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Bangladesh-India Diplomatic Relations (1975-1996): Transitions, Bilateral Disputes, and Legacies

Md. Habibullah [α] & Emran Hossain [σ]

Abstract- Bangladesh, born in 1971, endured her very first setback in 1975 when a bloody military coup took place, which killed the father of the nation, and subsequently, the army seized power. From then to 1990, two military dictators ruled the country for a short time as a military dictator and the rest of the time under the veil of the democratically elected President. With the fall of the Mujib government, a new diplomatic stance had taken up; from a socialist, liberal, secular, and democratic state, Bangladesh crawled down to a capitalist, conservative, Islamist and authoritarian form of state. It appears from the policy of the dictators that they had tried to satiate the people through the amendments in the constitution to shape it as an Islamist country and to satisfy the capitalist class, they replaced the moderate socialist economy into a capitalist one. An identical procedure that was implemented by the Pakistani military ruler in the pre-independence era, had been ensued by the military dictators in independent Bangladesh.

The two military dictators and an elected government of the time discussed in this study tried to draw the attention of world leaders who were holding the same ideologies and interests that ran here by them. Consequently, the friendly and warm diplomatic relations with India came to an end and the foreign dependency of Bangladesh became dependent on Pakistan and pro-Pakistan friendly nations for the protection and support of the military government. China and the USA, who vigorously opposed our liberation war, became the key friends of Bangladesh in the diplomatic arena and our largest neighbor country without her help; we couldn't possibly have our independence, became an ultimate scapegoat of our newly adopted foreign policy. A new trait in politics had been intentionally indoctrinated that was the anti-Indian sentiment. From then to now, this trait has been nurtured by most of the political parties who are now out of mainstream politics. In this study, we will try to investigate the transitions, bilateral disputes, and legacies of Bangladesh's diplomatic relations with India from 1975 to 1996.

Keywords: military, democracy, diplomacy, accords, disagreements.

I. Introduction

The partition of the Sub-continent birthed two new nations; of them, Pakistan had helmed the westernmost part of the sub-continent, but Radcliff's line provided the opportunity to bag East Pakistan, which was situated thousands of miles away from her main territory. The existence of the Eastern portion, which had a boundary with India from three sides, was very sensitive to India both geographically and militarily. This impractical and ascribed demarcation fuelled with 23 years of misrule, oppression, authoritarianism, and militarization of democratic institutions provoked Bengalis to reveal in the 1971 war, and with the join of India on 3rd December as an ally, Bangladesh becomes an Independent nation. As a war-stricken and newly liberated country, Bangladesh ascertained her goal in foreign relations to draw foreign economic assistance and recognition from the outer world. Bangladesh's largest neighbor and a key ally of the liberation war, India has been a crucial factor in the country's foreign policy (as well as domestic politics). Again India-Bangladesh collaboration is cultural, civilizational, social, and economical, many factors unite the two countries historically viz shared history, common heritage, geographical contiguity, and cultural and linguistic affinity. But Dhaka's perception of India, and consequently its approach toward that country, has varied over time and under different governments: sometimes perceived as a positive factor, it has, at other times, been viewed as a key source of a threat to security.[1]

The first government after the independence headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman pursued a clear pro-Indian foreign policy. Then to 1975, Dhaka and New Delhi adopted a very close, cooperative relationship, which is generally dubbed as a 'honeymoon' period.[2] The Bangladesh-India connexion dropped straight down at high speed over the night and became hostile when the Awami League government collapsed and Bangladesh fell into a military regime led by General Zia. Bhumitra Chakma rightly opined that "mistrust and mutual hostility were the dominant room in Bangladesh-India relations during Zia's tenure".[3] A similar kind of relationship was further maintained by the subsequent military junta H.M Ershad and the first elected Government in 1991 after the assassination of Mujib.

We may recall the comment of the ex-Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh. In an interaction with editors in 2011, he said that "we must reckon that at least 25 percent of the population of Bangladesh swears by the Jamiat-ul-Islami and they are very anti-Indian…."[4] This group of people was targeted by the subsequent head of the governments for the support and stability of their governments. In exchange they are permitted in doing politics which was banned after the independence due to their brutal role in the liberation war, thus they

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rehabilitated the accused leaders in mainstream politics and society.

This paper is organized into four sections The first section will deal with the diplomatic personnel who were deployed and the Ministers from both nations involved in the maintenance of bilateral-relationship. In the second section, the stance that was taken by Zia regarding Bangladesh's relations with India, Pakistan, and the then anti-liberation superpowers of the world and the status of mutual issues between India and Bangladesh during his tenure. The third section will evaluate the extension of Zia's policies and Islamization of the state and constitution by H.M Ershad. The fourth section will focus on the policy and approach of the first democratic government towards India.

