaka and Islamabad agreed to unfold the process of normalization of their relations in the aftermath of their mutual recognition on February 22, 1974.

In the world of real politics there are no permanent adversaries or friends, but only interests. From December 16, 1971 till February 22, 1974, an element of acute hostility had overshadowed Dhaka-Islamabad relations. Yet, even after the granting of mutual recognition, relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh remained cool and under the atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion. Pakistan had to reconcile with the reality of the dismemberment of "Jinnah's Pakistan" and Bangladesh had to cope with the legacy of Pakistani military's operation against the liberation movement of the country. While both realities seemed adequate to prevent any future reconciliation between Pakistan and Bangladesh, pragmatism from both sides demanded ushering a new era of relations while learning lessons from past happenings. It was the feeling of moving away from the bitterness of the past and to establish a new era of friendship, which unleashed the process of normalization in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations. Pakistan President Pervez



Musharraf in his visit to Bangladesh from July 29-31, 2002 also emphasized on ushering a new era of friendship between the two countries and pointed out that the time of BD-Pak reconciliation has arrived.

Ironically, even after 31 years of the emergence of Bangladesh, relations between Dhaka and Islamabad are not conflict free. There still exist "historical" and "psychological" hangovers discouraging close friendly relations between the two countries. Neither meaningful trade ties (amidst the signing of MOU on forming the BD-Pak Business Council on the occasion of President Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh) nor meaningful people to people interaction seem to take an upward trend in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations. In this scenario, pessimistic-optimistic nature of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations provides an opportunity for rethinking the entire gamut of these relations and seek an alternate but a viable approach to institutionalize the process of cooperation.

This paper aims to examine the dynamics of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations in the context of four variables.

1. Historical and psychological barriers.
2. Prospects in trade relations and people to people contacts.
3. External and internal dimensions.
4. Strategies for meaningful ties.

Following questions will be examined and responded to in this paper.

1. What are the pending issues in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations and how these could be resolved?
2. Why people to people interaction could not be strengthened and how the civil societies of the two countries could come forward in this regard?
3. How the areas of convergence could neutralize the areas of divergence in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations?
4. To what extent, the visit of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has helped the process of BD-Pak reconciliation?
5. What lessons could be learned from negative factors in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations and how conflict free relations between the two countries could be established?

## **I. Overcoming the Barriers**

The transition of Pak-BD relations from animosity to gradual normalization is still an on-going process. Since January 1976, when diplomatic missions of the two countries assumed their responsibilities till today, there have been



several ups and downs in Pak-BD relations. Some of these ups and downs were the outcome of past bitterness and unpleasantness, particularly as a sequel to the events of 1971, while others were primarily the result of bureaucratic obstacles in implementing decisions for greater cooperation made from time to time by different governments of the two countries. Still, the desire among the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh to begin a fresh journey of friendship and cooperation remained alive. As noted by a former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh,

Bangladesh and Pakistan were bound by many common ties rooted in a shared history and culture, which was overshadowed but not obliterated by the tragic happenings of 1971. The Bangladesh role in the creation of Pakistan was also a historical fact. The original "Lahore Pakistan Resolution" was moved by Mr. Abdul Kasem Fazlul Huq, a Bengali. Muslim leader, and of the Muslim majority provinces of the British India, Bengal was the only province where the Muslim League was voted to power, thus providing the Muslim League with a political power base.<sup>1</sup>

While common past of the two countries stretching over a period of around quarter of a century was marred with conflicts over distribution of resources, language issue, military's involvement in politics and a great sense of deprivation among the majority population of Pakistan living in the eastern wing, two important facts should be taken into account. First, the role played by the people of East Bengal in Pakistan movement was quite significant. The Muslims of Bengal had willingly participated in Pakistan Movement and played a significant role in the creation of a new Muslim State. G. W. Choudhury, a renowned political scientist and former Communications Minister during the regime of Yahya Khan, points out the fact that, "of all the provinces which made Pakistan, it was Bengal which gave the most solid support to Jinnah in his struggle for the establishment of a separate Muslim state in the subcontinent. Yet within a very short period, the Bengalees found themselves in an unfortunate situation, which made them have second thoughts about the creation of a state in which they had joined with the Muslims of other parts of the subcontinent in the north, separated by a thousand miles of foreign territory. Although, they were the majority group in Pakistan, they suffered from a deep-rooted fear of domination by the minority groups of West Pakistan."<sup>2</sup> They

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Shamsul Huq, *Bangladesh in International Politics The Dilemmas of the Weak States* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1993), p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1998), p. 5

expected fair and just treatment from people at the helm of affairs after the creation of Pakistan but they were utterly disappointed because of policies formulated and implemented by the ruling elite from West Pakistan. That elite managed to control the instruments of power and by the time the Bengali sense of deprivation was addressed in late 1960s, it was too late. A sense of frustration loomed large among the people of East Pakistan because of insecurity and fear prevailing among them that the over centralized state structure imposed by the West would undermine the society and culture of the East.

A former Pakistani civil servant who was posted in the then East Pakistan from 1956-1962 and again in May 1971 has given an authentic picture of an unequal East-West Pakistan relationship resulting into a sense of deprivation among the Bengali population of East Pakistan. According to him:

The West-dominated ruling class of early Pakistan never really tried to understand the Bengali point of view. From the inception of Pakistan, it developed a self-righteous state of mind, which ignored the objective political realities of East Pakistan. The Pakistani establishment, which was a conglomerate of the Punjab political leadership, the old League leadership of NWFP, migrant League leaders of Muslim minority provinces in India, and the senior Punjabi and Mohajir civil servants, passionately believed in a strong central government, that Urdu as a symbol of unity and Islamic ideology should be the only state language of the country and that the opposition groups in East Pakistan were generally subversive, influenced and instigated by the Hindus and communists and that the defense of East Pakistan depended on the strength of the armed forces in West Pakistan. These narrow premises, ad others in a similar vein, coupled with a sense of racial and cultural superiority in the West Pakistani elite, prevented the evolution of a dynamic and equal relationship between the two Wings. The dominant ruling class suffered from a siege mentality. Any demand of East Pakistan, which deviated from the dogma, was regarded as a conspiracy and a threat to Islamic ideology and the integrity of the country.<sup>3</sup>

The West Pakistani elite, controlling most of the instruments of power never tried to understand the undercurrents of dissatisfaction among the Bengali population of the then East Pakistan and undermined the importance of democracy which could have given a genuine sense of participation to them.

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<sup>3</sup> Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan The Rise and Realization of Bengali Muslim Nationalism* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2001), p. 16. Also see, Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (Dhaka: the University Press Limited, 1994).



Second, the process of national integration which should have been a top priority of governments in power since August 14, 1947 because of geographical and cultural contradictions between the two wings of Pakistan could not be properly unleashed. Otherwise, had the leadership of Pakistan after independence followed democratic path and formulated policies on the basis of social justice and political wisdom, the expectations of the people of East Pakistan would not have encountered the violent events of 1971. On this account, if a relationship is based on exploitation and undermining the legitimate rights of people, the outcome cannot be conducive and pleasant. There are very few examples in modern history where people of a particular region who participated in movement for a separate homeland with other groups from diverse regions gave second thoughts to their relationship with that state and struggled to seek independence. Only the disintegration of Pakistan could be cited as such an example.

Even after more than three decades of the emergence of Bangladesh, one can see bitterness and animosity between the two countries. It is because of past hangovers that Pakistan and Bangladesh have not been able to forge meaningful economic, political and cultural ties. Time is a great healer and one can hope that the future generations of Bangladesh and Pakistan will not carry the historical baggage and will forge a healthy and respectable relationship. But, at the present, the legacy of the past is still a factor in BD-Pak relations. A security and defence analyst of Bangladesh has examined the shadows of past as an impediment to better Pak-BD relations in the following words:

A historical bitterness still pervades the minds of the people in both the countries. For Bangladesh the bitterness is that of politico-economic exploitation and domination of West Pakistan in erstwhile Pakistan as well as Pakistani atrocities during the independence war. For Pakistan the bitterness exists because of the humiliating defeat in the war of 1971. Although much of the agonizing memory of the cataclysmic event has subsided the bitterness lingers. It gets fueled on various occasions like 21<sup>st</sup> February Martyrs Day, Independence Day, the Martyr Intellectual Day and the Victory Day, all of which are officially celebrated. These are both official and unofficial arrangements for the preservation of the ideals and values of independence war which all have anti-Pakistan undertone. The contemporary art, literature, sculpture and painting are much colored with the harrowing tales of atrocities carried out by the Pakistanis. Every year the fateful 25<sup>th</sup> March of 1971 is recalled with renewed emotion. The National Museum and archives have exhibits and records that keep these

emotions alive. Even the new generation grows up with information and knowledge contained in textbooks or contemporary history that easily generate bitter feelings for Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

When the symbols of liberation movement of Bangladesh have been institutionalized reminding people again and again of the bitter past, particularly the events of 1971, what can be done to create goodwill and harmony, particularly among the people of Bangladesh and Pakistan for moving ahead despite past bitterness? There is no short cut to deal with historical hangovers and barriers but four important steps, if taken by the governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh, can certainly help in making things better as far as removing past hangovers and improving future prospects of relations between the two countries are concerned.

First, going beyond emotions and rhetoric, the two governments may wish to consider efforts to dissuade people from exploiting the bitter events of 1971 for accomplishing their agenda. But, in that process, the "humanitarian aspect" of 1971 tragedy should not be undermined. Since millions of innocent people had suffered because of military operation and subsequent violent events, the government of Pakistan needs to come out openly against the atrocities, which were committed on civilians during the military operation. Probably, such a gesture by Islamabad will help the healing process and create a better understanding, particularly in the new generation for close relations with Pakistan. Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has taken a big step by courageously regretting the bitterness of the past and has appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forget such unpleasant events and move towards a better future. The initiative taken by the civil society groups of Pakistan to apologize to the people of Bangladesh for military action conducted during March-December 1971 is an important development because such a step will pave the way for a categorical official condemnation of military atrocities committed in the then East Pakistan. The future leaders of Bangladesh and Pakistan, particularly those representing the civil societies of the two countries, can sustain the process of reconciliation by allowing more people to people interaction and promoting viable relations at various levels.

Second, the government of Pakistan needs to encourage non-governmental organizations to interact with their Bangladeshi counterparts in different areas, particularly in culture, human development, education and media so that a better image of Pakistan is created so that the bitter memories of 1971 which still impede meaningful ties between Dhaka and Islamabad are gradually replaced

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<sup>4</sup> M. Abdul Hafiz, "Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: Still Developing?" *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 6. No. 3, 1985, pp. 366-67.



with mutual goodwill and harmony. There are so many areas where there exists tremendous potential and scope for better ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan and with a substantial involvement of NGOs much can be done to build bridges between the two brotherly Muslim countries. Third, the government of Bangladesh, with the support of non-governmental organizations, need to take positive measures to create and sustain an environment of goodwill and cooperation between the peoples of the two countries. There is a need to go beyond emotions and discourage attempts to malign each other.

True, no one can justify the unfortunate acts on the part of Pakistan army to deal with the issues emerging after the elections of December 1970 yet it is time a cool and an objective approach is followed to depict the tragedy of 1971 and to learn lessons from such unfortunate events. Atrocities were not only committed by the Pakistani Army but also by the pro-Pakistani elements. Similarly, there is no scope of undermining the violation of human rights during 1971 and the concerned should possess moral courage to accept the guilt of injustices and discrimination done to the Bengalees of the then East Pakistan. Finally, both the governments should promote maximum interaction between the post-1971 generation of Pakistan and Bangladesh because such an approach will help minimize mistrust and suspicions particularly among those who did not experience the tragic events of 1971 but are exposed to partly subjective information on such events. Interaction among the students through meaningful exchange programmes at the governmental level and also at the non-governmental level can also help remove psychological barriers, which still block close relations between Dhaka and Islamabad. By giving scholarships and fellowships to the students the two sides can mend fences and move towards augmenting the process of reconciliation.

## II. Post-1971 Situation

Bitterness and hostility between Dhaka and Islamabad after December 16, 1971 made the process of reconciliation between the two countries difficult. For Pakistanis, the shock of separation was so severe that for many of them it was unthinkable to recognize Bangladesh as a sovereign state. The movement launched by some political elements against recognizing Bangladesh also restrained Mr. Bhutto to take a decision in this regard. In 1973, the Pakistan National Assembly in its resolution had authorized the government to recognize Bangladesh but Mr. Bhutto waited for some suitable opportunity to make that decision. For Pakistan, the issue of holding war crimes against 195 Pakistani PoWs by Bangladesh was also linked to recognition. Without recognition, Bangladesh was not willing to talk on that issue and other related matters



leading to normalization of relations between the two countries. The holding of the Islamic summit in Lahore in February 1974 provided an opportunity for the Pakistan Government to offer recognition to Bangladesh because Dhaka was insisting that without being recognized by Islamabad it would not attend that summit. As a result of mediation carried by the members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Pakistan recognized Bangladesh on February 22, 1974 and next day, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman arrived in Lahore to attend the OIC summit.

Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh was considered as a major breakthrough in overcoming the legacy of 1971 war and starting the process of reconciliation between the two Muslim countries. Excluding a small minority, majority of Pakistanis welcomed their government's decision to recognize Bangladesh as a first step to mend fences with Dhaka. According to a Pakistani writer,

In fact, Pakistan could not have normalized its relations with Bangladesh without recognizing it. We had tried to do that for the last two years. We tried to arrange for a meeting between Prime Ministers Bhutto and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman[sic] prior to the recognition. But that did not come through. Other countries too had tried hard to bring about reconciliation between Pakistan and Bangladesh without recognition as the pre-condition. Those countries included Indonesia, Malaysia, several of the Arab states, including Egypt and some of the big powers. But they too could not make much headway. After 26 months, Pakistan has chosen to end the hiatus by recognizing Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup>

A warm welcome was given when the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman arrived in Lahore on February 23. At the reception given to the delegates of the OIC in Lahore, the warmth and pleasantness<sup>6</sup> expressed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Z.A. Bhutto to each other raised expectations of the beginning of a new era in BD-Pak relations and the hope that charges against

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<sup>5</sup> Sultan Ahmed, "Bhutto's bold decision to speed up detente," *Morning News* (Karachi), February 26, 1974.

<sup>6</sup> The fact that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came to Pakistan, held Mr. Bhutto in a fraternal embrace, took part in the deliberations of the Islamic summit and mixed and chatted freely with the people at the Shalimar Gardens shows that the gulf of misunderstanding and distrust that the vested interests had created had been bridged. A new feeling of brotherhood had been generated both in Pakistan and Bangladesh about each other. Newspapers in Bangladesh welcomed Pakistan's step to recognize their country and congratulated Mr. Bhutto on his courageous stand. See, Politicus, "A historic decision," *The Pakistan Times* (Lahore) February 27, 2002.