II. Objectives of the Study

The key objective of this research is to trace out the trends of diplomatic relations of Bangladesh with India and the factors that played a significant role in this regard. Moreover, some specific objectives will be pursued such as

1. To review the historical roots of Bangladesh-India relation.
2. To find out the factors which deteriorated the bilateral relations between the two nations.
3. To identify the settled, semi-settled, and unsettled bilateral issues.
4. To predict the ways to reach into a common understanding for settling the issues which are threatening the friendly relations of Bangladesh with India.
5. Finally, this study will try to recommend that India-Bangladesh relations should be on a good terms for mutual convenience by comprehending the shared history, ethnic compliance, lingual harmony, geographical dependence, and role of India during the liberation war at any time.

III. Methodology and Strategy of the Research

The overall research is conducted with the consultation of primary and secondary sources. Local and international journals covering this topic are also addressed. Interviews of the retired and current officials, diplomats, and ministers have been taken. Relevant information from national newspapers of both countries from 1975 to 1996 is being recuperated for a better understanding of the past incidents. For collecting pertinent information, relevant website information and sources are also consulted.

IV. Diplomats and Ministers

A significant number of diplomats and ministers were in charge of high commissions and foreign ministries during the tenure of several Indian Premiers, and two military dictators, and a Prime Minister in Bangladesh from 1975 to 1996. They were the key personnel to ascertain the policies and objectives of their respective governments as per the government's political and diplomatic stance. The following tables illustrate the names of the Head of Governments, Ministers, High-Commissioners, and other relevant information so that it would be clear to understand and to evaluate the transitions of bilateral relations of the time under discussion.

Prime Ministers of India:

Prime Ministers	Tenure	Political Parties	Visits to Bangladesh
Indira Gandhi	Mar 1971 to Mar 1977	Indian National Congress	Mar 17, 1972
Morarji Desai	Mar 1977 to Jul 1979	Janata Party	Apr 16, 1979
Charan Singh	Jul 1979 to Jan 1980	Janata Party (Secular)	N/A
Indira Gandhi	Jan 1980 to Oct 1984	Indian National Congress	N/A
Rajiv Gandhi	Oct 1984 to Dec 1989	Indian National Congress	Jun 2, Dec 7, 1985
Chandra Shekhar	Nov 1990 to Jun 1991	Samajwadi Janata Party	May 12, 1991
P.V Narashima Rao	Jun 1991 to May 1996	Indian National Congress	Apr 10, 1993

The Chief Martial Law Administrators/Presidents/Prime Minister of Bangladesh

Names of Presidents/ Prime Ministers	Tenure	Political Parties	Visits to India
Ziaur Rahman	Apr 1977 to May 1981	BNP	Dec 19-20, 1977& Jan 21, 1980
H.M. Ershad	Dec 1983 to Dec 1990	Jatiya Party	Oct 6-7, 1982, Nov 4, 1982 & 14 Jul, 1986
Khaleda Zia	Mar 1991 to Mar 1996	BNP	May 26, 1992 & May 2, 1995

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Foreign Ministers of India:

Names of Foreign Ministers	Political Parties	Head of Governments
Atal Bihari Bajpayee	Janata Party	Morarji Desai
Shyam Nandan Prasad Mishra	Janata Party (Secular)	Charan Singh
P.V. Narasimha Rao	Indian National Congress	Indira Gandhi
Bali Ram Bhagat	Indian National Congress	Rajiv Gandhi
P. Shiv Sankar	Indian National Congress	Rajiv Gandhi
N.D. Tiwari	Indian National Congress	Rajiv Gandhi
P.V. Narasimha Rao	Indian National Congress	Rajiv Gandhi
I K Gujral	Janata Dal	V.P Singh
Dinesh Singh	Indian National Congress	P.V Narasimha Rao
Pranab Mukherjee	Indian National Congress	P.V Narasimha Rao

Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh:

Names of Foreign Ministers	Political Parties	Head of Governments
Muhammad Shamsul Haque	BNP (Education Minister Of Yahah Khan 1969-1971)	Ziaur Rahman
A.R. Shamsud Doha		H.M Ershad
Humayun Rashid Chowdhury	Jatiya Party	H.M Ershad
Anisul Islam Mahmud	Jatiya Party	H.M Ershad
A S M Mustafizur Rahman	BNP	Begum Khaleda Zia

High-Commissioners of India:

Names of The High-Commissioners	In-Office	Power Parties in India
K.P.S. Menon	Jan 1977 to Sep 1979	Janata Party
Muchkund Dubey	Oct 1979 to Oct 1982	Janata Party (Secular) & INC
I.P Khosla	Nov 1982 to Aug 1985	Indian National Congress
I.S Chadha	Oct 1985 to Feb 1989	Indian National Congress
K. Srinivasan	Feb 1989 to Mar 1992	Janata Dal (National Front)
K. Raghunath	Apr 1992 to Mar 1995	Indian National Congress

High-Commissioners of Bangladesh:

Names of The High-Commissioners	In-Office	Names of Military Dictators
Shamsur Rahman	Aug 1975 to Oct 1978	Ziaur Rahman
Abul Ehsan	Nov 1978 to May 1982	Ziaur Rahman
A.K Khandkar	Jul 1982 to Jul 1986	H.M Ershad
Faruk A. Chowdhury	Aug 1986 to Jan 1992	H.M Ershad and Caretaker
Farooq Sobhan	May 1992- Feb 1995	Khaleda Zia
C.M Shafi Sami	Apr 1995- Jun 1999	Khaleda Zia

V. Lt. Gen. Ziaur Rahman's Tenure

Professor Sukumaran Nair[5] divided the years from the post-Mujibur regime to the end of Zia's regime into three periods regarding the fall and formation of the Indian government. According to him, the first period is from Nov 1975 to 1977 during an internal emergency in India and when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister. The second period is between Mar 1977 and 1980 during Janata Party's tenure and the third period is from 1980 until the assassination of Zia. The Janata Party's government, the first Non-Congress government, initiated 'bilateral benificialism' as the key principle of its approach regarding diplomatic relations towards the immediate neighbors.

On 15 Aug 1975, a bloody military coup took place in which President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his whole family, except two daughters, were killed.[6] The leading conspirator and President Mujib's cabinet member Khondaker Mushtaq Ahmed gained the Presidency, though for a very short time; this transition of power ushered a new horizon for Ziaur Rahman to attain the political authority of the country. K.M Shafiullah, Army Cheif appointed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was replaced with Ziaur Rahman as the new Army Chief. Meanwhile, a counter Coup was staged again on 3rd Nov by General Khaled Mosharraf (Veteran freedom fighter) and Shafat Jamil, they forced Ziaur Rahman to throw up his position and put him under home arrest. It was followed by the so-called 'Soldiers and People's Coup'[7] on 7 Nov, a mutiny staged by the

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Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) under retired Lt. Col. Abu Taher and a group of socialist military officials.

The key players of the 3rd Nov coup, Khaled Mosharraf was killed and Jamil was arrested. Zia became the Army Chief for another time. Justice Sayem had taken the office of President and Chief Martial Law Administrator on 6 November 1975. He has given up the office of the Chief Martial Law Administrator on 29 November 1976 and office of the President on 21 April 1977.[8] Justice Sayem was installed in the key positions of the state because it was Khondokar Mushtaq who recommended placing someone in power who has no political affiliation. Although Zia was the de facto leader of Justice Sayem's government, he retired from the Bangladesh Army as a Lieutenant General (promoted by himself) in 1978 effected from 28 Apr. Bangladesh formally entered into an era of military dictatorship, uncertainty, and a capitalist economy.

Before evaluating General Zia's foreign policy and diplomatic relations with India, It is opting to have a brief overview of Bangabandhu's policy toward India and the status of diplomatic relations during his regime. The main factor for adopting an India-friendly foreign policy orientation by Sheikh Mujib's government was due to India's contribution to the liberation war. India, the mighty immediate neighbor, contributed through providing diplomatic and moral support and sheltered more than 10 million refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan for several months. India also interfered militarily, and played a very crucial role in the fall of the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan, and thus facilitated the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation.[9] Even India recognized Bangladesh as an independent country on 6th Dec before the ultimate victory. Hence, it was apparent that Dhaka would follow an India-positive foreign policy and that both nations would construct a very intimate relationship after the liberation war of Bangladesh.[10] Eastern bloc countries also supported Bangladesh during the liberation war. In the months following the independence, Bangladesh had maintained warm relations with them. A treaty was signed between India and Bangladesh for 25 years on the matter of peace and security. Bangabandhu was grateful to USSR and established friendly relations with the leaders of the socialist bloc. Due to the warm relation and strong bargaining power of Bangabandhu with the Indian government, he was successful in rehabilitating 10 million refugees and to persuade Indira Gandhi to take back the Indian Army by 16 Mar 1972. Bangabandhu promulgated a constitution in a record short time, which emphasized on the establishment of a secular state and socialist economy. His foreign policy and the constitution of Bangladesh made him familiar to the world as a secular statesman and a moderate socialist leader.