195 Pakistani PoWs would be dropped by Dhaka. Therefore, it was not wrong to hold by the Pakistanis that, "the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan should provide a starting point to normalize our relations with that country on the basis of reciprocity, equality and mutual goodwill. The degree of interdependence that had been achieved through nearly 25 years of living together can serve as a sound basis for the early resumption of trade and economic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan."<sup>7</sup>

Once historical and psychological barriers which have obstructed better relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh for so long are removed as a result of positive role played by the governments and NGOs of the two sides, other irritants, along with external factors, cannot stop the process of reconciliation and affinity between the two countries. As rightly said, "it took her (Bangladesh) less than three years to come to an amity with her erstwhile persecutor. Unofficial relationship started even earlier in the form of small-scale trade through third countries. Given the background, the speed and urgency marking the growth of this relationship have few parallels in contemporary history. The problems were enormous, but virtually nothing stood on the way."<sup>8</sup> In February 1974 when Bangladesh and Pakistan recognized each other and agreed to "forget and forgive" for the unfortunate events of 1971, it was expected that through purposeful dialogue Dhaka and Islamabad would resolve pending issues of stranded Pakistanis and division of assets and liabilities. By April 1974, the government of Bangladesh had agreed not to go for the trial of 195 Pakistani Prisoners of War who were held responsible for committing unprecedented atrocities against the people of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) during nine month military operation.<sup>9</sup>

At the signing ceremony of the tripartite agreement (India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) in Delhi on April 9, 1974, Pakistan Minister of State for Defense and Foreign Affairs, Mr. Aziz Ahmed, paid glowing tributes to the Prime Ministers of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh for statesmanship like approach in making this possible. He said the biggest contribution was made by Sheikh Mujibur

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<sup>7</sup> Rafique Jabir, "Trading with BD under the changed conditions," *Morning News* (Karachi), March 17, 1974.

<sup>8</sup> M. Abdul Hafiz, *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>9</sup> In April 1973, the government of India and Bangladesh put forward a proposal to resolve certain issues. According to that proposal, India would return the Pakistani POWs, Pakistan would repatriate the interned Bengalees, and Bangladesh would send to Pakistan more than 200,000 Urdu-speaking Biharis who had opted for citizenship in Pakistan. Bangladesh would maintain the right to bring almost 200 Pakistani officers and enlisted men to trial for war crimes. See Wayne Wilcon, *The Emergence of Bangladesh* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1973), pp. 60-61.



Rahman because its (agreement) conclusion depended on how far he was prepared to go. Sheikh Mujib displayed a far-sighted and magnanimous approach, which led to the successful and constructive conclusion of the tripartite talks.<sup>10</sup> Some critics in Pakistan objected to the expression of regrets to the military operation of March-December 1971 but by and large that agreement was welcomed. The release of 195 Pakistani PoWs who were to face trial in Bangladesh on the alleged war crimes removed another stumbling block in BD-Pak normalization in relations. A Pakistani newspaper rejected the criticism against the April 1974 tripartite agreements and argued that, "the political malcontents here might strike a discordant role and say that in expressing deep regrets over the excesses of the PoWs, the leader of Pakistan delegation to the Delhi parleys confessed a guilt or performed an act of penance, but the fact is that Mr. Aziz Ahmed only reiterated a position taken publicly by his country. The Prime Minister himself has observed some time ago that Pakistan owed to its conscience to acknowledge old mistakes and blunders. He even indicated that when he visits Bangladesh he would appeal to the people there to forgive and forget. That way alone can old wounds be healed and a new leaf turned in our history."<sup>11</sup>

However, a valuable opportunity to resolve contentious issues between the two countries was lost in June 1974 when Prime Minister Bhutto visited Bangladesh. No breakthrough was achieved in Mujib-Bhutto talks. The two countries, despite recognizing each other had not established diplomatic relations until January 1976. It proved that despite the unfolding of positive events after the recognition to each other and Mujib's visit to Lahore on the occasion of second Islamic summit in February 1974, nothing substantial happened which could have brought the second and third largest Muslim countries closer. In January 1975, Prime Minister Bhutto repeated his offer for a joint commission to sort out all issues between the two countries. Such an offer was not responded by Dhaka. The Bangladeshi side wanted the settlement of the pending issues like division of assets and liabilities and the return of remaining stranded Pakistanis essential for full normalization of relations with Islamabad.

It was only after President Ziaur Rahman's visit to Pakistan in December 1977, which led to some improvement in Dhaka-Islamabad relations. His visit ended a long period of stalemate in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations and the two countries decided to move from conflict to cooperation. While the pending issues remained on the agenda, these did not impede breakthrough in promoting trade, commercial and cultural relations between the two countries. Still

<sup>10</sup> See, "Tripartite accord signed in Delhi: Aziz praises Mujib," *Dawn* (Karachi), April 10, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> *The Pakistan Times* (Lahore), April 11, 1974.

historical and psychological barriers, which caused a major obstacle in bringing the two countries closer, remained in force. Perhaps, the opportunity, which existed after President Ziaur Rahman visit to Pakistan was not properly utilized and no serious effort was made to structure relations of the two countries in such a manner that bitterness of the past, could be minimized. President Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh has given another opportunity to better BD-Pak ties and it is yet to be seen to what extent the two sides are able to follow up to the deliberations of that visit and implement the agreements signed on that occasion.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AREAS OF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL COOPERATION

Amidst the feelings overshadowed by the events of 1971, it has been an uphill task for Bangladesh and Pakistan to overcome the unpleasantness of the past and move towards a better future. But the question is: how one should proceed to achieve that objective? As rightly said by M. Abdul Hafiz that, "the growth of relations between former adversaries is nothing new and often forms a part of real politik. There are instances of past enemies entering into excellent bilateral understanding and times forging multilateral cooperation found in today's Europe."<sup>12</sup> Until the fall of Mujib's regime in 1975, a very limited cooperative relationship existed between Bangladesh and Pakistan because of numerous socio, economic and political problems and disputes. After Mr. Bhutto's visit to Dhaka in June 1974, Bangladesh kept on reminding Pakistan about the need to settle the issues of division of assets and the repatriation of remaining stranded Pakistanis. But no progress was made as Islamabad insisted that given the complicated nature of these issues, it cannot concede to the demands of Bangladesh right away.

In fact, Pakistan became the first country to accord recognition to the regime assuming power after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. From August 15 to the first week of November 1975, internal crises rocked Bangladesh thus preventing any concrete progress in BD-Pak relations. However, with the leadership of Major General Ziaur Rahman, the lack of warmth in relations between the two countries was replaced with a semblance of cordiality when diplomatic relations were established and agreements signed to initiate the process of cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

Wide prospects of cooperation between Dhaka and Islamabad have existed since the beginning, particularly in the areas of trade and commerce, education, culture and science and technology. While political factor cannot be undermined in examining prospects of meaningful cooperation between Bangladesh and Pakistan, there exists some will and determination among the people of the two countries to establish mutually beneficial relations. As a policy of gesture, Pakistan presented to Bangladesh a Boeing 707 and 28 railway coaches, which were imported earlier for East Pakistan railways, were handed over to

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>13</sup> Emajuddin Ahamed, *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh A small state's imperative* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1989), p. 52.



Bangladesh. Moreover, Bangladesh gifted tea to Pakistan and the latter donated clothes to the flood victims of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's former High Commissioner to Pakistan Mr. C. M. Shafi Sami, in his address to the audience at the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Karachi vividly explained the dynamics of Pak-BD relations as:

Bangladesh and Pakistan share manifold affinities characterized by the age-old and traditional bonds of religion and history. These ties, which reflect the earnest desire of the peoples of two fraternal countries, have grown in intensity and depth over the years. The two countries have an identity of perception and have extended valuable support to each other in various international forums. Both the countries have a complete convergence of views on many regional and international issues.<sup>14</sup>

On the question of trade prospects between the two countries, the High Commissioner went on to say that, "there exists a vast opportunity for increasing our exports to Pakistan, especially raw jute, jute goods and tea. Pakistan may buy all her raw jute requirements from Bangladesh to feed its 17 existing jute mills. There is potential for increasing import of jute goods into Pakistan. Pakistan has developed the capability of manufacturing sugar plants and machinery and is willing to offer suitable terms of financing. There is a state credit of U.S \$ 50 million on soft terms as well as a U.S. \$ 50 million suppliers credit for purchase of container vessels, clinker factories and a sugar plant."<sup>15</sup> Huge prospects of cooperation between Bangladesh and Pakistan as envisaged by High Commissioner Shafi Sami exist but the question is why no upward trend has been seen not only in trade ties, but also in other areas of cooperation? Is it because of geographical distance or the legacy of 1971, which tend to impede progress in relations between the two countries? Or the domestic and external dynamics of the two countries play an important role in preventing sound progress in BD-Pak relations?

## I. Trade and Commercial Ties

In order to build relations based on cooperative security and mutual benefits, the best strategy is to develop trade and commercial ties so that mistrust and suspicion about each other could be removed. It is through economic stakes that even the two adversaries can be persuaded to move from the politics of conflict to cooperation. As far as Bangladesh and Pakistan are

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<sup>14</sup> C. M. Shafi Sami, "Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations in the changing international environment" *Pakistan Horizon* (Karachi) Vol. 44, No. 4, October 1991, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

concerned, the case is little different because the two countries after the tragic events of 1971 found themselves in a difficult situation. The scars of atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army during its nine-month operation prevented any immediate resumption of relations, including trade and commerce. It was only after the setting up of diplomatic missions in Dhaka and Islamabad that the way was paved for progress in various areas of cooperation. There existed wide prospects for trade relations between the two countries based on the complementary nature of the economies of former East and West Pakistan but political factors impeded such prospects to transform into reality.

Till 1971, the inter-wing trade was substantial and the businessmen from both sides knew each other quite well. During 1969-1970, the total exports from West Pakistan to East Pakistan were Rs. 165.22 crores, almost equal to its overseas exports, while imports from East Pakistan were estimated at Rs. 92.34 crores. During the entire Third Plan period (1965-1970) West Pakistan exported goods worth Rs. 681.90 crores to East Pakistan as against imports worth Rs. 387.02 crores from that wing. The major export items from West Pakistan included cotton (Rs. 67 crores), oil seeds (Rs. 60 crores), tobacco, rice (Rs. 90 crores). Among the manufactures exported during the Third Plan period were cotton fabrics worth Rs. 106 crores, cotton yarn and thread Rs. 36 crores, machinery Rs. 30 crores, drugs and medicines Rs. 29 crores, manufactured Tobacco Rs. 17 crores and paper and board Rs. 10 crores. The major items of imports from East Pakistan were tea Rs. 126 crores, jute goods Rs. 73 crores, paper and paper boards Rs. 46 crores, matches Rs. 18 crores, leather Rs. 13 crores and spices Rs. 7 crores.<sup>16</sup> The economies of the two wings of Pakistan were complementary in nature and the pattern of trade between the two indicated that their basic requirements were met.

After the breakup of Pakistan in December 1971, the resumption of trade relations between Dhaka and Islamabad had to be done according to the new geo-political realities. Costs of imports and exports had to be paid in foreign exchange and not in local currency. The issues of tariff and duties in trade relations between the two countries also had to be kept in mind. BD-Pak trade at the official level began to take place from 1976 and by 1978, the turnover of trade was Rs. 75 crores. Large number of items, which were exchanged before 1971, began to be traded again.<sup>17</sup> The two countries had to bear in mind the fact that as a result of separation, their trade relations had to be carried out on the

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<sup>16</sup> Rafiq Jabir, "Trading with BD under the changed conditions," *Morning News* (Karachi) March 17, 1974.

<sup>17</sup> "Pakistan-BD cooperation," *The Pakistan Times* (Rawalpindi), July 23, 1979.



basis of duty, tariff and quota. Earlier, no such restrictions existed in trade between the two wings of Pakistan.

The first trade agreement between Bangladesh and Pakistan was signed in April 1976 and through that agreement a joint committee was formed in order to identify and expand trade areas between the two countries. The first meeting of joint committee was held in December 1977 in Dhaka. The major items exported from Bangladesh to Pakistan were mainly in private sector, which included tea, raw jute, jute goods and betel leaves. Other exportable items from Bangladesh to Pakistan were paper and paper products, newsprint, hardboard, wires and chemicals. Pakistan's exports to Bangladesh included textile fibers, textile yarn, tobacco, oil seeds, fruits, chemical compound, iron and vegetable oil.<sup>18</sup> During the visit of Bangladesh Commerce Minister Saifur Rahman to Pakistan in July 1979, both countries agreed to set up a Joint Ministerial Commission so as to provide an institutional framework for expanded technical and economic cooperation between the two countries. Commenting on the formation of that Commission, a Pakistani Daily stated that, "the Joint Ministerial Commission should go a long way in paving way for getting the two economies as closely interdependent as they were before. A real breakthrough in mutual trade can be achieved only when both sides develop mutually beneficial trade relations and allow the private sector to invest in different sectors of economy."<sup>19</sup> The formation of Bangladesh-Pakistan Business Council by the Bangladesh Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry as a result of President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Dhaka and can go a long way in building meaningful trade relations resulting into more people to people contacts.

The two countries have already signed shipping, air and trade protocols. Pakistan is importing raw jute and jute goods, timber, tea, spices, betel leaf, newsprint and bamboos from Bangladesh and return it is exporting cotton, cotton yarn, edible oil, oil seeds, railway coaches etc. However, inadequate shipping facilities and higher freight rates have been the major snags as far as the expansion of bilateral trade is concerned. Higher frequency of sailings, improved timings, reduced freight and advance as movement of the schedule should help trade subsequently.<sup>20</sup> The Joint Ministerial Commission agreement was also aimed to exchange matters relating to their economies, review progress

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<sup>18</sup> Hafiz, *op.cit.*, p. 365. In July 1978 both Bangladesh and Pakistan signed a trade agreement in which Pakistan agreed to buy tea, jute and jute products etc. Dhaka agreed to buy cotton and clothes. See, Syed Serajul Islam, "Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: From Conflict to Cooperation" in Emajuddin Ahamed, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> See, editorial, "Pakistan-Bangladesh Joint ventures," *Morning News* (Karachi) July 26, 1979.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*,

of economic cooperation and suggest measures to strengthen it and formulate proposals for coordinated efforts in furthering economic interests of both the countries on mutually beneficial basis. Some of the possible areas of cooperation identified under that commission were horticulture, poultry, cultivation of cotton and wheat, rural development, railways, telegraph and telephone and shipping.<sup>21</sup> Two working groups, one on trade and shipping and the other on economic and technical cooperation were established to formulate proposals for enhancing the level of mutual collaboration. Presently, there is no direct cargo shipping service between Bangladesh and Pakistan and trade is only taking place through Colombo or Singapore. If direct shipping links are established between the ports of Chittagong and Karachi, the quantum of BD-Pak trade could maximize.

Gradually trade relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan picked up whereas, political factors, which had prevented meaningful economic relations between the two countries, were not allowed to overshadow the pace of such ties. From 1976 until early 1990s, Pak-BD trade and commercial relations prospered at a modest rate. At least during that period, there existed some political will from both sides to keep the momentum of cooperation going despite past hangovers. But later on the lack of interest and low priority given at the official level for BD-Pak relations led to stalemate and downward trend particularly in the arena of trade.