The Bangladesh-India diplomatic collaboration was jeopardized and became rancorous when the Awami League government was collapsed and General Zia took the authority of the state. A new era of mistrust and mutual hostility was initiated by the new military government. Even the coup and killing of Bangabandhu was tried to justify on the ground that Bangladesh will have embraced the fate of Sikkim[11] and Dhaka was so subservient to India in a way that it would work as a satellite state of India and the Mujib government was selling out Bangladesh's interests to India.

As Bangladesh-India relations became hostile, the Zia regime fostered closer ties with Pakistan, China, and Middle-Eastern countries as a countervailing weight to lessen Indian pressure and rivalry.[12] Dhaka's neo-policy caused a heavy disturbance for Indian policymakers and placed a serious impact on Indo-Bangla relations. The political combination, formed by the USA, China, and Pakistan, fully endorsed the coup and they gave it kind of legitimacy, providing political and financial support, which enabled Ziaur Rahman's regime to assert that Bangladesh's survival depended on its ability to come out of the Indo-Soviet orbit.

Bangladesh's extreme poverty, economic instability, and aid dependency directly or indirectly exacerbated Indian concerns about external intervention in the region. The post-Mujib rulers deepened Indian apprehension by emphasizing and promoting Bangladesh's link with the USA, China, and the Arab countries, the long-standing allies of Pakistan, India's key enemy in South Asia.[13] Zia cultivated warm relations with Saudi Arabia and China, Pakistan's wartime allies. These countries opposed Bangladesh's birth and hadn't recognized it until 1975.[14] In addition to strengthening diplomatic ties with China and Muslim countries, Zia also paid special attention to establishing an intimate tie with Pakistan for which he insisted on Islamic values and omitted the secular principle. The modus operandi for initiating a friendly relation with Pakistan centered on his firm stand against Pakistan's staunch enemy India.[15] Zia altered the Constitution's ideological statement on the fundamental principles, in particular, changing the Shiekh Mujib emphasis on secularism to "complete trust and faith in almighty Allah."[16] While detaching Bangladesh from India, Zia sought to enhance ties with other Islamic countries, particularly Saudi Arabia.[17]

It was Zia's perception that a significant portion of the population was carrying an identity crisis, both religious and as a nation. Intending to heal this, he started the Islamisation process of Bangladesh.[18] Unlike Mujib, Zia avowed three principles only viz Democracy, Nationalism, and Socialism and dropped Secularism[19] as a fundamental feature of the Bangladesh constitution.[20] The following changes were brought by Zia in the constitution by which he changed the nature of the state.

- In the preamble, he affixed the obeisance "*Bismillahir-Rahmaanir-Rahim*" (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful).[21]

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- In Article 8 (1) and 8 (1A) the statement "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah'" was added, replacing the socialist religious free commitment to secularism. Socialism was redefined as "economic and social justice" under his leadership.[22]
- In Article 25(2), Zia introduced the principle that "the state shall endeavor to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity."[23]
- Zia removed article 38 from the constitution which provided that "No person shall have the right to form or being a member or otherwise take part in the activities of any communal or other association or union, which in the name or based on religion has for its object other political purposes."[24]

The policies adopted by Zia to Islamize the country and to create a gap between India and Bangladesh had a bunch of commonalities with that of the Pakistani military junta. They had attempted to win the public sentiment through creating a religious fantasy as Islam was the religion of the major portion of people and intensifying the anti-Indian sentiment. The identical procedure that was instituted in Pakistan by Ayub Khan was also followed by Zia in Bangladesh in the post-Mujib era through the amendments in the constitution and adopted necessary initiatives to normalize the relation with Pakistan[25] and Pan-Middle Eastern countries. Zia preferred to open/write his public and official speeches/messages with the invocation 'Bismillahir Rahman-Ur-Rahim' and concluded with 'Joy Bangla', by doing all these; Zia was keen to strengthen relations with the Islamic nations of the world with which he could boast of religious, historical and cultural ties.

Several causes that helped Zia to nurture anti-India sentiment are as follows:

1. A voluminous section of society that occupied power after the military coup of 1975 wasn't in favor of liberation and they postulated that the people of Bangladesh were far better during the Pakistan era.[26]
2. Bangladeshi media also played a very crucial role in escalating the anti-India tirade, thereby deteriorating the relations between the two countries.[27]
3. Various mutual issues have remained unsettled since Independence also irritated the Bangladeshi people.
4. The unlawful trafficking of goods, stuff, and currency throughout the open and unsecured border caused severe resentment to Bangladeshi traders and the government. Moreover, the Bangladeshi market was poured with Indian products just like in the pre-independence time when Bangladesh became the shopping mall for West Pakistani products.
5. Pro-Mujib devotees led by Tiger Siddiqui were sponsored by Indira Gandhi both militarily and financially, which exerted security concern for Bangladesh.