But there were incidents that showed that political will and gestures can go a long way in promoting economic interactions. Professor Muhammad Shamsul Huq, former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh narrated such an incident. During Ziaur Rahman's visit to Pakistan in December 1977 when he requested Pakistan's Chief Martial Law Administrator, General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq that his country needed 50,000 bales of cotton on an urgent basis, the latter replied that, "this year our small exportable surplus in cotton is already committed. But Bangladesh comes first and your need will be met. During the formal talks, General Zia himself mentioned our request for cotton and Mr. Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the then member of General Zia's Council of Advisers incharge of Finance and Planning lent his support to our request and pointed out that the textile mills were set up in erstwhile East Pakistan on the assumption that raw cotton would be supplied from West Pakistan as raw jute from East Pakistan would feed the jute mills in West Pakistan, thus, underlying the economic complementarity of the two wings of erstwhile Pakistan."<sup>22</sup> General Zia's keen interest to promote trade and commercial ties with Bangladesh could also be verified from an interview, which he gave to a journalist from

<sup>21</sup> "Pak-BD Joint Economic Commission set up," *Morning News* (Karachi), July 22, 1979.

<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Shamsul Haq, *op.cit.*, p. 153.



Bangladesh. He said in his interview that, "Pakistan has been buying more than two million pounds of tea from Bangladesh. Before 1971, trade between the two wings of Pakistan was U.S. \$ 500 million. But after 1971 trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan came down to one-fifth. The situation needs improvement."<sup>23</sup> During 1989, Pakistan was Bangladesh's second largest trading partner after the United States. The volume of Bangladesh's exports to Pakistan in 1989-90 amounted to U.S. \$ 36.99 million and imports U.S. \$ 22 million, showing a favorable balance towards Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> It was reported at the end of the visit of Pakistan's Minister of State for Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Development, Mr. Ihsanul Haq Piracha that the two countries for the first time had agreed to expand and diversify bilateral trade relations. According to the agreement signed by the Pakistan Minister of State for Finance and the Commerce Minister of Bangladesh, Mr. M. A. Sattar that long term arrangements between the two countries, especially in the field of jute, tea and cotton were agreed upon. Bangladesh agreed to import a sizeable volume of cotton and Pakistan, jute. The two countries also decided to embark on joint ventures in medium and large-scale industrial sectors and extend mutual cooperation in other economic and technical endeavors.<sup>25</sup>

At the third meeting of Pak-BD Joint Economic Commission, which concluded in Dhaka on August 1, 1989 both sides, agreed to widen and diversify the existing bilateral trade and economic relations between the two countries. A joint press release issued at the end of talks said that both sides had expressed their satisfaction over the implementation of the special trading agreement concluded between Trading Corporations of Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1986.<sup>26</sup> In July 1988, Pakistan Federal Minister for Commerce, Finance, Planning and Development Dr. Mehabubul Haq visited Bangladesh. In an interview with *The Bangladesh Observer* he said that, "his country was ready to extend all possible assistance to Bangladesh so that it achieves self-reliance in the manufacture of engineering goods. Bangladesh had the potential to manufacture buses and trucks to meet its own requirements. India has nothing to worry about the expansion of trade between Pakistan and Bangladesh because we in Pakistan are

<sup>23</sup> Syed Zillur Rahman, "Dhaka-Islamabad Trade Relations will grow," *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka) August 5, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Shafi, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Syed Zillur Rahman, *ibid.*,

<sup>26</sup> See news item, Pakistan, BD for trade ties," *Dawn* (Karachi) August 2, 1989.



also keen to expand our trade and economic cooperation with India and other SAARC nations.”<sup>27</sup> The momentum built in Pak-BD trade and commercial ties in late 1970s and 1980s could however not be maintained in the 1990s because of two reasons: first, the emergence of garment products as the biggest exports of Bangladesh, particularly to the Western countries; and second, expansion of BD-Indian trade. Somehow, Pakistan, which was Bangladesh’s second largest trading partner before 1990s could not take measures to broaden its trade relations with Dhaka. As a result, the volume of trade between the two countries remained the same but could not be increased as in case of Bangladesh’s trade with India and Western countries. Moreover, political instability in Pakistan resulting in dismissal of four governments from 1990 to 1999 also made it difficult for Islamabad to give priority of its relations with Dhaka. Priorities of Pakistan in the arena of foreign policy changed as it got engaged in Central Asia, Middle East, Afghanistan and in the Kashmir conflict.

During 1990s exchange of visits between Bangladesh and Pakistan to promote trade and commercial relations took place but the two sides could not implement most of the decisions, which were taken from time to time. For instance, in a meeting with the visiting Commerce Minister of Bangladesh, Mr. M. K. Anwar, Pakistan President Mr. Ghulam Ishaq Khan in November 1991 stressed the need for balanced trade between the two countries. He laid emphasis on the need for reinforcing Pak-BD relations and pointed out that the joint economic commission could play a significant role in this connection.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Pakistan Federal Minister for Production, Mr. Islam Nabi and Bangladesh High Commissioner in Pakistan, Anwar Hashim in a meeting held in Islamabad in January 1992 identified new avenues of economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. The Minister pointed out that Pakistan could export a large range of light and heavy engineering goods, such as tractors, buses, road rollers, concrete-mixers, cars, motor cycles, cranes, construction machineries, sugar, cement and asphalt plants, transmission towers etc to Bangladesh at competitive prices. The Bangladesh High Commissioner hoped that economic ties between the two countries would be further strengthened in the coming days and in the private sector.<sup>29</sup> In May 1998, Bangladesh and Pakistan signed an agreement to take measures to control the recent declining trend of two-way trade and work for its balanced growth. After reviewing the status of bilateral trade and investment, the two sides also agreed to increase exchange of private sector trade delegations, participation in trade fairs and exhibitions in respective countries. They also agreed to revive the

<sup>27</sup> “Pindi to help develop engineering sector,” *The Bangladesh Observer*, July 27, 1988. In that visit, Dr. Mehbubul Haq in his talks with Bangladesh Minister for Planning Air Vice-Marshal (Retd) A. K. Khandaker offered U.S. \$50 million state credit on easy terms for procuring machinery and equipment including railway coaches, buses and road rollers. *The Bangladesh Observer*, July 23, 1988.

<sup>28</sup> “Dhaka-Pindi balanced trade stressed,” *The Bangladesh Observer*, November 5, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> “Pakistan for trade cooperation with Bangladesh,” *Dawn*, January 29, 1992.

Bangladesh-Pakistan Economic Cooperation Committee between the two national Chambers of Commerce. The two sides also agreed to set up joint venture projects in Bangladesh on textiles, transport equipment and 10-20 megawatt power plants. The Pakistan side offered suppliers credit for the sugar mills, cement and clinker factories. They also shared interest to set up cement and engineering goods industries. Islamabad also agreed to increase the import of tea, jute, jute goods and other agro-products from Dhaka.<sup>30</sup>

Currently, Pakistan-Bangladesh trade is around \$130 million a year. In 2000-2001 fiscal year, Bangladesh imported goods from Pakistan amounting to \$90.53 million against exports of \$30.2 million. Therefore, the trade gap between the two countries stands at \$63.27 million. In 1996, trade imbalance between Pakistan and Bangladesh was \$28.49 million.<sup>31</sup> A high profile trade delegation from Pakistan visited Bangladesh in January 2002. Led by Federal Commerce, Industries and Production Minister Abdul Razzaq Daud, the delegation held talks in Dhaka and Chittagong to broaden the areas of trade and commerce between the two countries. The former Bangladesh President Badruddoza Chowdhry in his meeting with the visiting Commerce Minister of Pakistan said that the trade gap between Bangladesh and Pakistan should be minimized for the benefit of the two countries. He said that Bangladesh should export pharmaceutical products, leather and leather goods, ceramics and melamine products to Pakistan in addition to tea and jute. He stressed the need for the exchange of visits of doctors, teachers, businessmen and cultural delegations between the two countries apart from government delegations so that such exchange of visits can help the people of the two countries to know each other better.<sup>32</sup> During her meeting with the visiting Commerce Minister from Pakistan, Prime Minister of Bangladesh Khaleda Zia invited Pak businessmen to invest and open joint ventures in Bangladesh taking the advantage of attractive incentives being offered by her government. She said that there exists ample scope for investment in the polyester, bamboo and cane industries as well as light engineering sector of Bangladesh where the Pakistani investors can take the advantage.<sup>33</sup> The Pakistan Commerce Minister while exchanging views with business people during his visit to Dhaka gave a positive response to Dhaka's request for duty free access for 21 category items, particularly jute and tea. However, he said he was not sure how far the Finance Ministry would agree to give 'zero tariff' but gave the assurance of studying the

<sup>30</sup> "Bangladesh-Pakistan agree to boost two-way trade," *The Daily Star* (Dhaka) May 9, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> See "Pindi agrees to duty-free access of Dhaka's jute goods," *The Bangladesh Observer*, January 28, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> "Trade gap should be minimized," *The Bangladesh Observer*, January 29, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> "PM invites businessmen to invest in Bangladesh," *The Bangladesh Observer*, *ibid.*,



request for duty free access of other items proposed by Bangladesh. He accepted the proposals for regular shipping services and joint venture banks to smoothen joint trade.<sup>34</sup> The demand from Bangladesh that Pakistan should give duty free access to tea, jute and jute products was accepted when Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf paid a three-day visit to Dhaka.

Addressing the business community in Chamber Bhaban at Agrabad, Chittagong, Pakistan Commerce Minister said that his country wanted to establish a win-win economic relations with Bangladesh based on highest forms of professionalism. He urged the Bangladesh entrepreneurs to favor strategic alliance with garment sector business in Pakistan to combat future challenges to effect RMG sector in South Asia in January 2005. He said that, "we assure the Bangladeshi business community that if they step one foot asking cooperation we would be marching two feet. We have a strong sense of desire to built Bangladesh-Pakistan ties."<sup>35</sup> There is a need to follow-up to the understanding reached between Dhaka and Islamabad during the visit of Pakistan Commerce Minister. Bureaucratic and various technical matters should not be allowed to delay the implementation of ideas exchange and agreed during that visit. Following table will help give a better understanding about the dynamics of trade relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan over the last five years and major gaps in this regard. Most important, the need to implement the objectives outlined in the MOU on establishing a BD-Pak Business Council cannot be undermined because trade relations between the two countries can take an upward position if there is a follow-up to what was agreed in the MOU.

**Table-1: Pakistan's Trade Relations with Bangladesh**

Million \$US

Years	Imports	Exports	Balance
1996-97	38.40	87.50	+49.10
1997-98	38.30	98.60	+ 60.30
1998-99	32.24	119.56	+ 87.32
1999-2000	29.49	120.45	+90.96
2000-01	33.27	133.84	+ 100.57

Source: *Foreign Trade Pattern of Pakistan* (Karachi: Economic and Research Development Cell, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2001), p. 56

## II. Cultural and Other Areas of Cooperation

Theoretically, there exists tremendous potential for strengthening Pak-BD relations in the fields of culture, education, science and technology etc. From

<sup>34</sup> "Pak Minister favors duty-free access of tea, jute initially," *The Bangladesh Observer*, January 30, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> "Pindi wants better economic ties with Dhaka, says Dawood" *The Bangladesh Observer*, January 31, 2002.



time to time, the two countries have also taken steps to broaden the scope of bilateral cooperation but the progress in this regard has been very slow. There are several reasons why a productive and vibrant Pak-BD ties in non-trade and commercial areas could not take off. First, the administrative and bureaucratic hurdles in pursuing and seeking the implementation of cultural agreement in its complete form. Second, the political misunderstanding and pending unsettled issues which also adversely affect progress in promoting bilateral ties between the two countries. From time to time, some unpleasant issues related to the events of 1971 make it difficult to keep things conducive for seeking close cultural interaction. Third, the lack of participation of people from the two countries in the process of reconciliation and cooperation. Dhaka and Islamabad had signed several agreements but in most cases, the non-involvement of civil society and intelligentsia of Bangladesh and Pakistan made it difficult to bridge the gap and usher a new era of friendship and cooperation.

Notwithstanding obvious impediments in Pak-BD relations, the two countries tried to improve people to people contacts. On October 16, 1979, Bangladesh and Pakistan signed a cultural agreement providing for exchange of teachers and scholars of the Universities and other educational institutions of Bangladesh and Pakistan, as well as scientific and industrial training for their students on reciprocal basis. Under the agreement the two governments agreed to promote cultural and intellectual exchange by organizing youth programs, art exhibition, music concerts and visits by folklore troupes. They also decided to exchange radio and TV programmes and films and promote free flow of books and regulations.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, not much was done to implement the contents of the cultural agreements. Relations between the two countries, particularly at the cultural and educational levels, would have certainly improved had Dhaka and Islamabad seriously tried to fulfill the understanding, which was reached between the two countries in the cultural agreement signed in 1979 and encouraged such cooperation to expand also at the non-governmental areas.

Another important attempt to promote cultural relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan was made on the occasion of Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's visit to Dhaka. In that visit, the two countries, signed a new cultural exchange programme for 1988-1991 under the cultural and scientific agreement of 1979.<sup>37</sup> Nawaz Shariff visited Dhaka in January 1998 to participate in India-Bangladesh-Pakistan Business Summit. A cultural agreement on promotion of cultural ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan was

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<sup>36</sup> See Syed Serajul Islam, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> "Call for international cooperation" *Dawn*, October 4, 1989.

signed by the Bangladesh Cultural Affairs Secretary and Pakistan's Foreign Secretary on behalf of their respective countries.<sup>38</sup>

On the occasion of Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to Pakistan in August 1992, two agreements were signed on scientific and technological cooperation and exchange of plots for setting up High Commissions in each other's countries.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the agreement on the exchange of plots for setting up respective High Commissions has not been implemented. A valuable opportunity to lay the foundation stone of a new building of the Pakistan High Commission on the occasion of President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Dhaka was lost because of bureaucratic delay.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto also visited Bangladesh in her second term in October 1993 on the occasion of Biennial Conference of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. In her meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Benazir Bhutto expressed her willingness to take technical expertise from Bangladesh to make family planning programme successful in Pakistan where the rate of population growth is very high. She praised Bangladesh's progress in family planning and welfare programmes.<sup>40</sup> Such developments in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations could have been of far reaching implications had the policy-makers of the two sides tried to seriously implement and follow up to these agreements.

Following is a list of major agreements signed between Pakistan and Bangladesh since January 1976:

1. Air link agreement signed in June 1976, which provided reciprocal landing of flights and to act as general sales agents to each other in their respective countries.
2. Trade agreement was signed in April 1976.
3. In 1976 the two countries signed an agreement to establish and improve direct telecommunication links via satellites.
4. In August 1976, the shipping authorities of Pakistan and Bangladesh fixed the freight rates of 98 commodities and finalized the sailing schedule of ships.
5. In 1978, a shipping agreement was signed which provided that the two countries would accord most favored nation treatment to each other's vessels and their crew.

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<sup>38</sup> "Dhaka, Islamabad to expand trade ties," *Daily Star*, January 17, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> *The Bangladesh Observer*, August 11, 1992.