India was also disturbed for several reasons which also exacerbated cold diplomatic relations between the neighbors; the series of brutal killings, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with his family members, four national leaders, numerous freedom fighters, and some top-ranked army officials. Mujib was a dependable friend of India, who symbolized those values that were dear to the people of India. The support, sacrifice, and contribution which are bestowed by Indian people during the war of liberation and the economic reconstruction of the war-stricken economy in the subsequent years, the legacy of those was fading away during the Zia regime under the state patronage.

Zia's policy of Islamization and the introduction of communal politics also generated insecurity among the Hindus of Bangladesh.[28] The communal harmony and co-existence were again jeopardized due to the revival of pro-Pakistani state policies.

VI. The Status of Disputes and Issues with India During the Zia Regime

Of the two states, India was in a far better position to compromise. Bangladesh did not represent a military threat and had much more to lose than India. The bilateral disputes should have been swiftly resolvable through diplomatic channels. Instead, the conduct of the issues was represented by "belligerence and insensitivity on India's part, and oversensitivity and suspicion on Bangladesh's part."[29]

The Ganges and Tista Water Distribution: President Mujib was successful in reaching a temporary agreement with India on the matter of water sharing at Farakka due to the close ties with India, but this agreement expired in May 1975. The subsequent government led by Zia failed to go for another treaty or to extend the tenure of the treaty. Zia sought international interference on the matter. Bangladesh raised the issue at the OIC conference of foreign ministers in Istanbul, 1976 and, at the NAM summit at Colombo. Subsequently, the issue was also placed on the 31st session of the General Assembly in Nov 1976 to draw international attention to the matter. To settle the issue, three rounds of ministerial talks were held, but no progress was made. Thus a bitter relation of distrust and hostility initiated at the very beginning of Zia's regime.

Tin-Bigha Corridor: The Tin-Bigha corridor is very tiny in size; under the 1974 accord between Indira Gandhi and Mujibur Rahman, India agreed only to lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh an area of approximately 178 meters by 85 meters near Tin Bigha to connect Bangladesh's mainland with its enclave Dahagram. The agreement on the terms of the lease was reached in 1982. Only in 1992, it was implemented.

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South Talpatti Land Issue: A tiny new deltaic island was discovered by the U.S satellite, which India calls New Moore and Bangladesh calls South Talpatti, and became a new dispute in the maritime boundary talks in 1979. Bangladesh demanded that in May 1979, Indian P.M. Morarji Desai agreed with the demand of Deputy Prime Minister of Zia's government, who had called on him to hold a joint survey. However, the Talpatty stand of India was changed, when the new Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came into power. She claimed that the island belonged to India.

Pro-Mujib Guerilla's in India: Kader Siddiqui was a devoted disciple and the leader of the guerilla who wanted to take revenge and to overthrow Zia's government. They were trained by India, and Mrs. Gandhi was providing economic assistance to them. Zia accused the Indians of arming and alleged that BSF helped them to infiltrate into Bangladesh to attack the northern border outposts. When the Janata government came into power, they projected a new approach in foreign policy 'Bilateral Benificialism' by which Morarji Desai wants to normalize the relation between the two neighbors. He met with General Zia in London on 10 June 1977 during the meeting of the commonwealth, where Mr. Desai promised to Zia not to provide any more help to Kader Siddiqui but refused to deport Kader Siddiqui.

The dispute over Exchange of Enclaves: Indira-Mujib signed a land-boundary agreement to settle the dispute, but Indira failed to ratify it in Parliament. The issue remained unsettled during Zia's regime too, although Morarji Desai and Zia talked on the matter.

Illegal Migration and Border Issues: Indo-Bangla border talks held in Dhaka in Jan 1977 proved to be unresolved. Bangladesh claimed that over 1300 border skirmishes had taken place between the two countries since Nov 1975 where fifty-six civilians from the Bangladesh side were killed and more than 200 dissidents either capitulated or were arrested.[30]

Evaluation: In the case of foreign relations, Zia was successful to obtain recognition from some Middle Eastern countries, China, and some other Pakistani allies, but he initiated a new approach of separation with the long-examined friend and the key ally in our liberation war.

VII. The Tenure of Lt. Gen. Ershad

After the assassination of Ziaur Rahman on 30 May 1981, Ershad remained loyal to the government.[31] He ordered the army to suppress the coup attempt by General Abul Manzoor. Ershad was subservient to the new president Abdus Sattar, who had led the BNP to victory in elections in 1982.[32] Ershad followed the same mechanism which was introduced by Zia, he first installed a civil government then took over the government in March 1982 through a bloodless coup as a CMLA. Finally, in 1986 he established a new political party named *Jatiya* Party, with the noted members of various sections of the society, and later with a disputed election in 1986, he was elected as the President of Bangladesh.

Ershad's policy in domestic and foreign policy had a significant resemblance with Zia and it won't be hyperbole to term his policies as the extension of Zia's policies in domestic and foreign affairs. Islam rightly pointed "Dhaka more or less followed a similar approach towards India as that of the predecessor, the Zia regime."[33] In domestic policy, Ershad had adopted the footprint of Zia regarding turning the country into an Islamic state through the amendments in the constitution. Ershad amended the constitution and made 'Islam' as the state religion; article 2A was added to the eighth amendment in 1988.[34] He gave importance to keep intimate relations with China, Pakistan, and the Muslim countries. There was continuity in the Indian policy during the second military regime and Bangladesh-India relations remained cold most of the time during the tenure of Ershad.[35]

Indira Gandhi's government welcomed the installation of the Ershad government in Bangladesh and wished to strengthen friendly relations with the neighbors and emphasized on the early settlement of unsettled issues mutually.[36] Naroshima Rao visited Bangladesh in 1982 and promised to provide one lac tons of wheat and Ershad paid his visit to India in the same year and also expressed his strong determination to maintain warm relations between the two countries. On Ershad's return visit, both leaders have agreed to form a joint economic co-operation to settle the mutual issues.

- They agreed to settle the dispute over the ownership of Newmoor/South Talpatty Island.
- They were successful in extending the 1977 Farakka agreement for two more lean seasons and directed to the joint river commission to settle the matter on river and water sharing disputes.
- Both also agreed to implement the 1974 land agreement, which up to then wasn't ratified by the Indian parliament.
- India additionally agreed to transfer the tin bigha corridor in eternity to Bangladesh.[37]
- They agreed to settle the maritime boundary dispute in a spirit of understanding and good neighborliness.

The earlier joint-economic commission, which was formed soon after the liberation war, was in hibernation for a long time, so a new joint economic commission was formed in 1982, but it couldn't make any headway. Since its establishment, it has met only thrice in 1986, 1990, and 1993. It appears that India wanted to reunite the ties between the two countries

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soon after the fall of Zia's regime. Hence Delhi started immediate interaction with the new military ruler, but the new leader didn't bring any change to the previous policies and also carry coal to the anti-India sentiment.

In Oct 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by his two Sikh bodyguards and Rajiv Gandhi, son of Indira Gandhi, had taken charge of the government. The Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi was trying to play the role of big brother with the neighboring countries. However, the foreign policy goals set by Rajiv Gandhi were aimed to strengthen the relationship with the neighbors. By this time, both leaders had visited each other for several times, and on some issues, they also agreed to settle down.

After Rajiv's first visit to Bangladesh, a special envoy visited Bangladesh to find out a long-lasting solution to Ganga water sharing issues. In 1986-88, the water sharing of Ganga was extended for more three lean seasons through an MoU signed by the respective ministers of both sides. Both agreed to form a task force composed of experts to control the flood caused by two major joint-rivers the Ganga and Brahmaputra and the way to use the surplus water. Both sides also promised each other that they would minimize cross-border insurgency and illegal trafficking of goods. India during Rajib Gandhi's period again promised to hand over the tin bigha corridor. Rajiv Gandhi and Ershad agreed that negotiations on the maritime boundary between the two countries in the Bay of Bengal region will be resumed.

The diplomatic relations of the two countries under Indra Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi was improved significantly during the Ershad regime, though the Bangladeshi government placed some impediments viz; Islamization, strengthening relation with Islamic and anti-India powers, etc. alludes the fact that the India-Bangladesh relations rely on the tendency of the leaders of both sides rather than the objectives circumstances. The Ershad regime saw the continuous commitments from the Indian side, but the policies and directives of Ershad never tempted and persuaded India to settle the issues and the outcome of bilateral talks, visits, and MoU's seem to us as formal and routine tasks. However, this formal relationship was again strained when India planned to fence the border to stop the influx of Bangladeshi people. It was also during the Ershad period, Bangladesh became safer for the separatists of India. As a consequence, ISI was involved in this matter to infuriate the separatists and provided all types of help to separate North-East popularly the seven sisters from India, which deteriorated the diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and India severely.