<sup>40</sup> "Pindi eager to take FP expertise from Dhaka," *The Bangladesh Observer*, October 23, 1993.

6. Another trade agreement was signed between Dhaka and Islamabad in July 1978 according to which Pakistan agreed to buy tea, jute and jute products and Bangladesh agreed to buy cotton, cotton clothes etc.
7. Joint economic commission was formed in July 1979.
8. Cultural cooperation agreement was signed in October 1979.
9. Convention relating to avoidance of double taxation was signed in October 1979.
10. Visa agreement was signed in August 1983.
11. A new cultural exchange programme for 1988-1991 under the cultural and scientific agreement of October 1979 was signed during Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's visit to Dhaka in October 1989.
12. Agreements on scientific and technological cooperation and exchange of plots for setting up High Commission in each other countries were signed on the occasion of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to Islamabad in August 1992.
13. In May 1998, Bangladesh and Pakistan signed an agreement to take measures to arrest the declining trend of two-way trade and work for its balanced growth.
14. Signing of MOU on setting up BD-Pak Business Council on the occasion of President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Dhaka in July 2002.
15. Protocol on enhancing cultural cooperation was signed in July 2002.
16. Protocol on regular consultation between the foreign ministries of Bangladesh and Pakistan on important regional and bilateral issues was signed in July 2002.

The list of the above mentioned agreements, protocols and MOUs signed between Bangladesh and Pakistan since 1976 may seem to be impressive but unfortunately in most cases the level of bilateral interaction, which should have shown an upward trend remained low. Probably, no proper follow-up strategy was pursued by Dhaka and Islamabad to make sure that official agreements signed should be properly implemented and not made a victim of bureaucratic and technical problems. The Joint Economic Commission which was signed earlier remain inactive and had to be activated as a result of talks held between Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and the Bangladesh Government officials. Similarly, the cultural agreement, which was signed in 1979 and renewed in 1989, also failed to bring meaningful cultural interaction between the two countries. Travel and tourism, which should have been promoted for improving Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, also remained a low



priority for the two governments. Therefore, the lesson which one learns after looking at the list of BD-Pak agreements, protocols and MOUs is a big gap, which exists particularly at the non-governmental level. Along with official interaction, for a vibrant BD-Pak relations, it is essential that meaningful people to people interaction is encouraged, joint ventures, joint investment, educational and cultural exchanges at the non-official level also take place.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AREAS OF POLITICAL CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

Political arena happens to be the most challenging area of cooperation between Bangladesh and Pakistan because unless political mindsets in the two countries about each other are shaped in the positive direction, no initiative for bringing Dhaka and Islamabad closer could be fruitful. When it comes to the issue of political cooperation between Bangladesh and Islamabad, it basically means a situation in which despite conflicts, the two sides can evolve a mechanism of cooperation and neutralize all such elements who have a vested interest in sustaining psychological barriers. President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh was an attempt to minimize the political areas of conflict and move towards reconciliation and cooperation. Sentiments expressed by him about the tragic events of 1971 during his visit to the martyr's memorial at Savar on July 29 and in his dinner speech on July 30 carried appeal to Bangladesh to forget the past and move for a better future of BD-Pak relations. Yet, pending political disputes tend to block any progress in the road to cooperation. According to an Indian scholar,

However hard Pakistan and Bangladesh may try to improve relations between the two nations, a preponderant majority of people of Bangladesh continues to distrust any move towards close Pak-BD relations. The Bangladeshi nationalists seem to be very sensitive about the past and a historical bitterness still pervades the psyche of the people of both the countries. This nevertheless constitutes a major impediment (apart from the vital questions of bilateral issues) in the way of total rapprochement for the present.<sup>41</sup>

Deep-rooted suspicions, mistrust and paranoia against each other fuelled by some external elements continue to shape the perceptions of some segments of Bangladeshi and Pakistani society. While, there exists some silence and indifference in the Pakistani elite about the events of 1971 and linking it to establishing better relations with Dhaka, in Bangladesh, political matters, particularly concerning the past heavily influence the perceptions of Bangladeshi elite about future ties with Islamabad.

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<sup>41</sup> Uma Singh, "Bangladesh and Pakistan: Convergence and Divergence" in S. R. Chakravarty (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1994), 230.

## I. Areas of Political Conflict

Some of the areas of political conflict in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations are as follows:-

1. The question of apology concerning the tragic events of 1971.
2. Repatriation of stranded Pakistanis.
3. Division of assets and liabilities.

Because of these political problems, relations between the two countries have not been able to reach the level of complete normalization. While one cannot disagree with the merit of these issues, yet there exists a perception in Pakistan that the relevance of these issues has become marginal over these years and to a large extent, Dhaka's approach on these issues is based on emotional and rhetorical lines than pragmatic. For Dhaka, the perceptions are real and need to be addressed to improve bilateral relations.

As far as the question of apology for the atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army against the civilians of the then East Pakistan during March-December 1971 crisis is concerned it is by some elements termed as the focal point of political tension between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Expression of deep regrets by President Musharraf about the excesses committed during 1971 in the then East Pakistan were considered symbolic but short of a formal apology.

If one examines this issue objectively and rationally, two important facts come into picture. First, the question of apology is consistently and systematically raised by the governmental and non-governmental sources of Bangladesh only since January 1998 when Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif after his visit to Dhaka said in a public gathering in Karachi that "his government would take action against all those who played foul during the previous governments and acted against the stability and integrity of the country."<sup>42</sup> Soon after his speech, the Government of Bangladesh sought

<sup>42</sup> Brig (Retd) A. R. Siddiqi, "East Pakistan returns!" *The Nation* (Lahore) February 18, 1998. At a banquet speech in Dhaka hosted by Sheikh Hasina Wajid, Prime Minister of Bangladesh on January 16, 1998, in his honor, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif said that, "even today I feel that had the results of 1970 elections been respected, the history of the region would have been different. It is only when we do not respect the principles of democracy or the sanctity of the ballot box do problems arise. External inimical forces are always there to exploit our mistakes. Let us learn from the mistakes. Let us learn from the mistakes of the past and build a better tomorrow for our people." According to Altaf Gauher, Pakistan's Information Secretary during President Ayub Khan's regime, "for the first time since military action was launched in Dhaka on the night of March 25, 1971 a duly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan has admitted in clear and unmistakable terms that the government of that day failed to respect the results of the 1970 general elections, universally recognized as free and fair, which gave a clear majority in the National Assembly to the Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur



apology from Pakistan for the atrocities committed by its Army during 1971 against the Bengalees. The question of apology from Dhaka was reinforced when a mass grave of people killed during 1971 was discovered in 1999. Second, as far as Pakistan is concerned, its stand on apology has been quite clear. Islamabad did apologize from Bangladesh for the events of 1971. A statement of Pakistan's Minister of State for Defense and Foreign Affairs, Aziz Ahmed was included in the text of the tripartite agreement signed by Bangladesh, India and Pakistan on April 9, 1974 in which it had condemned and regretted any crimes that may have been committed by the Pakistani soldiers in Bangladesh (former East Pakistan). It was also included in the text that the Prime Minister of Pakistan had declared that he would visit Bangladesh in response to the invitation of Prime Minister of Bangladesh and appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past in order to promote reconciliation.<sup>43</sup> The Prime Minister of Bangladesh reciprocated the regret expressed by Pakistan by saying that "he wanted the people to forget the past and make fresh start."<sup>44</sup> However, it should be noted that such a regret by Pakistan was made in a situation when Dhaka had announced the trial of 195 Pakistani POWs kept in Indian camps for their atrocities committed during 1971. When Pakistan regretted the "war crimes" and agreed that "excess and manifold crimes" were committed by 195 PoWs and appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past in order to promote reconciliation, Dhaka agreed to drop the plans for war trials as an act of clemency.<sup>45</sup> Once regret was expressed on the part of the Government of Pakistan in April 1974 the question of apology did not occur until 1998 after the statement of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the discovery of mass grave in 1999.

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Rahman. See Altaf Gauher, "Thoughts and afterthoughts What we need is a Truth Commission," *The Nation*, February 8, 1998. Muntassir Mamoon, a History Professor, Dhaka University holds the opinion that there is a strong opinion in Bangladesh that the statement of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is not enough and there has to be a formal apology. But we are not considering the fact that Nawaz Sharif was actually the first Pakistani ruler in the last 28 years to comment on 1971 and admit the mistakes of his countrymen. See Muntassir Mamoon, *The Vanquished Generals And The Liberation War of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Somoy Prokashan, June 2000), p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> Farzana Shakoor, "Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations A Survey," *Pakistan Horizon* (Karachi) Vol. XLII, No. 2, April 1989, p. 115. Also see the text of the Bangladesh-India-Pakistan Agreement signed in New Delhi on April 9, 1974.

<sup>44</sup> Abdul Hafiz, *op.cit.*, p. 359.

<sup>45</sup> *The New York Times*, April 8, 1974, quoted in Iftikhar Chowdhry, *Bangladesh External Relations The Strategy of a small power in a sub system*, Ph.D. thesis, Department of International Relations, Australian National University, May 1980, pp. 120-121.

Interestingly, when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had categorically condemned the war crimes in the then East Pakistan, Pakistan's Foreign Office followed a different line. For instance, in May 1998, Bangladesh High Commissioner in Pakistan was summoned to Pakistan Foreign Office and told about Pakistan's displeasure at what was described as "anti-Pakistan propaganda" in recent times and 'historical inaccuracy' about the number of people killed and women violated by Pakistani occupation forces in Bangladesh in 1971. The reaction of Bangladesh was prompt. Pakistan High Commissioner in Bangladesh was summoned to the Foreign Office and was told that Bangladesh may forgive Islamabad if it sought apology for 1971 genocide. The Foreign Office reiterated the number of casualties in the genocide.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it was in the second Awami League Government during 1996-2001 when the question of apology was made an issue following the statement of Pakistan's Prime Minister, unearthing of mass grave in Dhaka and the overall global trend about apology reinforced by the acts of apology made by the then U.S. President Bill Clinton to Afro-Americans for the injustices made by the white Americans and by the German and Japanese Governments to the victims of their occupation forces during the second world war. While a dominant perception in Bangladesh, particularly among its intelligentsia is for seeking apology from Pakistan, in Pakistan apology is hardly considered an issue in Pakistan's relations with Bangladesh.<sup>47</sup> The comments made by Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Irfan Raja about the Bangladesh liberation struggle at a seminar in Dhaka in November 2000 also reinforced the question of apology.<sup>48</sup> During President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Dhaka, the issue of apology was not raised by the Government of Bangladesh, but the main opposition party Awami League and numerous human rights groups and associations of freedom fighters demanded an apology from the Pakistan Government on the excesses by its forces during the military operation of March-December 1971. While the Pakistan President merely expressed his regrets about the events of 1971, 51

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<sup>46</sup> Abdul Hannan, "An Apology would improve our relationship with Pakistan," *The Daily Star*, May 13, 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Author's interviews from cross-section of people in Bangladesh and in Pakistan during his fieldwork, particularly in the young generation of Pakistan, there is lack of understanding on the question of apology because of dearth of information on the events of 1971 mentioning the massacre or genocide committed by the Pakistan Army against the Bengali people.

<sup>48</sup> When the issue of apology by the Government of Pakistan concerning the atrocities committed by its forces in 1971 was raised by some of the participants in that seminar, Mr. Irfan Raja rejected such a demand while asserting that the liberation movement of Bangladesh was primarily the work of some miscreants. His remarks created an outrage in Bangladesh and the question of apology from Pakistan gained ground. Mr. Raja was declared a *persona non grata* in Bangladesh.



civil society groups of Pakistan immediately after Musharraf's visit to Dhaka asked their government to tender an unconditional apology to the people of Bangladesh about the atrocities committed by its forces in 1971.

As far as the issue of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh is concerned, unlike the question of apology, it has assumed a low profile. As a legacy of 1971 crisis, the issue of stranded Pakistanis remained unresolved even after 31 years and it has lost its momentum because of three main reasons. First, according to the tripartite agreement signed by India, Bangladesh and Pakistan in April 1974, Pakistan agreed to take those stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh with divided families, West Pakistani domiciles, federal government employees and hardship cases. Pakistan took around 200,000 stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh but then refused to take more. A Pakistan Government spokesman told newsmen in Islamabad on August 18, 1979 that, "the repatriation of non-Bengalees of agreed categories from Bangladesh to Pakistan will be completed by the end of this year (1979) or in early next year (1980). He further said that "non-Bengalese[sic] not belonging to the agreed categories and the agreed number would not be repatriated to Pakistan. They will have to live in Bangladesh."<sup>49</sup> Second, because of ethnic and political factors in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh where most of the stranded Pakistanis were resettled in mid-1970s, Islamabad has been unwilling to take more. Third, because of the lack of political will expressed by various Pakistani regimes, the issue of stranded Pakistanis, which is humanitarian in nature was not seriously taken. As a result, after around 31 years, majority of such people who have been living in camps in a miserable condition have reconciled with the reality that they cannot go to Pakistan and hence will have to consider Bangladesh as their home. Those who were born in these camps after 1971 are reluctant to go to Pakistan because in the last 31 years they have assimilated with Bangladeshi society and have a remote idea about Pakistan.<sup>50</sup> When Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited Bangladesh in October 1989, the matter was raised by the stranded Pakistanis. According to the *Dawn's* correspondent in Dhaka, "the circles which were expecting some definite announcement by visiting Prime Minister Benazir

<sup>49</sup> The Pakistan Government spokesman further said that about 22,000 non-Bengalees were to be repatriated to Pakistan in the second phase. Of them, 4,785 have arrived in Pakistan in three shiploads. He said responsible people from Bangladesh had assured that non-Bengalees of non-agreed categories would be assimilated in Bangladesh. Of the 534,000 non-Bengalees who applied for repatriation to the International Committee of Red Cross, 118,866 were cleared for repatriation under the auspices of UNHCR in the first phase, 107,836 non-Bengalees were officially repatriated from September 1973 to June 1974. They included 25,098 hardship cases. See news item, "Repatriation to end early year," *Dawn* (Karachi), August 19, 1979.

<sup>50</sup> Perception based on author's visit to the Geneva camp of stranded Pakistanis in Mohammadpur Dhaka on August 14, 2002.



Bhutto concerning the repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis living in vice, disease and hunger ridden 60 camps dotted all over the country were utterly disappointed. The disappointment was further compounded when the issue was not even mentioned in the joint communiqué. Mr. Nasim Khan, leader of stranded Pakistanis, who had made elaborate and emotional arrangements to receive Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the airport and later at different places during the short visit, said that "today I am the saddest man on this planet. Our Prime Minister had let us down. By refusing to meet us and declare a timetable for our repatriation she has hit all of us very badly. I wish God forgive her for what she has done to the people who have been suffering from last 18 years the life of indignity and frustration for upholding the cause of their great country."<sup>51</sup>

From time to time, the government of Bangladesh has raised the issue of stranded Pakistanis with Islamabad but without any positive outcome. The last indication in terms of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh was seen in 1992. A joint press statement issued simultaneously from Islamabad and Dhaka at the end of a three-day state visit of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to Pakistan said that the, "repatriation of the first batch of 3,000 families of stranded Pakistanis would commence by year end." Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told his Bangladeshi counterpart that the stranded Pakistanis living in various camps in Bangladesh would be rehabilitated in specially constructed housing settlements in various areas of the Punjab province.<sup>52</sup> Apart from the settlement of couple of hundred stranded Pakistanis in the Punjab during late 1992, the process was stopped because of the dismissal of Sharif's government in April 1993.

Since then no major activity has taken place to sort out this humanitarian issue. However, during his visit to Bangladesh in January 1998, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif assured Dhaka of the settlement of the repatriation issue. Bangladesh welcomed Pakistan's reported position on the repatriation of its citizens from Bangladesh. It should be taken into account that when Nawaz Sharif was the Chief Minister of Punjab, in an open statement he had offered to accommodate in the Punjab all Pakistanis presently stranded in Bangladesh. He said that the "problem of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh is essentially to be solved by the Federal Government. This problem has many ramifications. I appreciate and sympathize with the fears and sentiments of our brothers in Sindh. Their urban areas are reaching a point of saturation. The previous government had concluded an agreement with the *Rabita-i-Alam-i-Islami*, who have graciously agreed to raise the requisite funds for repatriation

<sup>51</sup> Hasan Saeed, "Benazir's visit: hope or despair," *Dawn*, October 12, 1989.

<sup>52</sup> "Repatriation to start by December," *The Bangladesh Observer*, August 12, 1992.

and resettlement of these unfortunate brethren of ours."<sup>53</sup> Nawaz Sharif did take back couple of hundred of stranded Pakistanis in 1992 and settled them in the Punjab when he was the Prime Minister during his first term. However, when he returned to power in 1997 he did not do any thing to resume the process of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, which was interrupted because of the dismissal of his government by the President in April 1993.

Speaking at the "Meet The Press" forum of Karachi Press Club, Bangladesh High Commissioner to Pakistan Mr. C. M. Shafi said that "it is the legal responsibility of the Pakistan Government to have the Pakistanis stranded in Bangladesh repatriated to Pakistan as early as possible. Out of one million Urdu speaking non-locals left over Bangladesh in 1971, some 500,000, when given the option had decided to accept BD nationality and were subsequently assimilated in the Bangladeshi mainstream. The remaining such persons refused BD nationality and insisted they were Pakistanis and are to be sent to Pakistan. The terminology of stranded Pakistanis has not been forced on those people, but it is they who have taken it upon themselves. We in Bangladesh cannot force any one to belong to us. Following the agreement, 140,000 of those people were repatriated to Pakistan in 1974 and 8,000 in 1981. In the past there had been perceptual differences between the Governments of Bangladesh and Pakistan about the actual status of such persons. However, these have now been cleared after the statement by Pakistan Government leaders in National Assembly in June 1987 that Pakistan regarded the stranded persons in Bangladesh as much Pakistanis as any other citizens of Pakistan."<sup>54</sup> On July 30, 2002 a delegation of stranded Pakistanis met Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in Dhaka and appealed to him to end their plight by starting the process of repatriation at the earliest. While expressing sympathy to the plight of stranded Pakistanis, the President ruled out an early settlement of that issue arguing that in view of the presence of millions of Afghan refugees it will be difficult for his country to accommodate stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh at this stage.

Realistically speaking, the only viable solution to the unfortunate issue of stranded Pakistanis is to provide a financial package by the Government of Pakistan for the relief and rehabilitation of such people in Bangladesh. Apart from raising funds from various sources, both the governments of Pakistan and

<sup>53</sup> "Punjab ready to take stranded Pakistanis: Nawaz" *Dawn*, February 22, 1989.

<sup>54</sup> "Repatriation onus rests with Pakistan," *Dawn*, April 6, 1988. A two-day international conference for repatriation of Pakistanis (ICRP) was held in New York. It demanded that the Government of Pakistan should allow the repatriation of those Pakistanis who cannot return to their homeland on their own expense. If the government cannot repatriate, the ICRP members would themselves raise funds for their repatriation, and for this purpose the Government of Pakistan must give them necessary clearance. See *Dawn*, April 4, 1988.



Bangladesh can solve this issue in such a manner that those who are living in camps and who do not want to go to Pakistan through that package are settled while taking into account their housing and other needs. The funds lying with the *Rabita-i-Alami-Islami* for the purpose of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis should also be used. Others who want to go to Pakistan, their cases should be considered on humanitarian grounds and with the help of the Muslim countries they should be repatriated to Pakistan soon. In any case, majority of the stranded people understand the fact that they cannot go to Pakistan and will be pragmatic enough to accept the nationality of Bangladesh. Funds mobilized for these people need to be disbursed by a credible NGO of Bangladesh so that the amount is not misused. Through that arrangement, a sad chapter of 1971 and a political issue in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations could be justly and amicably resolved.

Concerning the issue of division of assets and liabilities, it remained a major political irritant between Dhaka and Islamabad since the emergence of Bangladesh. For Dhaka, it was imperative that Islamabad settles that issue keeping in view the contribution of erstwhile East Pakistan to the national exchequer of united Pakistan. But, Islamabad, while not rejecting the Bangladeshi claim, suggested negotiations so as to remove various technical and complex matters.

Bangladesh proposed that the division of assets can be done on the basis of the following principles:-

1. Population basis: Bangladesh could demand 50% of total assets.
2. Equal distribution of wealth basis: Bangladesh could demand 50% of total assets.
3. Foreign currency: Bangladesh could demand 51% of the foreign exchange as East Pakistan contributed to the national reserves.
4. Proportionate basis: Bangladesh could demand 44% of the total wealth.

According to a report of the Bangladeshi Planning Commission, Pakistan should pay at least Tk 257 crores and 57 lakhs as Bangladesh's share of the united Pakistan's assets. Bangladesh on the other hand is liable to pay to Pakistan Tk 10 crores and 88 lakhs.<sup>55</sup> In 1974 when Pakistan's Prime Minister Mr. Z.A. Bhutto visited Dhaka both Mujib and Bhutto discussed the issue but could not reach an agreement. Bhutto stated that whether at all the question of division of assets was acceptable to Pakistan would be decided by a joint

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<sup>55</sup> Syed Serajul Islam, *op.cit.*, pp. 57-58.



commission. In July 1975 on the occasion of Islamic Foreign Minister's conference in Jeddah, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Kamal Hossain proposed arbitration on the question of assets by Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E and Kuwait or any one of the three and announced his government's decision to abide by the outcome.<sup>56</sup> On the conclusion of President Ziaur Rahman's visit to Pakistan in December 1977 it was stated in a joint statement that Pakistan was ready to discuss the question of division of assets and liabilities.<sup>57</sup> It needs to be taken into account that because of lack of agreement between Dhaka and Islamabad on the question of division of assets and liabilities, diplomatic relations could not be established between Bangladesh and Pakistan following their mutual recognition in February 1974. According to the Bangladeshi point of view, from the beginning it was Pakistan's strategy to drag on the issue to an extent when an exhausted Bangladesh will be brought on to point of giving it up. Whereas, from the Pakistan's point of view, the issue is very complex and technical and needs to be resolved through negotiations. A Pakistani writer commented on the issue of assets and liabilities in the following words:

A major hurdle in the way of resumption of economic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan is said to be the question of assets and liabilities. But the fact that Pakistan's claims would far exceed BD's by way of governmental and non-governmental investments, it is to be hoped that Bangladesh will not adopt any rigid attitude in this regard. The assets left by Pakistani businessmen in Bangladesh alone are estimated at Rs. 460 crore. As regards foreign debt liability, the World Bank has already absolved Pakistan of the responsibility for the repayment of the project aid utilized in East Pakistan.<sup>58</sup>

Since the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the toppling of Awami League government in August 1975, the new government, which came into power, decided not to press on the settlement on the issue of division of assets and liabilities and decided to establish normal diplomatic relations with Pakistan. However, even in the post-Mujib era, Dhaka used to insist on Pakistan that the issue needs to be resolved but eventually, it lost its momentum. Presently, this issue is mentioned from time to time by Bangladesh as a major political irritant in its relations with Pakistan. During the visit of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf to Dhaka, the Bangladeshi Government raised the issue of division of assets in official talks with the Pakistan delegation but

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<sup>56</sup> Iftikhar Chowdhry, *op.cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>58</sup> Rafiq Jabir, "Trading with Bangladesh under the changed conditions," *Morning News* (Karachi) March 17, 1974.

according to the Pakistan President, it cannot be resolved at once in view of the complicated nature of that issue. He also indicated that perhaps the two countries would have to live with that issue in the years to come.

## II. Area of Political Cooperation

Despite periodic unpleasantness, relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan are not entirely negative in nature. Political differences do occur at various levels and same is the case with Bangladesh and Pakistan. But, no serious attempt was made by the two sides to lower the political temperature and move for better and meaningful cooperation. In this perspective one can refer to the bilateral visits right from the time of Mr. Z. A. Bhutto to Ziaur Rahman, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina and Pervez Musharraf to each other's countries. All the heads of state and government and foreign ministers of Bangladesh and Pakistan in their speeches and statements given on the occasion of bilateral visits emphasized on moving from conflict to cooperation but in reality not much could be done to promote cooperation at the political level or to promote people to people ties because theoretical adherence to better relations was not transformed into practice.

When Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto visited Dhaka in June 1974, at the official banquet hosted in his honour by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Bhutto expressed the hope that "their words and deeds would remove the obstacles in the way of friendship, peace and prosperity and contribute towards the realization of the hopes and aspirations of their people." He declared that with determination and with the help of God, Pakistan and Bangladesh can revive good, friendly and mutually beneficial relations.<sup>59</sup> However, no breakthrough could be achieved in Mr. Bhutto's visit but the two countries signed two agreements relating to the resumption of trade and cessation of hostile propaganda against each other.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, a good opportunity to unleash the process of BD-Pak relations was lost. There was no follow-up of Bhutto's visit and relations between the two countries remained at a low key because Dhaka demanded the settlement of pending issues like the division of assets and the repatriation of remaining stranded Pakistanis.

In December 1977, President Ziaur Rahman visited Pakistan. It was the first bilateral visit by any head of Bangladesh to Pakistan and contributed significantly to break the ice in improving relations between the two countries. President Zia in his visit stated that "the strengthening of relations between the two countries would contribute significantly to peace and stability in the South

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<sup>59</sup> Dawn, June 28, 1974 quoted in Farzana Shakoor, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>60</sup> Dawn, July 9, 1974, quoted in *ibid.*,



Asian sub-continent and to the cause of Islamic solidarity. Cooperation between Pakistan and Bangladesh would continue to expand, since forging close and friendly relations with all our neighbors is the main objective of Bangladesh's foreign policy."<sup>61</sup> Followed by President Ziaur Rahman's visit to Pakistan, steady improvement was noticed in relations between the two countries. Several agreements were signed on promoting trade and cultural ties, while contentious political issues remained unresolved. The two countries decided to freeze their disputes and move ahead for establishing normal relations. It proved the fact that if a statesmanship like approach is followed by people at the helm of affairs, much can be done to move from conflict to cooperation.

The visit of Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yuqub Khan in August 1983 to Dhaka was quite useful because it further strengthened the pace of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Speaking at a luncheon hosted in honour of visiting Pakistan Foreign Minister, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh A. R. S. Doha said that, "both Bangladesh and Pakistan were heirs to a rich civilization and cultural ties rooted deep in our shared faith, tradition and value." In his reply, Pakistan Foreign Minister said that "both Pakistan and Bangladesh were linked by spiritual affinities of a glorious faith, a shared history and culture and heritage."<sup>62</sup> On the completion of his visit, Yuqub Khan called for, "burying the past that lay between Bangladesh and Pakistan" and urged both the countries for working arm-in-arm for a bright future, which holds promise of peace and progress for the people of the two countries. He declared that, "let us close the sad chapter. Let us open with sincerity a fresh chapter of good relations and cooperation in various fields."<sup>63</sup> On the pending issues of division of assets and liabilities and repatriation of stranded Pakistanis his visit remained inconclusive. Perhaps, it was calculated by Pakistani leaders that with more and more trade and other areas of interaction, the bitterness of the past will gradually disappear and then the two countries could sit down and resolve the pending issues. One can agree or disagree with the merit of this approach but in the absence of consensus between Dhaka and Islamabad to resolve the issue of division of assets and liabilities and stranded Pakistanis, the middle path available to the two sides required continuing with the normalization process.

In October 1989, Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto paid a bilateral visit to Bangladesh. Again, there was no breakthrough on pending issues.

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<sup>61</sup> The Pakistan Times (Rawalpindi) December 23, 1977 quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>62</sup> Syed Tayyab-Ur-Rehman, *Global Geo-Strategy of Bangladesh, OIC and Islamic Ummah* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1985), pp. 46-47.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.



Speaking at a banquet hosted by Bangladesh President Hossain Muhammad Ershad, Benazir said that,

We are prepared to cooperate with you in all walks of life without any reservations or qualifications. We can do much in matters of commerce, trade and economic development to better the lot of our peoples. Over the years, we have traversed a journey, which at times was difficult, at times traumatic. But like two brothers who set up separate homes, we remain as members of the same family, each always caring about the future, well-being and security of the other. We in Pakistan follow, with great interest your effort to promote prosperity and well-being of your people.<sup>64</sup>

It needs to be mentioned here that Benazir was the first Pakistani head of the government to visit Bangladesh since her late father's visit in June 1974. President Ershad in his speech said that,

Existing relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan are excellent. But they require a new investment of imagination and courage for the resolution of unresolved issues between us.<sup>65</sup>

On the occasion of Benazir's visit to Bangladesh the two sides signed a new cultural exchange programmes for 1988-1991 under the cultural and scientific agreement of October 15, 1979.<sup>66</sup> In a joint statement issued simultaneously from Islamabad and Dhaka at the conclusion of the three-day official visit of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the two sides reaffirmed their determination to invigorate and widen cooperation between them in various areas. They agreed to provide a new and concrete impetus to mutually beneficial relations.<sup>67</sup> The two sides called talks held as fruitful. Mr. Iqbal Akhund, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's adviser on foreign affairs and national security told newsmen that Prime Minister chose Bangladesh as the first SAARC nation for the visit, which signifies the close and brotherly ties between the two countries. The talks were open and frank adding that the focus of the discussion was on how best to further strengthen the bilateral cooperation.<sup>68</sup> Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia paid an official visit to Pakistan in August 1992 and Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto paid a visit to Bangladesh in October 1993. V. A. Jafarey, Adviser to Pakistan's Prime Minister on finance and economic

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<sup>64</sup> "Benazir, Ershad for expansion of ties," *Dawn*, October 2, 1989.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>66</sup> "Call for intensified cooperation," *Dawn*, October 4, 1989.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>68</sup> "Benazir, Ershad hold fruitful talks," *Dawn*, October 3, 1989.

affairs in his meeting with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Khaleda Zia in July 1994 said that his country was bringing down import duty for certain Bangladeshi exportable items and further said that "we have removed restrictions for import and are taking steps so that Bangladeshi tea costs cheaper than that of other countries."<sup>69</sup> In August 1996, Pakistan Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Sheikh visited Bangladesh and held meeting with Commerce Minister Tofael Ahmed and Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan. He discussed with them prospects of establishing various joint venture industries and agreed on the point that the trade relations between the two countries should be developed further.<sup>70</sup> Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Bangladesh on the occasion of three nation (India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) business summit held in Dhaka in January 1998. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Pakistan in the aftermath of Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests of May 1998. These visits at various levels, though not quite frequent, helped in keeping communication lines open between the two countries. Yet, the momentum, which should have been kept alive in strengthening the areas of cooperation between Pakistan and Bangladesh, could not be kept. The visit of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf to Bangladesh has given another opportunity for the two countries to seek better cooperation and amicably resolve pending issues through negotiations.