VIII. The Tenure of Begum Khaleda Zia

At the end of the Ershad regime, an unprecedented mass movement was taken place in the late eighties, where all walks of people have joined. Major political parties came under the same platform to resist Ershad at any cost; Awami League, BNP, and other Islamist parties called for country-wide hartals and blockades. Eventually, the economy, communication, and daily affairs of people have come to a standstill. He was backed by the Western countries basically by the superpowers for almost a decade, but they were no longer supported him with the effective end of the Cold War. Moreover, the Chief of the Army Staff Lieutenant General Nuruddin Khan also didn't want to back the President. On the teeth of an all-pervading student movement, General Hussain Muhammad Ershad was forced to hand over the power to Justice Sahabuddin Ahmed as the head of an interim Government aiming to arrange a free, fair, and neutral election on 6th Dec 1990. In the 5th General elections held on 13 Jan 1991, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) got the highest number of votes and it emerged as the largest party in parliament with 140 out of the 300 seats (without reserved for women). One hundred fifty-one seats are needed to form the Government, finally, with the support of Jamat-e-Islami, Khaleda Zia was sworn in for her first term on 20 Mar 1991.

After 16 years of the autocratic military regime, a new era of the democratic journey had been started with the 5th general election in the early 1990s. Although a truly elected government was in charge of state power in Bangladesh, during the whole period of the first post-military government, the Bangladesh-India relationship till then stood materially frozen. The key reason for this was that the ruling BNP as a political party is right of center, anti-Indian, of an Islamic bent, and largely favored by the business community of the country.[38] Moreover, eminent political scientist Professor Rounaq Jahan in her book "Political Parties in Bangladesh" says that "these political stands were inspired by the BNP's traditional anti-Indian posture which was one of its foundational positions under Zia. New Delhi, on its part, did not demonstrate any goodwill towards the new government or interest in improving the bilateral relations of the two countries. Mistrust and mutual suspicion again continued as before."[39]

During the tenure of General Ziaur Rahman and to the reinstallation of his wife in state power, BNP was stick with anti-Indian policy and on the other hand, adopted a policy of friendship with Islamabad as a counterpoise to that of Delhi. Unlike BNP, during different tenures of the rule of the AL, Bangladesh has pursued an India-friendly foreign policy. The new India policy of the BNP-led alliance government in the early nineties raises the question, 'Why BNP had undertaken the policy of anti-Indian stance and a pro-Pakistan stance even after a decade of the fall of Zia's Government?. It could be for voting politics, BNP as the key force in a communal-based alliance tried to grab the attention and support of the Muslims through adopting an anti-India stance. Moreover, Jamat-e-Islami was one

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of the strong partners of their alliance, traditionally doing politics with exacerbating hatred against the minority Hindus and India.[40] Moreover, General Zia had permitted the revival of Jamat-e-Islami as a political party, which was banned by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the ground of its role during the liberation war of 1971. It maintained a strong communal sentiment and historically held a strong anti-Indian approach from the perspective of religion and India's conflict with Pakistan on several issues. Khaleda Zia failed to get an absolute majority in the 1990's general election and only successful in forming the Government when Jamat-e-Islami joined with her. Soon after the formation of the Government, Khaleda Zia preferred to strengthen the relationship with Pakistan to pacify the will of Jamat-e-Islami and to follow the path of enmity with the trusted neighbor India. Hence little change occurred in Bangladesh–India relations during the tenure of the BNP-led coalition government from 1991 to 1996.

Even before the formation of Government, during the election campaign, Khaleda Zia formally reinstated her ani-India stance. At a public meeting in Dhaka on February 23, 1991, Khaleda Zia said, 'If Awami League comes to power, the land till Feni will be captured by India. You will not be a citizen of Bangladesh; you will get enslaved to India'. All through its history, the party has also opposed closer trade and communications connectivity with India, which was a manifestation of its anti-Indian politics.[41] Khaleda Zia termed the military and strategic friendship treaty between Bangladesh and India signed by Mujib and Indira as "a treaty of slavery."

The Kashmir conflict and the separatist movement in the North-Eastern provinces of India caused deadly casualties for the Indian Armed forces and a severe threat to Indian sovereignty. It was an Indian fear that the separatist groups could use the Bangladesh land for their bases to operate militant operations against India. Eventually, ISI has been active in Bangladesh during the first term of Begum Khaleda Zia's government (1991-1996). ISI in a collaboration with Jamat-e-Islami is alleged to have aided a network in strengthening Northeast India's rebel groups during the BNP's rule. The spy agency was also alleged to have launched a campaign from Bangladesh to destabilize Northeast India by patronizing and providing logistic support, weapons, training, money-laundering to fund covert operations by the separatist groups from Bangladesh.[42]

India is also, for its part, reluctant to build a warm and friendly relation with Bangladesh due to communal intolerance and post-election violence against the minorities. Around 3000 temples in Bangladesh were demolished, many Hindus were forced to leave the country, many women raped and properties of Hindus were usurped following the demolition of Babri mosque in India in December 1992 during the tenure of Khaleda Zia.