In case of political relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan two conclusions could be drawn. First, domestic politics plays an important role in determining the course of bilateral relations and second official visits can only generate a temporary momentum but if there is no follow up of such visits, nothing substantial happens in strengthening the bonds of friendship. Political cooperation in BD-Pak relations requires frequent people to people interaction and also exchange of delegation of parliamentarians and leaders of political parties. If non-governmental cooperation also takes place then domestic political issues, which sometimes discourage the upward trend in BD-Pak relations, can also be neutralized. Merely official interaction cannot help build bridges between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Following chart will help understand the dynamics of conflict and cooperation Pakistan-Bangladesh relations:

<sup>69</sup> "Pakistan to cut import duty for goods from Bangladesh," *Morning Sun* (Dhaka) July 1, 1994. Also see, "Pindi to reduce duty on some Bangladeshi items," *The Bangladesh Observer*, July 14, 1994.

<sup>70</sup> See news item "Farooq terms talks with Pakistan useful," *Morning Sun*, August 14, 1996. Also see editorial, "Pak Foreign Secretary's visit," *Morning Sun*, August 18, 1996.

**Chart One: Conflicts in Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations**

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Solution</b>
Trade imbalance	Negotiations	Possible
Question of apology	Cautious by Pakistan	Possible
Repatriation of stranded Pakistanis	Unfavorable by Pakistan	Remote
Division of assets and liabilities	Unfavorable by Pakistan	Remote
Hostile propaganda/Enemy images	Political issue in Bangladesh and Pakistan	Possible

**Chart Two: Cooperation in Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations**

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Trade and Commerce	Problem of implementation of agreements signed	Partially satisfactory
Culture, education	Problem of implementation of agreements signed	Partially satisfactory
Travel, tourism	Not promoted	Not satisfactory
Science and information technology	Yet to be properly explored	Wide prospects
Joint ventures/investments	Political and historical obstacles	Wide prospects



## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DIMENSIONS

#### I. External Dimension

Perhaps no factor has been so significant in the dynamics of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations as India because of historical cleavages and conflicts between India and Pakistan. It was not only partition and post-partition polemics, which polarized Indo-Pak relations, but also the role played by New Delhi during the crisis of March-December 1971. Since the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign state in December 1971 until today, no effort or initiative in the direction of bettering Dhaka-Islamabad ties has been unaffected from the India factor. Similarly, the dynamics of Indo-Bangladesh relations are also not free from the Pakistan factor.

There exists a perception in Islamabad that the role of New Delhi in the Bangladesh liberation struggle of 1971, the 1972 Indo-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and huge economic, cultural and educational relations between the two countries tend to marginalize Pakistan's role in Bangladesh. One may agree or disagree with this perception, but the fact is as long as Indo-Pak relations are tense, India factor in BD-Pak relations will continue to remain a stark reality. Hence the relevance of Delhi, Dhaka and Islamabad triangle in BD-Pak and Indo-BD relations. According to an Indian scholar,

Pakistan views the emergence of Bangladesh as purely an Indian affair. India wanted to weaken Pakistan by dismembering its enemy number one, forgetting fully well that dynamics of the struggle were provided by East Pakistan's aspirations for self-determination. Bangladesh emerged as a nation because Pakistan failed in its process of national integration and was an inevitable consequence of exploitation of one region by another.<sup>71</sup>

However, she argues that, "Bangladesh's enthusiasm for better economic and diplomatic relations with Pakistan, can to a considerable extent be attributed to their disenchantment with India. Bangladesh has consistently accused India of treating it as a client state. People in Bangladesh, by and large, have very bitter memories of the role India played during the Mujib era when the Dhaka

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<sup>71</sup> Uma Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 218.

government was overwhelmingly pro-India.”<sup>72</sup> Is India really responsible for preventing BD-Pak cooperation or such a perception lacks rationality or is based on rhetoric? Has India opposed better relations between Dhaka and Islamabad? Indo-Bangladesh relations, despite former’s role in the latter’s liberation struggle have also experienced several ups and downs.

J. N. Dixit, India’s former Foreign Secretary and India’s first Head of Mission in the newly established state of Bangladesh in his book, *Liberation and Beyond Indo-Bangladesh Relations* throws some light into the events, which led to coolness in Indo-Bangladesh relations. According to him,

By the autumn of 1974, goodwill towards India and the euphoria over the liberation struggle had disappeared. The media and political opinion outlets reverted to the mindset of the days when Bangladesh was “East Pakistan”. Political trends generated by Bhutto’s visit strengthened these negative undercurrents in Indo-Bangladesh relations. India viewed these developments as objectively as it could and dealt with them patiently, but sections of the Indian public opinion began to react critically to Bangladesh’s attitude. The failure to resolve the Farakka issue, the on-going controversies over the transfer of enclaves, demarcation of the maritime boundary and ownership of the New Moor islands and Bangladeshi political and economic criticism of India together generated negative reactions in India. Questions were raised about the ingratitude of Bangladesh for India’s sacrifices and support for the liberation of Bangladesh. Mujib’s failure or unwillingness to control the anti-India diatribe in the Bangladeshi media and statement by various political parties compounded the crisis, and evoked a counter response in the Indian media.<sup>73</sup>

When Mujib flew to Lahore in February 1974 to attend second Islamic Summit followed by Pakistan’s recognition to Bangladesh, India did not express any negative reaction but according to Dixit, “the fact of the matter that, as events showed in the remaining part of 1974, was that anti-liberation forces in Bangladesh drew strength from Pakistani recognition and became more effective as an opposition to Bangladeshi politics.”<sup>74</sup> The amnesty given by Mujib on December 16, 1973 to those who were convicted or detained under the Bangladesh Government’s anti-Pakistan collaborator’s order of 1972

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>73</sup> J. N. Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond Indo-Bangladesh Relations* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1999), p. 195.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

strengthened pro-Pakistan elements in Bangladesh. Apart from pro-Pakistan individuals getting inducted into Bangladeshi armed forces and civil services, such elements re-entered Bangladeshi politics at the grassroots level in municipality elections held in January 1974. Because of Mujib's policy of national reconciliation by giving amnesty to "collaborators" of 1971, his style of governance, his visit to participate in the Islamic summit and the visit of Bhutto to Dhaka exposed contradictions in Bangladeshi society on relations with Pakistan and India. Indian actions like taking valuables to India from Bangladesh after the surrender of Pakistan Army on December 16, its failure to resolve the Farrakha dispute, lack of demarcation of some border areas and dumping Indian goods in Bangladeshi markets created resentment in wide sections of people of that country.

Certainly, India felt comfortable with Awami League because of the equation, which it had with its leadership during the liberation and post-liberation era. After Mujib's assassination in August 1975 and the new political dynamics of Bangladesh, Indo-Bangladesh relations also underwent radical change. From August 1975 until the induction of second Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina in 1996, India's role and influence in Bangladesh remained contrary to what it was during Mujib's era. New Delhi looked with caution about growing links between Dhaka and Islamabad following Mujib's assassination. Pakistan became the first country to recognize the regime, which took over after toppling the government of Awami League in August 1975. Pakistan also announced 50,000 tons of rice, 10 million yards of long cloths and five million yards of bleached mull as a gesture of friendship to Bangladesh.<sup>75</sup>

It was interesting to note that if on the one hand New Delhi was shocked and angry because of the change of regime in Dhaka, on the other hand, Islamabad fully exploited the opportunity and granted recognition to the new regime and also used its influence over Saudi Arabia and Peoples Republic of China to do the same. With the emergence of new issues in Indo-Bangladesh relations the outcome was misunderstanding, suspicion and ill will in a vast section of Bangladeshi society about the policies of New Delhi vis-à-vis Dhaka. One example of India's discomfort vis-à-vis Dhaka-Islamabad relations could be found in the resumption of air links between Bangladesh and Pakistan. On July 7, 1976, when the national carrier of Bangladesh flew its first flight for Karachi, India prevented that flight to fly over its air space thus causing an unnecessary delay in the aircraft's arrival. Captain Tahir of Bangladesh Biman Airlines told

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<sup>75</sup> Dawn, August 16, 1975 quoted in Farzana Shakoor, *op.cit.*, p. 118.



newsmen in Karachi that the Indian government did not permit his aircraft to fly over the Indian territory to make a direct landing at Karachi airport.<sup>76</sup> One important trump card which India has in case of BD-Pak relations is the projection of tragic events of 1971 in such a manner that anti-Pakistan feelings remain in some shape in Bangladesh. How can Bangladesh and Pakistan deal with such a situation?

Much depends on the methodology of Dhaka and Islamabad to carry on with steps for better cooperation in their relations without allowing New Delhi or the pro-Indian lobby in Bangladesh to negatively play a role in this regard. Till the time Indo-Pak relations are normalized, it will be a big challenge for Dhaka and Islamabad to move on to the road of cooperation. This is a reality and one needs to understand the dynamics of Indo-BD relations and how these affect relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. To some extent there also exists mutuality of "threat perception" between Pakistan and Bangladesh about India since the two countries share large borders with that country and have unresolved conflicts with New Delhi.

Rationally speaking, if Pakistan and Bangladesh relations prosper, it should not be at the expense of India and if Indo-Bangladesh relations thrive, it should not be at the expense of Pakistan. If this fundamental reality is seriously taken into account by Dhaka, Islamabad and New Delhi, it will certainly help in removing suspicions and paranoia, which exist in the external dynamics of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations. Moreover, improvement in Indo-Pak relations and Indo-Bangladesh relations will be better for the progress of SAARC.

Another issue which India has been raising about Pakistan in the context of Bangladesh, is about its allegations that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been involved in anti-Indian activities. *The Times of India* quoting sources in the Indian Home Ministry revealed that, "India and Bangladesh will hold a joint working group meeting soon comprising officials of the home ministries of the two countries to decide strategies to tackle the activities of ISI of Pakistan in the north-eastern region of India. According to the reports, it will be more in the nature of coordinated action and not a joint cooperation."<sup>77</sup> According to Bangladesh news agency, UNB, at a meeting of Joint Working Group of Dhaka and Delhi, Bangladesh categorically brushed aside the Indian complaint that Pakistan intelligence agents are operating from its territory into India. There is no camp or activities of the ISI or any other foreign intelligence agency in Bangladesh. Bangladesh will not give a single inch of its land to any

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, July 8, 1976 quoted in Farzana Shakoor, *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>77</sup> See, "Indo-Bangla officials to decide strategies to tackle ISI activities soon," *The Daily Star*, September 5, 1999.

country to conduct subversive acts in a third country.<sup>78</sup> According to the same news agency, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Morshed Khan dismissed as untrue and baseless the reported remarks by the West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya that foreign agents are operating from Bangladesh and Pakistan's security outfit ISI is sponsoring that. To a call attention of Jamaat member in parliament, Morshed Khan said that Bangladesh government through its diplomatic channel took up the matter with the Indian government.<sup>79</sup>

In August 2002 the Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha visited Bangladesh. His visit took place after the visit of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and was considered a tactful attempt made by New Delhi to balance the goodwill which Musharraf had earned for Pakistan. During his visit to Savar to pay homage to the liberation war martyrs, Sinha wrote in the visitor's book,

The determination with which the people of Bangladesh waged a relentless struggle for freedom, dignity and the inalienable right to protect and preserve their language, culture and rich heritage is an unforgettable saga of our times. India had lent support to the struggle motivated by the justness of cause and a common commitment to the ideals of freedom and democracy. In the process, the blood of many young Indians mingled with that of the Muktiyoddhas (freedom fighters) on the sacred soil of Bangladesh. We were comrades-in-arms then. We are brothers in peace and partners in progress today.<sup>80</sup>

Sinha's remarks were meant to prove to the outside world, particularly to Pakistan that the bonds of Indo-Bangladesh friendship have their roots in the liberation war and cannot be weakened. Hence the relevance of Pakistan factor in Indo-BD relations. Some Bangladeshis still feel that they were pushed towards India by the ugly military operation launched by the Pakistan Army on March 25, 1971. That they had fought for Pakistan to emancipate themselves from Hindu domination but the senseless and thoughtless policies of West Pakistani elite resulting into the disintegration of Pakistan again made them dependent on India.<sup>81</sup>

## II. Internal Dimensions

As far as internal dimensions in Bangladesh about relations with Pakistan are concerned, there are five types of people and groups. First, those who still

<sup>78</sup> "ISI activities: Dhaka brushes aside Delhi's charges," *The Daily Star*, January 25, 2000.

<sup>79</sup> "FM dismisses Buddhadev's remarks," *The Bangladesh Observer*, April 8, 2002.

<sup>80</sup> *Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), August 25, 2002.

<sup>81</sup> Discussion with renowned intellectuals of Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi during the author's fieldwork.



have bitter memories of Pakistan Army's action during the liberation war but are not associated with the Awami League or have pro-Indian feelings. Second, those who have a hostile opinion of Pakistan and have clear-cut political affiliation with Awami League and have soft corner for India. Third, those who have positive feelings for Pakistan on account of historical and religious factors and want close relations with Islamabad. Fourth, are those segments of society, particularly belonging to the young generation who have an interest in Pakistan and want to have close cooperation with that country, particularly people-to-people level without politicizing various issues. Fifth, those who are naive about Pakistan and lack any opinion about that country. There also exists a perception in Bangladesh that as far as the two mainstream political parties are concerned, Awami League is hostile, while Bangladesh National Party (BNP) is soft towards Pakistan. Whereas, religious parties, particularly Jamaat-i-Islami are considered as pro-Pakistan.

In August 1997, BNP Chairperson and leader of opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia visited Pakistan and met Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad. Sharif welcomed the Bangladeshi opposition leader and discussed with her bilateral, regional and international issues.<sup>82</sup> However, her visit to Pakistan led to a serious controversy in Bangladesh. According to a Dhaka based English newspaper, the Bangladeshi High Commissioner in Pakistan was asked by the Foreign Ministry to furnish a comprehensive report about leader of opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia's recent visit to Pakistan. The report was sought against the backdrop of reports that one or more of the self-confessed killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had secretly met Begum Zia during her recent visit to Pakistan and also about allegations that the two persons involved in the killings, Colonel Rashid and Major Nur, had obtained Pakistani passports. Meanwhile, Pakistan High Commissioner in Dhaka, Mr. Karam Elahi talking to *The Daily Star* refuted the claims of issuance of Pakistani passports to anyone linked with the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.<sup>83</sup>

Internal contradictions in Bangladeshi society had also come into surface when Mr. Z. A. Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan visited Bangladesh in June 1974 resulting into the strengthening of so-called pro-Pakistan elements. In post-Mujib Bangladesh also, internal dynamics continue to influence BD-Pak relations because of the sharp division of Bangladeshi society into those who favor and oppose Pakistan. The suspicion expressed by the Awami League government concerning Begum Khaleda Zia's visit to Pakistan is another

<sup>82</sup> "Khaleda, Sharif discuss issues," *The Daily Star*, August 26, 1997.