Despite this, both states recognized that they needed to cooperate to address mutual problems. But no significant progress was made despite many issues were unresolved. Nonetheless, India agreed in 1992 to grant Bangladesh a perpetual lease over the Tin Bigha corridor, covering an area of 1.5 hectares.[43] Secretaries' Committee met six times alternatively between Dhaka and New Delhi from Apr 1990-Feb 1992 on the matter of Ganga water distribution; no advancement was achieved during the tenure of Khaleda Zia's government till 1996. Only a Protocol was signed on July 31, 1991, between the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research of India and the Science and Technology Division of Bangladesh on Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

On May 28, 1992, a joint communiqué was issued at the end of the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to India where the Prime Minister of India and Bangladesh have expressed their determination to further consolidate the friendly, harmonious, and good neighborly relation for the larger interest of the peoples of the two countries and for the peace and stability in the region.

They were agreed that efforts should be intensified to resolve the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement of 1974, New more/South Talpatty Islands, Ganga and Teesta water distribution, large-scale illegal immigration of people across their borders, speedy repatriation of all Chakma refugees to Bangladesh in full safety and security. Eventually, all the matters remained only in the communiqué; no apparent measure was taken from the Bangladesh side to strengthen the tie with the influential neighbor and to bargain for grabbing some advantages for Bangladesh.

It is worthy of mentioning some of the remarks of Begum Zia after the end of his tenure. When the Ganges water treaty was signed, Khaleda Zia, as the opposition leader had stated 'Although the Ganges water treaty was signed, Bangladesh will not get a single drop of water, vehicles will be run in the mighty river the Padma within two years.' She also had stated in the election campaigns of 1996 that *Adhan* (call for Muslim prayer) would be replaced in Bangladesh by blowing of conch shells if the Awami League came to power. It could be stated from the speeches of Khaleda Zia that she and her party didn't want to improve relations with India due to basically voting politics.

IX. Conclusion

Bangladesh's geographical location made it dependent on India. Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by India and there are 257 rivers in Bangladesh, from which 59 are transboundary rivers, fifty-five of them emanate from India. All of these rivers play a

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prospective role in the economic development of the country and also caused floods in deltaic Bangladesh as annually, these rivers carry about 6 million m3/s water flows.[44] After the erection of the Farakka dam, Bangladesh partly became dependent on India's mercy for water distribution during the wet season and water management during the rainy season. Moreover, historically, the two countries have a shared history, heritage, culture, and common ethnicity and the demarcation in 1947 was so ascribed and impractical. Again, during the war of 1971, India extended unprecedented humanitarian, political and military assistance to Bangladesh. India was the first country to recognize Bangladesh as an independent nation. As a result, warm relations between the two countries were continued, but the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ceased the close ties. From then to 1996, Awami League, the party that led the liberation war, wasn't in state power, and almost all the governments formed had maintained anti-Indian stance and geared up the anti-Indian sentiment among the mass people. There was a huge scope to strengthen the relation of the two countries, India could have taken the lead and by giving priority to the demands of Bangladesh, the two countries became an intimate friend. They could ensure free entrance to each other territory rather than fencing the border. In return, India could have taken a transit facility to transmit supplies to the North-Eastern provinces and to control the separatist forces there. Ultimately, when Sheikh Hasina formed the Government in 1996, the relation between the two countries again reached into a new height.

The Real transformation in the bilateral equation between the two countries began with Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujib, assuming office in 1996. The signing of the Ganges water treaty of 1996 and the Chakma Agreement of 1997 removed the two key irritants that had plagued Indo-Bangladeshi relations for years. Although the two neighbors during this period had several unresolved issues between them, they were firmly on a friendly track. Unfortunately, this momentum was lost after the next elected government of the BNP alliance took over in 2001. It is seen that bilateral ties reached their lowest point between 2001 and 2006.[45] Again in 2009, Sheikh Hasina became the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for the second time and the mutual ties got a new redeem. Mozammil Ahmed rightly suggested that "India and Bangladesh share the fifth-longest land boundary in the world. It has long been important for India to maintain a positive working relationship with Bangladesh to bolster security and border management."[46] Both nations worked hard to strengthen their bilateral agreements and diplomatic ties.

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