<sup>83</sup> "Envoy to Pakistan asked to prepare detailed report," *The Daily Star*, August 31, 1997.



example of how domestic political factors shape perceptions in relations with Pakistan. In the same way, the welcome extended by the BNP-led government of four party alliance to the visit of President Musharraf to Bangladesh and the boycott of the visit by the main opposition party Awami League clearly demonstrated internal contradictions in Bangladeshi society. On the one hand, are those elements who are Islamist, anti-Indian and who believe in Bangladeshi nationalism. They have a soft corner for Pakistan because strong BD-Pak ties can help their country counter the Indian influence. On the other hand there are people who are hostile to Pakistan because of historical reasons, particularly those concerning the events of 1971 and are indebted to the Indian support which was given to seek independence from the oppression of West Pakistan. These two groups divide the Bangladeshi society into pro and anti-Pakistan as was evident during the visit of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf to Bangladesh. Such a divide will continue to shape future trends in Bangladeshi politics and society till the time foreign policies issues are delinked from domestic politics regardless of their negative implications.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### STRATEGIES FOR MEANINGFUL TIES

There is no short cut to transform BD-Pak relations from relative indifference to mutual warmth. The process of reconciliation, as envisaged by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in their speeches of July 30, 2002 require extra effort not only by the two governments but also by various segments of civil societies of the two countries. Since the two sides have their domestic compulsions and external factors also play a crucial role in determining the paradigms of their ties, it will take some time to ensure the following of a more cooperative path in Dhaka-Islamabad relations. The two countries had made a good start by establishing full diplomatic missions in each other's capital in January 1976 and had moved fast in strengthening bilateral ties by signing a number of agreements in trade, commerce and cultural cooperation. But, such a progress, which remained at a modest pace until end of 1980s, lost its momentum in 1990s. As a result, prevailing BD-Pak ties despite having tremendous scope for meaningful cooperation in different fields, lack proper initiative and political will.

Bangladesh and Pakistan, despite geographical barriers are proximate to each other in several ways. Both countries share a common past, common religion and understanding on various regional and international issues. Tremendous potential in the areas of trade and commerce exists and requires practical policies to be implemented. The two countries have supported each other in various international fora and close defense cooperation also exists as evident from the visit of military officials from time to time. Therefore, it will be not wrong to argue that despite their unresolved conflicts, because of geo-political reasons and the bond of religion, both Bangladesh and Pakistan are natural allies. Both countries need each other.

#### I. President Musharraf's Visit to Bangladesh

Perhaps no event in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations has been of so significance as the visit of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf to Dhaka from July 29-31, 2002. In fact, it was the first official visit by any Pakistani head of the state to Bangladesh.<sup>84</sup> As the Chief of the Army Staff and President of

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President General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq had visited Bangladesh on the occasion of SAARC summit in 1985 and visited to the cyclone-hit areas in 1986 with the Indian Prime Minister and the Sri Lankan President.

Pakistan, Musharraf knew very well that during his visit to Bangladesh, he would have to confront with various unresolved issues in BD-Pak relations. Earlier, on the occasion of UN's millennium summit, a planned meeting between General Musharraf and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was cancelled because of the latter's criticism in her speech at the UN against military takeover in different countries. Subsequent event like the comments made by Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka, Irfan H. Raja, against the liberation struggle in a seminar at a Bangladeshi research think tank in November 2000 also soured relations between the two countries. Irfan Raja was expelled from Bangladesh and Dhaka's demand that Pakistan should officially apologize against the atrocities committed during its military during 1971 gained ground. It was only after the defeat of Awami League in October 2001 elections and the meeting between the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Khaleda Zia and President Musharraf on the occasion of SAARC summit held at Katmandu in January 2002 that some betterment in BD-Pak relations took place. In that meeting Prime Minister Khaleda Zia invited President Musharraf to visit Bangladesh.

While Musharraf's visit did not witness any major breakthrough in case of settling pending issues, it created proper conditions for ushering an era of reconciliation between Bangladesh and Pakistan. He and his delegation were warmly received at Dhaka airport by the Government of Bangladesh whereas, the main opposition party Awami League and some left-wing organizations decided to express their displeasure over the visit of Pakistani President and boycotted that event. It was against the background of that political environment that the visit of President Pervez Musharraf to Dhaka was undertaken. On the question of apology, Musharraf followed a middle path but gave a clear message of reconciliation with the people of Bangladesh. Immediately after attending welcome ceremony at the Dhaka airport he went to pay homage to the liberation war martyrs at Savar. After placing a wreath at the pedestal of national martyr's memorial he wrote in the visitor's book that, "Your brothers and sisters in Pakistan share with pain of the events of 1971. The excesses committed during that unfortunate period are regrettable."<sup>85</sup> While Musharraf's regrets about the excesses committed during 1971 were open to various interpretations, his gesture and thoughtfulness was more or less welcomed in Bangladesh and also in Pakistan. It was argued that the courageous and sincere gesture on the part of Pakistani President should not be misinterpreted because no Pakistani head of the state or the government since 1971 has been so thoughtful and straight to the unfortunate events of 1971 as President Musharraf.

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<sup>85</sup> See "Musharraf regrets Pak forces' excesses in 1971" *The Independent* (Dhaka), July 30, 2002.



Again referring to what he had written in the visitor's book during his visit to Savar, President Pervez Musharraf in a dinner speech hosted by the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the BD-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka said that,

My bothers and sisters in Pakistan share with their fellow brothers and sisters of Bangladesh profound grief over calamitous events of 1971. As a result of this tragedy, a family having common religion and cultural heritage and united by a joint struggle for independence and shared vision of a future was torn apart. We feel sorry for the tragedy, which left deep scars on both our nations. But wounds do heal with time. We shall always stand by our Bangladeshi sisters and brothers. Time has come to build brotherly trust and confidence and lay down the foundation of mighty pillar of friendship so that our future generations take pride of what we accomplished today and painful memories of the past don't haunt them any more.<sup>86</sup>

Spontaneously responding to the gesture of President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said,

Thank you, Mr. President for your candid expression on the events of 1971. This will no doubt, help mitigate the old wounds. We like to look forward and work together as brothers for a bright future.<sup>87</sup>

She further said that "we are deeply committed to promoting and further strengthening the existing bonds of friendship between our two countries. Our relations have reached a level of maturity. Therefore, we can look together confidently into the future."<sup>88</sup> There was a mixed reaction to President Musharraf's expressing regrets and saying sorry to the tragedy of 1971. Two opinions clearly emerged related to Musharraf's remarks of regrets and sorry. The first opinion welcomed his feelings about 1971 and argued that such a gesture will give an impetus to the process of BD-Pak reconciliation. The second opinion considered Musharraf's remarks insignificant and devoid of the sufferings of the people of Bangladesh from the military operations during 1971. They demanded a categorical apology from Islamabad, trial of those involved in war crimes and payment of compensation.

A Pakistani newspaper *Daily Dawn*, in its editorial of July 31 stated that, "there is no doubt the events of 1971 leading to the emergence of Bangladesh as

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<sup>86</sup> "Musharraf says sorry for 1971 calamitous events," *The Independent*, August 31, 2002.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*,

a sovereign state constitute a sorry chapter in Pakistan's chequered history. The excesses to which President Musharraf referred are a matter of historical record, with both sides guilty of massacres and horrendous human rights violations. It will be futile to lay all the blame on one side while exonerating the other."<sup>89</sup> The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party welcomed the expression of regrets and sorry by President Pervez Musharraf. Redwan Ahmad, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs, told *The Independent* that Pervez Musharraf's expression of regret was a manifestation of the conscious feeling of the Pakistani people. The sincere confession would help remove the long-standing irritants and ill feelings and help bring the two peoples closer. That the then government of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had cordially received the then Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1974 without any mention of regret from the Pakistani side."<sup>90</sup> A former Bangladeshi Ambassador to Pakistan, Abul Ahsan welcomed the good gesture of President Musharraf and his sorry feeling for the tragic events of 1971 as it would help heal the wounds and improve relations between the two people.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, the acting President of Awami League, Abdus Samad Azad called the comment of Pakistan President as a "non-serious talk." He demanded that Pakistani authorities should give unqualified apology for the crimes they committed by undoing the election results of 1970 and going for an undeclared war against the people of Bangladesh.<sup>92</sup> Awami League, which had earlier agreed in writing to send a delegation to meet President Musharraf retracted from its earlier position and cancelled the proposed meeting and also called for one-day strike on July 30 against the visit of Pakistan President.

Immediately after the visit of President Pervez Musharraf to Bangladesh, a joint statement by the leaders of fifty-one civil society organizations of Pakistan apologized to the sisters and brothers of Bangladesh for the violation of the people's human rights. They demanded that a full apology be tendered by Pakistan to the people of Bangladesh. The civil society groups of Pakistan led by the Human Rights Commission stated that, "we take it that the positive developments centering around the apology issue signal Pakistan's intentions for making up on some of the feelings generated by the genocide committed by her armed forces on the people of the then East Pakistan in 1971."<sup>93</sup> The Chairman of Pakistan Human Rights Commission (HRCP) welcomed President Musharraf's statement but said that it was not enough. The HRCP and other

<sup>89</sup> See editorial, "Regrets over '71 excesses," *Dawn*, July 31, 2002.

<sup>90</sup> "Musharraf's regret evokes mixed reaction," *The Independent*, August 1, 2002.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>93</sup> See editorial, "Internal demand in Pakistan for apology," *Daily Star* (Dhaka), August 6, 2002.



Human Rights groups published a newspaper advertisement in Pakistani newspapers calling for a full apology to the people of Bangladesh. According to that advertisement, these groups reiterated that, "through that advertisement campaign we are sending a message to our brothers and sisters in Bangladesh that the civil society in Pakistan does not endorse what was done by the military."<sup>94</sup> Appreciating the gesture expressed by the civil society groups of Pakistan on the question of apology, the editorial of *Daily The Independent* stated that "although President Pervez Musharraf came nearer than any Pakistani leader to extend apology but he confided himself to regret for the calamitous situation that took place in 1971. This is miles away from apology. At any rate we welcome the gesture by Pakistan civil society and any change of heart for the part of Pakistan's rulers."<sup>95</sup> But the civil society of Pakistan through its expression on the question of apology will find it difficult to pursue the military establishment (the holder of real power) to come out openly condemning the excessive use of force against the Bengali population of the then East Pakistan. Till the time there is a categorical apology by Islamabad for the events of 1971, the burden of history cannot be lightened.

Does it mean that pending a formal apology, Bangladesh-Pakistan relations could progress or that issue will continue to cast a dark shadow in BD-Pak relations in the years to come? From a survey<sup>96</sup> made on the question of apology in the context of President Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh, it seems that the issue still carries a weight in the minds of the people of Bangladesh and a demand of a formal apology has not lost its significance even after the regrets expressed by the Pakistan President.

On the question of division of assets and liabilities and return of stranded Pakistanis, no breakthrough was achieved between the two countries. Before the arrival of President Musharraf, Dhaka made it clear that it would raise these two issues in official talks with the Pakistani delegation. When a question was asked from President Musharraf at his breakfast meeting with the media people before his departure on July 31 on the division of assets he said that the issue was very complicated and we will have to live with it in future also.<sup>97</sup> It was stated by a

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<sup>94</sup> "Pak HR groups press government for full apology," *Daily Star*, August 8, 2002.

<sup>95</sup> See editorial, "Pak apology for the part of Pakistan's rulers," *The Independent*, August 8, 2002.

<sup>96</sup> Based on author's presentations given at the University of Rajshahi on August 18, at the Research Society of Bangladesh, Chittagong on August 30 and at the University of Chittagong on September 2, 2002 and views shared with people from a cross section of society in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong.

<sup>97</sup> Mahbul Hasan Khan, "Reflections on the visit of Pakistan's President," *The Independent*, August 5, 2002.



Pakistani analyst that the "question of division of assets between the two countries is a complex matter. Perhaps it could be taken up by the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries in accordance with the framework agreed during the President's visit to Dhaka. Bangladesh should be expected to take a realistic view of the huge political and legal complexities involved in working onto a reasonably fair award on the accounts by way of division of assets and liabilities acceptable to both sides. As far as the question of losses on account of the private assets abandoned by individuals and industrialists in both countries is concerned, this could perhaps be taken up for review by the Pakistan-Bangladesh Joint Business Council"<sup>98</sup> It should be noted that Bangladesh provided the figure of U.S.\$4.5 billion to Pakistan for the payment of assets and the Government of Pakistan has also made its own calculations on the issue of division of assets and liabilities.

As far as the issue of stranded Pakistanis is concerned, President Musharraf while expressing sympathy with the plight of such people made it clear that given the pressure of three million Afghan refugees it will not be possible to launch their repatriation at this stage.<sup>99</sup> However, during official talks, he assured the Bangladeshi Prime Minister that "they (stranded Pakistanis) have opted for and are citizens of Pakistan, they will be taken back."<sup>100</sup> In a press release issued by the stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC) a five-member delegation led by Alhaj Nasim Khan, Chief Patron of SPGRC met Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf during his visit to Dhaka. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, Inamul Haq and Pakistan High Commissioner to Bangladesh Mr. Iqbal A. Khan were also present on the occasion. In that meeting, Pakistan President assured the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh that his government would do every thing possible to resolve the issue and expressed his sympathy for them. The leader of SPGRC briefed President Musharraf on the problem they are facing in Bangladesh.<sup>101</sup>

As far as the progress on bilateral areas of cooperation during President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Dhaka is concerned, it proved to be substantial because of two reasons. First, institutional measures to enhance BD-Pak cooperation were taken and second Pakistan granted duty free access to Bangladeshi jute and tea to its markets. Both Pakistan President and Bangladeshi Prime Minister termed official talks very successful. While giving her reaction to newsmen about talks, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said that she was fully

<sup>98</sup> M H. Askari, "New equation with Dhaka," *Dawn*, August 7, 2002.

<sup>99</sup> "No deal on repatriation of stranded Pakistanis," *Daily Star*, July 31, 2002.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>101</sup> "Musharraf assured stranded Pakistanis of resolving issues," *The Independent*, July 31, 2002.

convinced that the future of Pakistan and Bangladesh relations is extremely bright."<sup>102</sup> After BD-Pak official talks held on July 30, two protocols were signed. The first protocol called as "Cultural Exchange Program" between Bangladesh and Pakistan will have a duration from 2003-2007. The protocol signed on "Bilateral Consultations" called for periodic consultation between the Foreign Affairs Ministries of the two countries. Pakistan also unilaterally granted duty free access to Bangladeshi products, particularly on items like jute and tea to her markets.<sup>103</sup>

In the area of non-governmental cooperation, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a Bangladesh-Pakistan Joint Business Council (JBC) to promote bilateral trade and investment through increased interaction between business people of the two countries. It will provide a regular and recognized platform for discussion on promotion of trade, investment, technology transfer, services and other industrial sectors between businessmen and industrialists of the two countries. The Joint Business Council agreement would also mark the renewal of the agreement on Economic and Commercial Cooperation, which was signed on July 22, 1992 in Dhaka between FPCCI and FBCCI. According to the details of the MOU, the BD-Pak JBC meetings will be organized in Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively for liaison and consultation between the two business circles. The two-nation business body will also exchange recommendations, receive businessmen and technical experts and conduct other activities useful in order to achieve the JBC purpose.<sup>104</sup> It was also decided in BD-Pak official talks to reactivate the moribund joint economic commission and ensure its regular meetings to broaden areas of cooperation.

Another area in which BD-Pak cooperation took a new leaf was the defense sector. Pakistan Defense Secretary Mr. Hamid Nawaz who accompanied President Musharraf held talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart and the service chiefs. Talking to the correspondent of *The Nation*, he said that Pakistan and Bangladesh have agreed to further enhance cooperation in the defense sector. According to the understanding reached, Dhaka will buy small arms and ammunition manufacturing units from Pakistan. According to him, a feasibility study will be prepared to finalize the deal. According to the defense cooperation

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<sup>102</sup> "Khelada terms talks with Musharraf very successful" *The Bangladesh Observer*, July 31, 2002.

<sup>103</sup> "Pakistan offers duty-free access of jute, tea," *The Bangladesh Observer*, *ibid.*,

<sup>104</sup> "Dhaka-Pindi Joint Business Council formed," *The Bangladesh Observer*, *ibid.*,



agreement signed between Dhaka and Islamabad several years ago, Pakistan has so far trained 900 military officers from Bangladesh and about 33 Pakistani officers have got their training from Bangladesh. Bangladesh has asked for more vacancies in the military training programmes.<sup>105</sup> Pakistan also waived around 80 million rupees, which Bangladesh owed in the purchase of military equipment.

The high profile visit of President Musharraf ended with a breakfast meeting with the journalist on August 31. He evaded the question on giving categorical apology by saying that what "I said, what I said. Now we have to look forward to a new future." Confidently terming his visit a great success, he said that the "main achievement of his visit to Bangladesh was the desire and will of the two countries to move forward to forge better relations. This achievement is more than what has been achieved in terms of economic and business sectors."<sup>106</sup> Calling his visit a win-win situation all the way for the two countries, he stated that, "I came with the sincere desire to cement the ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan. I came with the desire to forget the past and move forward."<sup>107</sup> He hoped that the protocol signed for consultations by the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries, the MOU on cultural cooperation, the setting up of business council, as well as reactivation of joint economic commission would cement understanding and promote cooperation between the two countries. The MOU on cultural cooperation would promote people to people contacts while the other one on business council would bring the business communities and the private sectors of the two countries together while the governments and the public sectors would play the roles of facilitation. Free market for Bangladeshi tea and jute to Pakistan would initiate great business ties between the two countries.<sup>108</sup>

Generally speaking, President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh could be analyzed while taking into account three major realities. First, resumption of high level contacts and interaction at the official level between the two countries resulting into the signing of protocols and MOU on strengthening the areas of bilateral cooperation. Earlier visits by Pakistani and Bangladeshi leaders to each other countries since 1974 couldn't leave such a deep impact as the visit of President Musharraf. As rightly observed in an editorial of a Bangladeshi Daily newspaper,

<sup>105</sup> "BD to buy Pak arms making units," *The Nation* (Lahore), July 31, 2002.

<sup>106</sup> See the news item, "Desire for better relations main achievement of visit: Musharraf," *The Independent*, August 1, 2002.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*,



Musharraf's official visit has added a new chapter on the economic front as well. It was for long that Bangladesh has been requesting for special trade facilities for a few products. It is heartening that the presidential visit has recognized a couple of products that would enter Pakistani market as duty free items. That would help to some extent in reducing the gap of imbalance existing between the two countries. The visiting delegate has definitely looked into Bangladesh's long-standing request for preferential trade facilities. One may hope that the list may include few more items in future.<sup>109</sup>

The understanding to have formal consultation between the foreign ministries of the two countries is another important step to unleash the process of better understanding on regional and international issues. But, it is yet to be seen to what extent the element of continuity is maintained in official contacts and exchange of views between Dhaka and Islamabad. In the past also, a joint commission was formed but it failed to move BD-Pak relations from conflict to cooperation. Second, the visit was able to partially unleash the process of reconciliation between Bangladesh and Pakistan. It is not true that the visit of Pakistan's President created substantial goodwill and affinity among various sections of Bangladeshi society but it played an important role in neutralizing the influence and role of those elements in Bangladesh who since long were propagating the negative image of Pakistan, particularly the one related to the atrocities committed by its military against the Bengali people from March-December 1971.

According to a Bangladeshi writer, "the visit of General Pervez Musharraf to Bangladesh in the last week of July was significant and was described by the guest as more than our expectations. Hopefully, politically and economically the two countries will now be closer than before. Notwithstanding the two governments failure to resolve two vital issues, negotiations of the stranded Pakistan and sharing of Bangladesh's pre-independence assets, the tour had drawn significant public attention. It was mainly due to the obvious significance that the Pakistan leader possesses. Musharraf's reference to the historical birth of Bangladesh including his regret for the events of 1971 that had separated the two wings of Pakistan 32 years ago, has also made his trip worthy."<sup>110</sup> According to one school of thought, Musharraf's tactful reference to the events of 1971 was able to release the pressure from those pro-Pakistan elements in

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<sup>109</sup> See editorial, "President Musharraf's visit and Bangla-Pak relations," *The Independent*, August 4, 2002.

<sup>110</sup> "General Musharraf's regrets for 1971," *The Independent*, August 7, 2002.

Bangladesh who felt defensive vis-à-vis the continuous tirade against Pakistan's military atrocities during 1971.

Third, Musharraf's visit reinforced the conviction of those elements in Bangladesh who did not trust the spirit of Islamabad to mend fences with Dhaka by resolving the pending issues. For them, his visit was a clever move on the part of Islamabad to symbolically express gesture on 1971 while maintaining status quo on all major outstanding issues. Neither the Pakistan President gave formal apology, nor there was any understanding on the question of division of assets and liabilities and the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis. Even the duty free access given by Pakistan to Bangladeshi tea and jute to its markets will not help in removing the trade balance between the two countries. Therefore, according to that school of thought, "for Bangladesh, there is nothing to gloat over the assumed success of the visit. There was no progress on outstanding substantive issues. President Musharraf has not apologized, nor he has conceded to the demands of share in the assets or compensation or repatriation of stranded Pakistanis. The MOU signed are cosmetic baggages in diplomacy"<sup>111</sup>. On this account, it is expected that there will not be a major shift in the perception of Bengali elite about the events of 1971. While the expression of regrets has soften the hearts of those who wanted some confession from the Pakistani side about the tragic events of 1971, subsequent visits by the two sides and more people to people cooperation will help enhance the healing process and establish strong bonds of friendship between the two countries.

Till the time, people at the helm of people in the two countries are able to follow-up to the visit of Pakistan President and go beyond the existing parameters of relations, it will be difficult to predict a qualitative breakthrough in BD-Pak relations. It is true that bilateral visits play an important role in clearing mistrust, doubts and misperceptions about each other and giving a road map for bettering things, in case of Pakistan and Bangladesh historical evidence gives a different message. Pervez Musharraf has said before leaving Dhaka that his visit would unleash the process of reconciliation between Bangladesh and Pakistan but he has not clearly indicated how that objective will be achieved. Will the process of BD-Pak reconciliation be limited to only official level as one witnessed during President Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh or people of the two countries be also involved in that process? As far as the second thing is concerned, people to people contacts, which is the key to any reconciliation process, is almost non-existent in case of Bangladesh and Pakistan. There is no proper indication after President Musharraf's visit that the two governments

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<sup>111</sup> Abdul Hannan, "Musharraf's visit: An appraisal," *The Independent*, August 5, 2002.



have taken required steps to reduce restrictions on the flow of people, goods and services. Without proper travel facilities and the exchange of students, teachers, media men, businessmen and people from other segments of society, the process of BD-Pak reconciliation cannot take off. Unfortunately, in the past also, the lack of follow-up to the understanding reached between the two countries on augmenting the process of cooperation resulted into stalemate in their relations. One can only hope that such a scenario will not be repeated again.

Some of the strategies which could be formulated and adopted in giving depth and a positive direction to Bangladesh-Pakistan relations are as follows:-

## **II. Short Term Strategies**

1. Building of trust and confidence by discouraging negative propaganda against each other, particularly in the media. From time to time, one can hear provocative statements, speeches and programs covered in some sections of print and electronic media maligning each other. Such type of a situation is detrimental to the objective of promoting cooperation between the two countries and can only accentuate biases and hostility against each other, particularly among the generation born after 1971. The assertion made by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in his banquet speech delivered on July 30 in Dhaka in his honor that in his view the time of Bangladesh-Pakistan reconciliation has arrived and the truth expressed by the Bangladeshi Prime Minister on the same occasion that a level of maturity has arrived in BD-Pak relations cannot be undermined. What is needed is to extend the understanding for cooperation from official to the non-governmental level so that suspicion and mistrust which since 1971 tend to negatively influence BD-Pakistan relations are removed.
2. The trade volume of the two countries is very low and should be enhanced by promoting trade both at the official and non-official level. Both sides need to provide maximum facilities in order to seek win-win situation in trade and commerce both at public and private sector. The formation of BD-Pak Business Council and the exemption of duty given by Pakistan to Bangladeshi tea, jute and jute products can positively shape trade relations between the two countries. Moreover, there is also a need to encourage bilateral investments and the launching of joint ventures in various commercial fields.
3. There is an urgent need to encourage people to people contacts by launching exchange programs in education, culture, media, business, science and technology and other areas. For this purpose, air and sea links between the two countries need to be made more effective so that more and people from



the two countries can visit resulting into the promotion of tourism and developing better understanding of each other.

4. Visa policy of the two countries should be people friendly. There is a need on the part of Pakistan Government to establish consulates in Chittagong and Sylhet and for the Bangladesh Government to open consulates in Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta. The issuance of Visas should be without any hassle to the applicants. The tourist corporation of the two countries can launch joint ventures by special package tours at an affordable prices for students, artists, musicians, media people and businessmen.
5. The two governments should encourage NGOs to carry out joint projects in important areas like environment, rural development, gender emancipation etc.

### III. Long-term Strategies

1. In order to create goodwill among the people of Pakistan, it is imperative on the part of Government of Pakistan to categorically condemn and regret the atrocities, which were committed by its forces during 1971. This can be done by the future parliament of Pakistan. Such a step will help remove misgivings and negative feelings among the vast majority of the people of Bangladesh who owe a formal apology from Pakistan Government for the unfortunate acts of 1971. Similarly, the killing of both Bengalees and non-Bengalees as a result of tragic events of 1971 should be simultaneously condemned by Dhaka and Islamabad without any political compulsion. Only then mutual forgiveness can clear past hangovers and create prospects for better ties. A truth and reconciliation commission composed of renowned persons, including human right's activists of the two countries should be formed so as to launch the healing process. Similarly joint studies by Bangladeshi and Pakistani researchers to rewrite the history textbooks should be initiated so that an objective view about the events of 1971 and other related matters could be presented to the people of Bangladesh and Pakistan. According to Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, Chairman, Department of International Relations, Dhaka University, "there is a need for a better understanding between the people of Bangladesh and Pakistan, particularly those related to 1971. A joint criminal court, composed of judges from Pakistan and Bangladesh with a reputed international jurist as Convener, if required, could be set up to probe the killings of 1971."<sup>112</sup> The Government

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<sup>112</sup> Imtiaz Ahmed, welcome address given at a seminar on, "Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: Future Prospects," organized by the Bangladesh-Pakistan Forum, Dhaka on June 8, 2002

of Pakistan also needs to close the sad chapter of stranded Pakistanis (Biharis) by establishing a special fund for their relief and welfare. It is quite obvious to the stranded Pakistanis living in different camps in Bangladesh that because of political reasons it is not possible for the Pakistan Government to seek their repatriation. Therefore, the fund composed of the amount lying with the a trust established by the *Rabita-i-Alam-i-Islami* with the contribution made by the Government of Pakistan and other agencies can help settle the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh. Once the stranded Pakistanis owe their allegiance to Bangladesh, there will be no problem for their settlement and absorption in the society of Bangladesh. However, those stranded Pakistanis who want to go to Pakistan should be repatriated on humanitarian basis. Here it must be taken into account that a survey was undertaken in the stranded Pakistanis in 1992 by the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka to determine the cases of repatriation. On the basis of that survey, the issue of stranded Pakistanis could be resolved. Similarly, the issue of division of assets and liabilities which is pending since the last 31 years should also be resolved through sincere joint efforts of Bangladesh and Pakistan. It is better for a better future of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations that existing conflicts between the two countries are minimized so that no further bottlenecks are created for unleashing the process of reconciliation.

2. In order to institutionalize Bangladesh-Pakistan relations on long-term basis, it is essential that all agreements signed in the past and in the future between the two countries should be implemented in latter and spirit. Unfortunately, Dhaka and Islamabad had signed so many agreements since 1976 but the implementation process has not been up to the mark. This is particularly relevant in case of MOU and protocols signed between Dhaka and Islamabad on the occasion of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh so that there is no gap in the pace of relations.

It is hoped that with the passage of time, the unpleasant part of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations will be replaced with positive developments. No matter how strong are the forces who are against Dhaka-Islamabad rapprochement, if there exists determination and good intention on the part of the policy-makers of the two countries, much can be done to open a new chapter in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations.

The need is to strive for positive future in BD-Pak relations and learn lessons from negative conflicts. Conflicts are common in relations between or among states, but such conflicts should not be allowed to assume a negative dimension. In case of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, in the last 31

years, instead of removing negative conflicts, status quo was maintained and minimum efforts were carried out at the governmental level to strive for a positive future. As time is passing, one can expect more interaction among the people of Bangladesh and Pakistan so that past misunderstandings could be minimized and strong bonds of friendship could be established between the two brotherly Islamic countries in not too distant future.

Bangladesh and Pakistan are natural allies because the two countries share their perceptions on number of international and regional issues. Both are the members of SAARC, OIC, D-8, NAM and the United Nations. People of Bangladesh and Pakistan have great warmth for each other as both have family, friendly and business ties. What is required is that the two governments should follow a proactive approach in terms of expanding political, cultural, educational, trade and commercial ties. With more and more trade and joint investments, one can expect better interaction between the people of the two countries helping to remove the shades of misunderstanding and build mutual trust and confidence.